

CARTON 8:5

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

MANUSCRIPT DRAFTS, CHAPTER 1

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## Chapter 1/Childhood

(Ver 2, revised 6/9/98, 6/18/98)

I went to live with my grandfather when I was five years old. Grandfather owned a farm in Morrow, Louisiana. Grandfather was well known and loved and respected by everyone who lived in Morrow. His name was Lee Brown. Everyone called him Uncle Lee Brown. When I was born in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans on May 28, 1921, I was named after him, Lee Brown,

Grandfather was a tall, dark-skinned man with kinda heavy shoulders. He was a large fellow, solid and strong. He was also a kind-hearted, easy going man. I never did see him angry. He never got in no fights. Everybody in that little country town liked him. He was always helping people, people that had trouble. He carried his money in a sack, a white sack. I think my grandmother made it. He would lend people money, poor people who needed help. He was always trying to do things for people.

We lived in the countryside among hardworking farmers who was very poor but also very friendly and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

To me there was no wiser or beloved a man than my grandfather. He loved me a lot, too. I remember he used to

take me to Bunkie, another little town, and he would buy me toys, a little wagon, marbles, spinning tops. I would bring them back home and then I would give the kids around there some marbles; I would always share with the other kids. He taught me to do that. Even the kids I used to play with, the next door neighbors, we never did have no fights. He taught me how to get along with people.

Grandfather had a buggy that he used to take me around in. It was a black buggy with red spokes on the wheels and and it was pulled by a black horse. Some of the happiest times that I can remember was when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those old dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him. Some Sundays we would go to the church and take food and stay all day talking with the neighbors and exchanging food.

My grandfather would haul freight for different stores. The freight train would stop and leave freight, then he would deliver the freight to the people at four or five stores. He picked it up in his wagon. Two mules pulled that wagon. That was his business, hauling freight.

On the farm he raised chickens and ducks. He had a few horses and a few mules. He used to gather hay from some other place to feed his horses. He didn't grow no crops except for a little truck patch of vegetables to eat -- cabbages, tomatoes, potatoes, things like that, and some corn. The farm wasn't no great large one, but it was large enough for

him, for what he was doing. Something that he could handle. Sometimes he hired two, three people round there to help him. He would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "One day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge.

In the house grandfather had this long table. I ain't seen no table like that in a long time. Every morning we had our breakfast at this table. He sat me at one end of the table and he sat at the other. He would say a prayer before eating. Now I don't understand this but in those days they had steak for breakfast. I don't know how they did that; maybe they kept it smoked or something. I know we ate meat and eggs. I remember we ate good. I think I had more than any kid around there, good food, toys. I was the only kid living on the farm. It was just me and my grandfather and Aunt Hannah before she died, and later Aunt Betsy.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. I called her Aunt Hannah. I don't remember her too good. They told me she was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She was tall with long black hair that hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. She was a kind lady.

That year I lived on my grandfather's farm was the happiest time of my childhood.

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. <sup>(He also went by the name of Joseph)</sup> My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes.

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My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. (Later he went by the name of Joseph.) My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes.

Before I was born my father changed his name to Joseph Brown because the law was after him. Years later I got the story from my sister-in-law, Henrietta who was married to my half-brother, Pete Robinson. She told me that my father and his brothers was robbing them little mixed trains, trains that had one coach car and the rest of them was freight. These mixed trains used to run between the little towns in Louisiana. She <sup>showed</sup> showed me a picture of one of my uncles with a red handkerchief tied around his neck. All three of them was riding together on the train like they was Wild West outlaws. When my father came to New Orleans he decided to change his name to Joseph, and that's what it says on my birth certificate.

My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work one morning in 1922 he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

My mother was born in <sup>L</sup>Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis. Like I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans. When I was small my mother received some money from my father's death. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm.

One morning later on my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I was really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the farm.

Grandfather took good care of me. He used to tell people that he wanted to give me the best education that money could buy. Grandfather never hit me, he never laid a hand on me. He paid a lot of attention to me. When his buggy would roll I'd be in there. He took me everywhere with him, to the stores, to meet white folks, to church on Sunday. People look up and say, "There come Uncle Lee, big Lee and little Lee."

It seemed like people knowed me through him. We was so close, when they see him they see me.

Somebody else I remember was Aunt Pauline who used to live around there with her husband, Uncle Bill. She was a kind of Creole and she didn't speak English. She wore a red handkerchief on her head and had red lips and wore a long dress. My grandfather and I used to pass her on the dirt road and she'd say "Bo' jour", and I didn't know what the hell she was saying. I'd break and run. I didn't know she was just saying good morning to me. Her husband, Bill Rioto, fought in the Civil War, and he had a old long gun that I sometimes saw sticking out their window when I passed there. He musta fought in the Union Army. I know he didn't fight for the Confederates, staying around my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was pretty militant.

One day some neighbor's children and I was playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. I don't know how it happened but he cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. A hospital that would treat black people was many miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a doctor. Things wasn't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's leg wouldn't heal, and

it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon she died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Later he married her. Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after that one night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that was in the room had to pull me away from him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and they carried swords which was a symbol of the organization, All the women wore white. I was dressed in white, too. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since my grandfather had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. Betsy was a mean woman with little education or knowledge. Betsy brought her sister, Aunt Alice, to live with us on the farm. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else. Betsy was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do. She used to fuss at me, and scold me and only half feed me.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man named Buster Wells, who used to work on the farm for Grandfather, came to live with us on the farm; he also brought his wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. Since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. But my grandfather left his land to me and Aunt Betsy. When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Opelousas to try to sell my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that the land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one. By that time I would be old enough to decide legally what I wanted to do with the land.

