

## **Addie Hamilton** (Julia Martin House)

**Interviewed by Nancy Cardona & Tonisha Gendraw**

My name is Addie Hamilton. I was born on August 12, 1935. I was born in what is now called Clark's Hill, South Carolina. It was really just 'country ' back then, but today, it's a small town. There weren't too many people — mostly family in that town. I lived with my parents -my mother and my father. My mother was Lobella, and my father was Henry Williams. It wasn't bad when I was young. See, my parents had seven girls, and only two boys, so I was one of nine children. There was my brother Clarence — he was the oldest. Then, came my sister Ozella, then Occie and Bessie, then me, Addie, and my twin brother Eddie. After that came Beatrice and Florence, and finally my sister Bertha.

My mother stayed home and took care of the kids, but my father — he worked on the railroad. He had nine children, so he had to work hard — there was no welfare. He had to buy shoes every month! They were good people, my parents. My father did keep food on the table, even with nine of us. And my mother had a garden and she grew collard greens, cabbage, turnip greens, okra, squash, and other vegetables. So we cooked from the garden, and we would cook some corn bread to go along with that, and drink some milk, and it was good.

No, I didn't play sports. We didn't do anything special, just play! I played with my brothers and sisters, neighbors, my school friends, and my cousins. We like to play hopscotch, jump rope, you know, those were the little street games kids like to play. We couldn't play in the house of course, we always played outside. We all got along with each other, and we still do right now. I can get on the phone right now and call one of them, and we'd have things to talk about. Friends won't let you down.

My favorite season is Christmas. When I was a kid, I didn't get a doll or anything, but I got some things. Christmas is important because I'm a Christian. We would go to church. Yes, I'm still a Christian. I'm a deacon now at my church, so I go to the hospital to visit people, things like that. How would I describe myself? I try to help people, and I go and pray for them when they're sick. I talk to them and visit them. What I'm working on, I guess, is love. Jesus saves, that's it.

Yes, I liked school when I was young. I liked reading and arithmetic and all that stuff! I didn't have a favorite teacher...there were too many kids. But I did have a teacher named Ms. Bissonet. She was nice *sometimes*. When I wasn't in school, we

had chores to do, and we had to play close to home. I liked it because I didn't have no choice!

We didn't have too many chores to do. We had to sweep the yard. We didn't have a farm, but we would help other people on their farms. Like if they needed help to pick cotton, we would go. We would get a dollar for 100 pounds. Then we would pick that cotton, get that dollar, go to the store and get something for yourself! I'd buy myself some pork and beans in a can, then I'd have change and I'd buy other things. One time I saved my money to buy a dress. The area that I grew up in was like a little family section out in the country. But, if you needed to buy clothes or shoes or something like that, you had to go 'in town.' That was just across the state line to Augusta, GA. So whenever anyone asks me where I come from, I say Augusta, because that's where we had to go to get things.

Yes, my parents were very strict. I got in trouble a few times for saying something. And once, when I was sixteen, I got a good beating because my cousin told her mother what I had done. We kids were all together. We had gone to a basketball game, and I was left in charge because I was the oldest. So on way back, I saw this club (a bar), and I said, "*Let's go in and see what's going on.*" So we went in, and that's why I got the beating.

When I was sixteen, my life was good, because I had a boyfriend. My first date, I think, was with a boy named - can't remember - I had so many boyfriends! Oh, it was James Garrett. As I said, my mother was really strict, and he was kind of bold like me. He said he wanted to come see me, and I said he had to ask my mother. So, he said to my mother "*I like Addie, and I would like to come to see her. I'd like to be her friend.*" And my mother said, "*Boy, if your bold enough to come ask me if you can see my daughter, I'm going to say yes!*" You see, a lot of people were afraid of her because she was strict, but he started the ball rolling.

