

*Excellent*

NC-20

"A Race Man Th'ough an' Th'ough."

Real Names

Gypsy Beauty Shops  
Ned Davis  
Darlington County  
Hartsville  
Eugene  
Rock Hill  
Mrs. Bass  
Annie  
Cap'n Johnson  
Mr. Matthews  
Mrs. J. A. Barber  
Ora Lee Springs  
Mr. Harrison  
George  
Aunt Cinda  
Courtland, N. Y.  
Mildred Kennedy  
Dr. Twitty  
Charlotte  
Sergeant Pitts  
Mr. Alexander  
Gastonia  
Baby Face Skin Tonic

Changed Names

Caravan Beauty Salons  
Vic Streeter  
DeRamus County  
DeWeese  
Ralph  
Desmond  
Sewell  
Lily  
Cap'n Tucker  
Mr. Belk  
Mrs. C. W. Thornton  
Ila May Brevard  
Mr. Douglas  
Will  
Aunt Celie  
Wiley's Landing  
Mabel Langford  
Dr. Oates  
Riverton  
Sergeant Grice  
Mr. Davidson  
Latonia  
Peachbloom

May 3, 1939

Ned Davis (Negro)

435 W. Stonewall St.,

Charlotte, N.C.

Beauty Shop Owner

Cora Lee Bennett, writer (Negro)

Mary R. Northrop, reviser

### 'A Race Man Th'ough an' Th'ough.'

"Lady, I'll tell you ev'ything. Ev'y single thing! When I gits started talkin' I don't know how to stop!" Vic began to laugh and dance-- a high-pitched cackle and a standstill swaying. He slapped his hands together, cracked his knuckles, blinked and winked his eyes. All the time he talked he slapped, cracked, blinked, and winked.

His white apron was filthy with hair oils, tonics and straightener, but under that his ~~blue~~ <sup>clothing</sup> ensemble was impeccable even to shirt, socks, and tie. His very long hair had been first skillfully straightened then waved in a loose geometric marcel, the work of his expert shop assistants, whom he had trained.

The shop--headquarters of the chain of Caravan Beauty Salons--was unpretentious. The desk was a packing box under a cover of tacked-on cretonne, and the only object on it was an old small radio. A home-made shelf, set crooked, a pay

telephone, and several picture calendars decorated the walls, but the two closet doors were brilliantly painted with intricate designs. These, a hatrack, and a heavy smell of tar used in Vic's hair preparations, were the room's only permanent fixtures.

It was early and the shop was not busy so Vic brought in chairs from the driers.

"Now in the first place I wasn't christened Vic. My real name is Invictus. I was born in DeRamus County, DeWeese, South Carolina, August 13, 1897. I was the only child that I know of because my brother Ralph died at the age of two, you see. My father was what you call a sharecropper. My mother died when I was three years old and for five years my grandma took care of me."

He grinned and slapped his hands together. "I can remember how she use-ta punish me. She made me 'crack' her head. In those days everybody had sump'n in they hair.

"But my father married agin to a lady from the city and then we moved to Desmond, South Carolina. Now this wife was different from my papa and was a cateress. She started me to school and I went to school till I was in the third grade and that's as far as I ever got. But let me tell you this what happened one day at school. We use-ta change lunch wif each other at school. But most of the time I'd be done ate my lunch up when I got to school and this mornin'

I had ate every thing up but some crumbs in my pockets; didn't have nothin' to start with but some biscuits and fried fat pork. And the little boy I was gonna change with had sweet 'tater and biscuits with p'serves and butter in 'em. Well, he ast me what I had and I said, 'What you got?'

"He answered, 'You see what I got. Where's your lunch?

" I said, 'Here's my lunch in my pocket.' Then he broke a biscuit with good old p'serves oozin' out half in two for me. I took it and started searchin' in my pocket for my lunch, knowin' there wasn't nothin' there but crumbs. I begun to pull out crumbs and he kept watchin' me. I thought I'd better eat my biscuit that he give me so I started to take a bite and just as I got it to my mouth he snatched it outa my hand." Vic broke into a loud cackle. "I ain't good at foolin' people most gen'rally.