When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she

gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was used to eating at. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised anymore over any stupid thing she did. There was times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. Her sister Alice would often hit me for no reason. My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They wouldn't have anything to do with such mean women.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me, more so than his sister. But my visit was cut short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Morrow about the way they was treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes was flooded out with water. People, black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Beauregard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we was transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Beauregard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle was burned.

Things began to get better for me. News reached my cousins who lived in the countryside between LeMoyen and Morrow. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta

Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife was very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.

All the black children in this small community went to the same school in Morrow. Most of the children was from the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these black families was sharecroppers. Miss Ida Bowers, our teacher, was very respectable and taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in LeMoyen. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. I walked on the railroad tracks with the other black children. We was afraid to walk on the highway because a man had got run over. Black children couldn't ride on the school buses. I realized for the first time I was living in an evil

Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses was available only for the white children. This made me want to learn what was behind these problems that existed for black people.

I liked to read. We used to read books like *Bob and Nancy*, and the story of the Tar Baby, and "Little Boy Blue Come Blow Your Horn. The sheep's in the meadow, the cows in the corn." Hell, with stuff like that no wonder I didn't learn nothing in that school!

But I did learn how to read. Reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school was over, I went back to help my cousins. When we wasn't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fireplace. But I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

The sharecroppers was very poor but I appreciated what my relatives was doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Babe (we called our cousins "aunt" and "uncle"; and T-Babe was the nickname for Rosetta, Uncle Tot's wife) made lunch for us everyday to take to school. Sometimes we had potatoes and a cinnamon roll, and sometimes we was eating that damned pork. We didn't know no better. But we ate good. Sometimes Aunt T-

Babe made cha cha, made out of cabbage, cucumber, pepper, mustard, and green tomatoes. They had a good garden. They had potato banks where they would store the potatoes buried in the ground wrapped in hay and corn silk. They killed their hogs and salted the meat and smoked the meat and made sausage. They would catch fish and smoke the fish. And Aunt T-Babe would bake light rolls. She would let the dough set and rise up and then bake it. And then wrap it up in a piece of cloth to keep it fresh. I remember we didn't have no ice, so we put our drinks in sawdust in a tub. At least that's how I remember it. It's funny how at 77 years old you can remember a lot of things. Seventy-seven ain't too old to remember!

I lived with Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Babe for several years, longer than I stayed with anybody else. They raised me like I was their own child.

One night Uncle Tot and his sister Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they was sitting at the table a drunk white man named Alec Havord came in from the white bar next door and tried to kiss or dance with Aunt Bernice. She refused him, and then he hauled off and slapped her. As soon as this happened, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man. White men on horses rode all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. The neighbors

gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. He had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Babe moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard that a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Babe and she gave me a good spanking.

Aunt T-Babe decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized in the local Baptist church one Sunday morning with three more children. I remember how the preacher gave a long sermon over us, and people be hollering just like it was a funeral. Then the old preacher took me in the water and I thought he was going to preach my funeral. And that water was cold! People just hollering. When the preacher dipped me that last time people was standing all around in the water and they started to singing "done got over." I remember that good. They took us back to a house and dressed and fed us. I felt like I was some kind of chosen person. For a while I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.

At about the age of 15, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but pretty large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out too well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Aunt T-Babe's brother, Dad Jones, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Jones had a large family, but everyone got to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me like one of the family.

The field hands' day off was on Saturday. One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents a day. I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melville, Louisiana. I went there looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reece. When I caught the freight train to Melville, other hobos was in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to jump off. With a suitcase under my arm and a little money in my pocket, I finally made it to Melville.

Melville wasn't no large town but it had streets and a theater. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reece. I happened to see a lady walking on the street and I said, "Lady, can you tell me where Joe Reece lives?" She said, "He

lives out of town." She told me how to get to where he lived, then she asked me, "What is your name? You kin to Joe?" I said, "Yes, my name is Lee Brown."

Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melville. When we arrived at her home, I was introduced to her husband, her daughter and other relatives. Her name was Esther; my other cousins was Jessie Brown, and Henry Brown. I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different towns. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.

That just goes to show how you can be walking on the street and you just stop some particular person, and it turns out you're related to them. That shows how things can happen. I don't know what you call it. I don't know if I was a chosen man or what, but that's what happened to me.

## Chapter 1/Childhood

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My grandmother's name was Hannah. I called her Aunt Hannah. I don't remember her too good. They told me she was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She was tall with long black hair that hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. She was a kind lady.

That year I lived on my grandfather's farm was the happiest time of my childhood.

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes.

My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work one morning in 1922 he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis. Like I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans. When I was small my mother received some money from my father's death. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm.

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leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon she died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Later he married her. Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after that one night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that were in the room had to pull me away from him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and they carried swords which were a symbol of the organization, All the women wore white. I was dressed in white, too. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since my grandfather had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. Betsy was a mean woman with little education or knowledge. Betsy brought her sister, Aunt Alice, to live with us on the farm. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else. Betsy was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do. She used to fuss at me, and scold me and only half feed me.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man named Buster Wells, who used to work on the farm for Grandfather, came to live with us on the farm; he also brought his wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. Since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. But my grandfather left his land to me and Aunt Betsy. When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Opelousas to try to sell my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that the land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one. By that time I would be old enough to decide legally what I wanted to do with the land.

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One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Beauregard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Beauregard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

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Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

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All the black children in this small community went to the same school in Morrow. Most of the children were from the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these black families were sharecroppers. Miss Ida Bowers, our teacher, was very respectable and taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in LeMoyen. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. I walked on the railroad tracks with the other black children. We were afraid to walk on the highway because a man had got run over. Black children couldn't ride on the school buses. I realized for the first time I was living in an evil

Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses were available only for the white children. This made me want to learn what was behind these problems that existed for black people.

