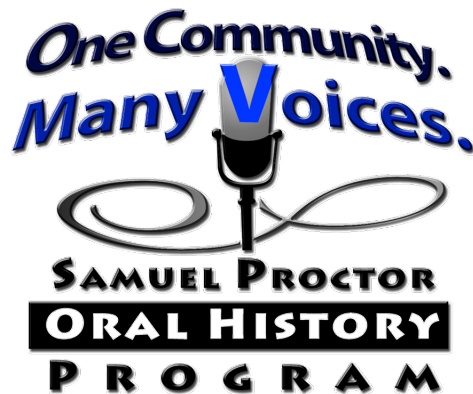


# Louise Willis

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project  
MISS CHOC-005**

**Interview by:**

**John K. Mahon  
December 4, 1973**



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director  
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215  
(352) 392-7168 [www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral)

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall  
PO Box 115215  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
(352) 392-7168  
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

**MISS CHOC 005 Louise Willis**  
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**45 minutes | 28 pages**

**Abstract:** Louise Willis describes moving as a child with her family, finally returning to the Bogue Chitto reservation at six years old. She discusses her current enrollment in a new careers program and her work as an administrative trainee. She then goes into detail about traditional Choctaw wedding traditions, and how women's roles have changed over time. She discusses stories her grandfather has told her about Choctaw history and language. She discusses writing and reading Choctaw, and the history of how some Choctaw hid in a nearby cave to avoid being taken to Oklahoma.

**Keywords:** [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Jasper Henry; Mississippi--Choctaw; Indigenous languages; History]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

MISS CHOC 005

Interviewee: Louise Willis

Interviewer: John K. Mahon

Date of Interview: December 4, 1973

M: This is an interview on December 4 at about twenty minutes of three, taking place in the principal's office of the Choctaw Central High School. The interview is with Louise Willis. And would you please just say your name into the machine, too?

W: My name's Louise Willis.

M: Would you comment a little bit about you and this area, your age if you're willing to?

W: I'm twenty years old and I'm in a **Eucharist** program as an administrative trainee.

M: Were you born and brought up in this area?

W: I was born here, but I was brought up in different areas.

M: Such as?

W: Uh, Ohio.

M: Oh?

W: In Ohio, and in Ellisville, Mississippi. And I was mostly going to public school when I was a young girl. And I came back to the Bogue Chitto Reservation where I originally grew up, and I went back to the Indian school when I was about in the sixth grade.

M: You mean this school here?

W: No. The Bogue Chitto Indian School.

M: Oh, yes, I've been there in the last month.

W: And I didn't know any Choctaw language at all.

M: Oh! You're the first I've encountered who did not. Do you know it now?

W: Yes, I know most of it, but there's a lot of words that I still haven't learned.

M: Well, are you a full-blooded Choctaw?

W: Yes, I'm full-blooded.

M: I see. Now, may I ask, how'd it happen you were brought up in Ohio?

W: Well, my family were relocated up to Ohio—

M: What does that mean?

W: That means that if we decide on relocating to another state where we could find a better job or be trained into some specific job, something like that. Well, then our family would go there, and my father would be trained into a job and we'd live up there. And if we don't like it, we relocate back.

M: Well, who was in charge of this what you call relocation?

W: The BIA employee **Mr. Sam Sal**.

M: Did your father have to apply for this relocation?

W: Yes. They had to apply.

M: And move to what, Canton, Ohio? What part of Ohio?

W: It was Cincinnati, Ohio.

M: Cincinnati. And did they then put him into a training program?

W: Yes, they did.

M: And what was it he was training to do?

W: He was training to operate some sort of machine to make stamps. S&H Green Stamps.

M: So how long in all did you stay there?

W: We stayed there for about three years. But before that we lived in Ellisville, Mississippi.

M: What were you doing there?

W: My father was training as being a watch repairman in Jones County Junior College.

M: Oh, yes. And did he ever practice that as a trade?

W: No, he hasn't, but I believe he got good training out of it. If he went back for a refreshment course or something like that, I believe he could make—

M: I talked to Mr. Henry yesterday, and he'd been trained as a watch—

W: That's my father.

