

Edgar May  
Edited by Pearl Ella Smith  
Transcribed by Tara Yvette Wren

[My mother was] Adline  
Deardon. That was her family name.  
[My father was] Felex May.

I was reared mostly by a  
stepfather. My daddy was named  
Felex May. They say I've seen him  
I don't know. I don't remember.  
My mother said that I was about 3  
1/2 years old when he walked off.  
And he just walked off, she said.  
No message or nothing else. No  
message whatever. And they assumed  
that he died. Some years later,  
his daddy was named Felex May, I  
saw him and talked with him. I was  
a big old boy. I could do a little  
research then. I talked with him.  
He said he did hear from him after  
he left. But he told me then that  
he was dead and that was '35. I  
heard about him mostly through my  
uncle, Uncle Charlie. That was  
mama's oldest brother. [My  
grandfather] got in touch with him  
and had him to meet me at his house  
at noon. He gave me all the  
information that I ever had on my  
daddy. Mother would not talk about  
[him]. She say it was not worth  
it. He said that he was a good  
worker when he would work. The  
only kid in the family that he had  
sacrificed and let stay in school  
while the others went to the field.  
Say he don't know what happened to  
him. He didn't see him himself  
after he left Red Lick.

I been out there and looked at  
the old home place where they say  
he left. And he just disappeared.  
He said he heard from him in fact  
that he was somewhere in Alabama  
when he died. That's the truth.

[What kinds of cures did your  
mother use when you got sick, how  
did she help you get better?]

So many of them, I can't recall them all but we did have home remedies not only my mother but there was some soul people in the community who they would send for. They send for certain people to come and they could look at 'em and subscribe something and they used one thing I can recall. They used a thing they called mullen. I don't see it now, I use to know what it was. This old green leaf look something like a collard leaf and they would boil that I reckon. They would boil it and fix you a tea and they say would cure the fever. I used to have chills and fevers just as regular as they would come and it was always something being subscribed. Mama used to get a cold leaf, any kind of cold leaf, a collard leaf is cold and there was a lot of old wide leaves in the bushes round-- what you call this thing, a maypop? It had a wide leaf they'd go out and get them things and put them up to your forehead and tie something around your head like that so it could bring the fever down.

[Who was the most important person when you were growing up?]

That I knew? That I kinda idolized? I tell you that would have been two people. Both of those were my teachers. One of them was Lloyd Weddington. That's old man Lloyd Weddington. You don't remember him, he been dead for years. And Henry Watkins, he's been dead a long time. I went to school with both of them. Watkins taught over there at Beechland and Lloyd taught down here at Mt. Zion. I don't know what year we moved from on that side of James Creek, where you cross that bridge going to Port Gibson. We moved on this side of James Creek down there from that old ruin, that old Windsor Castle house back over there in the field. And they both were good teachers and they both worked. I appreciate it. That's why I kind

of admire them. I don't know, I haven't gotten a whopping from one of them. I had a lady to teach me, I don't know a couple, maybe three or four years. She whopped me one time. Whopped me and her brother. Now what happened. When she ring the bell to come in at one we was too far back in the woods to know. We'd run out in the woods. We had to do something. We was way down there in the hollow when we heard that bell and we ran out, but when we got there the rest of them was in and she got her switch. Rapping us on the leg and I could feel it. But those men, they talk to me. You won't worry about a whopping if you know what to say.

You couldn't see it then if it was there you couldn't see it now and that made me happy coming to Mr. Weddington.

[Did you go to town often when you were young?]

No reason. I guess there wasn't anything to go for you know. We didn't have any money to spend and then it was a long ways from out here to Port Gibson on a wagon, a buggy, or horseback. I never did care much about a horse. I wanted to try it. I didn't like that horse I had, told him to just take it.

[When did you join church?]

Oh. I was 18 years old. I got to figure out to see what year that was but I remember joining church when I was 18 years old.

[What church was this?]

Beechland go up here cross the creek to this big church and turn right you can't miss it and go out through there and on to Russum.

