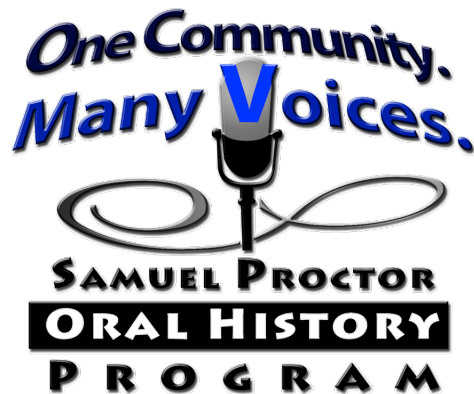


Charlie Denson

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-007**

Interview by:

**Dr. Samuel Proctor
December 3, 1973**



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MISS CHOC 007 Charlie Denson
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1 hour | 53 pages

Abstract: Charlie Denson describes his life as a sharecropper alongside the men in his family. Denson talks about the stories his grandfather told him about how customs changed during colonization. He also recalls his time serving in World War II in Europe as well as his experience during the Great Depression. Denson shares his religious beliefs as a Baptist and how he raises his children in the church. He explains his grandfather's Choctaw name and the origin of his English last name. He ends with discussing politics both in his Tribal Council as well as on a national level.

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi--Choctaw; Community Life & Family Life; Oral History & Interviews]

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MISS CHOC 007

Interviewee: Charlie Denson

Interviewer: Dr. Samuel Proctor

Date of Interview: December 3, 1973

P: Here at the Choctaw Reservation, Pearl River Community, in the gymnasium of the school, and I'm doing this interview with Mr. Charlie Denson, D-E-N-S-O-N, and this is Tuesday, December 3. The time is now 10:50 AM. Charlie, what community are you from?

D: Standing Pine.

P: Standing Pine?

D: Standing Pine.

P: All right, I want to get that down. Standing Pine, Mississippi, right? Is that one of the seven communities?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Where is it in location, from here?

D: From here it's southwest about twenty miles.

P: About twenty miles southwest of here. When were you born?

D: May 4, 1923.

P: 1923. Where?

D: At Newton. Newton, Mississippi.

P: Is that another one of the communities?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What are the—the Pearl River Community is one and Standing Pine is one. What are the other communities?

D: Conehatta Community which was Newton County.

P: Newton County. Was that where you lived, then, when you were born?

D: I was born—

P: In Conehatta?

D: Conehatta Community.

P: All right. And you were born, you said, in 1923. What kind of work do you do?

D: Well, my daddy was sharecropper. Then, I went on up with my daddy's side, you know. Sharecropper all my life.

P: You've been a sharecropper all your life?

D: Yeah.

P: Is your daddy from these parts?

D: No, sir. He's been dead in 1930.

P: Was he born around here?

D: He was born in Scott County.

P: In Scott County. What about your mother?

D: I think she's from Newton County.

P: What was her name, her maiden name?

D: Lily Solomon.

P: Lily Solomon. Is Solomon, is that an Indian family name?

D: Yes, sir. My grandpa was a Solomon.

P: Are you a full-blooded Choctaw?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Both sides?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Most of the Choctaws here are full-blooded, aren't they?

D: Yes, sir.

[Break in recording]

P: Charlie, name the other communities for me. You named three of them, Indian communities.

D: Well, one of them, Bogue Homa Community, is in Jones County.

P: Bogue Homa?

D: Bogue Homa.

P: All right.

D: Bogue Chitto is in Neshoba County. And Tucker is in Neshoba County. Red Water Community is in Lee County.

P: That's Red Water Community?

D: Yeah.

P: In Lee County?

D: Yes, sir. Standing Pine Community is also in Lee County.

P: So, there are two in Lee County: Standing Pine and Red Water?

D: Yes, sir.

P: All right. I want to talk to you a little bit this morning about your own memories of your childhood. What's the earliest memory you have?

D: Well ... kind of where to start off in Newton, moved 'round and back 'round, see. When we went up to Lee County, when my daddy was living then. In 1930 we was in Lee County, my daddy was passed away. Ever since, I stayed there about fourteen years of my life. And with the White man, sharecropper. I'm a day laborer.

P: You work for a White man as a sharecropper, as a day laborer?

D: Yes.

P: Who raised you, your mother?

D: Mother.

P: You were only seven years old when your father died.

D: Yes, sir.

P: What'd he die from?

D: I think he got the operation for appendix.

P: Were you born at home or in a hospital?

D: Myself?

P: Yourself.

D: Home.

P: Do you remember when you were a little boy? How long back can you remember?

D: Well, I could remember back about forty years old pretty good.

P: Did you work on the farm with your daddy when you were growing up?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What kind of work did you do?

D: Well, I—

P: As a kid.

D: Kid? Well, I toted waters, maybe a little fertilize.

P: What do you mean you towed water?

D: Toted water, carried it, give it to my daddy, you know.

P: Where did you tote it from?

D: Home.

P: You had inside water?

D: No, outside. Well.

P: A well.

D: Yeah.

P: You drew the water, then, and you brought it into the house for your mother to use?

D: Yes, sir.

P: And then you took it to wherever your daddy needed it?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What did you carry it in?

D: Carried it a jug.

P: Jug? Okay. And you helped around the farm. Did y'all have any stock?

D: No, sir. We usually used the White people's stock to make it.

P: What did you plant on the farm?

D: Cotton, corn.

P: Did you plow?

D: I did plow when I was big enough to plow, yes.

P: And you planted cotton?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You cut cotton?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You hauled it off to the gin?

D: Yes, sir.

P: So, you've done everything along those lines.

D: Yes, sir.