I liked to read. We used to read books like *Bob and Nancy*, and the story of the Tar Baby, and "Little Boy Blue Come Blow Your Horn. The sheep's in the meadow, the cows in the corn." Hell, with stuff like that no wonder I didn't learn nothing in that school!

But I did learn how to read. Reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school was over, I went back to help my cousins. When we wasn't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fireplace. But I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

The sharecroppers were very poor but I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Babe (we called our cousins "aunt" and "uncle"; and T-Babe was the nickname for Rosetta, Uncle Tot's wife) made lunch for us everyday to take to school. Sometimes we had potatoes and a cinnamon roll, and sometimes we was eating that damned pork. We didn't know no better. But we ate good. Sometimes Aunt T-

Babe made cha cha, made out of cabbage, cucumber, pepper, mustard, and green tomatoes. They had a good garden. They had potato banks where they would store the potatoes buried in the ground wrapped in hay and corn silk. They killed their hogs and salted the meat and smoked the meat and made sausage. They would catch fish and smoke the fish. And Aunt T-Babe would bake light rolls. She would let the dough set and rise up and then bake it. And then wrap it up in a piece of cloth to keep it fresh I remember we didn't have no ice, so we put our drinks in sawdust in a tub. At least that's how I remember it. It's funny how at 77 years old you can remember a lot of things. Seventy-seven ain't too old to remember!

I lived with Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Babe for several years, longer than I stayed with anybody else. They raised me like I was their own child.

One night Uncle Tot and his sister Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a drunk white man named Aleck Havord came in from the white bar next door and tried to kiss or dance with Aunt Bernice. She refused him, and then he hauled off and slapped her. As soon as this happened, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man. White men on horses rode all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. The neighbors

gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. He had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Babe moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard that a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Babe and she gave me a good spanking.

Aunt T-Babe decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized in the local Baptist church one Sunday morning with three more children. I remember how the preacher gave a long sermon over us, and people be hollering just like it was a funeral. Then the old preacher took me in the water and I thought he was going to preach my funeral. And that water was cold! People just hollering. When the preacher dipped me that last time people were standing all around in the water and they started to singing "done got over." I remember that good. They took us back to a house and dressed and fed us. I felt like I was some kind of chosen person. For a while I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.

At about the age of 15, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but pretty large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out too well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Aunt T-Babe's brother, Dad Jones, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Jones had a large family, but everyone got to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me like one of the family.

The field hands' day off was on Saturday. One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents a day. I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melville, Louisiana. I went there looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reece. When I caught the freight train to Melville, other hobos were in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to jump off. With a suitcase under my arm and a little money in my pocket, I finally made it to Melville.

Melville wasn't no large town but it had streets and a theater. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reece. I happened to see a lady walking on the street and I said, "Lady, can you tell me where Joe Reece lives?" She said, "He

lives out of town." She told me how to get to where he lived, then she asked me, "What is your name? You kin to Joe?" I said, "Yes, my name is Lee Brown."

Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melville. When we arrived at her home, I was introduced to her husband, her daughter and other relatives. Her name was Esther; my other cousins were Jessie Brown, and Henry Brown. I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different towns. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.

That just goes to show how you can be walking on the street and you just stop some particular person, and it turns out you're related to them. That shows how things can happen. I don't know what you call it. I don't know if I was a chosen man or what, but that's what happened to me.

## Chapter 1/Childhood

(Ver 2, revised 6/9/98)

I went to live with my grandfather when I was five years old. Grandfather owned a farm in Morrow, Louisiana. Grandfather was well known and loved and respected by everyone who lived in Morrow. His name was Lee Brown. Everyone called him Uncle Lee Brown. When I was born in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans on May 28, 1921, I was named after him, Lee Brown,

Grandfather was a tall, dark-skinned man with kinda heavy shoulders. He was a large fellow, solid and strong. He was also a kind-hearted, easy going man. I never did see him angry. He never got in no fights. Everybody in that little country town liked him. He was always helping people, people that had trouble. He carried his money in a sack, a white sack. I think my grandmother made it. He would lend people money, poor people who needed help. He was always trying to do things for people.

We lived in the countryside among hardworking farmers who were very poor but also very friendly and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

To me there was no wiser or beloved a man than my grandfather. He loved me a lot, too. I remember he used to

take me to Bunkie, another little town, and he would buy me toys, a little wagon, marbles, spinning tops. I would bring them back home and then I would give the kids around there some marbles; I would always share with the other kids. He taught me to do that. Even the kids I used to play with, the next door neighbors, we never did have no fights. He taught me how to get along with people.

Grandfather had a buggy that he used to take me around in. It was a black buggy with red spokes on the wheels and and it was pulled by a black horse. Some of the happiest times that I can remember were when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those old dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him. Some Sundays we would go to the church and take food and stay all day talking with the neighbors and exchanging food.

My grandfather would haul freight for different stores. The freight train would stop and leave freight, then he would deliver the freight to the people at four or five stores. He picked it up in his wagon. Two mules pulled that wagon. That was his business, hauling freight.

On the farm he raised chickens and ducks. He had a few horses and a few mules. He used to gather hay from some other place to feed his horses. He didn't grow no crops except for a little truck patch of vegetables to eat -- cabbages, tomatoes, potatoes, things like that, and some corn. The farm wasn't no great large one, but it was large enough for

him, for what he was doing. Something that he could handle. Sometimes he hired two, three people round there to help him. He would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "One day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge.

