

THE FAMILY OF NAT TURNER, 1831 to 1954

By LUCY MAE TURNER

PART II — CONCLUSION

Fannie and Lucy Turner were growing up, and doing well in their school work. But Gilbert Turner realized that in the city his little family would face dire poverty when he became too old to work. Zinc wash tubs began to replace the wooden ones. White washing, that he had used as a supplementary trade, was being replaced by wall papering and painting.

At first Gilbert Turner was at his wits end to decide what to do. Then, relying on the goodness of God and his recollections of the past, he recalled that Southern gentlemen usually ended up as the landed gentry. So, in the spring of 1892, he traded his town residence for a country estate of twelve acres, only a few minutes' ride from town, on Coopermill Road, with many fruit trees and a roomy two-storied house. The place was only a quarter of a mile from town, but the year 1892 was just a few years before the automobile age, and most wealthy people, craving ease, did not want to make as much as a quarter of a mile walk to town.

The family moved to the farm on Coopermill Road, in April, 1892. The place was very beautiful, level and fertile in the front, with orchards and vineyards, and even a hot house or green house, covered with a roof of glass, and filled with all kinds of small fruit and flowering shrubs. At the back of the level land there was a rippling brook, and then arose a hill, rounded and forest-covered. To be found in the hill were coal, building stone and other minerals. The house was a comfortable dwelling, of a Colonial type of architecture.

The Turner family was very happy. A life of comfort, though still of poverty, seemed ahead of the family. Fannie and Lucy were then little girls, who romped and played, and enjoyed this country freedom. Mrs. Sarah Turner sent them every day to the school in the city. Sometimes they rode, more often they

walked. Sarah Turner had learned, from her contact with the family or School Superintendent Lash, that the graded school in the city was far superior to the one-roomed country school on Coopermill Road, in Springfield Township.

But, one cold night in November, 1892, a few months after the moving to the farm, the country home and all the treasured family possessions were destroyed by fire. The family was left homeless and penniless in the street.

We will remember that, in those days, there was no such thing as public aid,—at least, the poor colored people received none. If one got out of work or out of doors, he just wandered around until he mercifully froze to death or starved to death. If he survived long enough for his misery to become a shame, a rebuke and a reproach to his more prosperous neighbors, then such poor outcast was sent to the county poor farm, deep in the heart of the country, so as not to constantly remind the rich of their religious duty to practice the Golden Rule.

But Gilbert Turner was like Job. His faith in God was so great that he showed to the world the truth of the verse: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Gilbert found a large dwelling house, abandoned, in town, and was able to buy it for the sake of the lumber in it. Though nearly seventy years old, he tore it down, single-handed, although the house was nearly two and one-half stories high. I, Lucy, as a child of seven or eight, used to sit in the yard of the house, as a protector, to summon aid, in case he should fall. But he never fell, being protected by God.

Soon, the Turner family was back on the Coopermill Road farm in a comfortable one-story cottage, not as large as the first house but more practical. The day of bungalows and smaller homes was coming in to replace the large luxurious mansions of Civil War days. They were cheaper to purchase, easier to heat,

and easier to be managed without the help of slaves or servants.

My sister Fannie and I were well pleased. We enjoyed the healthful atmosphere of the country. We had learned much. We now knew that there were really snakes, and that the crawling creatures which we called snakes when we lived in town on Eighth Street were, in reality, only fishing worms.

Our farm neighbors were mostly Dutch and German, and very friendly. But, since we went to town to attend integrated grade school and high school and the Union Baptist colored church, we kept in close touch and formed enduring friendships with both the colored adults and the children.

We will understand that this was just a little over twenty years after the slaves were freed, and both the white and the colored people still retained some warped ideals. All the adult population had lived in the days of slavery. Many of the whites were disgruntled because they had been reduced to poverty by the freeing of their slaves. Such would openly tell the freedmen that they wished they had the money that the slaves used to bring them in the open market. To them, it would be the signal for a verbal outburst to even mention the name of Nat Turner.

Many of the Northern born colored people whose ancestors had, through various means, obtained their freedom and moved away from the South before the Emancipation Proclamation, openly snubbed the recently freed slaves, as being of a much lower social stratum, and vastly inferior to themselves. They had not the hard common sense and reasoning power to check their prejudices and to disclose to them, that, in those troublous times, it was but a trick of fate whether one obtained his freedom in 1843, 1853, or not until 1863. The only means for the advancement of the whole colored race was in their working harmoniously together.