P: You grew cotton, and you grew corn. What else?

D: Irish potatoes, peas, pintos—things like that.

P: You ever butchered a hog?

D: Yes.

P: You have?

D: Sure.

P: You ever ground cane?

D: No, sir. We don't have no cane here.

P: Do you still butcher hogs?

D: Well, yeah, right now.

P: What season of the year do you do that?

D: Wintertime.

P: So, is it almost time to do that now?

D: Yes, sir. When the times keep cold, you know, I cure it then. 'Cause, we ain't got no deep freeze or anything like way back in [19]38, 'tween the [19]30s and [19]40s.

P: You didn't have any what?

D: Deep freeze, things like that.

P: Yeah.

D: Cured our own, smoked.

P: And that's how you kept it.

D: Yes, sir.

P: You smoked and cured your beef and pork?

D: Yeah.

P: You still slaughter hogs today, though, don't you?

D: Yes, sir.

P: And you're involved in that?

D: Oh, yeah.

P: It's getting toward Christmastime now. Do you remember any Christmases when you were a little boy?

D: Yes, I guess. Just before Christmas, my daddy went to the store and bought candy. I always put my stocking on the chimney so Santa Claus could put the candies in there. So, we get up early, about four o'clock that morning. I had to get up to see what's in my socks. [Laughter]

P: Did you have Christmas trees?

D: Yeah.

P: Decorated Christmas trees like they have today?

D: Almost. Right now, we have lights, see. We didn't have them lights. Decorated with, you know, just cloth, paper—things like that tied on the trees.

P: But you did go out and cut a tree and bring it in the house and decorate it.

D: Yes, sir.

P: And you put your presents around underneath the tree?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Was your family a religious family?

D: Oh, yes, sir.

P: They went to church a lot?

D: Yes.

P: What church did you go to?

D: Baptist.

P: You've always been a Baptist?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Is your wife a Baptist?

D: Yes, sir.

P: And your children are raised as Baptists?

D: Yes.

P: Did you go to Sunday school?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Can you remember who your Sunday school teacher was?

D: Yes.

P: Well, tell me.

D: That was a long time ago, about 1928, somewhere around there. We were in Sunday school up around Scott County. Fellow name of Gaston Cooper. He was our Sunday school teacher.

P: Was it a White man or an Indian?

D: Choctaw.

P: Choctaw.

D: Yes.

P: Were the services conducted in Choctaw?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Are they still?

D: They're still.

P: Are you a church-going man now?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Every Sunday?

D: Yes, sir.

P: How large is your family?

D: I got four boys and two girls and a wife.

P: Are you children all married?

D: One of them.

P: Are you a grandpa?

D: Yeah.

P: How many grandchildren do you have?

D: One.

P: What's your wife's name?

D: Mary Ann.

P: What was her family name?

D: Williams.

P: Where are they from?

D: Conehatta.

P: Do you remember your daddy dying?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Tell me about that. What did they do? Where'd he die?

D: Well, he was sick one Sunday. Carried to the hospital Sunday night. Then they bring him back Tuesday evening in a box. And 'bout a couple of days later, they had a funeral.

P: Where do you bury people? In the cemetery at the church house?

D: What we call it now is Pine Bluff Baptist Church in Scott County.

P: Is it a regular religious service?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Do the Indians have a wake? You get around and—

D: No, not as I know it.

P: Well, if somebody dies, what are some of the customs? Do people go to visit the bereaved?

D: Yes.

P: Do you go to their house, or do you go to the funeral parlor or the church?

D: Well, I go to the house and to the funeral, too.

P: You go to the house, and you go to the funeral.

D: Yes, sir.

P: Are the funerals carried on in the churches?

D: Yes.

P: Not funeral parlors, in the churches.

D: Nah.

P: Do you bring food to the family?

D: Yes. Help them out.

P: How about flowers?

D: Well, we do, yeah. Flowers, food.

P: You still—do you put flowers on the grave?

D: Yes.

P: So then, an Indian's burial is no different than a White burial. It's the same thing?

D: Well, it used to be different when my grandpa told me about it. It was a lot different. I never knowed it like that.

P: What did he tell you about it?

D: Well, before the White man came, you know, they had scaffolds just outside the door, things like that. They put it up there to rot out, I think.

P: A tower kind of a thing.

D: Yeah, they tell me.

P: Did you talk much to your grandpa?

D: Yeah, I did. I could—I wished I could listen all of it. I did but I just didn't believe that's what they mean, you know. He told me what his grandpa and back on down the line said, said before White man came, God-country around here. All such of things like this. If you want food, just go out there and go get it and eat.

P: You could fish in the streams?

D: Yeah, fishing. Anything they wanted, they could just went up there and get it. That's what they call God-given. He was preaching a whole lot of times about that, but I just don't believe it, don't want to hear anything about it.

P: Is your grandpa dead?

D: Yeah, he died when he was ninety-two years old.

P: Ninety-two.

D: He's dead about ... twenty-five years now.

P: What about your grandmother?

D: I don't know her.

P: But you did know your grandfather.

D: Yes.

P: Did your grandfather live with you?

D: No, he was living in Jones County, and I lived in Lee.

P: And he lived in his own house?

D: Yes.

P: Who took care of him when he got old?

D: He was pretty healthy.

P: Nobody cooked for him?

D: Well, he got a young wife.

P: He had a young wife? That was his second wife?

D: I think it was second, yeah.

P: And she took care of him when he—

D: Yeah—

P: Up until the time that he died. Did you go to school?

D: I don't go to school 'bout three years.

P: Where was the school?

D: Conehatta.

P: How'd you get to school?

D: Well, they called it boarding school. I went there.

P: Tell me about it.