In the house grandfather had this long table. I ain't seen no table like that in a long time. Every morning we had our breakfast at this table. He sat me at one end of the table and he sat at the other. He would say a prayer before eating. Now I don't understand this but in those days they had steak for breakfast. I don't know how they did that; maybe they kept it smoked or something. I know we ate meat and eggs. I remember we ate good. I think I had more than any kid around there, good food, toys. I was the only kid living on the farm. It was just me and my grandfather and Aunt Hannah before she died, and later Aunt Betsy.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. I called her Aunt Hannah. I don't remember her too good. They told me she was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She was tall with long black hair that hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. She was a kind lady.

*That year I lived*  
Living on my grandfather's farm was <sup>the</sup> ~~my~~ happiest time. *of my childhood*

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes. My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to

in 1922

work one morning he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis. Like I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans. When I was small my mother received some money from my father's death. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm.

One morning later on my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I was really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the farm.

Grandfather took good care of me. He used to tell people that he wanted to give me the best education that money could buy. Grandfather never hit me, he never laid a hand on me. He paid a lot of attention to me. When his buggy would roll I'd be in there. He took me everywhere with him, to the stores, to meet white folks, to church on Sunday. People look up and say, "There come Uncle Lee, big Lee and little Lee."

It seemed like people knowed me through him. We was so close, when they see him they see me.

Somebody else I remember was Aunt Pauline who used to live around there with her husband, Uncle Bill. She was a kind of Creole and she didn't speak English. She wore a red handkerchief on her head and had red lips and wore a long dress. My grandfather and I used to pass her on the dirt road and she'd say "Bo' jour", and I didn't know what the hell she was saying. I'd break and run. I didn't know she was just saying good morning to me. Her husband, Bill Rioto, fought in the Civil War, and he had a old long gun that I sometimes saw sticking out their window when I passed there. He musta fought in the Union Army. I know he didn't fight for the Confederates, staying around my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was pretty militant.

One day some neighbor's children and I were playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. I don't know how it happened but he cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. Hospitals were miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a doctor. Things weren't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's

leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon she died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Later he married her. Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after that one night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that were in the room had to pull me away from him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and they carried swords which were a symbol of the organization, All the women wore white. I was dressed in white, too. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since my grandfather had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. Betsy was a mean woman with little education or knowledge. Betsy brought her sister, Aunt Alice, to live with us on the farm. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else. Betsy was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do. She used to fuss at me, and scold me and only half feed me.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man named Buster Wells, who used to work on the farm for Grandfather, came to live with us on the farm; he also brought his wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. Since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. But my grandfather left his land to me and Aunt Betsy. When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Opelousas to try to sell my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that the land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one. By that time I would be old enough to decide legally what I wanted to do with the land.

When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she

gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was used to eating at. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised anymore over any stupid thing she did. There were times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. Her sister Alice would often hit me for no reason. My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They wouldn't have anything to do with such mean women.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me, moreso than his sister. But my visit was cut short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Morrow about the way they were treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Beauregard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Beauregard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

Things began to get better for me. News reached my cousins who lived in the countryside between LeMoyen and Morrow. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta

Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.

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The sharecroppers were very poor but I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Babe (we called our cousins "aunt" and "uncle"; and T-Babe was the nickname for Rosetta, Uncle Tot's wife) made lunch for us everyday to take to school. Sometimes we had potatoes and a cinnamon roll, and sometimes we was eating that damned pork. We didn't know no better. But we ate good. Sometimes Aunt T-

Babe made cha cha, made out of cabbage, cucumber, pepper, mustard, and green tomatoes. They had a good garden. They had potato banks where they would store the potatoes buried in the ground wrapped in hay and corn silk. They killed their hogs and salted the meat and smoked the meat and made sausage. They would catch fish and smoke the fish. And Aunt T-Babe would bake light rolls. She would let the dough set and rise up and then bake it. And then wrap it up in a piece of cloth to keep it fresh I remember we didn't have no ice, so we put our drinks in sawdust in a tub. At least that's how I remember it. It's funny how at 77 years old you can remember a lot of things. Seventy-seven ain't too old to remember!

I noticed one day when I was walking down the street that some people were coming out of a building carrying bags of food. I asked the people if I could get some of that food. They told me to go on in and ask for some. When I got inside the building and asked for the food, a lady, who was sitting behind a desk, told me to sign some papers. When I signed the papers, I got the food, some cornmeal, flour, plums and grapefruits. I was so glad to get this food I couldn't wait to get home to show Aunt T-Babe and Uncle Tot what I had. When Uncle Tot saw the food, he got very angry at me. Apparently, the building I went into to get the food from was the Welfare Office. Uncle Tot explained to me I shouldn't go to the Welfare Office to get food because that food was for people who were out of work and didn't have any other means of

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for work

support. Even though I didn't quite understand what he was talking about, I didn't go there ever again.

One evening passing the dock I noticed some men were giving away bananas. They gave me some, so I took them. I didn't know what reaction Uncle Tot would have. But he didn't say anything to me about that. I just wanted something different to eat for a change.

One night Uncle Tot and his sister Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a drunk white man came in from the white bar next door and put his hand on Aunt Bernice's breast. As soon as this happened, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man. White men on horses rode all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. The neighbors gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. He had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Babe moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard that a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

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and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Babe and she gave me a good spanking.

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At about the age of 15, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but pretty large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out too well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Aunt T-Babe's brother, Dad Jones, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Jones had a large family, but everyone got to eat a cooked

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Melville wasn't no large town but it had streets and a theater. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reece. I happened to see a lady walking on the street and I said, "Lady, can you tell me where Joe Reece lives?" She said, "He lives out of town." She told me how to get to where he lived, then she asked me, "What is your name? You kin to Joe?" I said, "Yes, my name is Lee Brown."

Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melville. When we arrived at her home, I was introduced to her husband, her daughter and other relatives. Her name was Esther; my other cousins were Jessie Brown, and

Henry Brown. I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different towns. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.