That's the neighborhood where I began to grow up in over there.

[You said you remember the day you joined church, what was it like, what did you do that day?]

I didn't do anything but get up you know. They had a custom in them days that if you didn't belong to church you wasn't a member. When you come in they had certain seats they'd put you on, called them sinners. Oh, that's right. That wasn't in the Bible either. I've told a lot of members about it. Oh, but that was the custom, so a lot of us that didn't belong to church had certain seats to sit on. Then boys could sit on one side and when you go in the isle. Men on the right and ladies on the left. That was an old custom back then. And it would be some boys up there on the front seat and when you get accustomed you ready to join the church and some girls the same thing. That just the way we lived back then. I really thought it was time. I told you I was 18 years old. People there attended Sunday School and those two men I was telling you about those two teachers, they were also in Sunday School every Sunday. And that's what got me started. They used to ask me a lot of questions. Have me to do a some reading and I could see that you would have to do something different than what you wanted to do if you want to be successful in life. And I just decided, say mama had talked to me about it. She called me Bud most of the time. Say, "Bud. You know you working out there in the woods and it's dangerous and anything could happen. You oughta get ready and join church." When that time hit me it was on a Friday I just decided I'd get up. You get up from here in this chair you sitting in and they ask you if you wanna be

baptized. Then you'd become a member and pick up some more responsibility you know. Play a little session. They wouldn't let you play baseball on Sunday. They wouldn't let you do any of those things on Sunday. And they would do what you call star your name. I looked at some of them old records after I got grown you know I had to take a lead pencil and make a star right up over your name. It didn't do anything in the world to you, it didn't make you no better or no worse but that was the custom.

[Why did they put a star?]

That was that you not a recognized member I think. I think that's what it meant and a lot of people you know, they when they find that out they wouldn't come back, or if they did they'd come back and beg pardon, they had that option where you could come back and ask pardon. We still can do that in a Baptist Church.

[Have you been an active church member since you joined?]

Oh yes and before. I haven't had a year off since I decided I wasn't gonna take another off. They say I was playing with them in Sunday School. Use to have me reading, answering questions, and shortly after that I had the young people class and from then on I worked in the church. Everywhere you could work, but preach, and still do. I was no different in the church than what I am in the community. I won't say anything or try to present anything over there in that church building and no other one that I won't do out there in the yard. I am not perfect by no means. I haven't seen a person that I thought was perfect. As I could say it don't exist, some others believe it do, in fact that is we all would fall short of the glory of God.

Christ is waiting to forgive us if you will ask for a change of mind. I am on the deacon board, superintendent. Oh, I don't know how long, where it started. Not a Sunday passed, unless it was a funeral or extremely bad weather that I'm over there and I opened that church up for Sunday School. You can't stop the conditions of the weather, and sometimes they have a funeral and would say we just won't have Sunday School today. So you won't have to go over there and come back home and get ready. Now I always put up a fight about the activities there in church. You know, a lot of it is a fake. You don't know it but I know it. You can't be any better on Sundays than you are on Mondays and Tuesdays. I don't care who you are. Whatever you're made up of, it's there. I could put on any kind of show. I could put in another order and be a different person in that order, on the inside I'm just who I am. So that's the way I want people to read me, just as I am. Say no to anything. Turn down a lot of things to keep out of the way and I'm not any better than they are, that's just my life style.

[What were some of the things you desired as a young man?]

In my mind you talking about? Something I would like to do? I always had tried to look ahead. Some things I desired. I'd like to tell one or two of them but I tell you what, when I was growing up there were six kids in the family. I was next to the oldest one, I had a sister older than me. And the rest of them were younger than me. We would have company, have quite a lot of visitors back in those days, you know. For instance if a minister came in this community to run revival you know, anything about it going on a week. Well, he would stay at somebody's house

during that week, and ah, just for some reason he stayed at our house. I thought too much. I say what would happen in those days, this is what I'm trying to get to. Whenever there was company coming, all adults, they would fix all kinds of food it was always a plenty for everybody. Well, that group would go to the table. And I would be around there just hungry as I could be and as mad as I could be but I wasn't gonna get to that table till all the adults eat. And I remember making a pledge, telling my sister. I said, "One time I get married and if I have any children anytime any other group eat at my house, anything they eat the kids are gonna eat. I live to fulfill that. That was narrow-minded, I reckon. That was the old people's custom. We just didn't, kids just didn't eat with the grown ups there. I don't know why.