But the Turner family openly proclaimed that they had come up through the trials and tribulations of slavery. My mother's father, Rev. Isaac Jones, had seen to it that she was born free by leaving Virginia, sometime in the 1840's before her birth. But my mother, Sarah Jones-Turner, though always a free woman, was proud to link her life with Gilbert Turner, the ex-slave. She realized that he possessed the true qualities of a gentleman and a noble man because he had been able to make his way honestly and honorably in the world, despite stupendous odds.

I, Lucy, was a favorite child with all the adult ex-slaves, my father's friends and associates. My father, who had succeeded just a little better financially than some of the other ex-slaves, opened his home to any newly arrived ex-slave who found himself penniless and stranded in the town. My father felt it his Christian duty to give them free board and lodging until they were able to get along independently. He was prayerful and grateful, and never forgot the day when he himself needed the assistance of his fellowmen.

These ex-slaves would sit by the open fire-place of evenings, and go through the story of slavery from Nat Turner's insurrection to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. They would fight the Civil War from Tom Brown at Harper's Ferry to Lee's surrender. Some of the older ones had lived on George Washington's plantation, and could remember faintly back to his times. Most of these slaves had been house servants, and were full of quaint anecdotes about Lee, Clay, Calhoun, Jeff Davis and others,—which anecdotes, though true, never found their way into polite United States history.

Negro History, in those days, was a profane subject, only to be whispered in the chimney corners and never discussed in the open or in polite society.

My father Gilbert Turner, has now been dead for forty years, having died in November, 1914, and, had I known how interesting those old folk tales would be today, I would have endeavored to write them out in long

hand, the purchase of a typewriter having been for me a financial impossibility at that time. Still, after forty years, his voice still echoes in my ears, telling the story of slavery.

My sister, Fannie, and I inspired by our mother and father, attended grade city school and high school in Zanesville, Ohio. We both graduated from high school, and I, Lucy, being the more aggressive of the two, won a scholarship to Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio. Our family felt very much elated, for we knew the cultural and financial benefits of getting a college education. But our hopes were dashed when we found that a scholarship to Ohio State represented only freedom from the paying of tuition, and that I must still have money for board and room, books and transportation, which would amount to between forty and fifty dollars per month.

Since my father was fast nearing the age when he was getting too old to do much except truck farming to feed the family, and since my mother was earning on the average about one dollar per week doing laundry work, it was utterly impossible for me to accept this college scholarship at Ohio State.

Then since I had graduated from an integrated high school, in a senior class composed of forty white students and six colored students, with the highest average for scholarship of any student in the class, I thought hopefully, for a few weeks, that some of the Civic organizations might help me in my struggle to get to college. I knew that some Civic organizations had assisted in sending some ambitious local colored boys to Ohio State. But after waiting a few weeks from the time I graduated, and seeing that not one helping penny was extended in my direction, I, at last, realized that I had two strikes against me,—I was black and I was a woman. Those who had been given help in going to college were boys. As a colored girl, the best life designed by the world for me, was to wash, iron, scrub, and to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for my more favored sisters and brothers.

So I went forth and got myself

some washing jobs and some scrubbing jobs, at one dollar per day,—sometimes at seventy-five cents. But, since my high school course had revealed to me the fact that I could master the higher intellectual subjects as well as did my more favored classmates, I carefully laid my plan of attack. I did the most arduous labor, earned a meagre pittance, helped with the family expenses, saved what I could, and dreamed. I thanked the Lord for an iron constitution, which even the performance of the heaviest tasks did not break.

After three years of toiling by myself and the other members of my family, I had at last enough money on hand to enter Wilberforce University, in Xenia, Ohio. I studied hard, and my aged father and mother, and my sister, Fannie, toiled in Zanesville, in order to keep me at Wilberforce. These Wilberforce teachers were the first colored teachers I had ever had, and they helped me solve my life problem, and get on my financial feet. These Wilberforce teachers opened my eyes to the vast possibilities of success for those of the colored race who had the time, patience and grit to prepare themselves.

After graduating from Wilberforce in 1908, my financial pathway was clear. As a teacher, I was a success. I did one year of teaching in the Lincoln High School of Paducah, Kentucky, and one and a half years of teaching in Sistersville, West Virginia. In the spring of 1911, I obtained a teaching position in the city schools of East St. Louis, Illinois, and have been teaching here ever since. I have enjoyed my work, and the contact with both children and adults.