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## Chapter 1/Childhood

(Ver 2, revised 6/6/98)

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We lived in the countryside among hardworking farmers who were very poor but also very friendly, and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

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him, for what he was doing. Something that he could handle. Sometimes he hired two, three people round there to help him. ~~Grandfather was a solid, strong man.~~ He would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "As far as your eyes can see--one day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge.

In the house grandfather had this long table. I ain't seen no table like that in a long time. Every morning we had our breakfast at this table. He sat me at one end of the table and he sat at the other. He would say a prayer before eating. Now I don't understand this but in those days they had steak for breakfast. I don't know how they did that; maybe they kept it smoked or something. I know we ate meat and eggs. I remember we ate good. I think I had more than any kid around there, good food, toys. I was the only kid living on the farm. It was just me and my grandfather and Aunt Hannah before she died, and later Aunt Betsy.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. I called her Aunt Hannah. I don't remember her too good. They told <sup>me</sup> she was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She was tall with long black hair that hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. She was a kind lady.

Living on my grandfather's farm ~~farm~~ was my happiest time.

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned

man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes. My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work one morning he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis. Like I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans. When I was small my mother received some money from my father's death. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm.

One morning later on my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the farm.

Grandfather took good care of me. He used to tell people that he wanted to give me the best education that money could buy. Grandfather never hit me, he never laid a hand on me. He paid a lot of attention to me. When his buggy would roll I'd be in there. He took me everywhere with him, to the stores, to meet white folks, to church on Sunday. People look

up and say, "There come Uncle Lee, big Lee and little Lee." It seemed like people knowed me through him. We was so close, when they see him they see me.

Somebody else I remember was Aunt Pauline who used to live around there with her husband, Uncle Bill. She was a kind of Creole and she didn't speak English. She wore a red handkerchief on her head and had red lips and wore a long dress. My grandfather and I used to pass her on the dirt road and she'd say "Bo' jour", and I didn't know what the hell she was saying. I'd break and run. I didn't know she was just saying good morning to me. Her husband, Bill Rieta, fought in the Civil War, and he had a old long gun that I sometimes saw sticking out their window when I passed there. He musta fought in the Union Army. I know he didn't fight for the Confederates, staying around my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was pretty militant.

One day some neighbor's children and I were playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. I don't know how it happened but he cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. Hospitals were miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a doctor. Things weren't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's

leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and she soon died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Later he married her. Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after that one night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that were in the room had to pull me away from him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and they carried swords which were a symbol of the organization, All the women wore white. I was dressed in white, too, I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since my grandfather had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. Betsy was a cruel woman with little education or knowledge. I never knew anyone could be so cruel and selfish. We never had much contact with each other, either before or after grandfather's death. She was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do. She used to fuss at me and only half feed me.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man named ~~was~~ Buster Wells, who used to work on the farm for Grandfather, came to live with us on the farm; he also brought his wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. ~~In addition,~~ <sup>Since</sup> Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. But my grandfather left ~~all his land to me,~~ <sup>to me and my kids,</sup> When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my ~~land.~~ <sup>land.</sup> But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Opelousas to try to ~~get~~ <sup>sell</sup> my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that ~~all~~ the land belonged to me, and ~~the~~ <sup>my</sup> land couldn't be sold.

My land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one: by that time I would be old enough to decide legally what I wanted to do with the land. When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was used to eating at. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew

whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised anymore over any stupid thing she did. There were times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. ~~She~~ <sup>Her sister, Aunt Betsy</sup> would often ~~beat~~ <sup>hate</sup> me for no reason (Check?). My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They wouldn't have anything to do with such a wicked woman.

Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. Then Aunt Betsy brought her sister, Alice, to the farm to live with us. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me, moreso than his sister. But my visit was cut short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Morrow about the way they were treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Beauregard (sp?). We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Beauregard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their

farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

Things began to get better for me. News reached my cousins who lived in the countryside between LeMoyen and Morrow. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.

All the black children in this small community went to the same school in Morrow. Most of the children were from ~~the~~ the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these black families were sharecroppers. Miss Ida Bowers, our teacher, was very respectable and taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in LeMoyen. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. I walked on the railroad tracks with the other black children. We were afraid to walk on the highway because a man had got run over. Black children couldn't ride on the school buses. I realized for the first time I was living in an evil Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses were available only for the white children. This made me want to learn what was behind these problems that existed for black people.

I liked to read. We used to read books like *Bob and Nancy*, and the story of the Tar Baby, and "Little Boy Blue Come Blow Your Horn. The sheep's in the meadow, the cows in the corn." Hell, no wonder I didn't learn nothing much in school.

But I did learn how to read pretty well. Reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school was over, I went back to help my cousins. When we wasn't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fireplace. But I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

The sharecroppers were very poor but I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Babe

(we called our cousins "aunt" and "uncle"; and T-Babe was the nickname for Rosetta, Uncle Tot's wife) gave me pork and beans and a cinnamon roll to eat every day for lunch. I noticed one day when I was walking down the street that some people were coming out of a building carrying bags of food. I asked the people if I could get some of that food. They told me to go on in and ask for some. When I got inside the building and asked for the food, a lady, who was sitting behind a desk, told me to sign some papers. When I signed the papers, I got the food. I was so glad to get this food I couldn't wait to get home to show Aunt T-Babe and Uncle Tot what I had. When Uncle Tot saw the food, he got very angry at me. Apparently, the building I went into to get the food from was the Welfare Office. Uncle Tot explained to me I shouldn't go to the Welfare Office to get food because that food was for people who were out of work and didn't have any other means of support. Even though I didn't quite understand what he was talking about, I didn't go there ever again. Nevertheless, I had been given some cornmeal, flour, plums and grapefruits.