Then I met Arthur, and he asked me to marry him. I said yes, then I went home and told my Mother that Arthur was coming over that night to ask for my hand. So my mother said to me, "*Child, I know you. You know you're not going to get up early in the morning and make breakfast, then go out in that hot sun and pick cotton, then go back at 12 o'clock, to cook dinner.*" And I said "*I sure ain't!*" So when he came to the house that night, and he asked my mother for my hand, she said, "*You know, it's up to Addie. If Addie wants to, she can.*" So I said, "*NO, I have to think about it.*" He wanted to know why, so I took him in the other room and said, "*Look man, I ain't going to pick no cotton, and I ain't dragging no sack, and I ain't going to do this and I'm not going to do that.*" And that was that.

When I graduated from high school, I went to work for this white lady. Her name was Ms. Williams. I lived with them and baby sat for the children. We stayed a year in Pompano Florida, then we left there, and we stayed for a year in Thompson, GA. After that, I was getting to be a big girl, and I wanted to be more on my own. I wanted a boyfriend!

So in 1959, I went to Philadelphia to live with my Aunt. I told my mother I wanted to go spend some time with my Aunt. I told her that I had asked my Daddy, and he said that I could go. Then my mother said, OK, I could go. Then I ran to my Daddy, and told him my Mother said I could go, so he said OK. So that's how I went to Philadelphia! Then, I met *this guy*. First, he was my boyfriend, then we fell in love, and we got married. That was how I met my husband, Herman Hamilton.

I told my mother, *I'm not going to have nine children*, and I had two children, Elaine and Herman. My daughter Elaine is a teacher *and* she's a nurse. She got two degrees! When she was in college at Texas A&M, she was in ROTC. Then, when she graduated, she was Army Airborne — she got her wings. She's very smart. First she taught in Galveston, TX. Now she's a teacher in Tampa, FL. She's a Special Education teacher.

We were lucky when I was growing up that we were all healthy. I was never sick, and I never had to go to the hospital until I had my first child. But my son, Herman Jr., had a brain condition that caused him to die young. He was only 34 years old. It was very sad. Once for Mother's Day he wrote me the most beautiful card. This was when I was working at *Bob The Chef's Restaurant* where I worked for many years.

He called it ***My Mother's Day Reward***. This is how it reads:

*"You are a wonderful Mother,  
and this is your Mother's Day Reward.  
You have given others 365 days of sunshine,  
even when the weather was bad.  
You stood fast for our family  
for 52 weeks, even when things were slow.  
You made 12 months richer for others,  
even when you were broke.*

*In recognition:*

*The way you are is extra nice,  
The way you look is just great,  
and the way you love, is A LOT.*

*This reward is presented with love and affection "*

*by Herman Hamilton III*

No, I don't like to drive. I use to drive a little bit with my grandfather, but I was too scared. My first driving experience was very, very scary. I was driving on the wrong side of the road, but they gave me my license anyway! Then I was in three accidents, so I decided I wasn't going to drive any more.

My favorite thing to do in my free time? Well, I don't have much free time now. I'm pretty busy. But when I do stay in the house, I might watch TV. When I was young I used to love coloring books. My mother would buy us coloring books and paper dolls, and I loved those. I read a lot of books, but my favorite book is The Bible.

When I was younger, I really wanted to join the Army. And, I wanted to be Airborne and jump out of planes. But my father was against it. My daughter did all of that though. I also wanted to be a nurse, but being a waitress was good because I met all kinds of people. I really wanted to be a nurse, that was my dream. I would love to have done that, but my daughter did it!

No, there isn't anything I would like to try at this age that I am now. The happiest moment of my life was when I had my first child. When I got married and had my baby. When that nurse came in and put that baby in my arms, I was so happy. And the saddest moment of my life was having to bury my son at 34 years old. We were very close, and had so much fun together, so that was the hardest thing I ever did. Then after that, my twin Eddie died, that was very hard too. What's important to me in my life? Right now, the most important thing is my health. Yes, I do have a best friend, in fact, I have two — Carol Wright and Lee Fisher are my best friends.

The most important lesson that I've learned that I can pass along to you is to love everyone. That's the most important thing, love everyone *no matter what*. And to give whatever you can, and pray for the sick. But the most important thing is to love the Lord, then yourself.