"My step-ma use-ta go out in the woods and dig roots and make grease, and all the chilluns hair that wouldn't grow she'd sell this grease to their mammas. I use-ta go with her and I remembered the root she use-ta git, so that's where I got the secret of my own hair grower. But my step-ma didn't stay with Papa very long and after four years they separated. Then we moved back to the country.

"That was in 1908 and papa was doin' day work on the farm. We was batchin' in a little shack in a pasture. My papa was eatin' at the big house and I was cookin' for myself.

Sometimes I'd go with my father to the big house and the white folks got attached to me because of my manners. So Miz Sewell hired me to look after her little boy. My pay was my meals.

"The cook's little girl was as mean as a snake. Her name was Lily. One day we got in a scrap and Lily told a bare-faced lie on me. Well, I went to the field where papa was plowin' and told him what happened myself.

"He said, 'Next time Lily tetch you, you whang hell out of her!'

"Now I wanted to stay with Miz Sewell 'cause I didn't have to cook for myself, so I says 'Papa if I be mean to Lily, Miss Ella, the cook, 'll be mean to me, won't she?'

"He walked a couple of rounds and then he says 'Yes, fellow, I guess you 'bout right.' I always was pretty smart.

"Well, I guess we stayed there for about a year. Then papa took me one day to my cousins' house for a visit. He left me there and no one knowed where he went. And did I have a time! I was really treated bad! My cousin's little girl did everything she could to me 'cause she knew I didn't have no business there. If I started to get a drink of water she'd come and want one too, and if I didn't give up the dipper she'd git me in trouble sure. I had to eat whatever they didn't want and the only way I'd git enough

of anything was to p'tend I didn't lak it--then I'd have it all. But finally papa come back after me." The thought of that bad time still hurt Vic. As he talked about it his voice trembled and his big eyes filled with tears.

"Not long after that Miz Sewell's sister wanted some one to help her so I went to live in her house as sort of a caretaker. I use-ta drive her 'round in the buggy and look after the cow and the like. I 'member she had a mortgage on a man's cow once and he didn't pay, so me and her went and got the cow. Ole Cap'n Tucker run a 'spensary and I use-ta slip in there lots of times. I learned a whole lot 'bout business while I was there. Once they decided to let me go home to see my father so he bought me a pair of brogan shoes, and a cheap suit and sent me home lookin' good. I looked so good papa decided to keep me.

"Papa was helpin' on Mr. Belk's farm then. He was one of them big farmers. He had a little boy and I was hired to take care of him. I made one dollar a month and that was the first money I ever made. They also had five girls and the girls taught me something~~s~~ too. One of them was a school teacher. Miz Belk was the stingiest white woman I ever seen. She'd make me carry in the wood, then she'd send me back for the big chips and then back agin for the little chips. Well, I got tired of staying around the house so I decided I'd learn to farm. So I followed my papa to the field and watched 'em reap oats. I learned how to tie the oats and I ain't

never seen another man that could tie oats as fast as I could. Anything I do I does fast.

"Shortly after that I started goin' around with a man thrashin' grain all over the country. I went with him for 'bout three years, makin' seventy-five cents a day and eatin' wherever we was thrashin'.

"But I never did like it on the farm. Papa intended to keep me there but I was determined to git off the farm. So I got a job in Desmond workin' for the road construction company. I swept the road before they'd put down the asphalt.

"From that job I went to work for a man who ran a public dray. I was working for half of what I really made, which was never over \$5.00. So I usually made around \$2.50 a week and I was payin' every cent of that for room and board. So I didn't keep that job very long.

"Then I got a job cookin' for Miz C. W. Thornton, makin' \$1.25 a week. When I went there the only thing I knew how to cook was batter cakes and flour bread. She taught me how to cook. Then I went to a cooking school where they taught servants how to cook with gas.

"They were pretty wealthy people and had cows and horses and a car too. It was a "Thrasher", model A. One of my duties was to go out and crank the car for Mr. Thornton every mornin'. So I watched everything he'd do and thought I knew how to drive. So one day when everyone was away from home

I went out and decided to drive the car. I got in and did every~~th~~ing I'd ever seen Mr. Thornton do and sho 'nough, the car backed out of the garage. Then it suddenly come to me that I didn't know how to put it back. I was scared stiff. But I run out of the yard and seen a man up on the hill. I called him and he come down where I was. I says to him, 'Lemme see you put this car up'

"He looked at it and shook his head, 'Sorry, buddy, I can't drive nothin' but a "Morris", he says.