D: Well, me and my brothers and sisters lived in Lee County, and, well, a White man, he was a friend of the Choctaws for life. And he liked me, you know, and he wanted me to go to school. He also knowed my daddy and my mother.

P: Do you remember this White man's name?

D: Yeah. George Langford.

P: George Langford.

D: And he come up to talk with us and find us a home to stay there to go to school. So, we did. I didn't finish no third grade.

P: You say there was a home there for you to stay in?

D: Yeah.

P: Who paid your—

D: The government did.

P: The government paid.

D: Yes.

P: To take care of you.

D: Yes.

P: Who ran this house that you stayed in?

D: Mike Williamson.

P: Mike who?

D: Williamson.

P: Was he a White man or a—

D: Choctaw.

P: Choctaw. Williamson?

D: Yes.

P: Mike Williamson. This was the first time you had ever left home, wasn't it?

D: Yes.

P: Were a lot of Indian kids boarding there?

D: Not then, because a lot of the Choctaws around Conehatta you know. I think we was the only boarding kids over there.

P: You were only what, now? I missed that.

D: Boarding home kids.

P: You were boarding home kids, and there weren't many of you like that?

D: No, sir. I don't think so.

P: How'd you get into town? Your daddy brought you in the morning? On Monday morning and then picked you—where'd you spend the weekends?

D: Well, right there. It was a long way, about thirty miles from home to Conehatta, you know. That's why we had to stay there.

P: So, you stayed there on the weekends, too?

D: About a month, we visited home.

- P: That was kind of lonely for you as a little boy, wasn't it—leaving home?
- D: Oh, sure. Yes.
- P: You went by yourself, or did you brother go?
- D: I got brothers and sisters with me.
- P: So, all of you boarded there at Mr. Williamson's house.
- D: Yes.
- P: And where was the school?
- D: Right at Conehatta.
- P: Right at Conehatta. So, where you boarded you didn't have far to go to school.
- D: Well, about a mile and a quarter.
- P: And you went not quite three grades.
- D: No.
- P: Did you learn how to read and write?
- D: Yes, sir. I did. I learned how to write my own name.
- P: And you've been a sharecropper, then, all your life.
- D: Yes, sir.
- P: You made a pretty good living from that?
- D: I did. The best living I ever had, see. I had no worry about food, things like that.
- P: Why aren't more Choctaws farmers now? They used to all be farmers.
- D: They did ... But most of 'em's quit now.
- P: Why?
- D: I don't know.
- P: It was a good life, wasn't it? You had plenty to eat—

D: Well, I did farm 'til, uh, not the last several years, I got laid off because I was a sharecropper with the White people. I bought my own land. And built my own land—I mean, house—and stayed there. I ain't got enough open space, I ain't got no mule. Got no farm animals, so—

P: You have no farm what? No farm workers, did you say? Or farm animals?

D: Farm animals.

P: So, you just gave up farming.

D: Yes, sir.

P: But you're a day laborer now, working for somebody. Is that right?

D: Well, I'm supposed to be carpenter.

P: You gave up farming and now you're doing carpentry work, and you're working for the reservation?

D: I work for the Tribe.

P: Yeah. What kind of carpentry work do you do?

D: A repairman, repair houses, things like that.

P: In Conehatta?

D: No, around here.

P: Right here?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You come here every day?

D: Yes, sir.

P: How do you get here?

D: Car.

P: You got your own car?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You drive?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What do your children do?

D: School.

P: They're all in school?

D: Oh, one of 'em married about four years.

P: How about your boy that's married?

D: Teaches over here.

P: He's a teacher here at the school?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Where was he educated?

D: A sixth grade, sir.

P: He went through the sixth grade?

D: He went to school here, and he got drop out. And he went the Marines three years and come back home and went to school at California. Graduated high school there, and come on back, **have those kids**.

P: Why did he go to California to go to high school? You got family out there?

D: No, he just wanted to be out there, you know. He was stationed there for two or three—two years, I think, and he liked it.

P: So, he graduated high school and then he came back here.

D: Yes, sir.

P: Now, what'd you tell me he's doing here?

D: Teach aide.

P: Teacher's aide.

D: Yeah.

P: And he's in this school?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Does he like that?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Is he planning to go on and become a teacher?

D: I think so. That's what he tell me.

P: How old a boy is he?

D: He's ... twenty-six.

P: Won't he need to get some more education?

D: Yeah, he do.

P: Is he working on that now?

D: I don' t know.

P: Where does he live?

D: He lives with me.

P: He lives with you?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You've got a big house?

D: It's pretty good size.

P: You live in a house or a trailer?

D: House.

P: That's your own house, too, isn't it?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You built that house?

D: Yes, sir.

P: And your wife, does she work?

D: No, sir.

P: And you only have one boy that's married. The rest are unmarried?

D: Unmarried.

P: And going to school?

D: Three of 'em go to school.

P: And what's the other one do?

D: One of 'em is in the navy. He graduated high school here.

P: Where is he stationed?

D: Panama Canal Zone.

P: The Canal Zone, Panama Canal Zone?

D: Yes.

P: Does he write home much?

D: No.

P: But you know he's getting along all right.

D: Yeah.

P: And you hear from him.

D: Once in a while.

P: How much longer does he have?

D: He's got about thirteen more months.

P: Thirteen more, and then he'll come back here. What will he do, you think?

D: Well, last time he talked like he wanted to make a career out of the navy, you know. Probably he liked it.

P: So, he may just stay on for another hitch.

D: Yeah.

P: It's getting close to Christmastime, now, isn't it? Are y'all getting ready for Christmas?

D: Yes, well, I don't think we actually get ready for it.

