**Mary Armstrong**  
*Mary Armstrong, 91 years old, was born on a farm near St. Louis, Mo. Her mother, Siby Adams, belonged to Wm. Cleveland and his wife, Polly, while her father, Sam Adams, belonged to a "nigger trader" that had a farm adjoining the Cleveland place.*

"You see when I was born, my mamma belong to old Wm. Cleveland an’ old Polly Cleveland, an’ they was the meanest two white folks what ever lived, ‘cause they was always beatin’ on their slaves. I know ‘cause mamma told me, an’ I hear about it other places, an’ besides, old Polly—she was a Polly devil if there ever was one—whipped my little sister what was only 9 months old an’ jes’ a little baby, to death. She came an’ took the diaper off my little sister an’ whipped ‘til the blood jes’ ran, jes’ cause she cry like all babies do, an’ it killed my sister. I never forgot that, but I got some even with that old Polly devil, ‘cause when I was about 10 years old I belonged to Mis’ Olivia, what was their daughter, an’ one day old Polly devil come to where Mis’ Olivia lived after she got married, an’ tried to give me a lick out in the yard, an’ I picked up a rock ‘bout as big as half your fist an’ hit her right in the eye an’ busted the eyeball an’ told her that was for whippin’ my baby sister to death. You could hear her holler for five miles, but Mis’ Olivia, when I told her, say, "Well, I guess mamma has learnt her lesson at last." But she was mean like old Cleveland ‘til she die, an’ I hopes they is burnin’ in torment now…

I don’t remember ‘bout the start of things so much, ‘cept what Mis’ Olivia and my mamma, her name was Siby, tell me. Close up there it was powerful cold in the winter times an’ the farms was lots diffrunt from down here. They call ‘em plantations down here, but up at St. Louis they was jes’ called farms. An’ that’s jes’ what they was, cause we raise wheat, barley, rye, oats, corn an’ fruit. They wasn’t no cotton growin’ up there…

…[M]amma say, that when I was little, old Cleveland took a lot of his slaves what was in ‘custom’, an’ brought ‘em to Texas to sell. You know he warn’t supposed to do that ‘cause when you was in custom, that was ‘cause he had borrowed money on you, an’ you was supposed to not leave the place ‘til he paid up. ‘Cose old Cleveland would jes’ tell the one he owed the money to that you had run off, or squirmed out in some way, he was that mean. I was jes’ a baby an’ don’t rec’lec it, but mamma say she was in one bunch an’ he had me back in ‘nother bunch. Mamma had been put together before this with my father, Sam Adams, what belonged to a nigger trader what had a place next to old Cleveland. But that didn’ make no difference to old Cleveland. He was so mean that he never would sell the man an’ woman an’ chillen to the same one. He would sell the man here, an’ the women there, an’ if there was chillen, he would sell them some place else.

Oh, old Satan in torment wouldn’ be no meaner than he and Old Polly was to the slaves. Why, mamma has tole me that when he would chain up a nigger to whip him, he would rub salt and pepper on him, like he said to ‘season’ him up. An’ when he would sell a slave, he would grease their mouth all up to make it look like they had been fed good an’ was strong an’ healthy."

**John Barker**  
*John Barker, age 84, was born on a plantation close to Cincinnati, Ohio, the property of the Barker family, who took him and his grandparents to Sedalia, Missouri, to another plantation, later to Texas where they continued farming, close to Houston.*

"I was a slave, yes ma’am, an’ I was born a slave in Cincinnati, Ohio. I ain’t one of these Seminoles; I am a ‘Malagasser’ (Madagascar?) nigger. I seen lots o’ slave times up dere. Yes’m, I ‘member all about dem times. I ‘member de old people well…Talk about times! De blood houn’s on deir trail! Dey had what you call de common houn’s and when you couldn’ get ‘em [runaways] by de common houn’s, you put de blood houns dat don’t make no racket a-tall on deir trail. Dey run my gran’fadder ovah one hun’erd miles and never caught ‘im till about t’ree or fo’ days an’ nights an’ dey found ‘im under a bridge. What dey put on him was e-nuf. I have seen ‘em whip ‘em till de blood run down deir backs and den dey would put common salt in de places where dey whipped ‘em an’ dey would have to go right on nex’ mawnin’ and do deir tasks dey puts on ‘em. I’ve seen ‘nuf o’ dat.…

