

Barbour County
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MID-WIVES ARE CALLED "GRANNIES."

Aunt Granny (Lula) Russeau. Mid-Wife, lives at 426 East Washington Street, Eufaula. She still practices her profession although she has grown old.

In a soft sweet voice, seated in a low bottom chair beside a bucket glowing with red coals of charcoal she told me her story.

"Darling, I be a granny nigh onto fifty year. I wuz born one. God made me dat way. I was born August 15, 1861, the first year ob de war, here in dis town (Eufaula) on Barbour Street in Miss Andrew McKenzie's back yard. My marster wuz Marse Andrew McKenzie and my Mistis was Miss Adelaide. My folks was quality.

"My ma wuz a Chickasaw Indian, born on Black Creek, Virginny. She had long black hair and a nose straight as an arrow and wore a number three shoe. My pa wuz a red man too. He come from South Callina. One day some po' white trash ax me if my pa wuz a white man. I told dat 'oman, don't you knowed de difference 'tween a white man and a red man?"

"I got pure blood in my veins, darling, and I's proud ob hit, and I sho don't lak no po' white trash.

"My pa died when I wuz a few months old, but my ma lived to raise me to a 'missy' gal. She learnt me all I knows. I wuz just five years old when freedom come, but us stayed right on in de white folks' back yard. Ma wuz a granny too, and de

best wash 'oman in Eufaula. She learnt me 'bout 'erbs and charms.

"Some folks thinks I is a conjur 'oman but I sho' ain't. I kin see in the future, though. I was born with a caul over my eyes."

Aunt Lula says she is not afraid of ghosts, but she has a remedy even for ha'nts.

"I turns my pockets wrongside out when I sees ha'nts," she said "and dey's don't pester me none. But when I wuz a little gal, I sho wuz scared ob Jack-O-Lanterns and Yankees. De Yankee soldiers wuz here during 'struction days and dey wuz sho' 'po white trash.' Dey said all us niggers dat kept on staying wid our marster deys gwine ter punch out our eyes and cut off our ears and noses. 'Course dey never done hit, us so scared us neber eben poke our head out de door. My ma learnt me how to wash and iron, to cook, to sew, to spin. I could do 'most anything.

"My ma used to spin on her spinning wheel, they used curds (cards), wodden curds, and they'd spin and sing and sing: "Oh, for yer heart to praise my God," and way before day she'd sing 'Amazing Grace; Grace has brought me saved this far, and Grace will lead me Home.'

"My ma wouldn't use no doctors. Made her own medicine out ob 'erbs. Use pine tops for bad colds, mullein leaves too; bitter weed for chills and fever; sage and catnip leaves, b'iled

down, steep hit and give hit for babies to cure hives. Then give the mama oil and turpentine. Mix tallow and mutton suet and a little kerosene oil and a little turpentine, put on a flannel rag and fry them. Put hit on the chest hot. Hit sho' helps colds.

"She learnt me to put sassafras roots and asafoetida^a in a little sack on a green string 'round yer neck and hit would ward off sickness. Ef you drap yer knife or fork, somebody is coming. Ef you wants your wife to have chilluns, throw cow peas in de big road. Ef de screech owl screeches near de house, somebody in your family sho' gwineter die. When de frogs hollow, hits gwineter rain. Ef a black cat licks her fur de wrong way, dat means a fight in de family. Ef a rooster crows in de first part ob de night, hasty news.

"Honey, don't eber put yer right shoe on first, and don't put yer hat on de bed, hits bad luck.

"Ef you drap your dishrag, that means somebody a fur piece is hungry. Ef your right eye itches, ye^h gwineter be in Georgy. Ef yer left eye itches, yer gwineter git mad. Ef yer right hand itches, it sho' is true yer gwineter git money or git a letter.

"Ef yer foot itches you is going to a strange land. Honey, I don't want to go to air strange land; de cemetery is one of them strange lands.