My father, Gilbert Turner, lived until 1914, five years after I had started teaching. During that time, my mother, my sister, Fannie, and myself did our utmost to make our home on Coopermill Road, in Zanesville, comfortable, and to make his last days his best days. My sister, Fannie, having received a high school education, in Zanesville, Ohio, took the West Virginia State Teachers' Examination, and began teaching in West Virginia, a few years

after I started teaching. So the money was at hand to make my father comfortable.

My aged father had such a rich knowledge of the past that the leading lawyers and judges of the town were his friends, and often visited him on his farm on Coopermill Road. He was such a wonderful conversationalist that his reminiscences were more fascinating than the accounts of past events as given in the history books.

Although at that time, we had no automobile, his friends often came to our country home, and took him to church in their autos.

And so, Gilbert Turner approached death in the fall of 1914. He did not know his age, whether it was ninety or one hundred. All his life, he had been kept in ignorance of his age, and the true facts and date of Nat Turner's Insurrection were not even mentioned in the ordinary history books, and he did not have access to an encyclopedia. The facts were still too rankling in the hearts of the dispossessed southerners.

So Gilbert Turner did not know his true age. He did not have any organic complaint. He was only very, very tired. Many days he would only sit in meditation, and sing or hum the hymn of mourning, of sacrifice and of resignation that had passed through his childish heart, when his beloved mother was snatched away from him on the auction block, and the child Gilbert had but one friend to whom he could turn, and that was the Lord. So the words and tune of this hymn of mingled anguish and supplication sang its way through Gilbert Turner's heart, even to his dying day.

But Gilbert Turner had lived a good life, and he had done his utmost to be true to his God, and to help his fellow men.

"Lucy," he told me one day, "I have fully lived my time out, far beyond the lifetime of my friends. I remember all those young acquaintances of mine who passed away early. Some were drowned, some whipped to death, some sold far away from me, my beloved mother, Fannie, my dear sister, Melissa, my elder brother, John, kind Mis'Mary,

my big-hearted father, Nat Turner! They all are calling, calling calling me! 'Gilbert! Come home!'"

After the death of my father, Gilbert Turner, my mother, for a time, attended to the farm alone. Then, my sister, Fannie, having obtained college credits from Ohio University, in Athens, Ohio, and from Normal University, near Bloomington, Illinois, was appointed to teach in East St. Louis, Illinois, where I was already teaching.

Then, since we were teaching together, we bought a home in East St. Louis, Illinois, and my mother moved there in 1918. The three of us spent several happy years together, until my mother, Sarah Turner, died in East St. Louis in November, 1935. She was much younger than my father, and, therefore, she survived him by twenty-one years. She did not dread death, for she felt that only through death could she be reunited with her beloved husband, Gilbert Turner.

Her children, my sister Fannie and myself, were Christian women and both held good teaching positions. So she felt that she could commend us into the hands of the Heavenly Father, and close her weary eyes in peaceful and eternal sleep.

My sister, Fannie, always a lover of music, has specialized in pipe organ and in piano, as well as in teaching.

I, Lucy, have always been interested in local government and in world affairs, as well as in teaching. Through summer courses and with money I had myself earned, I obtained the degree of B.S. from Ohio State University in 1934. I felt that, even though, because of poverty, I could not take advantage of the Ohio State University scholarship I had earned from high school in 1903, I would show myself worthy of such a course by paying my own tuition and expenses, and by obtaining the degree over thirty years later, in 1934.

Then, through my own efforts, and by paying my own expenses, I obtained the Master's degree from the University of Illinois, in 1942.

Being deeply interested in all af-

fairs of state, I had at various times taken short courses in law, but, because of color restrictions, had never been able to take an extended course of legal training. Then, in September, 1946, St. Louis University opened its doors in the Law School, and was the first University in Missouri to allow colored students to take a Law Course. I entered the Evening School on the opening night, and never missed a session and was never tardy at a session, until I graduated from the Law School, with the degree of Bachelor of Law, in June, 1950, the only colored woman in the class, and the first colored woman to graduate from the St. Louis University Law School.

But life still has its cities of Jericho, from which the walls have not yet come tumbling down. For, though I made a perfect attendance record, and finished all courses with credit, I have never yet been admitted to the Bar to practice law. All other members of the class have been admitted to the Bar, and have practiced law for several years. I, alone, am left, without admission to the Bar, without recognition, deprived of all contact with the legal world about me.

When, in June, 1950, I graduated, the only colored woman, from the St. Louis University Law School, I had high hopes for a busy and useful future, such hopes as I had when I graduated from high school many years ago,—usefulness to the community, usefulness to the race, usefulness to my country. But, just like it happened when I graduated from high school, I found I had several strikes against me,—I was black and I was a woman. After three years of Herculean toil and effort, I was able to outrun these two strikes, and reach my goal of a college education.