M: Oh! Well, sure! Well, I had a discussion with him up on the stage yesterday.

W: [Laughter] Yeah, that's my father.

M: Oh, I didn't realize that. Well, yeah. He told me about where he'd been and so on, but I didn't pick up that he had a family. So you went to public school in Cincinnati.

W: Mhm, until I was about ten or eleven years old. And that's when I didn't know— all I knew was English, I didn't know any Choctaw at all.

M: Your mother, you said, is Choctaw.

W: She is.

M: They didn't speak it at home?

W: They spoke it together, but not to us. They didn't teach us, you know.

M: How many brothers and sisters have you got?

W: I have one younger sister and one younger brother.

M: I see. And they never learned the language either, I guess.

W: My younger sister did, because she lived mostly with my grandparents. But my younger brother never did learn it, but he knows just about as much as I do now.

M: Well, were you known as an Indian when in the public schools?

W: Yes, they really recognized me quite well.

M: And what kind of status or position did that give you?

W: Well, I made friends real easily, but, you know, when I had some friends, they would say, "This Indian's gonna get you if you don't do something," or something like that, you know. But really, we didn't have any conflicts.

M: You never found it any handicap or anything?

W: No, I didn't.

M: Did you date White boys?

W: No, I wasn't at the dating age, and I wasn't thinking—

M: Oh, that's right. And by the time you were dating age you were back here?

W: Yes, I was back here.

M: And have you only dated Indian boys?

W: Yes.

M: I see. Is your husband a full-blooded Choctaw as well?

W: Yes.

M: I see.

W: He's deceased now.

M: Oh.

W: For—it'll be two years this coming January.

M: Wasn't he quite young?

W: Yes. He would be twenty-seven.

M: What was his problem?

W: He was in a car accident. And I have two small children, one and two years old.

M: Well now, how much education did you pick up along the way?

W: Well, after I graduated, I went to Haskell Indian Junior College—

M: And remind me where that is. Lawrence, Kansas?

W: Lawrence, Kansas, right. And I took business, but I didn't like it there, so I went up on to Chicago and I became a long-distance telephone operator. And I stayed there for about six months and then I came back here. I had been going with my husband for so many years that he asked me to marry him, so that's when we got married. And after that, I got a job here in the **fall through** program as a teacher's assistant. Through that program I've gotten some extension courses from different colleges, and now I'm in this New Careers Program which will give me about fifty-seven hours of college credits.

M: How many do you have to have to get a B.A. degree?

W: I don't know about a B.A. degree, but I think you need about ... I'm not sure, but it's sixty-three hours or sixty-four hours for A.A. degree.

M: Well, so you are now functioning as a teacher's assistant?

W: No, I am an administrative trainee.

M: What do you do in that? I mean, I don't understand the term.

W: Okay, like—first of all, I started here with the principal at Choctaw Central, Mr. Gibson, and he shows how they work in the office and how things are worked

through the BIA and how they get their property and supplies and things like that. And I also work with the Title One program coordinator, Mr. Calvin Isaac, and I also work with the guidance department here and see how they work with the young people here. And then after four months, you rotate up to the Choctaw Indian Agency, the BIA agency in town, Philadelphia. And there I work with the personnel manager first.

M: Is he an Indian, or is he a White man?

W: No, he is a White man. And I have to read a lot of books of personnel management and civil service, and I have to know a lot of these things, because he would ask me questions about such-and-such a thing, and then I would have to know about it in case I do work in some kind of civil service personnel management.

M: Do you type and things like that?

W: No, I didn't get typing in high school. It wasn't in high school the year I was there. And then I rotated to administrative manager under the administrative manager, and he would in turn ask me questions and things like that and I would have to look it up in different branches of the Choctaw agency. And I also learned what his jobs are and how an administrator should work and things like that. And now I'm working under the education principal for the reservation. I go to meetings and sometimes I go to school council meetings.

M: Well, what would be the ultimate end of a traineeship like that? What kind of job can you move into with this background?