…Maybe dey puts you on a task dis mawnin’ and dat dare task got to be finished seben o’clock dis evenin’ an’ if it ain’t, dey whip you. I have seen many a nig-person go out in de mawnin’ and deir backs cut jus’ like it was cut wid a knife. De overseer was a white man, ‘an he rode hossback and wo’(wore) dese big tall beaver hats an’ had a wide strap hangin’ dowm from de saddle, wide as yo’ han’. Jus’ like a belt ‘round yo’ waist, only wider, you know. No, it didn’ have no holes in it, but it raised a blister, jes’ de same, an’ cut yo’ back like a knife. "I wasn’t old ‘nough an’ big ‘nuf to be a slave like my mother an’ gran’mother. I know my gran’mother had been whipped lotsa times…

…I’ve seen slaves sold up in dere aroun’ Cincinnati, Ohio. You see dey keep ‘em yoked togedder and dey would have ‘em fixed in a way till dey have to go de same direction an’ dey would sell ‘em by de pair fo’ so much. Maybe sometimes all de way from a thousand to t’ree and fo’ thousand dollars. Dey would put ‘em up on a auction block, sometimes t’ree and fo ‘ at a time. Dey was biddin’ ‘em an’ whoever make de highest bid, he would get ‘em. Probably once a year, or even two years, dey would sell ‘em. Dey wasn’t allowed to marry. But if dey seen you talkin’ to somebody like you was makin’ love, whether you love ‘em or not, dey make you live wid ‘em. Dat was marryin’ each other, all right, but you ain’t got no papers an’ t’ings like dat. Dey wouldn’t have no license."

SOURCE: *Rawick Papers, Series 5*. Thomas Jefferson Library Reference Department, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

**Mark Discus**  
*Mark Discus was interviewed by Bernard Hinkle in Joplin, Missouri, February 2, 1938.*

*Well, Uncle Mark, I have been asked to get the story of your early life for our government. Will you favor me by answering a few questions?*

No indeed, I feel proud and honored and will be glad to.

*Now Uncle Mark, what is your full name and where were you born?*

My name is Mark Anthony Discus and I was born on the old Bidstrap place. Bidstrap is the present owner of the Jeff Montgomery place, where I was born. Hit is just about four five miles from here and my first master, was a Presbyterian preacher, his name was Jeff Montgomery. My Pappy’s name was Hardin Montgomery and my Mammy was Susan Montgomery.

*Uncle Mark, did you have any brothers or sisters?*

Yessuh, there was ten children of we’uns and we was all separated. I was sold when I was four years old, they said, for three hundred and fifty dollars. Wish I had the money now, I could shore use hit good.

*Do you know when your birthday is, Uncle Mark?*

Yes Suh ree. I was born on Chris’mus day and will be eighty-eight (88) years old this Chris’mus (1937). I know this is so ‘cause my master had a boy born the same year and he allus said it was so.

*Did you ever see any of your brothers or sisters or your parents after you were sold?*

Yes Suh, sometimes I did. I seen my brothers and sisters but they had different names. Then I heard my Pappy had died. I don’t remember him. My Mammy was sold down South and I never seen her again ‘til after the war was over. She came back here and died at South Greenfield, about thirty-five years ago.

*Tell me, Uncle Mark; they say when slaves were marketed off they were sold like cattle— is that right?*

Well now, I kain’t remember much about hit only what I was told. I remember my Mammy cryin’ and I was scared. They stood me on a big stump and auctioned me off. They told me they stuck pins in the older ones felt their muscles and looked at their teef, but I kain’t remember that.