"I climbed back into the car and he kept showin' me things to try and finally I got it back into the shed. That's one time I was too smart.

"It was while I was workin' there that I met my first wife. The folks she worked for got milk and butter from my folks so she'd come for it twice a week. Her name was Ila May Brevard. She had four sisters and all the white folks classed them girls as outstandin' servants. I was fresh from the country and didn't know nothin' about city life. But she kept askin' me to come over to her house on Sunday evening to a club meetin' that raised money for the church. It was the Live Wire Club. So I started goin' to see her. I went to an entertainment at her house one night and I thought it was the swellest thing I'd ever been to. We paid twenty-five cents and were served supper. Ila May played for dances and I use-ta go around with her, but I couldn't dance.

"While I was workin' there at Miz Thornton's I had to give papa half of what I made every week. So I had sixty-three cents a week left to buy my clothes. So I decided to quit givin' papa anything. So that Saturday when he come for his money I said, 'Papa, you needn't come back for no money next Sad'dy'. From then on I had all my money for myself.

"I was never accused of stealin' anything but once. Miz Thornton had a can of potted meat sittin' on the table in the kitchen and it disappeared. Miz Thornton asked me about it and I told her I didn't take it.

"She said, 'Vic, no one else has been here but you and I know you took it.'

"She made me mad. I remembered the ice boy had been in to bring in the ice so I said to her 'Yes, there is been someone else in here, the ice boy's been here.'

"But you know the ice boy wouldn't take that potted meat, Vic,' she said.

"Will you give me a chance to see if he took it?' I ast her.

"The next day when the ice boy come in the back door I went out the front. I asked Mr. Douglas, the man who drove the ice wagon, if Will had brought the can out the day before. He had and he had told Mr. Douglas that I give it to him. So Mr. Douglas come in the house and told Miz Thornton I didn't take it. I was satisfied. I ain't no thief. Shortly after that they moved back to the country

and I decided to stay in Desmond. When they left, Miz Thornton give me the first recommendation I ever had. Two things on it I will never forgit, they were "is trustworthy and willin' to learn".

"When I left there I had a chance at two jobs. One was with a carnival and the other was in a hotel. So I went to old Aunt Celie. She could tell me things I wanted to know--sort of a fortune teller. So I drank my coffee and she begun to read the coffee grounds. She told me I was thinkin' of two jobs; that I'd be better off if I took the one in the building that looked like the postoffice. I knew that was the hotel.

"I went to the hotel and they put me on the bell stand, hoppin' bells. They didn't give us no sugar but once a day, in our coffee in the morning. I wanted tea for my dinner so I decided I'd try to git it. You know I always have been a terrible fellow to git what I want. So I went to the boss and told him I'd swap his sugar for my meat at dinner. He liked me so he said it was all right. I stayed at the hotel about six months.

"Then I got a job at a garage and learned to drive a car. I made \$3.50 a week. It wasn't long till I was makin' extra 'cause I got to be famous as a sho'fa. I drove for all the white folks on special occasions, like funerals and weddin's and the like.

"Then one day my big chance come. A man come to the garage and wanted me to drive him to Wiley's Landin', N.Y. I jumped at the chance. When I come back I was the biggest thing that had ever hit Desmond. The next year I married Ila May.

"We was married on the front porch of her house. After the weddin' I was so broke I couldn't even buy a cigarette, but I got my old job back at the garage makin' \$6.00 a week.

"Our first child was born the followin' year. At first we thought the little thing wouldn't live. It seem like ev'y thing was wrong. We was havin' so much trouble that I decided maybe we'd do better if I joined the church. So I went to church one Sunday mornin' and it seemed like the preacher just knew why I was there and preached right to me. I enjoyed the sermon so much and my heart was so touched that I reckon you'd say I was converted that day. It was the first real dealin' I had with the church because my folks never was much for religion. But my wife always was a good church member. Things seemed to pick up for us then and we got along fairly good for a while.

