

My Heritage

Enslaved Ancestors & Native American Ancestors



by *Kathy Vrzak*

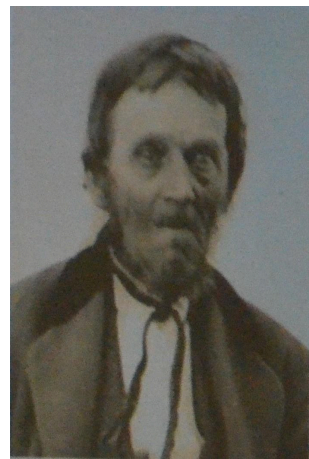
My Mother's Lineage

My Mother Lorene Reagor used to sit all of her 9 children down and talk to us about Our Grandparents. They died before I was born. She told us about her and her two sisters having to work in the cotton fields on the Reagor Springs plantation in Ennis, Texas.

Mama was born in 1923 and even though the slaves were freed, in her childhood her father Dewey and Grandpa Pleas still had to work the cotton fields or leave the land with no place for ex-slaves to go. So I remember her telling us how the stems of the cotton plants would have her hand bleeding every day.

The Reagors of Reagor Springs: A Legacy of Resilience

The town of Reagor Springs, Texas, nestled amidst rolling hills, bears the name of a prominent family: the Reagors. Their story, however, is one of both privilege and profound injustice, a legacy intertwined with the dark history of slavery in America.



John Bascom Reagor (*left*), a wealthy landowner, was the patriarch of the family. He owned a large plantation, and like many other landowners in the South, he enslaved Black people. Among the enslaved on his property was a woman, whose name has been lost to time. To John Bascom Reagor, she was not a human being, but property. Yet, through this brutal system, he fathered a child: Eliza Ann.



Eliza Ann (*left*) was raised within the Reagor household, not as an equal, but as a ward of one of John Bascom Reagor's brothers. This unique upbringing, while offering some degree of protection, was still deeply flawed. It

reflected the pervasive racism of the time, where Black people, even those born into the lives of the wealthy, were denied their basic human rights and freedoms.

Despite the system of subjugation she was born into, Eliza Ann found strength and resilience. She met and fell in love with Pleas Reagor, another Black man born into slavery. They married and, against all odds, built a life together. Their love story, a testament to human connection and the enduring power of hope, blossomed amidst the harsh realities of racial segregation.

To Eliza Ann and Pleas, a son was born: Dewey Reagors. Dewey, like his parents, faced the daily indignities of racism. Yet, he persevered, building a life for himself and his family. He married and had children, including my mother, Lorene Reagor.

Lorene carried the weight of her family's history, the echoes of slavery and the resilience of her ancestors. She instilled in her children the importance of their heritage, the strength of their family, and the enduring fight for justice and equality.

The Reagors of Reagor Springs, Texas, are a testament to the enduring human spirit. Their story is a complex one, a tapestry woven with threads of privilege and oppression, love and loss, struggle and triumph. It is a story that must be told, not to glorify the past, but to learn from it, to

acknowledge the injustices of the past, and to strive for a more equitable future.

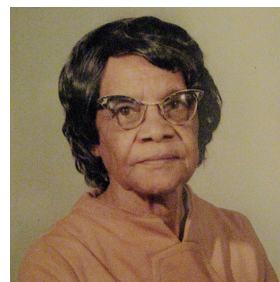
My Father's Lineage

The Legacy of Lucinda: A Story of Resilience and Stolen Land

The late 1800s in rural Texas witnessed an unusual convergence of cultures. Amidst the cotton fields and sprawling ranches, the lives of enslaved people intertwined with the indigenous communities of the region.

The Choctaw and Cherokee Nations, despite their own struggles against displacement and persecution, forged unlikely alliances with the enslaved. Interracial marriages, though forbidden by the dominant white society, occurred, blurring the lines of race and creating a unique blend of heritages.

This was the world of Will M. Smith, a proud Choctaw man, and Fannie, a woman of strong Cherokee descent. Their love blossomed amidst the hardships of their time, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit against all odds. Their union resulted in the birth of Lucinda, a child carrying the rich legacy of both Choctaw and Cherokee bloodlines.



Lucinda (*left*), with her mixed heritage, grew up in a world marked by both beauty and brutality.