[Did you have any special customs when people would come to visit?]

I wouldn't think so. People just jealous when they'd come no matter who they were. I told you we had a lot of ministers. I had that since I've been married. My wife's mother used to take ministers in and now naturally I guess it just run in the family.

[Did you work then?]

Yes, always worked. I started work pretty young. On public jobs. I was out on public jobs in the woods with men logging, you know, they give youngsters lighter jobs. And I was out there thumping around there when I was 17 years old. I had a short school session and I would spend 3 or 4 months out there. I never did like to farm, but I did work on a farm.

[What kind of work did you do as you got older?]

Well, this is about it. I logged most of my life. I got started in the woods, that's why possibly I never did go on to college. I just kind of worked up. The man I started work for I guess he saw something I didn't see. I just started thumping around I was there. I must of worked for him. I tried to figure it up and it appears to be 17 years just on and off. I drop out, and catch a few of them months in school and go back. I just kind of worked up there. I scale logs. I filed saws, still can, I could run nearly any machine when they moved from mules and the oxen, you don't know about that but I was in the woods when they was hauling logs with oxen. And then we moved to tractors and trucks. I could handle anything out there. I just don't know. Just a talent I reckon cause it wasn't no way I had been trained, because it was something just beginning in this neighborhood.

[When you say scaling logs what is that?]

That's measuring a log in diameter and length and telling you how many feet in it. That is 30 something, I know. I don't have a log ruler, but I have a regular one and it was made identically like this and then you would take and put this across that log and out to the end--just where the bark come, now you wouldn't scale the bark. On the inside the bark and if that bark was 10 feet long, it had so many feet, and if it was 12 feet so many and so on up to 16 and up to 18. And it was called and still is a log ruler. They have them but this is just a regular measuring ruler. I did that, loaded logs which you don't



understand that because we had a rig at the depot there at Port Gibson in a big log yard there. They had a thing up called an A frame-we'd put it up. I learned how to build those and I'd give you a little idea of that if you just want to know what it was like when I was young. It was an A frame. It was 2 poles set up like this and you would swing a block right in here you heard 'em talk about a block and tackle. Alright you put it right across a (fork). There was some able to hang a block in there. Then you run a cable through there and it could go on out there on a log and pull a tractor back here with a cable on it to bring that log up there to lift it up and that pole it had a large at the bottom so it could rock this way and that way it would lean over far enough to let that log down. I went to work down there [at Alcorn] in '45 when it was just a different place than what it is now.

[How was it in '45?]

It was about a third or fourth the size it is and the conveniences and so forth they have there now just didn't exist.

[What did you do when you worked there then?]

My first work at Alcorn was driving a truck and later I was probably promoted up a little to heading transportation. I had to drive a bus, truck or whatever came up. Also keep a record of the maintenance such as tire repair and so forth.

[How long did you work at Alcorn?]

25 years, 3 months. I went there in April, I believe in '45. Left in 70, [when I retired].

[Did you do that in the woods?]

No, right there at the Depot in Port Gibson. I sat there many a days on a tractor.

[Who was the logger?]

That man was Mr. Greer, W. C. Greer. Mrs. Greer is still living in Port Gibson.

[Where did you meet your wife?]

