

## Nicey Pugh

### Interview with Nicey Pugh

—*Ila B. Prine, [HW: Mobile]*

"I was bawn a slave, but I ain't neber been a slave", was Aunt Nicey's first remark to me as I came upon her pulling up potato draws in her garden in Prichard, Alabama. "Dere was 'leben chilluns in my family an' all 'em is daid ceptin' me an' one brother who is seventy-five year old at de present time. My pappy's name was Hamp West an' my mammy was Sarah West. All my folks belonged to Massa Jim Bettis, an' was born an' raised on his place.

"When I was a little pickaninny I worked in Massa Jim's house, sweepin' an' a-cleanin'. Us slaves had to be up at de house by sunup, build de fires an' git de cookin' started. Dey had big open fireplaces wid potracks to hang de pot on. Dat's whar us boiled de vegetables. An' honey, us sho had plenty somp'n' t'eat: greens, taters, peas, rosenyurs an' plenty of home killed meat. Sometimes my oldest brother, Joe West, an' Friday Davis, anudder nigger, went huntin' at night an' kotched mo' possums dan we could eat. Dey'd ketch lots of fish; 'nuf to las' us three days.

"I remembers one day when me an' anudder little nigger gal was agoin' atter de cows down in de fiel' an' us seed whut I reckon' was de Ku Klux Klan. Us was so skeered us didn't know whut to do. One of 'em walked up to us an' say: 'Niggers, whar you agoin'?'

"'Us is jus' atter de cows, Mr. Ku Klux,' us say. 'Us ain't up to no debilment.'

"'All right den,' dey say, 'jus' you be sho dat you don't git up to none.'

"Atter we got home us told de massa 'bout de 'sperience, an' he jus' laugh. He tol' us dat we warn't goin' to be hurt iffen we was good; he say dat it was only de bad niggers dat was goin' to be got atter by dem Ku Klux.

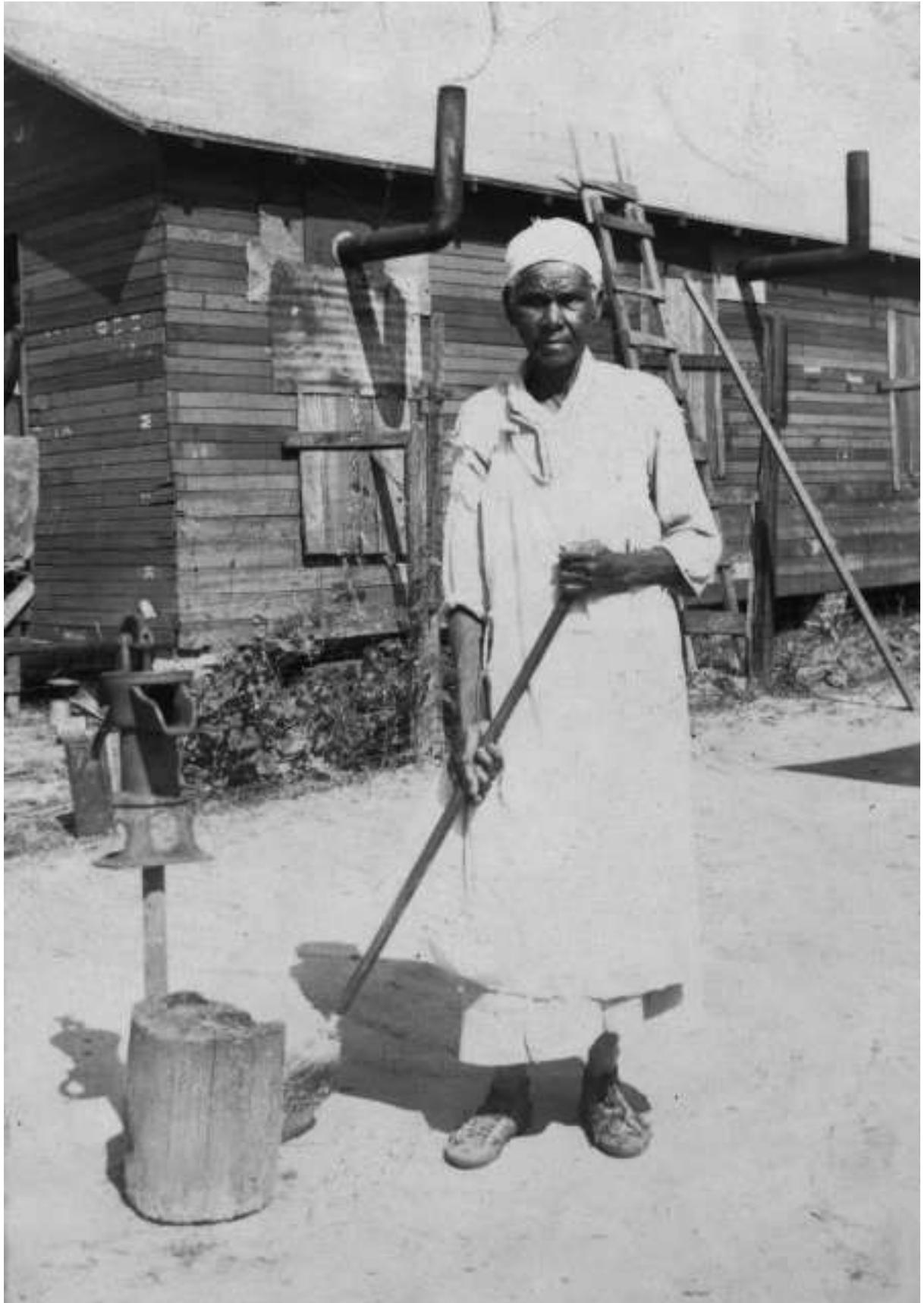
"When we was little we didn't hab no games to play, kaze Massa Jim an' Miss Marfa didn't hab no chilluns, an' I ain't neber had no speriences wid ha'nts or hoodoos. Dey neber teach us to read or write kaze when de niggers learn anything, dey would git upitty an' want to run away. We would hab Sad'day afternoons off, den us would sweep de yards, an' set aroun' on benches an' talk. It was on de benches dat mos' of us slaves set in warm weather. We et outen tin cups an' us used iron spoons to shovel de food in.