"Ef a rooster comes up in de porch and sticks his head in de door and crows, somebody is coming. Ef a rooster comes up

in de house and sticks his head out ob de door, somebody gwineter die. Ef a cow lows at night somebody gwineter die. Ef a snake comes in de house, dats de debil."

Aunt Lula is proud of her work as a midwife. "I's kotched ober five hundred chillun in my life she said. "I is had good times and bad times. One ob de worst times I eber had wuz with May Bell. Dis gal she wasn't no good gal, but dat don't count. She suffered awful; dat baby weighs twenty pounds. Hit wuz writ up in the medicine journals. Hit wuz born dead. Hit wuz a blue baby and I kotched it all by myself, but I sont fer Dr. Britt. When he got dar he said, 'My God, how did you done hit? I is gwineter give you a 'ploma.' The sweat wuz just a-rolling off ob me.

"Dey had me up in church 'bout dat chile. Axed me if it wuz white. I said, 'No; hit wuz blue!'"

Then she talked of her ways of predetermining sex, and recited some of her strange remedies.

"When I ketches a chile and hit's face is up before hit's born, I knows hit's a girl. Ef de face is down hit's a boy. Now and then I ketches a girl with hit's face down, and hit's always bad luck," she said earnestly.

"When a 'oman is threatened with a miscarriage the best thing to give her is double tansy. Double tansy is a garden herb. Some grannies give dirt-dobber tea, but I never did. When dey mention dirt-dobber's tea to me I just shooes 'em away.

"When a 'oman starts de 'change,' rosemary tea is de best thing; you can mostly find hit in de cemetery. A German doctor tole me dat. Honey, don't forget I wiz born with two brights (two sights) and dat caul ober my face.

"I kin always tell ef a 'oman is gwine to have twins. I kin tell dat 'cause I had dat caul ober my eyes. I have give blackpepper tea and elbow tea (a little weed) but I ain't got no confidence in hit.

"Yellow-root tea is good for sick stomach, when a 'oman is sick at her stomach when she is pregnant. Night shade is another good herb for making salves for sore-head.

"Honey, when de after-birth comes, burn hit, den don't take up de ashes in four weeks. If you does hits bad luck. Den wash all de clothes in de yard; dat's good luck. Ef you put butterbean hulls in de road dat will keep yer wife bearing chillun. Don't give fish to a 'oman laying in bed. Hit's sho' death.

"Honey, I had a bad time not long ago. A chile wuz born and de nigger man said hit wasn't his'en, 'cause de foots wasn't right. Didn't have foots like him. Said de midwife always drew de foots and dat chile's foots wasn't lak de rest, and dey part right den and dar. Dat gal sho' wuz mad; said she didn't care ef he did lef' her. Maybe hit wasn't his'n sho nuff."

Aunt Lula had been with this Negro woman four days in labor, unable to deliver. She called a doctor in consultation. The

doctor found everything normal except that the woman was exhausted from long labor pains. He told her she would deliver in a few minutes, but they would just have to help her pains out. She said, ef things is normal, ain't hit time to quiller (quill her) ?

The doctor didn't know what she meant and endeavored to hide his ignorance. He told her Yes, it was, to go ahead. She said, No doctor, you do hit. The doctor said, No, I am the consultant, you go ahead and quiller.

So Aunt Lula hurried to get a quill from an old broom sage broom, filled it full of red pepper, inserted the quill in the expectant mother's nose and blew. She immediately went into a convulsive spell of coughing and sneezing. Aunt Lula then said, Watch dat baby come here now, doctor, she gwine ter spit him out lak a cat having kittens. And the baby came "right now," she said.

Then Aunt Lula walked over to the bed and pulled a knife from under the mattress and said, "I put dis knife under dar to cut dem labor pains, but hit sho didn't hope her none. You doctors give 'push' medicine now but I don't fool with hit, hit's too new fangled."