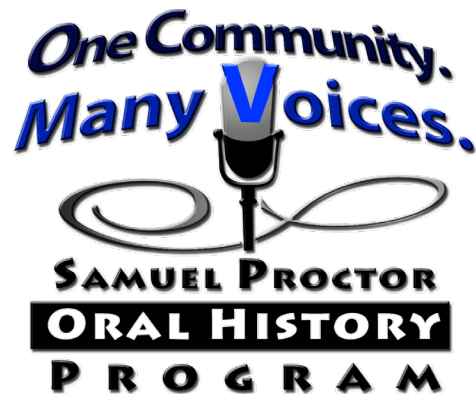


Jessie Dugan

Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
CHER-007

Interview by:

Dr. Samuel Proctor
October 24, 1973



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CHER 007 Jessie Dugan
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Dr. Samuel Proctor on October 24, 1973
18 minutes | 11 pages

Abstract: Jessie Dugan discusses her life and childhood living on the Cherokee reservation. Her mother died when she was young, so she and her brother were mainly raised by their grandparents. Dugan talks about her mixed heritage and the lack of acceptance for marriage between White people and Native Americans that was prevalent in the past. She also mentions stories that her grandmother shared with her, one of which being about an owl who turned into a man. In addition to talking about her past, she also discusses her current job at the museum, where she sells tickets and gives tours. She talks about her husband and her eight children, as well as mentioning the background of her husband's family and how she and her husband met.

Keywords: [Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; North Carolina--Cherokee; Oral biography; Race relations]

ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CHER 007

Interviewee: Jessie Dugan

Interviewer: Samuel Proctor

Date of Interview: October 24, 1973

P: Now, I always start out by saying, would you tell me your name, please?

D: Jessie Dugan.

P: You're Jessie Dugan. We're doing an interview here with Mrs. Dugan, and we're in the Cherokee Council House. This is Wednesday, October the 24th, and she and I are talking about some of her experiences. Mrs. Dugan, how old are you?

D: Fifty-one.

P: Where were you born?

D: I was born at Ravensford.

P: Ravensford? How do you spell that?

D: R-A-V—I don't know.

P: Is it R-A-V-E-N-S-ford, F-O-R-D?

D: It's towards up the river here on the top. There used to be an old town there, and my father worked for the railroad when the train run up through here.

P: What'd he do for the railroad?

D: Well, I don't really know. That's been a long time, I'd have to ask him. All I know is that he did work for the railroad.

P: And y'all were living up at Ravensford when you were born. What's the date of your birth?

D: June 16, 1922.

P: And can you remember—how long did you live at Ravensford?

D: I don't know, I never did ask.

P: When you moved, were you still a small child? And you moved where?

D: To Birdtown.

P: And you grew up in Birdtown. What kind of a community was Birdtown then when you were growing up in the 1920s?

D: Well, it was a good community.

P: Was it a village?

D: No.

P: Larger than that?

D: Homes scattered around out on the reservation, it wasn't no village.

P: Try to remember your house in Birdtown and describe it.

D: Well, it was an old house. I don't know how old it was. But it had three rooms, and it was built in the shape of an L—went in the kitchen, through a bedroom, and on into another bedroom.

P: It was a house that your father rented?

D: No. My mother died when I was five years old, so I had to live with my grandfather until they put me in boarding school. I went to Birdtown School a year or two, and then they took me out and put me in boarding school up here and I stayed up there 'til the boarding school was done away with.

P: What was your father's name?

D: Lloyd Owl.

P: Owl. So, you're related to the Owl family then? Lloyd Owl. What was your mother's name?

D: Well, her name was Lillian Arch. Well, she was an Arch—her mother was an Arch, but the Murphy family raised her, and she went by the name of Lillian Murphy.

P: How much Indian are you?

D: Well, I don't know exactly. They got me on the roll as five-eighths.

P: Five-eighths? Now that means, what White grandparents did you have?

D: My grandmother was part, the one that raised me—my father's mother. My grandfather was half.

P: What was your grandmother's name that raised you?

D: Nettie Owl.

