Everett Ingram

Interview with Everett Ingram

—Preston Klein, Opelika, Alabama

MY GRANDMA RAISED PLENTY CHILLUNS

Uncle Everett Ingram mused: "Honey chile, my gran'mammy was de beatenest woman to have chilluns dat you ever seen. I has hyared dat she raised so many of dem dat she brung a mighty heap on de block; somewhere near a thousan' dollars."

Uncle Everett is a familiar figure in East Opelika, where he has lived for years. He was "a right good-sized scamp at freedom time" and remembers much of what he has seen and heard. He was born in Russell County, the son of Prince and Fanny Ingram. They had seven other children; Jerry, Clara, Rubin, Jep, Lula, Eugene and Lucy.

Everett says of his life:

"Our house in de slave settlement was made of logs an' had one room. It had a mud an' stick chimney, a plank floor an' a boxed-up bed wid one leg at de foot. De mattress was stuffed wid shucks an' straw.

"My gran'pappy, Prince Walden, an' Lucy, his wife, come from Russell County, too, an' belonged to de Covingtons. Later dey was sold to Dr. Walden, at Uchie. When dey come to Uchie de county was full of Indians. My gran'pappy useta drink likker wid 'em; but gran'ma, she was skeered an' runned away to Columbus, Georgy. On her way dere, my mammy was borned in de woods.

"I 'members dat when I was a strip of a boy, dey cooked ash-cake on leaves an' de chilluns et pot-licker an' bread an' greens outen wooden trays wid wooden spoons. Dey would sit under de trees an' eat. Each family had dey own bowl, an' us et a-plenty, too. In cold weather mammy kept all de chilluns in de house by de fire.

"Master had us a two-room house, 'ca'se my mammy was de cook an' weaver. Dey made dey own silk den, too, an' raised de silk worms. Us useta get mulberry leaves to feed de silk worms wid. Us used indigo, which us cooked an' used for dye. Us would wear any kind of clothes on everyday an' Sunday; an' didn't have no shoes 'til us was big chilluns.

"Ol' Marster an' Ol' Mistus, Mr. Bill an' Miss Lucy Ingram, lived in a big weather-boarded house wid a wide hall an' a chimney at each end. De kitchen was off from de rest of de house.

"I 'members dat de overseer useta whip mammy an' pappy, 'ca'se dey fight so much. He useta take my mammy to de carriage to whip her. Marster was in de war den. When he come home, de overseer tuk mammy by de han' to de house an' tell Marster 'bout havin' to whip her. He'd jest shake his head, sad-lak. He was mighty good to all of us.

"My gran'pappy was put in de speculator drove, put on de block an' sold.

"I 'members dat Mistus read de Bible to us an' my mammy was converted by de white preacher. He baptized her. De colored folks used de white church an' set in de back.

"An' honey, dey shorely did have good times dancin' on Sattidy nights; an' sometimes dey would dance 'till Sunday mornin'. When de corn needed shuckln', it was hauled up near de crib, an' on a purty moonlighted night Marster would pass 'roun' de likker. It wouldn't be long 'til dey was all happy an' had what dey called a general. De general led all de hollers an' songs. Dey shorely did get dat corn shucked fast, too.

"Gran'mammy was a great doctor; useta give us turpentine an' castor oil an' Jerusalem oak fer worms. She'd give us all kinds of teas, too. I 'members dat gran'mammy was also a midwife.

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"De Yankees comed through de yard in May an' tol' us: 'You's free.' De Yankees wasn't so good. Dey hung my mammy up in de smokehouse by her thumbs; tips of her toes jest touchin' de floor, 'ca'se she wouldn't 'gree to give up her older chilluns. She never did, neither.

"Daddy stole both de older chilluns, dough, an' went off. De Yankees stole provisions an' stock an' hauled 'em off. De news got to Uchie an' everybody hid out; Marster wid 'em. Dey hunted de money whut was hid in de colored folks beds; nearly $2,000. De jewelry was dere, too. Dey foun' some money at de big house an' said: 'Dis money ain't worth a damn;' but dey tuk it jest de same.

"I married Hattie Graves. Den I j'ined de church an' was saved