Well, I first met her at school and as I told you there's a little old school just below, just on the same campus as Mount Zion is. I was going to school over at Beechland and on some occasion we would come over for something, spelling matches or something. Know it wasn't but about a mile and a half walk across that field. And I ran into her over there and I don't know what her age was but mine must of been 15, 16 and I don't know what started it. But me and her a few years later when we going to church or Sunday School I'd see her and we'd get a chance to talk. And from then on, I know we just considered ourselves obligated, I reckon, to each other about eight years. I was just at home whenever I seen her, I believe she felt the same way. That went on for about eight and a half years before we got married. It was a little delay in there. After we had I'll say become well acquainted or concerned we talked about getting married. I say well she was in her junior year. I say, "Well, you need another year of college to finish you know." My plan was after she finish college and I was going back to school, I didn't tell her that was my plan. So I thought that was all set cause if she was living here like I told these kids she said I'm telling a tale but it's a fact. And Sunday

night she told. I got a letter from her saying she wanted to talk with me about something. I thought she was going to say that she was going to back out. She said, "I, uh, you know, it wouldn't be no need for us to wait until I finish college a year and a half." We was talking about getting married round a year and a half before she could have graduated. We talked at length about it and she never did tell me why she just thought it was necessary that we go ahead and set it up a little early. So we waited and waited and waited up about four or five months in August. I waited and my birthday is on the 15th. It happened on a Sunday. Very beautiful, moon shining night which I can't forget it and I was out and I could stay late as I wanted then, they trust me, and they sat down and talked, her mother and all of them. I could pick her up and take her anywhere. So I picked her up and we talked and I told her to go ahead and set a date. We did set a date and it wasn't far away, the 10th of October. After we had set what date it was and where we was going home. I had to get out and open a gate and as I say it was a beautiful, moon shining night as I've ever seen. I got out, opened the gate, drove my old T-model car through, and come back and fastened the gate. Come back and got in the car then I didn't have another stop until I got home. All the way I got to thinking about it. I say now I wonder why this young lady got in a hurry, what happened?

So it's always good to double check anything. I guess the middle of that week unexpected to her, I know she didn't know I was coming, cause I didn't tell anybody her or nobody I went back down there and we talked and I said though I shouldn't but its true well I called her Mrs. May way back here long before we were married. And I said, "Mrs. May, why, what's the rush, why did you decide that you

wanted to go ahead and get married before you get out of school?" She said, "I heard some people talking and one of the girls was a good friend of yours." I finally learned who that was. She said, "She said that you had another girl." I said, "Well, you knew better didn't you." She said, "I thought I did but I know who the other girl was, Miss Wyatt." Well, I had been talking with her. She wasn't married and I wasn't either. You know, you can talk to people but it's just unfortunately for some reason she lives close to Port Gibson and most time I guess she knew about what time I was coming to town. I'd run into her and we'd walk around there on the street and talked and so forth and that was all. I'd go on about my business and she would, too. And she say, "You wouldn't tell me about it." I went on and explained it to her and she didn't change her mind. So this happened and that's about it. I say, "If you want to know when we first met I told you we met when just about neither one of us was really old enough to be in love and serious." And we went and got married and stayed until she passed, 44 years and never had a fight. We had some arguments and I gave up on some things, just walk away from it, not because I supported it but it paid off.

[What was her name?]

Her name was Mary Davis.

[And what year was it that you finally got married?]

'29, 1929.

[And that was the depression.]

Well I would've like to waited a while. I was hoping it would turn up some starting in the '30s about 7 years. I was working on public jobs and she was ... well when I

got her out of school that became my responsibility after we got married. And then she wanted to go to work. This was the sad part. I thought in my life she was making 30 dollars a month assisting teacher. I was making about 38 to 40 dollars making about average 19 dollars every 2 weeks. That's what you was getting paid. I would have to take some of that money to give her the things she needed to wear going to school everyday. That went on a couple of years. I told her, "Well, you know if you would just stay at home and relax or just kind of keep house, it would be easy and better for both of us." She said, "I had thought about it. I had wanted to finish college so very bad. Somebody is going to have to teach our children and I know I'm not being paid for it. Say but I'm willing to sacrifice if you are." I said, "Well that solves that problem." And there was no more talk about it and I spent a lot of money getting her to school. Not only that and themtimes you have to stay out a couple years you have to go back to Alcorn across the summer and she just kept going until she finally got an exempted license. And she did some further studying. We did it together most time. She would bring her work and hand it to me and I had to work out what you call this daily, monthly report attendance. I'd sat around here and work it out for her until she retired cause she could do it. But I just have to put in one when it comes to arithmetic and figuring and I got a lot of college people covered today. They don't know know it and I don't want them to know it. It's just a gift, so that's the story.