P: Do you celebrate Thanksgiving?

D: Yes, sir.

P: What'd you do for Thanksgiving?

D: Well, last Thanksgiving we celebrated with church.

P: What'd you do?

D: Preaching service, and pastor give us the bible and the scripture what we want to read, tell them what Thanksgiving mean. So, I read in mine and tried to explain what Thanksgiving mean. In the bible. About the time Abraham give Isaac to the father and return with the sheep. I read them scripture for them.

P: You read it at the church service?

D: Yeah. Before the service started the pastor's working on them.

P: Do you have a Choctaw as your pastor?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Is the service in Choctaw?

D: Yes.

P: You sing songs, the hymns are in Choctaw?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Are there any Christmas songs in Choctaw?

D: I don't think so.

P: On Thanksgiving, do you have a big family dinner?

D: Ah, we usually have that.

P: All together?

D: Yeah.

P: The family eats together?

D: Yeah.

P: Do you fool around much eating turkey?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Is your wife a good cook?

D: I think so. I'm used to that. I like it.

P: What's some of your favorite foods?

D: Turkey.

P: Hominy?

D: Hominy.

P: Your wife knows how to fix hominy good?

D: Yeah, she knows how to fix it.

P: Do you grind your own hominy?

D: Yeah.

P: How do you do that?

D: Well, way back then they had to cut the log about that high and start a hole in it—

P: How did you put the hole in it?

D: Burn it.

P: Burn the hole into the log?

D: Yeah. About six inches deep, you know, grind it inside there.

P: Do you grow your own hominy?

D: Yeah.

P: And then you pour some into the hole, and then what?

D: I get the—

P: Pestle?

D: Pestle, start working on it. Grind it.

P: And then your wife takes that, and she cooks it up with what?

D: Well, she cooks it up with the water and anything meat.

P: Any kind of meat?

D: Yeah. Chicken, or whatever she wants to do.

P: She put peas in it?

D: Yeah.

P: What else do you like to eat? What do you eat for breakfast?

D: Well, I like a scrambled eggs now.

P: You eat the same thing as a White man.

D: I changed, yeah.

- D: Yeah, I changed quite a bit ever since I come out of the Army, you know.
- P: When were you in the service?
- D: 1943.
- P: Where'd you go?
- D: Europe.
- P: What were you, Army?
- D: Army.
- P: Where were you in Europe?
- D: I was in Luxembourg, Belgium, **Switzerland**, Rhine River, all the way into Czechoslovakia.
- P: Were you drafted?
- D: Yes, sir.
- P: Here in Philadelphia?
- D: No, I lived in Newton County.
- P: You were still living in Newton County, then.
- D: Yeah.
- P: Where were you inducted?
- D: Camp Shelby.
- P: Camp Shelby, Mississippi. And you did your basic training there?
- D: Yeah, I got my basic in Camp Shelby, which is artillery. I transferred to infantry at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.
- P: You went into the artillery and then transferred to infantry?
- D: Yes, sir.

P: When you went to Camp Shelby, you knew how to read and write then already, didn't you?

D: Well, yes, sir.

P: You didn't have to go into one of those special training programs there, did you?

D: No.

P: You went right into basic training.

D: That's right.

P: Okay. And how long were you at Fort Jackson?

D: Fort Jackson, about seventeen weeks.

P: And then from there you went where?

D: Fort Benning, Georgia.

P: And you got ready to go overseas at Fort Benning?

D: Fort Benning to Camp Gordon, Georgia, on up to Camp Shanks, New York.

P: Now, let's see. You went from Fort Jackson to Fort Benning, and from Fort Benning you went where?

D: Camp Gordon, Georgia.

P: Camp Gordon, Georgia. And then from Camp Gordon you went up to where?

D: Camp Shanks, New York.

P: And then you shipped out overseas there?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You remember the name of the boat you were on?

D: I'll never forgot it. [Laughter]

P: What is it?

D: Queen Mary.

P: The Queen Mary! You were traveling in style. And you landed where?

D: Glasgow.

P: Glasgow, Scotland. And how long were you there?

D: Oh, about—not more than twenty-four hours, I don't think. Got on the train again, landed at Southampton, England. Got on a boat again. To the **shores of France.**

P: You were a long way from Mississippi!

D: It is. [Laughter]

P: And you were in service, then, from 1943. 'Til when?

D: [19]46.

P: That's three years. You saw a lot of action?

D: I did. About ninety-one deaths on the battlefield. I got two battle scars.

P: Were you wounded?

D: Scratched just a little. I was a reconnaissance trooper.

P: So, you saw a lot of real, strenuous action.

D: Yes, sir. Lot of times late, I'd pray.

P: You prayed? You wanted to get back to Mississippi. [Laughter] Did you enjoy that life, in the Army?

D: Well, after hard work was over. I should have stayed there maybe thirty years, so I don't have to work now. [Laughter]

P: But you got out?

D: Yeah, I just wanted to tear up out.

P: And you came straight on back home?

D: Yes, sir.

P: They shipped you back here. What'd you do when you got back home? What kind of work did you do?

D: Tried farming again.

P: Were you already married when you went in?

D: No, sir.

P: You got married after you came home.

D: That's right.

P: Can you remember the Depression years around here, the 1930s?

D: Yeah. Around 1931, [19]32, we had a pretty good time with the Depression.

P: Pretty good time? [Laughter] You didn't starve to death?

D: We didn't starve.

P: You were already poor to start with and the Depression made it worse, didn't it?

D: Yes, sir. It did.

P: How'd you make a living in those days?

D: Well, uh—

P: Your daddy was dead.

