

# THE SEARCH for FREEJOE

## EXCERPTS

This journey back through time began in Chicago, Illinois in August of 1984, has taken me to Goochland County, Virginia, Kalamazoo, Michigan and changed my permanent address to Memphis, Tennessee.

The documents you see in this book, came from the courthouses and archives of Goochland County, Virginia and Memphis, Tennessee. They were used as a frame of reference in order to write my biographical novel, "FreeJoe: A story of Love, Faith and Perseverance".

### The trip to Memphis

"You really missed out on a nice affair. They gave out information on the family and I bet you didn't know that you have a great, great....wait a minute, let me count. Two greats for me....and three for you. You have a great, great, great grandfather that was never a slave" Suvella said.

"What was his name" I asked.

"FreeJoe Harris" Suvella replied, calmly.

"That name FreeJoe implies that he was locked up somewhere. If you were always free, why would you use an adjective like free" I asked.

"I don't know. He's buried in Gray's Creek Cemetery" Suvella said. "Do you know where" I asked, not quite believing this story. "I have no idea. I was told that he's buried somewhere in the cemetery. That's all I know" Suvella said.

"I think I know where he's buried" I murmured. "What! Now aren't you something. A few minutes ago you never heard of the man, didn't know where he was buried, and now all of a sudden you do" Suvella said, in a surprised voice.

"I'll be a Gray's Creek at 8:30 a. m. and I'll show you his final resting place" I said.

{Only my mother and I knew what happen at Gray's Creek Cemetery after my great uncle Arthur Lewis was lowered into his grave in early December of 1944. I was five years old at the time. It was cold. Mother and I were walking out of the cemetery, down that wide path that led us in, when I became drawn to a large gray headstone on my left. I walked up to it and just stood there.

“Come on Earnest, it’s cold out here” mother pleaded. She pulled me away but I pulled back, refusing to leave, fixated on the headstone. “Does he like candy” Queenie Lewis, a cousin asked, rushing over. “Oh he loves candy” my mother replied.

I was lured out the cemetery with the promise of candy. For the next 40 years, whenever I was at Gray’s Creek, I would visit that headstone in the cemetery. In August of 1984, on a trip to Memphis, I found out, I was visiting the grave site of my great, great, great grandfather, born on July 18, 1796 and died on July 15, 1875}

#### Gray’s Creek Cemetery

“Well...I’ll be. You said you knew where he was buried” said Suvella, gazing down at the writing on the headstone.

#### The Archives

“I’m glad you didn’t hang up. There is a county in Virginia that is close to the name you gave me. Goochland county. It’s spelled G. o. o. c. h. l. a. n. d.” she said.

#### Dogwood Village

“I found this in my trunk” Bernice said. It was a quit claim deed.

#### A fat letter from Virginia

“Oh my! This is unbelievable! So that’s why they called him FreeJoe” I said to myself.

#### Mother’s Death

Over the next few months, the search for FreeJoe was put on hold.

#### House hunting in Memphis

Instead of focusing more attention on research, I was preoccupied with the move to Memphis.

#### Cottage Grove Height

“I’m moving” I said. “That’s what I though you said. You’re going back to Memphis, FreeJoe country” Willie said, smiling.

#### Our New Home

“Do you have family here” Mathew asked. “I sure do. I was born here. My mother was a Lewis and she grew up in Eads. I’m related to Ethyl Venson, Suvella Horton, Ernestine Martin, Iola Brooks, Harold Brooks, and Joe Branch, just to name a few” I said, smiling. “You know...you’re related to me too. Those are my cousins” Mathew Gray said calmly, with a smile.

#### Mound Bayou, Mississippi

“Did you find what you were looking for” Melvin asked. “I sure did. Peter Harris, the grandson of FreeJoe Harris, and the son of James Harris and William Harris, the grandson of FreeJoe Harris and the son of Peter Harris were both founders of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. William and Peter were cousins and preachers too” I replied.