W: We also get college courses, too, so I think the people that are in administration—there are five of us in administration—I think we could get some kind of supervisory position.

M: In schools?

W: In schools or in business, in factories or anywhere, I think.

M: And would your intention be to remain here in the Choctaw area?

W: My intentions—yes, after I found out about personnel management, I think I really like that better than the other areas.

M: Are your children in this school here?

W: They're too young to go to school yet.

M: I see. And what do they do while you're out in the big world working?

W: They're in daycare center that they have provided for us here at the Methodist church. And they keep them there all day until I go and pick them up.

M: Are you a Methodist?

W: No, I haven't gone to a church at all.

M: I see. Do you know of any ceremonies the Choctaws have that pre-date Christianity? You know, traditional Indian—?

W: I have gone to a couple of wedding ceremonies, Choctaw wedding ceremonies. And I think in my community, Bogue Chitto, they do that quite a lot.

M: Would you mind describing a Choctaw wedding ceremony? What's that like? This is non-Christian, you're saying.

W: Non-Christian, yeah, it doesn't have anything to do with the church.

M: Well, what happens? Is that something you can tell?

W: Yes. If the family invites you to the wedding, you would have to bring in some food like beans or something like that in half-gallon cans. And you'd also have to bring—the men would have to bring a bag of biscuits, a bag of sweet biscuits. I don't know if it's cookies or what they call it, but it's sweet. And they have a ribbon around the bag. It's usually a flourbag that they put it in, and they put the name on there, and the women bring the buckets, and the men bring the biscuits into the home. They sometimes kill hogs and they cook hominy on the outside pots. The family of the woman, they all go way off somewhere and they talk for a long time. And the family of the man go way off another road and talk for a long time. Then the man that is in charge of the wedding ceremony will start talking and say that this family are gonna unite with this family, and say something like that, and they'll start walking toward the house, and this family over here will start bringing them in. They'll hold them by the elbow and then bring them in. And they have a chair outside in front of the house, two chairs. And they sit the woman in one chair, and they sit the man in the other chair. And the man that's in charge will say something, you know—I don't remember what they say.

M: No, that doesn't matter.

W: And then they'll tell them to stand up. They stand up, they move the chair back over a bit farther and let them sit down again. They sit down and this time they say, "The family of the man come and shake hands," or welcome the bride to the family. So, they come over and they give her either ribbons or handkerchiefs or some sort of thing like that to her. They lay it on top of her head. She will have a handkerchief—not a handkerchief but a scarf on her head. They'll be wearing the

Choctaw dress and the men will be wearing the Choctaw shirt. And then the man in charge will say, "The family of the lady will come and welcome the man to their family." So, they come over there and all they do is just shake hands. And while they're doing this, the women that's cooking, who have collected the biscuits and the beans or whatever the people that were invited brought to eat, they'll be laying out the sacks of flours, whatever the biscuits came out of, and they'll be laying out the cans. And after they have collected the ribbon and the scarves and the handkerchiefs and things that the bride got, they will go back there and they will lay 'em on top of the bags and on top of the cans. And whoever the cans and the bag belong to, whoever were invited, they will go back there and they will pick up the cans and they will keep the handkerchief or the ribbon or whatever they got on top of their cans.

M: Is that considered in White society a legal marriage?

W: Yes.

M: Is it registered?

W: No, it's not registered, it's legal.

M: But it's considered legal so the—

W: In the Choctaw Tribe it was a long time ago.

M: Well, how about the White society? I mean does this count? Somebody I was talking to said that, you know, a common-law marriage and if one person dies the children are not entitled to various things.

W: Yes, that's true. But the younger ones now, when they get married, they will just go ahead and get the license and everything, but they still want to go through the ceremony the way the Choctaws used to a long time ago.

M: So that's pretty common.

W: So that's the way they do it now.

M: What about divorce? It used to be said in some Indian societies, in Creek society, it was really quite easy. What do you know about—

W: My grandfather told me that a long time ago, if they just didn't want to live together anymore, that they just separated. Just like White society do when they separate. They just separate and don't live together anymore.

