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CADDO ■ BOSSIER ■ WEBSTER ■ DESOTO

Courage to rise



Artist
chronicles
her life in
new book
LIFE, 1L



YOUR FORECAST

Partly cloudy;
high 62,
low 33

TOMORROW:
Mostly sunny;
high 59,
low 34

Weather details,
forecast /2A

Nation/World: Border panel's clout may be deal-breaker, **5A**



Bertha Harris with her artwork. Harris tells the story of her childhood at Beene Plantation through her art and her autobiography, "The Courage to Rise Again."

The courage to **rise again**

Book chronicles journey through artist's life

Story and photos by **Henrietta Wildsmith**
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Artist Bertha Harris tells stories. And she has been telling them with paint for years. Last year, she put words to her art when she wrote her autobiography, "The Courage to Rise Again."

Beginning with, "My motivation to write this book stems from first-hand experiences of horrors that the strong can inflict on the weak" and ending with "Rise, woman. Rise like you have the wings of an eagle," the book is an intimate account of her life growing up in north Louisiana.

Now in her 70s, Harris has written about a time few remember. Her earliest memories are happy ones from Cooper Hill in north Louisiana. Her family then moved to Beene Plantation in north Bossier. The plantation was



Bertha Harris stands in front of the remains of Beene Plantation where she spent her childhood.



See **HARRIS**, Page 3

FIND IT ONLINE

View more photos of Bertha Harris!

Harris

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a thriving farm where
many people worked and
lived.

The Beene plantation
is the subject of several
of Harris' paintings.
From picking cotton to the
school she attended, her
paintings depict both the
good and the bad aspects
of life on the plantation.

"By six o'clock in the
morning they were ready
to go to the fields," Har-
ris recalls in her book. "It
would be late evenings be-
fore they returned home."

Her current painting
is of the grocery store on
the plantation. The gro-
cery store offered supplies
people needed, but also
could be a source of con-
tention because the money
was taken out of their pay-
checks.

"Once a month we go
down there and get grocer-
ies. By the end of the year
we would get our checks
and we would still owe;
we were always in debt. It
was modern day slavery
to me," Harris said. "As I
look back on it, we were in
bondage."

The book takes you on
a journey through Harris'
life. Surviving an abusive
relationship and later sexual
harassment at work,
Harris said, "I learn not
to dwell on past hurts and
disappointments that hap-
pen in my life; it can't be
changed, undone or forgot-
ten. Take it as a lesson and
walk in forgiveness."



Bertha Harris' paintings depict life on the Beene Plantation. HENRIETTA WILDSMITH/THE TIMES

Harris' faith is strong
and for guidance in life,
she focuses on Philippians
3:13: "Brethren, I count not
myself to have apprehend-
ed: but this one thing I do,
forgetting those things
which are behind, and
reaching forth unto those
things which are before."

It was her faith that led
her to painting.

"I asked God to help me
see and appreciate my
unique skills that only I

had," she said. "One day
while sitting at my kitchen
table doodling around on
some paper adding up my
bills, I looked down and I
had penciled a drawing of
a little man that reminded
me of my grandpa."

Harris said a light came
on in her head and she
heard a voice that was so
loud, she thought it was
her husband, Alce, talking
to her.

"The voice just kept say-
ing to me, 'your family his-
tory needs to be told in
painting,'" she said.

Painting, Harris said,
helps her forget "the trou-
bles of the world."

And, she finds the words
to her paintings in her
book.

"I wrote the book to heal,
and maybe help someone
else with their struggles,"
she said.