Now, however, I find that there are three strikes against me,—I am black, I am a woman, and I have no influence in high places. Therefore, I have not been able to reach the goal, so easily obtained by my classmates, although I have made five years of Herculean effort. But, I still remember the inspiring motto of the Turner family, as sung by Nat Turner in the Gethsemane of his

suffering and sacrifice:

“Trust in the Lord,
And you’ll overcome,
Somehow,
Somewhere,
Someday!”

I retain my faith in God, and in mankind, and my cheerful disposition. My school pupils understand me. There is not an hour of the day that we do not find something to laugh about. There is no one else so earnest, so quaintly comical, and yet so philosophical as is a seven year old boy. There is no one else so anxious to please, and yet so pleased with herself, as is a six year old girl. My sister Fannie and I keep house together, interested in our school teaching, our church and our home. We talk reminiscently of the past, and look hopefully toward the future.

The picture of Nat Turner is self explanatory. It shows the interior of his cabin, where he and his faithful followers were preparing to go forth to make their own sacrificial effort to regain the God-given right to freedom, that had been wrested from them by the artifice of man.

The picture of my father, Gilbert Turner, was taken when he was about sixty years of age, married, and had one child, Fannie Virginia Turner. Fannie is pictured with my mother, Sarah Ellen Jones-Turner. At this

time, I, Lucy, was not yet born. I think my mother bore a slight resemblance to my father’s long lost mother, Fannie, sold from him, so cruelly, on the auction block, when he was but a little boy.

My sister Fannie and I are pictured as we usually appear when going about our school, religious and social duties.

Therefore, thanks to the mercy of God and the workings of an all-wise Providence, the Turner family, descendants of Nat Turner, have been able to carry on, even unto the present time. We have enjoyed the days of freedom, purchased by Nat Turner, with his life’s blood, as well as we have suffered the days of slavery. We have watched the expansion of the great United States, and the growing opportunities of black men.

And, many times, when the clouds of discord have gathered and the thunders of trouble rolled, the sunshine of peace and hope has broken through, and has revealed to our perplexed hearts and to our wondering eyes, the eternal truth of the words:

“Trust in the Lord,
And you’ll overcome,
Somehow,
Somewhere,
Someday!”

The Brotherhood Pageant was a beautiful blending of singing, narration, dancing, and acting. It was a great spiritual message, an artistic triumph. Visual aids loaned by the museums greatly enhanced the pageant. Added to all of this was the inspiring address of Judge J. Waties Waring.

Miss Truda Weil is to be congratulated on bringing to the community another fine program of “One Nation Under God” where “in likenesses we learn

Through love of each for each
as we recall

The Oneness of the fatherhood of
all.”

The contribution of Dr. James Egert Allen, Community Coordinator in helping to make this program possible is greatly appreciated.

Former D. C. Teacher A Ph.D. in Physics



JOSEPH G. LOGAN, JR.

Joseph G. Logan, Jr., formerly a teacher at the Garnet Patterson Junior High School in the District of Columbia received his Doctor of Philosophy Degree from the University of Buffalo, February 22, 1955. His thesis was “The Effect of Isotopic Substitution on Vibrational Wave Functions and Dissociation Probability of Diatomic and Linear Triatomic Molecules.”

A graduate of Shaw Junior High School, Dunbar High School and Miner Teachers College, in Washington, D. C., Dr. Logan taught for several years at Garnet-Patterson Junior High School before accepting a government job at the Bureau of Standards. He left the Bureau, where he was commended for meritorious service, to work as a research physicist at the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratories in Buffalo, New York. While so employed, he completed the work on his Masters Degree and Doctorate. In 1950 he developed a new small jet engine that had relatively low fuel consumption and was applicable to guided missiles and helicopters.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph G. Logan, Sr. of 139 S Street, N.W., of Washington, D. C. Mr. Logan, Sr. is a retired principal of Shaw Junior High School, from which his son graduated as valedictorian.

Brotherhood

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fellow-men so well that he gave up his law practice and his wealth to lift his people economically, politically, and spiritually. In the scene we saw Gandhi on one of his many treks on foot through India to teach his people the significance of the spinning wheel as a sacred symbol of Independence of body and spirit and to arouse folk to the need for breaking down the age-old caste system. The people of India hear and follow him—their living saint.

An added bit of warmth and humility was fused into the scene as we watched the tenderness with which the spinning wheel, once used by Gandhi, was carried about the stage.