Wrote  
on hand  
by Aunt  
T-Babe

One evening passing the dock I noticed some men were giving away bananas. They gave me some, so I took them. I didn't know what reaction Uncle Tot would have. But he didn't say anything to me about that. I just wanted something different to eat for a change.

One night Uncle Tot and his sister Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a drunk white man came in from the white bar next door

and put his hand on Aunt Bernice's breast. As soon as this happened, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man. White men on horses rode all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. The neighbors gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. He had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Babe moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard that a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Babe and she gave me a good spanking.

Aunt T-Babe decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized in the local Baptist church one Sunday morning with three more children. I remember how the preacher gave a long sermon over us, and people be hollering just like it was a funeral. Then the old preacher took me in the water and I thought he was going to preach my funeral. And

that water was cold! People just hollering. When the preacher dipped me that last time people were standing all around in the water and they started to singing "done got over." I remember that good. They took us back to ~~the place~~ <sup>a house</sup> and dressed and fed us. I felt like I was some kind of chosen person. For a while I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.

At about the age of 15, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but pretty large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out too well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Aunt T-Babe's brother, Dad Jones, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Jones had a large family, but everyone got to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me like one of the family.

The field hands' ~~days~~ <sup>me</sup> off was on Saturdays. One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents. <sup>a day??</sup> I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melville, Louisiana. I went there looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reece. When I caught the freight train to Melville, other hobos were in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to

jump off. With a suitcase under my arm and a little money in my pocket, I finally made it to Melville.

Melville wasn't no large town but it had streets and a theater. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reece. I happened to see a lady walking on the street and I said, "Lady, can you tell me where Joe Reece lives?" She said, "He lives out of town." She told me how to get to where he lived, then she asked me, "What is your name? You kin to Joe?" I said, "Yes, my name is Lee Brown."

Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melville. When we arrived at her home, I was introduced to her husband, her daughter and other relatives. Her name was Esther; my other cousins were Jessie Brown, and Henry Brown. I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different towns. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.

That just goes to show how you can be walking on the street and you just stop some particular person, and it turns out you're related to them. That shows how things can

happen. I don't know what you call it. I don't know if I was a chosen man or what, but that's what happened to me.

LEE BROWN Interview 6/4/98 on Childhood (Ch. 1)

Muskie  
Grandfather was a tall, dark-skinned man with kinda heavy shoulders. He was a large fellow. He was a kind-hearted, easy going man. I never did see him angry. He never got in no fights. Everybody in that little country town liked him. He was always helping people, people that had trouble. He carried his money in a sack, a white sack. I think my grandmother made it. He would lend people money, poor people who needed help. He was always trying to do things for people. He liked me a lot, too. I remember he used to take me to Bonkey (sp), another little town and he would buy me toys, a little wagon, marbles, spinning tops. I would bring them back home and then I would give the kids around there some marbles; I would always share with the other kids. He taught me to do that. Even the kids I used to play with, the next door neighbors, we never did have no fights. He taught me how to get along with people.

My grandfather would haul freight for different stores. The freight train would stop and leave freight, then he would deliver the freight to the people at four or five stores. He picked it up in his wagon. Two mules pulled that wagon. That was his business, hauling freight. Then he had a buggy what he used to take me round in. It was a black buggy with red spokes on the wheels and a black horse.

On the farm he raised chickens and ducks, didn't raise no hogs. He had a few horses and a few mules. He used to gather hay from some other place to feed his horses. He didn't grow no crops except for a little truck patch of vegetables to eat, cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, things like that, and some corn. The farm wasn't no great large one, but it was large enough for him, for what he was doing. Something that he could handle. Sometimes he hired two, three people round there to help him. He had a fellow that used to come help him named Buster Wells.

My grandmother, who I called Aunt Hannah, I don't remember too good. They told she was a Seminole Indian. She was tall. I remember Aunt Betsy, who used to be the housekeeper. After grandfather died she became mean to me, talk mean and didn't want to feed me. She was kind before he died.

I remember Aunt Pauline who used to live around there with her husband, Uncle Bill. She was a kind of Creole and she didn't speak English. She wore a red handkerchief on her head and had red lips and

wore a long dress. My grandfather and I used to pass her on the dirt road and she'd say "Bo' jour", and I didn't know what the hell she was saying. I'd break and run. I didn't know she was just saying good morning to me. Her husband, Bill Rieto, fought in the Civil War, and he had a old long gun that I sometimes saw sticking out their window when I passed there. He musta fought in the Union Army. I know he didn't fight for the Confederates, staying around my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was pretty militant.

In the house grandfather had this long table. I ain't seen no table like that in a long time. They would have breakfast at this table. He set me at the head of the table and they would say a prayer before eating. Now I don't understand this but in those days they had steak for breakfast. I don't know how they did that; maybe they kept it smoked or something. I know we ate meat and eggs. I remember we ate good. I think I had more than any kid around there, good food, toys. I was the only kid living on the farm. It was just me and my grandfather and Aunt Hannah before she died and Aunt Betsy.

Like I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans, but my mother got ill and went to live with my grandfather. When I was small my mother received some money from my father's death after he stepped on a live wire. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm. He took good care of me. He used to tell people that he wanted to give me the best education that money could buy. He paid a lot of attnetion to me. When his buggy would roll I'd be in there. He took me everywhere with him, to the stores, to meet white folks, to church on Sunday. People look up and say, "There come Uncle Lee, big Lee and little Lee."

Betsy's cruelty: She would fuss, half feed me. She and her sister Aunt Alice lived there and they were both mean. They wasn't kicking me or abusing me. Grandfather never did hit me, he never laid a hand on me.

