

[The Life of Jim Davis]

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THE LIFE OF JIM DAVIS

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Jim Davis was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, British West Indies, in the year 1878. He was a happy youngster. having everything that any child could wish for, a good home, fine mother and father, and two brothers. He began to mingle with older boys when he was eleven years of age, and soon began to hear the wonderful stories of other countries. One day while loitering on the street, he was approached by a Sea Captain, who asked him if he would not like to take a job as cabin boy on his sailing ship "Red Jacket". Miraculously the opportunity that he was longing for had come, and he could now go out into the world and seek his fortune. So it was, that as a boy of eleven, he started on a journey that led him to foreign shores, never more to return to his native land.

One whole year or more he was on the Red Jacket as a cabin boy, and enjoying the thrill of handling the sails with the crew when he was off duty. He saw much of the world during those years, the ship having touched England; Cardiff, Wales; Buenos Ayres, Argentine; Russia; Germany and many other seaports of the world, not to mention the different ports in the U.S., that his ship touched. Again the wanderlust seized him and the desire to see

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more of those foreign ports was strong within him, so one bright Friday morning, while the Red Jacket was in Mobile, tied up at the foot of Lipscomb Street, Jim with several others of the crew, jumped the ship. It was not long before the little twelve year old West Indian boy found himself alone. For one week he lived as he could, getting odd jobs for food; sleeping where he could, he did not care if he suffered a little from hunger and cold for his whole future lay ahead of him; but at the end of 2 that first week, the law, in the person of deputy sheriff Brown, arrested him for “loafing”, and when he appeared before the Judge, the sentence was that he should be returned to the Red Jacket.

While Mr. Brown, with Jim in tow, was walking back to the ship, he found himself talking frankly to this little quiet boy. They had now gotten very near the Red Jacket, when Mr. Brown stopped, and said:

“Get going! and don't let me catch you again”.

Jim took to this heels, he flew, as if he had wings to his feet, but never forgot those words. His regard for Mr. Brown (long since passed away) is still very deep.

He ran until he found himself in that part of the northern section of Mobile known as “the Grove”, and soon he was met by an old colored man by the name of John McMillan, whose voice was low and pleasant, and whose eyes held warmth and kindness. The old man asked a few questions and Jim poured out his story into his sympathetic ears. The old colored man sitting himself down on the curbstone of the sidewalk listened, and when Jim had finished his story, he found that he had won himself a home, for the old man, who had so little for himself, made a place for the little boy and kept him as he would have a son.

As Jim grew older, again the wanderlust and desire to see the world got the better of him, so he left his adopted home and after wandering around from town to town and station to station, he got a job as water boy at Lock I, on the Tombigee River, where he worked for about six months.

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Forty years ago in 1898, Jim started working at the Alabama Corn 3 Mills Company as a porter drawing a salary of fifteen dollars a week, gradually working up to be a teamster of a meal truck at eighteen dollars a week, He remained with that firm until the Company closed its doors, December, 1931, throwing Jim out of work.

He had been married since 1914 to Lizzie - , a native of Mobile, and is still living with her to-day, although she is now a large, (corpulent) woman. During those years when Jim was out of work, and there was none to be had, Lizzie aided him by taking in washing. Their little home of three rooms, is the fifth in a row of ten houses all just alike in the front, but his home has a vine growing over the porch, which is freshly swept each day, although now Lizzie is far from well, suffering from rheumatism which seems to have settled in her feet causing them to swell. In spite of her sickness, however, she is able only to keep the house almost immaculate, do the little household washing for the two of them (for they have no children), and in her spare time quilts up all the pieces of material that she can get her hands on. I could not keep count of the quilts she showed me, that she had finished and put away, but were at least two dozen or more, some finished, others partly finished.

After the Alabama Corn Mills closed out of business, Jim could only get odd jobs to do, painting, gardening, housecleaning and such like jobs until 1932, when he was lucky in getting a job as helper on one of the Taylor Lowenstein trucks at fifteen dollars a week, and is still with this firm, and says they are the finest people to work for, as the firm aids its employees in every way that it can. Jim's duty now is to travel 4 on a truck, which leaves at around five in the morning, going up the State and returning from six to nine in the evening. He had just returned from a trip (when the writer called for this interview), which took him through - Bay Minette, Evergreen, Peterman, Brewton, etc. He enjoys truck work, for each day carries its own experiences and he enjoys every one of them. Each evening when he gets home he is too tired for anything but supper, a minute to relax, and to bed.

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Saturdays, Jim, upon his arrival home, gives Lizzie her share of the pay check; hers to pay the bills and expenses and keep the house, his share, as Jim told the writer, to spend as he sees fit, which usually means joining “the boys” and gambling.

On Sunday Jim is a gadabout, never going to Church, as he is indifferent to all religions, although at some part day he was baptized. Lizzie is just the opposite, and is very religious, but has had to fore-go Church meetings because she does not get out any more on account of her rheumatic condition.

Jim is now a grey-haired man, of medium height, of about 160 pounds, and is in good health, and, as he expresses it himself, “is as fit as a fiddle”. He is a thorough American, remembering the land of his birth but dimly and is perfectly satisfied to be in America. He reads and writes, although his eye sight is not so good for reading at night. Both Jim and Lizzie enjoy life in their own simple way, in their little modest home and are happy and congenial.