[Where did she teach after she graduated?]

Well her first teaching was right down here, working in the county for 18 dollars a month she told me. Then she had another teaching job up in Yazoo County. I don't know it didn't last long, maybe a year or two years. I would take her up there, go back to get her, and take her back. And she taught out here close to Collins, MS. A while after that she changed to Jefferson County. It was a school up there where Waterloo Church is. I don't know how many years she taught there until they consolidated and we moved to Fayette and she retired.

[Do you remember any old ghost stories?]

I don't really remember any ghost stories that probably would be worth mentioning. But I've heard a lot of stories and that's what they most turn out to be. I think I can remember one which I'm sure is a story. An old man told this story. I believe and I was referred it was true. I heard him tell it when I was quite young. And he told this story in this order: He said back in the slavery times, you read about it you know something about it, that there was an old man that he worked around for a master for a few years until he was just too old, just physically wasn't able to do any work. He made a kind of manager out of him. He let him ride and supervise the people. And said that seemingly that he wanted to be the boss. He was pretty hard on some of the people. Says he whipped a few people and he said you couldn't resist so they all marched politely, you would have to hear him when you were in trouble. So this old man went out and he said he was called Watt. He'd sit on his horse and a couple of ladies there were doing some talking. They must of been staring at him or saying something they shouldn't be saying and he whipped them. And he sat on his horse and whipped them. They couldn't run, wouldn't run. There

wasn't anything that could be done about it to help them. And sometimes later they said Watt disappeared. They never did know what happened to him, but they found, I believe, they said he was riding a mule. Then found the mule somewhere not too far from where they learn later that Watt was and those women, not only those two women but a group of them got together and sat down out there to provoke him. He came up and to try to make them go to work they fail to go and he started whooping them and he said they got a hold to him, killed him, and threw him in a well. Found by a Christian man and said, asked how come they had a well back then. And they said well it wasn't meant for a well. They say they use to build these pits called silos to put green corn down in there for to keep. They fill that old man full of water and threw him down in there and he wasn't found until some years later. One of them women told it. And then he said each year about that time, say it would be November, there would be a light. See there was the old man. See used to have a lantern all the time cause it be out in the dark it be a light passing around. And he said that the people use the woods said, "There go Watt." And that thing scared me and I just really believed that I see a light at night, or stars, I almost had a fit getting home. That's something I'll never forget. I can't tell it exactly like he told it but he told it like he seen it. He's a pretty old man then. But I don't think he had any way of proving it.

[What was the man's name that told you the story?]

Ike Barker was his name. He was in that first war? Civil War? It was ahead of World War I. Now somewhere here if I could find it, I have his discharge papers.

That's the honest truth.

[You remember any other stories that you heard as a kid that people taught you?]

Oh, I think I can remember one that maybe could be told. This is another story that was told in the modern times. A man by the name of George Turnipseed told me, it must have been 30 or 40 years ago. You know like water come down over folks an uh, a man had a lot of logs he had cut, waiting in this water to float 'em. Do what you call--the logs had been cut in the summer you know and they were ready. This was on the Bayou Pierre coming down from Port Gibson this was even North of Port Gibson that water on up there. There was a bunch of us up there to get them in there. We worked on Sundays as well as Mondays water get up there and stay so long whenever we put them logs in there and pin em together and we was sitting out for some reason, I don't know, it must have been lunch, but it was a break and he decided he would tell a tale. And he told a pretty good tale there. A lot of us believed it. He didn't know he couldn't verify it. What he told us. He said that there was a time, sometime back, there was two men liking the same lady. Now he called these men by name. He claimed remembering them but I couldn't remember either one. He didn't say one of 'em had a family or not but he said that they were both liking the same lady. And said some of the ladies had talked with her about it. Saying, just using the name Pamela. Say, "Pamela you know that's kind of dangerous one man here and then another one coming. You might run into