Relationship with Grandfather: It seemed like people knowed me through him. We was so close, when they see him they see me. I remember when they called themselves baptizing me, people be hollering just like it was a funeral. The old preacher took me in the water and I thought he was going to preach a funeral. People be

standing around like at a funeral. And that water was cold. People just hollering. Then when the preacher dipped me that last time people were standing all aroun in the water and they started to singing "done got over." I remember that good. They took me back to the place and dressed and feed me. I felt like I was some kind of chosen person.

Then I had a "parain" (sp?) and a "marain" (sp?) they call it. They were like a godfather and godmother. Lank Green and Annie Green.

After my grandfather died and I was staying with Tot Howard, my sister used to send me clothes. My half-sister, my father's daughter, was living in Alexandria. She heard about and she came to see me. She brought me clothes. She used to wear long brown boots and she carried a walking cane. Her name was Henrietta, I believe.

Tot Howard lived in the country between LeMoyne and Morrow. I used to go to school in Morrow, then went to school in LeMoyne. [Doesn't remmeber how old when started school.] My teacher was Miss Ida Bowers. I remember I had to walk to school with the rest of the children [while the white kids rode in school bus.] We walked on the railroad tracks. We were afraid to walk on the highway 'cause a man had got runned over. We took our lunch to school. Sometimes we had potatoes, and sometimes we was eating that damned pork. We didn't know no better. But we ate good. My Aunt T-Bay made that cha cha. They had a good garden. They had potato pumps (sp?) where they put their potatoes and killed their hogs and salted the meat and smoked the meat and made sausage. They would catch fish and smoke the fish. And Aunt T-Bay would bake rolls. She would let the dough set and rise up and then bake it. And then wrap it up in a bar. You know that had them big bars on the beds.

*pieces of cloth*

(clarify?) I remember we didn't have no ice, so we put our drinks in sawdust in a tub.

*at 77  
you  
saw  
- 1st  
70*

I liked to read. We used to read books like Bob and Nancy, and the story of the Tar Baby, and "Little Boy Blue Come Blow Your Horn. The sheep's in the meadow, the cows in the corn." Hell, no wonder I didn't learn nothing much in school.

Aunt Bernice was Tot's sister. [ Lee says the Tot and Bernice and T-Babe were really his cousins, "but we was trained to called them aunts and uncles." They had children and I was like one of their children.]

I was looking for my cousin, Joe Reece. Melville wasn't no large town but it had streets and a theater. I happened to see a lady walking on the street and I said "Lady, can you tell me where Joe Reece live?" She said, "He lives out of town." She told me how to get to where he lived, then she asked me "What is your name? You kin to Joe?" I said, "Yes, my name is Lee Brown."

That goes to show how people walking on the street and you just stop a particular person, and it turns out you're related to them. That shows how things can happen. I don't know what you call it. I don't know if I was a chosen man or what, but that's what happen to me.

Concerning his grandfather's farm: "The main house and the land are still there. My cousin tried to sell it, but they told him in Opelussas that it belonged to me, but it was never turned over to me. I don't know who is paying the taxes on it. One of these times I'm going to have go down there and see what happened."

Concerning white man who got shot in bar: "There was a white bar in the same building. A white man came over to the black people's bar after he got his head bad."

6/9/92  
More at end of our tape  
on Aunt Katy + land / Aunt  
Aunt hitting Little Lee  
potato "pumps"  
Benny Light Holly / St. Baker

## Chapter 1/Childhood

<sup>I went</sup>  
My mother took me to live with my grandfather when I was five years old. Grandfather owned a farm of many acres in Marrot, Louisiana. He raised cattle, chickens and <sup>hogs</sup> ~~hogs~~. Grandfather was well known, loved and respected by everyone who lived in <sup>Marrot</sup> ~~Marrot~~, Louisiana. His name was Lee Brown, Senior. Everyone called him Uncle Lee Brown. When I was born in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana, May 28, 1921, I had been named after him, Lee Brown.

Grandfather's farm was <sup>NVT</sup> ~~so~~ huge he had to hire men to help with the work around the farm. Some of the happiest <sup>times</sup> moments that I can remember were when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those rugged dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him.

See <sup>Ch 1</sup> ~~See~~ <sup>Describe his grandfather</sup> ~~See~~ church and take food and stay all c- exchanging food. Grandfather was a- <sup>any more stories he remembers about him?</sup> ~~any more stories he remembers about him?~~ and with me by his side looking over - <sup>what did he give me?</sup> ~~what did he give me?~~ as your eyes can see--one day this - <sup>what did farm look like?</sup> ~~what did farm look like?~~ up to him for guidance, wisdom a- <sup>who all lived on farm?</sup> ~~who all lived on farm?~~ To me there

man than my grandfather. Grand others who were less fortunate. I sh <sup>what happened to farm? I didn't see it in ~~some~~ ~~base~~?</sup> ~~what happened to farm? I didn't see it in some base?~~ ve me with my friends,

What did farm look like?

How did he feel this?

## Chapter 1/Childhood

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Grandfather's farm was ~~so~~ huge he had to hire men to help with the work around the farm. Some of the happiest <sup>times</sup> moments that I can remember were when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those rugged dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him. Some Sundays we would go to the church and take food and stay all day talking with the neighbors and exchanging food. Grandfather was a solid, strong man. He would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "As far as your eyes can see--one day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge.

To me there was no wiser or beloved a man than my grandfather. Grandfather taught me to share with others who were less fortunate. I shared my toys or whatever he gave me with my friends.

We lived among hardworking farmers who were very poor. Grandfather delivered freight. He met the train for supplies, and then delivered the goods back to different stores,

*Did he  
do this by  
a train?*

I sincerely loved my grandfather, and he loved me. Every morning we had our breakfast on a long diningroom table: my grandfather sat at one end and I sat at the other end. Living on the farm, listening to different farm sounds, were my happiest moments.