D: My daddy was dead. My brother was older than me, you know. We was in sharecropper. We had a little corn, raising a few hogs. Living on the peas—

P: Life was hard, wasn't it?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Did you get enough to eat?

D: Well, I think we got enough to eat, because we don't eat no flour much. In the morning, my mother was cook the flour. She mixed it up with cornmeal and make a biscuit. Saved on flour.

P: So, you ate what you grew right on the farm, didn't you?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You didn't have any money to go into the stores and buy?

D: No.

P: What kind of fun did you have in those days, when you were growing up as a kid? What'd you do to enjoy yourself?

D: I can't hardly remember then. Anyway, I just, you know— [Laughter]

P: Did you go swimming?

D: Swimming and played ball—rag ball. What they called it.

P: What do you mean, rag ball?

D: Make a rag ball, make a baseball. Play it, me and my brothers.

P: You had a stick.

D: Yeah.

P: You played it just like you play baseball today?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Three bases?

D: Yeah.

P: You and your brothers.

D: Also, and them White kids with us, then. Call a bunch of young kids together and play.

P: As you remember back on your childhood, was it a happy time?

D: Well, I think I was happy then. Don't know better. [Laughter]

P: You didn't have to go to school too much.

D: No, I don't go to school too much, but I started learning how to be with the White kids around here.

P: Did you find any problem being an Indian when you were growing up with the White kids?

D: I don't see any problem.

P: The kids, the White kids didn't treat you any different just because you were an Indian.

D: No, we was made pretty good.

P: Do Indians have a hard time out in this area now?

D: Not now, I don't think so.

P: They used to have a hassle over in Philadelphia, didn't they?

D: Uh-huh.

P: Those problems are gone now?

D: Well, it's about out.

P: Indians—your children aren't having any difficulties now, are they?

D: I don't think so. My children are all in public school.

P: They don't go to this school, they go to public school?

D: Right.

P: Do they have Indian teachers? Or White teachers?

D: White teachers. White school.

P: And they don't have any problems in school as far as you know?

D: Uh-huh. I've got good reports.

P: Your kids doing well in school?

D: Yeah.

P: I want to talk to you a little bit about your grandfather. He was a fine old man, wasn't he?

D: Yes, he was fine.

P: Was he a religious man?

D: No, sir. I don't think so.

P: He didn't go to church too much?

D: Well, he'd go to church but he don't join the church.

P: He didn't join the church. Did you join the church?

D: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

P: When did you join the church?

D: Back in 1936.

[Telephone rings]

[Break in recording]

P: What brought that about? You're joining the church. How did that happen?

D: Well, the priest here talked about the Christ and the be saved, things like this. So, I believed it. By the way, me and my wife joined the same church, and we were baptized at the same time. [Laughter]

P: But you weren't married then, were you?

D: No.

P: It just happened.

D: I was just fourteen years old, and she was thirteen. And sometimes we talk about that. [Laughter]

P: Well, were you at the service when this came about? When you joined the church that night? What brought this about? Were you at a service there already?

D: Yeah.

P: You had just gone to church and the spirit hit you that night?

D: I think so, yeah.

P: Was it a visiting preacher or your regular preacher?

D: Regular preacher.

P: And you decided that that was what you wanted to do?

D: Yeah, yeah.

P: You haven't been sorry?

D: No. I was happy. [Laughter]

P: And you've been happy about it ever since. You've not been sorry about the thing.

D: No.

P: What about your wife? How did it happen she joined at the same time?

D: I think she was the same. She was happy.

P: Are your children church members?

D: Yeah.

P: I wonder why your grandpa didn't belong to the church.

D: He didn't believe in no Christian people.

P: Was he a Christian? He never had been—

D: Never had.

P: Are most of the Indians Christians? Now.

D: Yeah, now probably. About ninety-five percent is Christians, I think, right now.

P: How about the old ones?

D: Old ones? I don't know.

P: But your grandpa was not. He was not a Christian.

D: No. He didn't believe in no Christian.

P: You remember when your grandpa died?

D: Yeah, sure. I was about twenty-seven years old then.

P: Oh, so you were already grown then. Did he have a Christian burial?

D: Yeah, we did.

P: He wasn't a Christian, but y'all brought the preacher in.

D: Yeah, we brought him to the church.

P: And the preacher didn't mind?

D: No.

P: When did you get married?

D: When I was twenty-four years old.

P: Where?

D: Conehatta.

P: Where'd you get married, in church?

D: No. Courthouse.

P: Justice of the Peace?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Why did you decide not to have a church wedding, you being a church man?

D: Kind of shy. Too many peoples talking. [Laughter]

P: You don't look like a shy man to me. [Laughter]

D: I did at that time, though.

P: And your wife didn't mind?

D: No.

P: What'd the family say?

D: They didn't say.

P: They didn't mind?

D: They didn't mind. They don't said a word.

P: Save them the cost of a wedding. [Laughter] Of course, you didn't get any presents.

D: No.

P: And you went right into housekeeping.

D: Yeah.

P: How old was your wife when you got married?

D: Twenty-three.

P: So, she was already a grown woman.

D: Yes, sir. She's just one year behind me.

P: So, you knew what you were up—you knew what you were doing.

D: Yes, sir. [Laughter]

P: This was no child marriage.

D: No, we was grown. My mother, she was the only one with me, you know, and, then, I was farming at that time. I got to get up early to start hitching my mule. My mother, she's getting old where she don't get out. That's the reason I had to marry.

P: You needed a woman to come into the house.

D: Uh-huh, yes.

P: To take care of things. How about kids today? Are they causing a lot of trouble around here? In your community, are the kids—

D: My community is a quiet community.

P: Is it a quiet community?

D: That's right.

P: Kids not causing any trouble?