"At Christmas time, Massa would have a bunch of niggers to kill a hog an' barbecue him, an' de womens would make 'lasses cake, an' ole massa Jim had some kinda seed dat he made beer outen, an' we-alls drank beer 'roun' Christmas.

"But dere warn't no udder time such as New Years. Us all celebrated in a big way den. Most of dem no 'count niggers stayed drunk fo' three days.

"An' as fo' de funerals, I don't eber remember but three white folks dyin'. Dey jus' didn't seem to die in dem days, an' de ones dat did die was mostly kilt by somp'n'. One white gentman got hisself kilt in a gin 'chinery an' anudder was kilt a workin' on de big road. Den dere was a white 'oman who was kilt by a nigger boy kaze she beat him for sicking a dog on a fine milk cow. He was de meanest nigger boy I eber seed. I'll neber forgits de way dem white mens treated him atter he done had his trial. Dey drug him through de town behin' a hoss, an' made him walk ober sharp stones wid his bare feets, dat bled lak somebody done cut 'em wid a knife. Dey neber gib him no water all dat day an' kep' him out in de boilin' sun till dey got ready to hang him. When dey got ready to hang him dey put him up on a stand and chunked rocks at his naked body; dey thro gravel in his eyes and broke his ribs wid big rocks. Den dey put a rope around his neck an' strung him up till his eyes pop outen his head. I knowed it was a blessin' to him to die.

"But all and all, white folks, den was de really happy days for us niggers. Course we didn't hab de 'vantages dat we has now, but dere wus somp'n' back dere dat we ain't got now, an' dat's secu'aty. Yassuh, we had somebody to go to when we was in trouble. We had a Massa dat would fight fo' us an' help us an' laugh wid us an' cry wid us. We had a Mistis dat would nuss us when we was sick, an' comfort us when we hadda be punished. I sometimes wish I could be back on de ole place. I kin see de cool-house now packed wid fresh butter an' milk an' cream. I can see de spring down amongst de willows an' de water a trickling down between little rocks. I can hear de turkeys a gobblin' in de yard and de chickens a runnin' aroun' in de sun, an' shufflin' in de dus'. I can see de bend in de creek jus' below our house, an' de cows as dey come to drink in de shallow water an' gits dere feets cool.



*Nicey Pugh, Prichard, Alabama*

"Yassuh, white folks, you ain't neber seed nothin' lak it so you can't tell de joy you gits f'um lookin' for dewberries an' a-huntin' guinea pigs, an' settin' in de shade of a peach tree, reachin' up an' pullin' off a ripe peach and eatin' it slow. You ain't neber seed your people gathered 'bout an' singin' in de moonlight or heered de lark at de break of day. You ain't neber walked acrost a frosty fiel' in de early mornin', an' gone to de big house to build a fire for your Mistis, an' when she wake up slow have her say to you: 'Well, how's my little nigger today?'

"Nawsuh, jus' lak I told you at fus'. I was bawn a slave, but I ain't neber been one. I'se been a worker for good peoples. You wouldn't calls dat bein' a slave would you, white folks?"