M: What about it now?

W: Now they have to get a legal divorce.

M: Go through the standard procedure.

W: Mhm.

M: Well now, you spoke about this being almost a marriage of two families. And is that what it really amounts to?

W: Yes, I think so.

M: Well, do the families adhere together pretty closely? For instance, did you and your husband's family and vice versa?

W: Mhm. My husband—we didn't go through the ceremony, but my husband—you know, a long time ago they said the husband would have to bring in a hog, and the other family would have to—hog and have dinner and everything like that. So that's what my husband did, and his parents and family made up a big dinner and

everything like that, and he provided the hog, and they killed it and cooked the hog and everything like that.

M: Well, did you thereafter remain—I mean what I'm trying to get at is, the relationship of a bride with her husband's parents close and the rest of the family remains so?

W: Mmhm.

M: And vice versa.

W: Yes.

M: Well, with regard to women in the Choctaw society. I don't know much about Choctaw society, but in the Florida Indians, the women were always quite aloof from other than their own men and would remain so. What is your experience now, with Choctaws?

W: What do you mean by aloof? Sticking to their husbands—?

M: Well, all I mean is ... the Seminole women—except the very young ones that have been educated in the White society—talk very reluctantly with the White man. They still will.

W: Oh, yes. That's the way it used to be a long time ago. I can still remember my grandparents, and they were that way. And, you know, when they walked in town, the woman would always walk behind her husband.

M: Do you remember this, or—?

W: Yes, I remember it.

M: Is that so any longer?

W: No, it's not so any longer. [Laughter] The younger women just walk side by side by their husbands.

M: How's that come about? Have you got any idea?

W: I think the younger people had decided that the man is not going to have so much say-so in the family. The women and the men will be equally when they're married.

M: You said you inquired of some of your relatives about Clans.

W: Yes, I did. I asked my grandparents about that, and my grandfather said he doesn't remember—his last name was Thompson, but he doesn't remember of any Clan.

M: I'm surprised at that. It's still active—I don't know how vital—but all the Florida Indians know Clan they're in, and there is some respect paid to it in marriage. Well, how is descent traced among Choctaws, through the woman's side of the family or the man's? Do you know?

W: I would think—

M: In the Creek culture it went through the woman's.

W: I think it would be through the woman's.

M: And you know, if there was a Chieftainship hereditary, it passed through the woman's side, instead of through the man's. Is that the way it was as far as you know?

W: I think it was, the way he spoke about it. Because he said we didn't get our last names—he told me that the names they used to have, they only had one name. They never did have a last name, the Choctaws didn't. But the White people,

when they would go to the store or something, they said you have to have a last name, so they gave them such-and-such a last name, and that's how they started having last names. And my grandfather said that's how come they got the name Thompson, the last name. And this was pretty interesting to me. My cousin and I were referring back for our history because we wanted to know some things about how we got the name Thompson, how we got my last name Henry, and things like this. He said it's because the White man gave us the last name. From the beginning, we only had one name.

M: Is your grandfather that you're talking about still living?

W: He is still living.

M: Do you occasionally talk to him—

W: Yes, I do.

M: About the Choctaw past?

W: He is one of the persons I personally would like to interview.

M: Besides the Clan thing, what else have you questioned him about?

W: I've asked him about the names that we have of these towns like Philadelphia, Kosciusko, and Nanih Waiya, and what they stand for and things like that.

M: Of course, the Philadelphia and Kosciusko weren't Indian, I don't think. They're some other name.

W: Well, my grand—

M: What did he say?

W: He said there was a trading post in the town of Philadelphia where it is now, and the Indians would come there and they would trade. And the White men would

ask the Indians, "What do you call this when you come to the store?" And the Choctaws said [Choctaw phrase 20:47] and that means "Milky Way." [Choctaw word 20:55] means "star," [Choctaw word 20:56] means "backwards," but he said it's sort of like "Milky Way." Anyway, he said the Whites just kept on saying and [Choctaw phrase 21:04] and it finally got to Philadelphia.

M: Oh, that's the way he says it was named.

W: Mhm.