D: No.

P: Y'all not having any problems with drugs over there?

D: No, I don't think so. Not yet.

P: Is there too much drinking going on in the community?

D: Not in this community.

P: How about the other communities?

D: Worse.

P: What causes all this drinking?

D: I've thought about this a whole lot of times, but I can't figure it out.

P: Think people got too much time on their hands?

D: I think so. I think people just don't go to church, they got plenty of time to go somewhere else, see. That's happened.

P: Do many Indian people here get divorces?

D: I think so.

P: A lot of divorces, a lot of broken families? What brings that about?

D: I've thought about it, and that is brought about because welfare took care of them woman, see.

[Telephone rings]

[Break in recording]

P: What do you mean, the welfare took care of the woman?

D: Give her some money when they separated. That's why they don't want the man.

P: She can take care of herself with the welfare giving her money.

D: The way I heard about it is get the welfare money and go along with the other man.

P: Is there a lot of that kind of thing going on here?

D: That's what I hear. See, I currently watching **Momma travel** constantly.

P: That's not good.

D: That's not good.

P: What about Indian men marrying White women? Is much of that going on?

D: Yeah, there was. Been going on pretty fairly over the last about three years, I think.

P: Well, what happens? Does the White woman come on to the reservation?

D: Nothing. [Laughter]

P: She's accepted here?

D: Oh, yeah.

P: Are there many of these mixed marriages in your community?

D: I think one or two families around in my community.

P: No problems?

D: No problems.

P: The women are all right?

D: Yeah.

P: How about Indian women marrying White men?

D: The same thing.

P: That happens too?

D: Uh-huh.

P: Most of them leave and go with their husbands?

D: Yes, yes.

P: Do you have any White men living on the reservation? How about in your community?

D: Yeah. Not around my community, but they are here.

P: So mixed marriages are not strange at all and create no problems?

D: No. There ain't no problem.

P: Do these White women mix and go to church and do the things that the Indian women do?

D: Yeah. Baptist people around here, we got a lot of White people are visitors.

P: You have a lot of White people doing what? Doing what? I didn't get that.

D: Visitors to our churches.

P: Visitors.

D: Ain't no problem.

P: Good. Now, I've been reading about all these women trying to get ahead. Are you having that problem here? The Indian women trying to get ahead here? Women's liberation?

D: No. No.

P: You're still the boss in your family?

D: Right, yeah.

P: You make the decisions?

D: Yeah.

P: You decide how the money's going to be spent?

D: That's right.

P: Do you talk to your wife about it?

D: Yeah, she knows about it. She was my boss when I come to house, you know. She's the boss around the house.

P: She is the boss.

D: Yeah.

P: Who disciplines the children?

D: Both of us.

P: Do the children in an Indian family have much say-so?

D: No.

P: You didn't? Nobody asked your opinion when you were growing up, did they?

D: No.

P: Your mother made the decisions about—What was going on, and when your father was living, your mother and father decided what you were going to do?

D: Yeah. Right then on, my daddy disappeared. My mother was raised us, you know, then my brother and sisters—the White man, we lived with him. He was a good old man, you know. We sat around the table, things like that. He'd talk to my grandfather and talk to us, too. Yeah.

P: Now, do your children have much say-so in the household?

D: No.

P: You and your wife run the family.

D: Yeah.

P: Do you have anybody else living with you other than your children?

D: No.

P: Who takes care of old people here? Old people who have nobody to take care of them. What happens to 'em?

D: Well, they have houses where they take care of some of them.

P: So, the tribal council provides some funds for that?

D: Yeah.

P: How about children who have no father or mother?

D: Well, some of the rest of the people take care, you know.

P: Family?

D: Family.

P: The children aren't left homeless, are they?

D: No, I don't think so. No.

P: You don't have an orphan's home here, do you?

D: No.

P: Do you have a home for poor people, a work farm or anything?

D: No, for the poor. [Laughter]

P: Nothing specially set up, though—

D: No, nothing specially set up.

[Telephone rings]

[Break in recording]

P: So, there are no agencies that are set up to take care of people who cannot take care of themselves. You get welfare, and Social Security, and that kind of thing.

Are there a lot of people on Social Security?

D: I don't think too many of them.

P: Are there a lot of people on welfare?

D: Yes.

P: This is a major source of income for most people, isn't it? Welfare.

D: Yeah.

P: They get paid so much for the children that they have in the household?

D: I don't know how they work them things, but I know a lot of people's on welfare.

P: Where does your wife do her shopping?

D: Carthage.

P: Carthage? You have a supermarket there?

D: Well, a IGA supermarket over there.

P: Does she still do a lot of canning and things?

D: Oh, we do. Yes.

P: So, you live still off of what you produce.

D: I ain't going to say too much on them, because we done butchered hogs already.

P: You've butchered your hogs.

D: We buy some flours and cornmeal, stuff like that.

P: And you grow your own fresh vegetables, don't you?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Do you eat much fruit?

D: Yes.

P: Where do you get that?

D: Store.

P: You don't have any fruit trees?

D: No, sir. We don't have no fruit trees. We bought oranges and grapes, things like that.

P: Uh-huh. Do they grow much fruit around here? Peaches or apples?

D: No, sir.

P: I haven't seen any orchards or anything. I've seen a lot of vegetable growing.

D: They don't grow much around here.

P: So, you grow your own vegetables, your own corn and your own—you've got some potatoes?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You're a pretty good gardener, then, aren't you?

D: **Oh, I work.**

P: You take care of it yourself?

D: Trying to.

P: How large is your garden?

D: We got two of 'em. About an acre.

P: Being a carpenter here, you don't have to belong to a union, do you?