"Some time after that I lost my job with the garage and decided to go to West Virginia. I got a job there as dinin' room waiter. Then my wife come up and got a job cookin'. She took a course in Beauty Culture too while we was there. She never did get to work any, though, 'cause she soon had to go home to be confined. It took all we had

to get her home, and I had to send money for the doctor bill. Then after the baby was born she didn't seem to be gettin' better. She got worse till they had to send for me. At that time I was so broke I didn't even have railroad fare. But the clerk of the hotel liked me so he loaned me the money to go home on.

"When I got there she was very sick but got well enough in some time to git up, even if she wasn't entirely well. So I got my old job back at the hotel there. I wasn't makin' much but it was better'n nothin'. The doctor said to give Illa May plenty chicken broth and the cook at the hotel give me lots of chicken to take home for her to make soup out of. For a while she done all right.

"She use-ta tell me about the Beauty Culture course that she took and how she wished she could do that work. So I got to thinkin' real hard about it and told her about the herb my step-mamma use-ta git to make hair grower out of. So I went back down home and got all of the herb I could find and started exper'mintin' with it. Every evenin' when I was off from the hotel I'd work on my formula. My wife got worse again and soon she died. I was heartbroken; left with two small children and had no idea what to do with them. For I thought I'd shorely never marry agin.

"But I did marry agin and it was just six weeks after the death of my first wife. My second wife's name was Mabel Langford. She had been away from Desmond for some time but

had come back home and got a job cookin' for Dr. Oates. I was showfin' for him occasion'ly when I was off duty at the hotel, so that's how I met her. But I didn't make the advances to'rd her first. She told another lady she liked me. I told the lady I wasn't study'n 'bout her. But one day I went to take Dr. Oates to the office and it was rainin' like ever'thing so Miz Oates told me to come back by Mabel's house and git her and bring her to work. And I did. She talked so nice to me! I looked at her real good and fell in love with her right then. After that I couldn't get over to Dr. Oates's often 'nough. I think I made her feel sorry for me so we got married soon after.

"Then we moved here to Riverton and I got a job in a hotel here. I had already applied for a patent for my hair grower and soon I was sellin' it on a small scale. I wasn't makin' much and my wife couldn't help me any because she stayed sick most of the time with childunn. I was so anxious to set up my business that I decided I'd have to find some other way to make some money. It was so hard for us and I give up even bare necessities and put every penny I could in my business.

"I decided to sell me some whiskey to help out. And I did. I had a friend workin' on the dinin' car of the Magnolia Special. He slipped the whiskey in here to us. Course I was in with some other fellows. We was supplyin' all the hotels

around here. I got my start from the money I made from that whiskey.

"But one night I got caught. When I went down to the station to meet the Special this night I had just got the bag with three gallon jars of whiskey and old Sergeant Grive seen me and got 'spicious and stopped me. Well, he took me in. I lied my way out. I told 'em that a man give me the bag and told me to take it to the hotel. 'Cause it was my first offense I got off with \$75 fine and costs. Well, I decided that I wouldn't sell no more whiskey. And I never did agin.

"I use-ta git off from the hotel some nights to try to work up my business. The boss got so he didn't wanna let me off so I quit. Then I got a job as a sho'fa again for Mr. Davidson. I worked for them about three years. While I was there it seemed like the family kind of died out so I decided to give all my time to my business. At that time Mabel was working in Druid Hills where all the rich folks lived.

"I had one agent for my hair grower at that time in Desmond. Then I perfected my Caravan Pressing Oil and Caravan Shampoo. I had to find me a name for my products that would attract people's attention. I remembered when I was small there was some gypsies that used to come by home every year and camp near us. Somebody said it was a gypsy caravan and I thought that was so pretty. I thought what pretty long hair they had so I decided to name my product after the gypsy caravan.

"At this time I couldn't dress hair but I had my wife to quit working and learn to dress hair. Then my agent come up here from Desmond and studied with us for awhile. Then she went to Latonia and set up a parlor there. The first month I opened the shop I don't think we done but seven heads.