M: What'd he say about Kosciusko? Is that the way you pronounce it?

W: Kosciusko.

M: Kosciusko.

W: Okay, he said that was called [Choctaw phrase 21:20], which means, "Where you drink water." And so, the Whites there again changed it to [Choctaw phrase 21:30] and kept on changing to Kosciusko.

M: Any other names around here that he spoke of?

W: Uh, Shuqualak.

M: Well, that's plainly Indian.

W: Shuqualak, he said that is—I asked him, it's [Choctaw word 21:48] the way he pronounced it. He said [Choctaw word 21:52] and that stands for beads. And he said that's where the Indians used to go to get beads, to make their beadwork and things and that's how come the Whites there then again changed—kept on changing [Choctaw phrase 22:05] to Shuqualak.

M: Have you had particular definable problems in learning Choctaw?

W: Oh, yes. Um ...



- M: I mean specific. Could you pinpoint why you have any difficulty? What is the problem, vocabulary or pronunciation or word order or what?
- W: Pronunciation.
- M: I see. Did you ever have a course in formal English grammar?
- W: Formal English grammar—?
- M: Well, you know what I mean. Talk about verbs, nouns, adjectives—
- W: Mhm.
- M: Are those terms all meaningful to you, noun, verbs and stuff?
- W: Yes, they are.
- M: Well, could you tell me, for instance, how does Choctaw differ? The action words, the verbs—is there a different usage? Is there a different way they're applied?
- W: First of all, when we say something in English, we turn around and we say it in Choctaw, we say it backwards.
- M: Yes. I was told that by somebody else. You put the action word first, don't you?
- W: Yes, most of the time.
- M: Could you illustrate that? I mean by telling me something in English and then telling me the same thing in Choctaw?
- W: Uh, let me see ...
- M: I don't understand Choctaw, naturally, but—
- W: "Let's run to the door." And in Choctaw would say [Choctaw phrase 23:36].
- M: And if you literally translated that, what would you have said?
- W: It would say, "Run—" No, excuse me. Let me say that again. [Choctaw phrase 23:49] Okay, I said, "Let's run ... run ..."

M: You really can't literally translate it, can you?

W: No, I can't.

M: I think, in general, you can't do it. I've had other people with Tribal languages say the same thing.

W: Most of the Indians, the older ones, think in Choctaw, and then they would have to transfer it to English before they would speak back to you.

M: And of course, you go the other way around still.

W: Yeah, I go the other way around.

M: You think you're gonna ever get to the place where you think in Choctaw?

W: I don't think I ever will. Of course, I think that's one reason why some of the children are slow at learning English and learning things in school.

M: Well, how do you get to practice Choctaw?

W: Well, I was raised up—after we come back from Ohio my parents were divorced, and I was raised by my grandparents. And also, I wasn't accepted in the Indian school. I was accepted by the principal and the teachers but—

M: Down at Bogue Chitto.

W: Mhm, down at Bogue Chitto. But I wasn't accepted by the students because I couldn't speak any Choctaw and because I made good grades in school. And I really wanted to have some friends, so I started—I tried, I really tried to learn some Choctaw and I did by my grandparents. Even though they would laugh at me, I still kept on trying, and I finally accomplished a little bit. Even now, some of the people still don't understand me when I say something in Choctaw, and they

will laugh at me, too, but I tell 'em back in English—if they knew English—but I'll try to illustrate what I'm talking about.

M: And so, you talk it just as much as you can.

W: Mhm. My children, my little girl, she talks Choctaw also now. She's two years old.

M: Where'd she pick it up, from you?

W: From my family, and from my mother-in-law and her family. And she speaks pretty good. She also knows English, she can say this in Choctaw, then she turn around to say it in English. So I think that is real good for my girl. I want both of my kids to know English and Choctaw.

M: Are you familiar with the term "generation gap"?

W: Yes.

M: Does that exist in Choctaw society?