*What food  
was breakfast?*

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes. My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work one morning he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

We lived in the countryside where people were very friendly, and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

*Who was  
some of  
the neighbors?*

One morning my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I were really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the

*Who was  
this?  
Where was  
his home?  
Why?*

farm. My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. She was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She lived on the farm with my grandfather and I. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. Her long black hair hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah was a kind lady. Grandfather didn't believe in banks. He would let his neighbor (one that he trusted) keep his money in an old sack until he got ready to use it.

One day some neighbor's children and I were playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. He cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. Hospitals were miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a physician. Things weren't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. Later he married her. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after my grandfather died. One night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that

use?

how?  
(he didn't know)

how?  
(doesn't know)

how?  
(doesn't know)

were in the room at that time had to pull me away from him. My grandfather was such a kind man. Everyone, Black and white, liked him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and also carried swords<sup>which were</sup> a symbol of the organization. All the women wore white. I also was dressed in white. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since he had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. She was a cruel woman with little education or knowledge. I never knew anyone could be so cruel and selfish. We never had much contact with each other, either before or after grandfather's death. She was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do.

There was  
the cruel  
would kill

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man whose name was Buster<sup>well</sup> came to live with us on the farm; he also brought a wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. In addition, since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

feminine  
to  
witness,  
cop as a  
child.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. But my grandfather left all his land to me, When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in <sup>Opalville</sup> ~~Apalouise~~, Louisiana to try to get my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that all the land belonged to me, and the land couldn't be sold.

My land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one: by that time I would be old enough to decide (legally) what I wanted to do with the land. When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was so accustomed to eating upon. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised anymore over any stupid thing she did. There were times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. She would often beat me for no reason. My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They didn't have anything to do with such a weak woman. *wicked?*

Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. Then Aunt Betsy brought her sister to the farm to live with us. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me: moreso than his sister. But my visit was cut

How did  
this shape  
views  
toward  
women?  
(the 3  
at dawn?)

How old?

short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Marrot, Louisiana about the way they were treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, Black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Burguard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Burguard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

Things began to shape up for me. Finally news reached my cousins who lived in a small countryside of Lamond and Marrot, Louisiana. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.

~~Evangelical?~~

All the children in this small community went to the same school. Most of the children were from the the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these Black families were sharecroppers. Mrs. <sup>Howards</sup> Ida, our teacher, respectable as she was, taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in <sup>Lemoyne</sup> Lamond, Louisiana. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. School buses weren't available for Black children. Clearly then, I realized for the first time I was living in an evil Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses were available only for white children. For this reason, I had to learn what was behind these problems that existed for Black people.

I learned how to read remarkably well. Then reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school were over, I went back to help my cousins. When we weren't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fireplace. I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

Sometimes when the neighbors were out of food, a lady named Jew Mama, who operated a grocery store in the Black community,

*was she a Jew? white?*

*What book did he like?*

*AW Galvesta Texas*

*how? and how did this influence your life?*

*Mom to Galvesta Texas section*

would let Black people have credit and tell them to pay whenever they got some money.

The sharecroppers were very poor but I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Bay gave me pork and beans and a cinnamon roll to eat every day for lunch. I noticed one day when I was walking down the street that some people were coming out of a building carrying bags of food. I asked the people if I could get some of that food. They told me to go on in and ask for some. When I got inside the building and asked for the food, a lady, who was sitting behind a desk, told me to sign some papers. When I signed the papers, I got the food. I was so glad to get this food I couldn't wait to get home to show Aunt T-Bay and Uncle Tot what I had. When Uncle Tot saw the food, he got very angry at me. Apparently, the building I went into to get the food from was the Welfare Office. Uncle Tot explained to me I shouldn't go to the Welfare Office to get food because that food was for people who were out of work and didn't have any other means of support. Even though I didn't quite understand what he was talking about, I didn't go there ever again. Nevertheless, I had been given some cornmeal, flour, plums and grapefruits.

One evening passing the dock I noticed some men were giving away bananas. They gave me some, so I took them. I didn't know what reaction Uncle Tot would have. But he didn't say anything to me about that. I just wanted something different to eat for a change.

One night Uncle Tot and Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a white man put

white?  
who?

And what did  
this mean  
you as a  
life experience?

who she?

whites + blacks were  
in same bar?

his hand on Aunt Bernice's breast. As soon as this was done, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man.

From then on, white men rode horses all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. At night the neighbors gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. Uncle Tot had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Bay<sup>be</sup> moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Bay and she gave me a good spanking.

Aunt T-Bay decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized, in the local Baptist church one Sunday morning with three more children. I won't forget now the preacher gave a long sermon over us, as if he <sup>was</sup> were at a funeral. After the baptism the three other children and I changed our clothes in one of the member's houses. From then on I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.

to talk  
Klay -  
how did racism  
affect his  
growth?

Am I affected by  
church? was it  
important?

15.  
At about the age of 10, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but quite large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Dad Howard, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Howard had a large family. Everyone had to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me as one of the family.

who he?

The field hands' days off were on Saturdays. One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents. I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melvin, Louisiana. I went looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reeve. When I caught the freight train to Melvin, other hobos were in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to jump off.

14. or 15. 116

How old?

Suitcase under my arm, little money in my pocket, I finally made it to Melvin, Louisiana. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reeve I ran into one lady who knew him. She asked me what my name was. I told her Lee Brown. Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melvin. When we arrived at her home, I was

116 she took me to her home

introduced to her husband, daughter and other relatives. My cousin's name was Esther; my other cousins were Jessie Brown, and Henry Brown, <sup>who was a cook at the hotel.</sup> I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different cities. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.