P: Nettie Owl, and where was she from?

D: In Cherokee County somewhere. [inaudible 4:25]

P: Do you happen to know how she and your grandfather met and got married?

D: Well, I've heard them talk. He lived down in there, too, somewhere, and they got acquainted, and back then if a White woman or a White man married an Indian or part-Indian, they had to slip off. Well, I know they had to run off to get married, but they went up through Tennessee [inaudible 5:03] back over Tennessee somewhere and got married.

P: And they were married, and they came back here then?

D: I don't know how long it was before they come up in here, but they both lived down in there before they were married, I reckon.

P: You remember them telling any stories about their early life?

D: Well, yeah. I've heard my grandma tell an awful lot of scary tales.

P: What do you mean, scary tales?

D: Things that had happened, you know, she'd hear around places where she lived.

P: Like what?

D: Oh, I don't know. She might have been telling us kid's tales—hearing things dropping down in the loft. You know, like it'd drop from the top of the house down into the loft. In an old house back then, they called the upstairs the loft. With her hearing things dropping around and being outside and hearing things holler, and it scared her. And the way she talked, my grandfather was away from home a whole lot. I think he'd politic a lot. You know, back then you had to go to Asheville a lot of times, and maybe they'd be two or three days getting there and back.

P: What kind of politicking was he doing?

D: Well, just in the elections, I reckon.

P: He was an Indian man, wasn't he?

D: Half-Indian.

P: Why would he be involved in politics, were Indians allowed to politic?

D: I don't know what it is, that's what I understood it to be. I just never had thought much about it, but that's what I thought it was.

P: How'd he make a living?

D: Farm. He was a farmer.

P: And you say your mother died when y'all were living at Ravensford?

D: No, I don't know where—no, she died after we moved to Birdtown.

P: I see, she's buried at Birdtown? And you went to live with your grandmother, Mrs. Nettie Owl. And your grandfather was a farmer, but he was also a politicking man.

D: I reckon that's what he done when he went off. I've heard her talk of him going off to Asheville. I won't say that's exactly what he done, but that's what I thought he was a-doing from just hearing her talk.

P: Did your grandmother run the family, then?

D: No, no, he wasn't gone that much.

P: And your daddy in the meantime was working on the railroad?

D: Yeah, he worked on the railroad.

P: After you left Ravensford and he came to Birdtown, he still continued to work on the railroad?

D: Yes.

P: Your father's still living, isn't he? Does he live with you?

D: No, he lives on Goose Creek. I live on Cooper's Creek. He lives across the mountain on Goose Creek.

P: How many children did your grandmother raise besides you?

D: She raised twelve children of her own and me and my brother.

P: So, there were fourteen kids in the family?

D: Of course, most of her children were just about grown when she took us. They're all alive but one.

P: Was it a hard life as you remember it?

D: No.

P: You had plenty to eat?

D: We surely did. Yeah, my grandfather always had horses and a wagon. We had cows, hogs, chickens. I don't remember it being any more harder than what anybody else had.

P: Everybody was poor, but you really weren't starving or anything?

D: No, really.

P: You had something to wear—

D: We had something to wear.

P: And you went to school?

D: We always had plenty to eat.

P: Were there lots of relatives, was this a big family?

D: Well, no. Back when I remember, there weren't too many of the boys at home, maybe three or—the older ones had married, you know, and left.

P: I want to get back to some of the scary stories your grandmother told you. Can you think of one that she might have told you?

D: Oh, she told us one, me and my brother, when we was little. There was a screech owl always coming to a person's house, some Indian man, and said every night it'd be there. Said one night he got aggravated, you know, at the owl hollering out in the tree. So, he got his gun, and he shot it. And so that owl flew off. It got a bunch of leaves to put in that wound. The next morning, they found an old Indian man dead, and there was a bunch of leaves in his side where he'd been shot. [Laughter]

P: So, the belief was that the owl was really somebody that was human.

D: Yeah. Of course, she didn't believe in anything like that. That was a tale I guess she'd heard somebody else tell.