W: Yes. With other families, I don't know, but with my grandparents I had experienced it a lot. We never got along. Like, when I was at a dating age and if I wanted to go out, they would not allow us to go out. Or anything like that. They wouldn't understand. My grandfather told me, he said, "If you go with one man, go out on a date one time, that you were meant to marry that man." And to me, I thought you could go out with different men, and you would finally find the man that you wanted to marry or something like that. Well, they had the idea that this was the way it was supposed to be—when you go out with one man, that's the man that you're supposed to marry. And before that, my grandfather said they used to pick out what family you're supposed to be married to.

M: That might possibly have been a Clan affair.

W: Yeah.

M: I don't know. Well, the role of women, apparently, in Choctaw society is changing very sharply. Where does it finally end up, in your opinion?

W: I think the young people realize that they need to keep their traditions. Some of the cultural things that we have here—we're proud of it. So this is one reason why we're trying to teach our own children to speak Choctaw and to learn how to do crafts and things like that that Choctaws have done a long time ago, and this is another way of finding out about Choctaw history—by our grandparents, what stories our grandparents has told us, we would in turn tell our children.

M: Do you know anything much about Choctaw history? Have you ever had occasion to read any history of the Choctaws or anything?

W: I've read quite a few pamphlets, but they didn't mean much to me because I wasn't—you know, when you don't get involved in something you don't—unless I was assigned to doing that sort of thing, I would really try to dig into it and see what it was about. But most of what I know is by my grandfather.

M: Is there any library around here where you would have access to, uh ...

W: Choctaw history?

M: Where would you go if you wanted to read something?

W: The library we have here at the high school. They have them locked up, but we can go back there and read some of the books that they have that the missionaries a long time ago who came here had something to do with the Indian people—had wrote stories about, or some little history about things there—

M: Well, you're proud of the Indian tradition you say? And what is it specifically you're proud of? I mean, what do you know about the Indian tradition? I'd just like to hear. What is it?

W: I'm proud that we still have our dances, the Indian dances. And I'm proud to know that we still—we're now realizing that we exist and we can accomplish something if we really try hard. And we are. Our Tribal councilmen, we are accomplishing something.

M: What is it you're accomplishing?

W: I think some people don't—

M: I'm just asking, you know, because this all, how people think about their society and so on, has to do with the culture.

W: I think we need to know more education, more Indian history. And the students realize this and I think they're ... anything that comes up with Indians, we always want to know about it—on TV or in the newspaper or something like that, we always want to know what the other Indians are doing. And I'm glad that, for one thing, that the Choctaws are peace-loving Indians, that—

M: Well, is it so that they always were?

W: No, I don't believe so. My grandfather told me a story time that where we lived, Bogue Chitto, there was a line between Kemper County and Neshoba County. There was a line there, and the Choctaws—this might have been part of a Clan also. That the Choctaws in Bogue Chitto were not supposed to go over the line where the other part of the Choctaws were on Kemper County. Because of some reason that I don't remember, I don't recall that. But he said if our Indians caught

some of their Tribe—which were still Choctaws, but they were called something else probably, probably a Clan name or something. If they caught them in our area, they would have to punish them. But they wouldn't kill them, they would send them back, they would punish them seriously—I mean, really—to make them remember not to come back. Well, the reason was that they didn't want our people to be going over their line to hunt for deer and rabbits and squirrels and things, and also they had different conflicts, you know, they fought about different things. Some were warlike and some weren't. And some were fighting to be a Chief, and the others, you know, wanted to be on this side of the line and some wanted to be on this side of the line. And I believe that's the way it was. And that's the way my grandfather told me it was a long time ago.

M: Did he ever tell you about any other encounters or conflicts of this type? Did he ever talk about conflicts with the Whites? I guess that's before his time, isn't it?

W: Yes. If I sit down and really ask him, I think he would tell me some stories that his father or grandfather had told him.

M: You'll have a chance to do that under this program.

W: Yeah. I think he's eighty-two years old.

M: Is his mind clear?

W: Yes. He's still farming. He still makes a garden and everything.

M: What's he farm on? Reservation land?