*Is it true, Uncle Mark, that they greased the bodies of the older ones before they sold them?*

Yes Suh, they did. And they fed’em up and didn’t work ‘em for awhile. They took wool cards and combed the kinks outer their hair too.

*Uncle Mark, do you know who bought you first?*

Yes Suh, a man by the name of Miller bought me first and then I was sold to ol’ master Ned Discus. This sale was just a trade, so I just changed homes, so to say.

*Did you go to school?*

Lawsy no, chile. I just worked. I don’t know nothin’ bout larnin. When I was nine years old I cut all the corn stalks offen a forty-acre field with a hoe. We had to work from sun up ‘til dark too.

*Did your master ever whip you?*

Yes Suh, sometimes. Once I remember he whooped me ‘til the blood run offen my heels for breakin’ an axe handle. We knowed to step when he yelled at us.

*Did you have plenty to eat?*

We had ‘nough of what we got, but hit was just course grub.

*Did you have meat and, what kind, if any?*

Yes Suh, we allus had fat meat but none of the ham.

*Do you remember how many slaves your master owned?*

No Suh, I don’t know how many the first master owned, but my last master did not have more than twelve or fifteen.

*Did you live in the house with your master or did you all have separate homes?*

Married folks lived in log cabins, but the single folks lived in the big house. I lived in the big house. I slept on a pallet on the floor in the kitchen and every mornin’ the ol’ master would holler, "Mark, Mark light that fire". And if I didn’t git right up I got a cane over my head….

*How did your master dress you?*

We just wore a one piece garment called a skift. It was a hol’ lot like a long night shirt. It was the coarsest of cotton stuff an’ had no collar.

*Didn’t you have anything else to wear?*

Well, in the winter we had ‘ol’ clothes of the master’s family. Of course, you had shoes? No we didn’t! Only in the coldest of weather we had split leather shoes without any linin’. I have had my feet freeze and crack open on the heels and bleed. Didn’t do us no good to complain neither.

*Did you ever have any fun or play games?*

Not much. Sometimes we’ud get a little time offen from work if the weather was too bad or on Sunday. We mostly tried to see who could lift the mos’. We would rassel too. Sometimes we pitched horse shoes, and sometimes we went possum huntin’.

*Did you like possum?*

Yes Suh, I sure did and still do. Possum wif sweet taters am fine, but my teef are gone now till I kain’t eat it any more.

*Did you ever attend religious services?*

Mos’ allus in the fall, after the crops was laid by and the white folks had camp meetin’s an’, of cose, us colored-folks went too…

**Richard Kimmons**  
"I was born in Missouri, Lawrence County, about fourteen years before de Civil War, near as I can tell from what my Mistis tel’ me. My father was Tom Kimmons. My mother was Liza Kimmons. She was born in North Cal’ina an’ come to Missouri when she was a young gal. My father was born fourteen miles from Springfield, Missouri, Lawrence County.

Shore is heap of diffunce ‘tween how we live now an’ t’was in dose times. We made our beds by driving logs in the dirt floor an’ makin’ a kinda scaffold. Den ropes was stretched across ‘stid of springs and we filled ticks with grass or straw or corn shucks an’ made our beds. Mos’ all de slaves everywhere lived in log houses which had two rooms. No’m I jus’ don’ seem to ‘member my grand parents. Oh, I did mos’ every kin’ of work on de farm. We et possums, rabbits, coon, wild turkey, deer an’ bears after we come to Texas. Our white folks was good to us an’ treated us like we was w’ite as dey was. Ef dey had flour, meal, coffee or sugar we had some too. I shore did like huckleberry pie and chicken pie. Guess yo’ all don’ hab no huckleberries here in Texas; dey shore plentiful back in Missou’i.