"Of course I had no equipment in my shop. We washed hair in a regular wash basin. I put up the partition in the shop and made me a place to work on my formulas, a office and waiting room. Then later on I cut a five pound keg in half and started using it to wash hair in. I wasn't able to have running water so I used a water cooler. I put the cooler up on a high shelf, attached a tube to the faucet and put on a sprinkler; then it worked just like running water. That brought me lots of customers because I told them we was the only operators that didn't let the dirty water go back on their hair once it went through it.

"About this time bobbed hair was the rage. I was working on my Caravan Touch Up, a preparation to use without straightening to freshen the hair up. It was good for bobbed hair because it kept the hair down flat. It got to be popular and before I stopped makin' it I had sold it in twenty-six states. I went to every public meetin', carnival, or any place I knowed a lot of people would b e, and I passed out samples and circulars.

"Then I left my wife in charge of the shops here and

went to travelin'. I bought me an old car from a man for \$17. 'Cause I knew all about cars I fixed it up fine and went over four states in it. Well I was makin' pretty good but some one said somethin' about my Touch Up that made me mad so I quit makin' it.

"Things got tough for a while and my wife decided to go back to workin'. Well, it made me mad but I let her go. Then and there I decided to learn to straighten hair myself. The first head I did, it took me all day. Then it got around that a man was straightenin' hair and a lot of customers come to me out of curiosity. Then I got so I could do hair quicker than the other operators and didn't burn nobody's hair, so the customers poured in. People begun to ask me to learn them the trade and I did learn them.

"About this time everybody started to usin' the Marcel in their hair. It wasn't the style to wear straight hair any more. It must be waved. So I started workin' an exper' minent to get kinky hair so straight that it could be finger waved. Finally I got it perfected. Then I made an oil to put on the wave to freshen it up. I was also makin' "Peach-bloom", a preparation for pimples and blackheads, Caravan Dry Skin for chapped hands, face and lips; oil of tar, to be used on the hair before it is washed to stop itchin', fallin' hair and dandruff, and was blendin' powder for individual complexions.

" In 1933 the State took over the control of Beauty Culture. I was one of the first Negroes to receive my certificate. Mine was the first Negro Beauty school approved by the state and from 1933 to 1938 about one hundred students finished my school. Now there is six other Caravan Beauty Salons in Riverton under my supervision; one in Queensberry, one in Ware Point, one in Salzburg, Connecticut. I keep three regular operators in this shop and one extra. We average fifty-five heads in a week and the highest number of heads we ever done in one week is one hundred and twenty-seven. I myself have did as many as thirty-five heads in one day.

"I has tried to make my business serve my race. I believe that beauty treatment properly used will enhance any person that uses it. But when I found that my Beauty school was only 'pealin' to the vain side of the race I closed the beauty school and opened "The Servants Clinic" to teach the workin' class of ~~Negroes~~ how to fit himself more better for their jobs. Workin' myself as a domestic for as many years, I think I is qualified to help my people. I hab~~/~~ received letters from many outstandin' citizens of Riverton tellin' me they think my idea good. You see I firmly believes that present day education does not fit a Negro to make his way in the world. 'Course I wouldn't say that I don't wish I coulda went to school, 'cause I do, but I do know if I had went to school I would of not been inspired to do this kind of work. As it is I thinks that I have made my contribution to my race.

"Since I have been in the business I have managed to stay out of the poor house. I have managed to keep up my bills, includin' doctor bills, and you know I do have sickness in my family a great deal. Poor little Jodie, he's got the epilepsy and Mabel's always down. The only reason my business is not bigger is 'cause I ain't had more money to put behind it.

"I have took several correspondence courses; one in body massaging, one in public speaking and in in law. I hold certificates from them. I also studied magic and am a magician, though I don't practice it only for fun. I can also tell your fortune with cards if you just tell me when is your birthday. I is very much interested in astrology. I im now studin' radio writing. I was apppinted Notary Public of Mecklenburg County in 1933.

"I vote and encourage voting among Negroes but I is not mixed up in politics. But I is a Bible student and have been for some time. For the past four years I have been very active in the church and served as Superintendent of my Sunday School three of those years.

"I'm a race man th'ough and th'ough."