W: Yes. BIA land. He's been there for almost all of his life. He still lives in the government house that they had built a long time ago, which they keep repairing every year, you know. And my grandmother, she tells me some stories that the

ladies used to do a long time ago, and things like that. She said that she remembers her mother telling her not to look at a White man.

M: Yes, that's the sort of thing I was referring to a little while ago, about—

W: Uh-huh. To never look at a White man, because if you do they will come and catch you and take you away, she said. And especially they used to wear beards a long time ago I suppose? She said especially one with a beard. Don't ever look at a White man with a beard.

M: I wonder what the occasion for that was. Do you know?

W: I don't know. But I'd like to bring that up and ask her.

M: Might have gone back to the Spaniards even. They were bearded.

W: Mmhm.

M: Yes, you have perhaps some very interesting opportunities talking to your grandparents, I would think.

W: There are a lot of Indian words that I still cannot understand, but maybe somebody can.

M: Do they know enough English to help you with them?

W: Yes.

M: Now, do you live on the reservation somewhere?

W: No. I own my own land and my own home outside of the reservation here.

M: How much land do you own?

W: I own just one acre of land and a house, a brick home.

M: Well, how do you handle an acre of land? Isn't that quite an order for you?

W: No. I have a fence around the house to keep the kids from off the street, but it's pretty hard to raise grass on the red clay. So, I have mostly red clay on my land, but maybe by next year I'll have it fixed up again.

M: Is that something that you and your husband bought?

W: Yes. He lived in that house for about two months before he passed on.

M: Why did you elect to move off the reservation?

W: From my reservation?

M: Yeah, and live on privately owned land.

W: Well, the Tribe would let you lease some land, but we thought the Indians should start owning their own land again. And that was our reason for buying our land.

And the land behind my house is still for sale and if I want to, I can buy it.

M: Is it expensive?

W: Yes, it is expensive.

M: And rising, I suppose.

W: Yes.

M: In price.

W: Mhm.

M: Well, you will continue, I suppose, to work as a career. Your object is—

W: Is to finish college and to—

M: Oh, you want to go on.

W: Uh-huh, to go on and finish college as much as I possibly can and come back and try to help my people in whatever way I can.

M: And with regard to the history, in what way do you think that would help them?



W: The younger people now?

M: Well, yeah, I don't care. I mean you have spoke of our program as being something that would help them. What would it do for 'em, do you think?

W: I think it would make them try to find out, to—even in their own homes—go and ask some of their parents, “How did this come about?” Or, “What did they do a long time ago?” And you'll find in different communities, everything is different.

M: Of the seven?

W: Yes, of the seven communities. And even in language, our accents are different.

M: That's curious.

W: Yes. Conehatta says things—we get along with people very well, different communities. But there are certain words and certain accents that are quite different, and you can tell.

M: I wasn't aware of that.

W: And I was glad that you were getting some tapes from different communities, because then you will find out there are different ways of doing things, that there are different ways that the Indians have done things a long time ago.

M: You can't read Choctaw, I suppose. Can you?

W: I used to read the Bible in Choctaw, but I don't think I can do that anymore.

M: Have you ever seen anything else in Choctaw but the Bible? I mean, is there anything, is it ...

W: We have a Choctaw dictionary.

M: You do? But is there anything else written in Choctaw but the Bible?

W: Uh, Mr. Calvin Isaac here made a speech not long ago for the Head Start little graduation they had. And he spoke in Choctaw and English and he wrote it up in Choctaw, and he gave me a letter one time—sent me a letter one time. It was all in Choctaw. But I couldn't read part of it.

M: Do you know where the written Choctaw language came from?

W: I think it came from the missionaries when they were here.

M: Yeah, mmhm. They—I think phonetically, you know.

W: Yeah.

M: On the way it sounds, put it together. And I believe this is true of all the North American Indians, except Sequoyah is supposed to have put together a written language for the Cherokees, very long, very late.

W: Yeah.

M: Have you ever had anything to do with Oklahoma Choctaws?

W: No, I haven't.

M: Do any of them come here to go to school that you know of?

W: No. We have one person here that teaches, he's a Choctaw from Oklahoma. I haven't seen any as I know of now, I don't know—

M: Is there any special relationship between the Choctaws in Oklahoma and these here?