My mother was de head cook on de plantation. We all had de garden togedder an’ de slaves got what dey wanted out ob de garden to cook. Dere was a mighty fine big apple orchard on de Missouri plantation. Our w’ite folks was fa’amers. Dere were three women slaves, my grandmother, my aunt and my mother. "Our marster made all de shoes us wore. I could make shoes an’ even made de shoe lasses (laces) what you make de shoes on. My marster had four boys but dey was all killed in de war but one. Marster had four girls. He didn’t habe no oberseer; he had two or three little small fa’ams but he seed after he niggers an’ mules heself. Said he didn’t want ‘em drug ‘roun’ an’ all brusied up. Our w’ite folks was considered well-to-do. We didn’t git up early jus’ ‘bout five o’clock in de summer an’ ‘bout six in de winter. We didn’t work ‘till dark like mos’ niggers did in ‘em days. We was whipped mighty little.

I seen a drove of slaves come out of Missouri one time. Dey was all chained togedder. When dey come to a creek of water dey jus’ all had to go ‘cross big an’ little, keep head up or sink, jus’ like hosses. A w’ite man, named Fullbright was bringin’ dem south to keep de Yanks from gettin’ dem. He was one bad oberseer. He would tie dem slaves togedder or tie dem down hog fashion and beat dem like he was beatin’ a dog. Dey come out of Missouri when we did but we was not close by.

My w’ite folks tried to larn me to read an write. Bill Kimmon, Marster’s baby chile tried to larn me, but shaw I couldn’t sit in dat house an’ study. Twas my own fault case I nebber larned to read an’ write…"

**Emma Knight**  
*Emma Knight, living at 924 North Street, Hannibal, Missouri, was born in slavery on the farm of Will and Emily Ely, near Florida, Monroe County. The following is her story as she told it.*

"We lived on a Creek near Florida. We belonged to Will Ely. He had only five slaves, my father and mother and three of us girls. I was only eight or nine years old. The Ely’s had eight children. There was Paula, Ann, Sarah, Becky, Emily, Lizzie, Will, Ike, and Frank. Lizzie was the oldest girl and I was to belong to her when she was married.

The master of the house was better to us than his mistress. We didn’t have to work very hard, because we was so young, I guess. We cut weeds along the fences, pulled weeds in the garden and helped the mistress with the hoeing. We had to feed the stock, sheep, hogs, and calves, because the young masters wouldn’t do the work. In the evening we were made to knit a finger width and if we missed a stitch we would have to pull all the yarn out and do it over. The master’s girls taught us to read and write. We didn’t have hardly any clothes and most of the time they was just rags. We went barefoot until it got real cold. Our feet would crack open from the cold and bleed. We would sit down and bawl and cry because it hurt so. Mother made moccasins for our feet from old pants. Late in the fall master would go to Hannibal or Palmyra and bring us shoes and clothes. We got those things only once a year. I had to wear the young master’s overalls for underwear and linseys for a dress.

My father was taken away. My mother said he was put up on a block and sold because master wanted money to buy something for the house. My mother told me she came from Virginia or down south some place. They brought her in a box car with lots of other colored people. There were several cars full, with men in one car, women in another, and the younger ones in another, and the babies in another with some of the women to care for them. They brought them to Palmyra and sold them. Master Ely bought my mothers. I don’t know where my father came from.

Mistress always told us that if we run away somebody would catch us and kill us. We were always scared when somebody strange came. The first we knew there was war was when some soldiers come through. We were sure scared then. Once a man came and we thought he was a patroller but he asked for something to eat. Mother took him to the mistress. She gave him something to eat wrapped in a paper and told him to get off the place. Some Union soldiers came and told us that we were free like they were and told us not to be afraid, they wouldn’t hurt us. They told us the war was over. The master told mother not to go away, that if she stayed a while he would give her a couple hundred dollars. We stayed a while but never got any money."

SOURCE: Slave Narratives (1938). Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.