D: No. I did belong to the union up in Meridian but, see, I stopped.

P: You belonged to a carpenter's union?

D: No, I was in just a labor union.

P: What union did you belong to?

D: New card, but I don't want to come back.

P: You had to pay union dues?

D: Yeah, I did.

P: Did you have any trouble getting into a union because you were an Indian?

D: No.

P: No problem at all?

D: I don't see no problem, anywhere I went.

P: The fact that you were an Indian didn't hurt you in any way.

D: No.

P: You've been able to make a living and you were able to go to school, and you've been able to do whatever you want to do.

D: Uh-huh. In fact, I should go to school when I was a kid. I'd be smart then.

P: Do you have many White friends?

D: Oh, yeah. Everywhere I go is a friend to me.

P: You have friends now who are White in the community?

D: Oh, yeah.

P: No problems.

D: No problems. White, nigger, Indians.

P: Are there many Blacks living in your community?

D: No, not in our community.

P: Indians don't much like the Blacks, do they?

D: Yeah. No, I don't think so.

P: Now, I get that feeling that they're not happy with the Blacks, and there's not much interchange.

D: Uh, the Black man, he's just actually a different people. What I mean, the White man and Indian together, you know, they don't have no problem. But I don't know. Black mans are a lot different.

P: In what way?

[Break in recording]

P: Okay Charlie, you were saying something about the Black people. What about them? I was asking in what way they were different.

D: Well, they've always been Black, you know. Talking about, you know.

P: Things you shouldn't be talking about?

D: Yeah, uh-huh.

P: Any Black people belong to your church?

D: No.

P: But you do have White visitors that come.

D: Yeah, well, they've got a White missionary, too.

P: A White missionary, too?

D: Yeah.

P: Do your kids go to Sunday school?

D: Yeah.

P: So, you'd call yours a religious family.

D: Yes, sir.

P: You read the Bible?

D: Yes, sir. That's the way I'm getting my education, see.

P: You read it every day?

D: Every day.

P: Do y'all have prayers in the house?

D: Yeah.

P: You read through the bible. Can you read through it in a full year?

D: Well, that's a funny thing when I start to read the bible, you see. For four years, I did. I tried to make them read it page by page through. But I start reading it, someone told me some, start me thinking, I'll have to go back over and see it again.

P: So, you study the bible rather than just read it page by page.

D: That's right. I study actually what they meant. I want to know.

P: Do you ever teach Sunday school?

D: I do. Back in 1940s. I was teaching Sunday school about five years.

P: You don't teach now.

D: No, I'm a scholar.

P: You're what?

D: I just scholar-sism. I be teaching, I just read.

P: You're a scholar.

D: Yeah, scholar.

P: Well, that's good. Teacher and you graduated to being a scholar. That's going a little backward, isn't it? I thought scholars then became teachers.

D: Well, see, I was just teaching, but we don't have enough teachers. So, they select me to teach. I teach both of them, English and the Choctaw language, too.

P: Charlie, do you ever get out to Oklahoma?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You visit out there regularly, or just—

D: No. I just visited over there one time.

P: You've ever get a chance to travel around since World War Two?

D: No, no. World War Two?

P: Well, you did a lot of traveling during the war.

D: On the eastern part.

P: Yeah. Have you done much traveling since?

D: Yeah, I do. After I got out of the army, you see. Come back, went in North Carolina, Virginia, Chicago, Florida. I work here and there.

P: You traveled around and you worked a lot of places—

D: Yeah, I—

P: Before you got married?

D: After I got married.

P: Oh, after you got married. Your wife went with you?

D: No. In the wintertime, I have to go to Florida, you know. My kids would go to school, and my wife stay there and tend to them.

P: Where was your kid in school?

D: Down here then.

P: Well, you said you had to go to Florida. Why?

D: I just went up there.

P: You just went visiting.

D: To visit the country, see what country like. That the same time I work.

P: I see. Where were you working?

D: I worked first time in Florida at Haines City.

P: Haines City.

D: Haines City, Mr. Nail. I'll never forget that name. He liked me.

P: What were you doing, picking beans?

D: No, picking oranges.

P: Oranges at Haines City?

D: Yeah.

P: For Mr. Nailor?

D: Mr. Nail.

P: Nail? And where else do you work in Florida?

D: I stay there about six months. Went on down there to Belle Glade.

P: Belle Glade?

D: Cut those celery. What's their name? Celeries?

P: Celery?

D: Celery.

P: You remember who you worked for in Belle Glade?

D: Yeah.

P: Who was it?

D: Adolf.

P: Adolf.

D: Yeah. Got a big plantation over there. He liked me working with him. I stayed with him about a year. I did work Orlando, Florida. Construction job.

P: So, you've been a farmer and a carpenter, doing some contracting work.

D: Yeah.

P: And you're planning to spend the rest of your life here? You've got a good job now working?

D: Yes, sir. You know when they kick me out, I'll be around here in in fifteen years, I'll be retired.

P: Good, you'll be retired.

D: Yeah. [Laughter] Then I'm going to Florida again.

P: Well, it's warmer dorm there than it is here.

D: It is.

P: Your wife ever travel with you?

D: Yeah, I had a car, me and my family. I carried my family one time over there, you know. She don't work. She just wanted to see the country what it looked like out, been moving around. I went to Virginia, West Virginia, stayed there for about six months picking fruit, apples.

P: So, you've enjoyed life. You've lived a happy life, Charlie?

D: Yes, sir.

P: You're satisfied?

D: I'm satisfied.

P: You've got a good family. Well, this is our interview, now. You see we've been talking about a lot of home-y kinds of things, haven't we?

D: Yes.

