

Hi, my name is Lataya. I'm 52 years old. I was born a slave in the USA. My parents were taken from Africa.

When I was seven, I started carrying buckets of water to the plantation workers. My hands were sore from holding the rusty bucket. This is how it was for three years.

When I was ten, I started to give the master's family food. I used to watch them eat bellyfuls of divine food. We got tiny amounts of stale bread and fatbacks – just enough to keep us alive. How I longed to have yummy food. The master himself was cruel and wicked, but his wife had a soft spot for the slaves. Each day she would secretly bring some sweets and snacks from her big house. One day, the master and his wife had a massive argument over an escaped slave. His wife decided to leave, but before she left she decided to pay one last visit to the slaves. She told us that she would always help slaves if they wanted to escape – then off she went.

The master decided to remarry, but the wife he chose was just like him. Her name was Strictina Jones. We had to call her Madam Strictina. When I was seventeen, she had two children. They were girls. To the master's horror, they were light brown skinned. I was very happy indeed when I was eighteen, because I started to babysit them. The children's names were Monica and Veronica. When they were two years old, they loved to play with me.

When I was twenty one, the news I had been dreading came. I had to work with the other plantation workers on the field. I tried to tell Veronica and Monica, but they would not let go of me. In the end, I had to tell them I was going to the necessary, and then I never came back.

The day started at six o'clock in the morning, until it was too dark to work. My hands were sore, with blisters all over them, and my back hurt. After only half an hour, I would be in agony. After two days of doing this, I burst out crying in the middle of working. The master brought out his whip. My body was stinging for hours after that. That night, I felt a gentle hand shaking my shoulder. It was the master's first wife. She told me to follow her. I did as I was told. She led me to her hut in the forest. She packed all the food she had, which was far more than I normally got.

As we set off on our journey through the forest, heading north, something rustled in the leaves. Could it be the slave catcher already? We hid under the nearest bush and waited until we couldn't hear anything else. We crept off. We were walking for weeks, and more than half of our food supplies were gone. I asked the master's wife if she missed her divorced husband. She replied "not at all." She said she wanted me to be her family. Hearing family mentioned, I stopped dead in my tracks. A tear ran down my face. The master's ex-wife asked me what the matter was. I didn't reply. I wiped my eyes on my sleeve and carried on walking. The master's ex-wife told me her name was Lucy Enright.

I could see a border... but what did it say? I nudged Lucy and pointed in the direction of the sign. As we got closer, I could just about read the welcome to Pennsylvania. Suddenly, I started running as fast as the wind. I started to dance. I couldn't believe my eyes. I was free. No more slavery. I remembered my family and told Lucy I had to get them. She told me to go to the house with the red blanket hanging outside, the first one I saw.

I did as I was told. Off I went. I asked the man in the house if I could shelter there and he asked what my name was. He asked if I was Lucy's friend and said I was more than welcome. Two weeks later, Lucy came back with my family. They were shocked when the man gave Lucy a full kiss. So he was her boyfriend... that made sense now.

We moved to a big house where all my family could live together. I felt so happy. I got food till I was content, a nice bed to sleep in and, most importantly, I was living in a slave-free state with my family. What else could I have wanted?

By Lataya 5G