She witnessed the injustices of slavery firsthand, the dehumanization of her people, and the constant threat of violence. Yet, she also experienced the warmth of community, the strength of her ancestral traditions, and the enduring power of love.



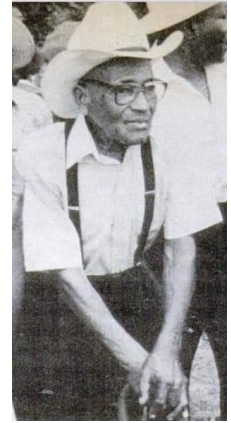
Lucinda found solace and companionship in Loonie Willis (*left*), the son of a remarkable man named Ike Willis. Ike was born into

slavery. His Father, Anderson Willis, also enslaved, defied the odds and managed to purchase a parcel of land, a symbol of hope and independence in a world that sought to deny him both. However, this hard-earned achievement was tragically cut short when white men, driven by greed and a sense of entitlement, forcibly seized Anderson's land.

The injustice committed against Ike Willis family reverberated through generations. His descendants, including Loonie and, ultimately, Lucinda's own family, have tirelessly fought to reclaim the land that was stolen from their ancestor, including years of legal battles in court, which were unfortunately unsuccessful but well publicized.

Their struggle, a testament to the enduring fight for justice and the unwavering belief in the sanctity of

ancestral rights, continues to this day. Ervin Willis, 82, (*right*) descendant of Anderson Willis, is shown celebrating filing the lawsuit.



Lucinda's story is a poignant reminder of the entanglements of the American story. It is a story of resilience, of interracial relationships forged in the face of adversity, and of the ongoing struggle for justice and the recognition of historical wrongs. It is a story that must be told, not just for the sake of her family, but for all those who have been denied their rightful place in the history of this nation.

Now, let's continue Lucinda's story with the addition of her son, Willie:

Lucinda and Loonie, despite the hardships they faced, built a life together. Their love blossomed into a family, and they welcomed a son, Willie Willis. Willie, with his unique blend of Choctaw, Cherokee, and African American heritage, was born into a world still grappling with the aftermath of slavery.

The era of Reconstruction brought a semblance of freedom for many, but the reality for Black Americans, including those with Native American ancestry, remained fraught with challenges. Jim Crow laws, segregation, and systemic racism continued to limit their opportunities

and perpetuate inequality.

Willie, like his parents, faced the daily indignities of racial discrimination. Yet, he persevered, determined to build a better life for himself and his family. He may not have been able to reclaim the land stolen from his grandfather, Ike, but he carried the spirit of his ancestors – their resilience, their strength, and their unwavering belief in justice. Willie and his wife raised their children, instilling in us the importance of our heritage, the strength of our family, and the enduring fight for equality.

And so, I, the descendant of Lucinda, carry the echoes of her story. I am a living testament to the resilience of my ancestors, a blend of Choctaw, Cherokee, and African American lineages. I carry within me the stories of my grandmother, her parents, and the generations that came before.

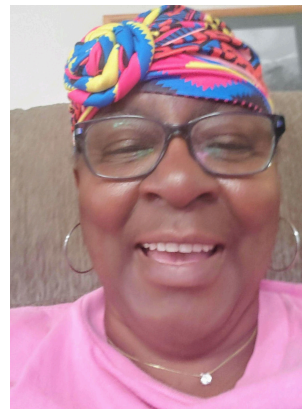
My 35% Choctaw heritage, along with my Cherokee and African American ancestry, connects me to a rich tapestry of cultures and experiences. It is a heritage that speaks to the complexities of American history, a history of both maltreatment and resilience, of interracial relationships and the enduring fight for justice.

Reflection: Love & Family Conquer Adversity

My story is a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of our histories and the importance of acknowledging

the diverse and often overlooked narratives that shape our nation. It is a story of resilience, of love, and of the enduring human spirit in the face of adversity.

By embracing my heritage and sharing my story, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of American history and inspire others to connect with their own roots.



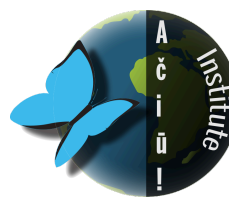
*Hi, I'm Kathy, a
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