trouble." She, you know, didn't take heed. She just went on until finally they got in the window one man found out. Seemingly he was spending his money there helping and the other man was, too. So they go together and talked about it. Well we gone close in on her. So one went seems like he just went and stayed a short while and he left. And when he left he met the other one. He wasn't far away. And he went on up and started talking to this lady and you know questioned about why this guy talked and why and she told him he had left her house he had been there talking to her say, "Well you realize you using him, using me, or using both of us. You think that was fun?" She told him, "Well I hadn't thought about how fair it was, I had thought about one thing. If I couldn't use you two I would use two more." Sure as he told that tale. I'll never forget it. Maybe some of those things happen. They tell me some of those things happen. Some of those things happen now but they don't have to hide it. It was just a lot of fun.

This probably the last one I can think of. There was a story told. I've heard it more than one time. That was back in the old slavery time. That was I guess it was slavery way back then, maybe before I was born. There was a guy that lived on two plantations. One was Mr. Henderson owned this plantation and Mr. Wilson owned that one over there. But they always cooperated, swap labor, and whatever and on one place there, I don't remember which one it was they had a black guy there was dumb, and deaf. But he was a young man. He must have been the guy told us that he must have been around 30 years old or younger but he always gave signs. And they just took him on and put him to work. And he would just go from one place to another one and beg

for food and other things. At one house they had some dogs, in spite of the number of times, when ever they would see him coming the mistress would have something for him. He went there this last day and either the mistress lady was busy or off, there wasn't anybody out in the yard. You know, they had a dog there. So he went up, the gate was open. They didn't keep the gate locked. This was a story. They never did lock the gate because they had a dog they called "Ditty-Bite" there and he didn't let anybody in but the right person so when he went through the house and went on in the yard. This dog learned that. You know he took out around and around the

house fast as he could run and the mistress came out, she knew it was something and she hollered, see when he went in the dog lunged at him, he pulled the gate behind him, you know, I don't know whether this was true but this he says it. She just kept hollering, "Come back, come back! Did he bite?" The guy was running around the yard say about 50 miles per hour and the dog wouldn't stop and he passed by the steps there, somewhere in front of the house where she was. She was saying, "Come here. Did he bite?" And he said, "No he didn't bite, but have the gate open time I make this next round." So, when they followed that guy on, this tale followed on, he wouldn't go back home because he knew they was going to report it. And he left and say he went several miles, it was sometime before they found him again. But when they did run upon him, he was on another plantation working at a cotton gin and just normal as anybody.

[How do you feel about life in general today?]

Life in general? Oh, I think in general life is O.K. If you don't make a choice nothing is

O.K. You have to decide what type of lifestyle you want. You should do that real young. And set a course. Something gonna come along and throw you off track occasionally, but stay with it. If you don't try to live with everybody and a way that everybody like you, you're wasting your time. So an opportunity for life and a good lifestyle is still out there. You don't see it too clear.

[Is life different today?]

Just so much different. I can't explain it. Because years back you didn't have a chance to get into these things. These things that we call mischief going on now if it existed you couldn't find it. Especially young people. That was because of the parents we grew up on. Just didn't permit it, that's all. The only difference today is the parents. Right here, that's my stake, that old Bible. It tells us to train the child the way it should go and when you don't train it, it don't [know it] and it don't name just the words it says by precept and example, you know what that is. I'll demonstrate it to you. I can't tell you don't drink when you see me do it. I can tell you but you don't hear me. This is our weakness, it's really these kids that's born today could be just as good a callabout as ever was, but who we gonna follow, that's an opinion.