W: I don't think so. My grandfather was also telling me that he had some relatives in Oklahoma.

M: I'm sure he does. I don't mean to embarrass you with the question, but do you know how the Choctaws got split like this, with some in Oklahoma and some here? I mean, what is that story? Do you happen to know anything about it?

W: Just that some wanted to stay here, and they had to hide where the Nanih Waiya mound is, or the Nanih Waiya Cave. They hid there for so many years until some White men found them there and thought that they needed help, because our people were having a hard time of living. And they finally set up a reservation, the government did, you know. As I recall, the Indians did own land, but taxation came in and they had to pay tax on their land. And the White men would get the Indians drunk to where they wouldn't pay for their tax. And when they didn't pay for it, they would put it in the trust fund for the government, or the government just took the land away from them.

M: Well, this story, is that the story, that those who remained east of the Mississippi hid in a cave?

W: Yes, that's what my grandfather said.

M: Is that right? I'm not familiar with the story, but that's a very interesting point. And they just hid there for a while?

W: Mmhm. You know where the Nanih Waiya mound is?

M: No, I don't.

W: Well, that's where they—

M: Oh! I've seen it, too.

W: You've seen it?

M: The Tribe's supposed to have originated there, or something.

W: Yes, they said that God wanted them to stay, so they stayed there. But when the White man was going to take all the Choctaws to Oklahoma, some of the people that wanted to stay ran back, it's about two miles back and you'll find the Nanih Waiya—if you walk, you know, it's about two miles back to the Nanih Waiya Cave. They ran away and they hid, and these other Choctaws went on to Oklahoma. They ran away and hid and that's where they stayed most of the time. It's near water, the cave—

M: Yeah, I believe that I visited the mound. I believe the last time we were here in March I was shown that.

W: But the cave is a different place from the mound, and the Indians used to run two miles from the White people.

M: Where'd you learn that?

W: My grandfather.

M: And where did the Choctaws originate? Around here? What about their origins, did your grandfather or anybody else ever tell you?

W: Um, he didn't tell me, but I think they originated from somewhere in ... what county I was thinking of ...

M: Around here in Mississippi?

W: No, the other side of Bogue Chitto.

M: But in this area.

W: Mmhm.

M: This is the original seat of the Choctaws.

W: I think so.

M: Well, turning to another subject for a minute. You spoke about the White man getting some of the Choctaws drunk. Among the Whites there is always the legend or the statement that Indians are especially susceptible to alcohol. Do you believe that?

W: No, I don't believe all of them are. Maybe a few of them. I think Indians who do that want to get out their hostilities, their emotions and things. But the younger people nowadays, they do like the White society do. Some of them just drink occasionally and invite people to come to their house and drink. And they don't go, you know, having wild parties or having fights and things like that, like they see on TV.

M: Around here you don't have any particular liquor problem, would you say?

W: Well, I think we have a few people that are still that way. That's why we have a—

M: Of course, that's true in any society.

W: Yeah—alcoholism program, we have to try to help these people who are alcoholics.

M: You have program specifically addressed to that? You have any other serious problems among the young? I mean, has there been any tendency to hard drugs or anything?

W: No. Not unless—

M: How about marijuana?

W: No.

M: No? Not at all?

W: Not unless another Tribe would come to this school and bring it with them and let the Choctaw students experiment with them.

M: But you've never seen any problem.

W: No, not with—

M: Is there discipline around here? They don't have a special discipline problem in this school?

W: The junior high students, I believe. They're the hardest group to get along with.

M: Yeah.

W: It's because parents are not—the older parents are not so much pushing their children into education. They just let them do what they want to. But I don't believe in that myself. I want my kids to have an education. I want them to have a good one. So I would think it's the parent's fault their children are not learning if they're not learning anything at all.

M: We're getting toward the end of our tape on one side, and we've been running these about one side. And I think probably you and I have talked as long as right now we profitably can, unless you have some other comment you want to make.

W: No.

M: Why don't you just shut it off?

[End of interview]

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