P: And this is the kind of work we're doing, talking to people like you. You wouldn't have any objections to anybody reading this once we typed it out, would you? Reading what we talked about today?

D: No, I don't think so. No.

P: We haven't talked about anything that's confidential at all.

[Break in recording]

P: What was the Choctaw name?

D: Like [Choctaw saying 52:56].

P: The ending of it was [Choctaw word 52:57] as though it was spelled o-b-i or o-b-e-y.

D: Yeah.

P: What did that mean if you translate [Choctaw word 53:10] into English?

D: Killer.

P: Killer?

D: Killer.

P: So, all Choctaws then had a killer name.

D: That's right, a killer name.

P: What was your grandfather's name?

D: His name was [Catawba name 53:35].

P: If you translated that—can you translate that into English?

D: "He-used-to-but-kill-it."

P: "He-used-to-do-" what?

D: "He-used-to-but-kill-it"

P: "He-used-to-but-"
"?"

D: Kill it.

P: Kill it?

D: Yeah. Kill it. [Choctaw word 53:54]

P: Now, I thought you said [Choctaw word 53:57] was "killer."

D: Yeah, that's what it is.

P: "He-used-to-be "
"?"

D: That's what English says, yeah.

P: "He-used-to-be."

D: "He-used-to-be."

P: Is that right or he-used-to?

D: He-used-to-be. Yeah. "He-used-to-be-killer."

P: I see. He-used-to-be-killer.

D: Yeah, yeah.

P: That's what I wondered. Are many—

D: I got the name but then I forgot.

P: Where did you get the name Denson?

D: That's what White are born almost the same as my grandpa, see. And anyway, I don't know what's this name. Grandpa's daddy was living with the fellow. He named it with that man, you know.

P: Your granddaddy was a sharecropper?

D: Yeah. He was a Joe Denson, so he called that little baby Joe Denson, too.

P: I see.

D: That's where we start Denson.

P: I see. The family name, then, came from the White man who owned the farm, the property, where your grandfather was sharecropping?

D: That' s right.

P: I see. So, it's a borrowed name, really.

D: Yeah, yeah. Borrow, he give it.

P: Did your grandpa know English at all?

D: Yeah. I don't know why, but all Densons talk pretty good English. Can't read or write, things like that, but they can—

P: But he could talk it all right.

D: Yeah. Except me. [Laughter]

P: Your grandpa was named Joe Denson?

D: Yes, sir.

P: And he was named that after this White man called him that.

D: Yeah.

P: But he also had a Choctaw name.

D: Yeah.

P: Do you talk Choctaw in your home?

D: Yes.

P: You don't talk English.

D: Well, we mix them.

P: How about your children?

D: They do.

P: Are they—

D: When they read and write, things like that, he can't even pronounce the Choctaw, so he has to talk English, see. [Laughter]

P: But you talk to your children in Choctaw and in English?

D: Yes.

P: When you and your wife talk, what do you talk?

D: We talk Choctaw.

P: Choctaw.

D: Yeah.

P: Does her parents—Are they still living?

D: No. She's got sister and brother living. But me, I ain't got no family.

P: You had a brother and sister.

D: I did.

P: They're dead?

D: All of them gone but me. My family's going. No sister, no brother.

P: But your wife has family.

D: Yeah.

P: Are you close to the family—do Choctaws get together as families?

D: Yeah.

P: So, there's a close relationship.

D: Yeah.

P: Have you ever held a post here? Have you ever served on the council or did anything like that for the Tribe?

D: No.

P: Have you been a representative?

D: Well, I represented from Standing Pine. That's all. That's as far as I went, you know.

P: Who gets the jobs on the council?

D: Well, councilors get the jobs on it.

P: You have two representatives from Standing Pine?

D: Yes, sir.

P: How are they elected?

D: Vote.

P: And you say you have once served from Standing Pine?

D: Two, we served from Standing Pine.

P: Were you ever on the council? Did you yourself ever serve, Charlie Denson?

D: Yeah.

P: You did?

D: Yeah.

P: When?

D: I don't remember, because I was on the tribal council, you know, on and off for the last about twelve or fifteen years. I just started right now, you know, on the two-year term.

P: I see. You've got a two-year term now?

D: Yes, sir.

P: Are you friendly with Philip Martin?

D: Oh, yes.

P: We met him yesterday. Seems like a very fine man.

D: Well, he's all right to me, because we knew each other long time when he was little kid then.

P: Oh, you grew up together.

D: Almost, yeah.

P: Well, he seems like a very able man.

D: Yes, he's a pretty good guy **to be**.

P: He's probably doing a lot for the Tribe, isn't he?

D: Yeah, yeah, he's doing a lot.

P: Is he a popular man?

D: The way I see it.

P: I guess everybody has some who are favoring him and some who are opposed to him.

D: Yes. A lot are opposed to him, but he don't realize what Philip doing, see. Philip, he was doing pretty good job.

P: I guess anybody who holds a leadership position is going to be criticized, no matter who it is.

D: Yeah, that's right. Even President Nixon. [Laughter]

P: Are you a political man? Do you vote?

D: Yes, sir. I vote.

P: You're interested in the politics?

D: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. At voting, we used to pay a poll tax.

P: Used to pay a poll tax here in Mississippi.

D: When he registered, he had to put application on it 'cause he was a Democrat or a Republican, see.

P: Yeah.

D: My daddy's always Democrat-like. And I stopped paying my poll tax since he's changed his registering. Right now, he just went up there and registered to vote.

P: You don't have to identify yourself anymore, do you?

D: No, no. He don't have to.

P: You just vote.

D: Just vote.

P: And you vote for the man, not necessarily for the party.

D: Yeah.

[End of interview]

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