P: But isn't that the kind of a tale that's been told around here in Cherokee country about birds or animals who are really human beings?

D: Oh, yeah. They claim, you know, way back years ago, some of the old people I guess might have believed that this man that could conjure. They called them conjuremen. They could turn their self into different things like birds or animals, they'd go, you know, they were conjuremen.

P: Are there any conjuremen around today?

D: No, not that I know of.

P: Are there people who still believe in this?

D: There probably are.

P: Old people living up in the mountains?

D: I guess they still believe in things like that.

P: How long have you been working at the museum?

D: Ever since last April.

P: You like it?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What do you do at the museum?

D: Well, I guide part of the time, and then when somebody has to be off, I open up the museum and sell tickets. During the summer I opened up two days a week, and I had to sell tickets and things like that. When I'm on the other lady's day off, I have to take her place.

P: Jessie, tell me about your own family. Who is your husband?

D: James Dugan.

P: He's an Indian?

D: No.

P: He's a White man? How many children do you have?

D: Eight.

P: What does your husband do?

D: He's a driller. He works on construction, and he runs a drill.

P: Jessie, how did it happen that you married a White man?

D: Well, 'cause I loved him, I reckon.

P: Where'd you meet him?

D: Here.

P: In Cherokee?

D: He lived right up the road, you know where the Boundary Tree is?

P: Yes.

D: There was an old house there, and that's where he lived.

P: He lived with his family? What were the Dugans doing here in Cherokee?

D: Well, they lived here, I reckon. He lived here all his life. He lived up there at Ravensford.

P: His father was a farmer, too?

D: Yeah.

P: So, it was a farm family.

D: He rented there after the park took over the buildings up there. He worked for the park, my husband's father did, and he lived in that house up there that belonged to the park. That's before the Indians bought that up there, traded it for whatever they got. His daddy worked for the park. He lived up in there all his life.

P: How'd you happen to meet your husband, at school?

D: No, it was here in Cherokee. He lived right up there, he's been around in here all his life.

P: Did you run into any special problems as you, an Indian woman, marrying a White man?

D: Well, I know his people didn't like it, but they never did mistreat me.

P: Where did you get married?

D: Georgia.

P: Where?

D: Clayton.

P: Church?

D: No, justice of the peace married us. [Laughter]

P: Why didn't you get married here?

D: We just didn't want to.

P: Was it this problem, you know, of Indian-White marriage?

D: Yeah, to a certain extent. We could have got married here. But you could go to Georgia back then, everybody did to get married right then. Up here you had to wait on the blood test and everything, and down there you didn't.

P: Jessie, how do you feel about intermarriage today, about your own children?

D: Well, I've got two girls that married Indian boys. That's up to the kids, it's not for me to say.

P: You don't care about that anymore like your parents might have.

D: No. Of course, I wouldn't try to pick for my children. I picked who I wanted, let them do the same.

P: Is this pretty much a prevalent attitude that today the old feeling has pretty well disappeared?

D: Yeah.

P: Do you think there's still this antagonism, White and Indian, around in Cherokee though?

D: There might be a little bit, but nothing like it was when I married.

P: The resentment is gone, isn't it?

D: Yes. Well, they can't hardly say anything anymore because the biggest part of the fathers and mothers now, one of them has got part Indian blood in them and the other one hasn't, and the children are mixed. They can't really say these things because the biggest part of them—of the girls back that I went to school with—the biggest part of them married Whites or mostly Whites.

P: Jessie, do you speak Cherokee?

D: No, sir.

P: Why not?

D: It never was taught at home. I just never spoke it.

P: Did anybody in your family speak Cherokee?

D: No.

P: What about your children? Are they trying to teach their children now, are they being taught in the schools?

D: My oldest boy has got a little boy going down here and the rest of them go to a public school.

P: Where is the public school?

D: My daughter lives on Soco, she sends hers to Quallah.

P: How do the children get to school from Soco?

D: The school bus runs up there and picks them up and takes them to Quallah.

P: Are you concerned about the fact that your grandchildren are kinda losing their Cherokee tradition?

[End of interview]

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