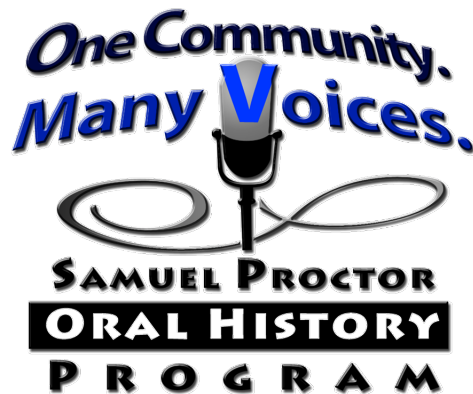


Karen Lilly

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-057**

Interview by:

**Annette Covey and Joanne Thompson
October 1, 1979**



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MISS CHOC 057 Karen Lilly
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Annette Convey and Joanne Thompson on October 1, 1979
15 minutes | 6 pages

Abstract: Karen Lilly, the 1979-1980 Choctaw Princess, speaks about her experience with the pageant. She explains that contestants must be sponsored by someone who provides them with materials such as dresses, shoes, and accessories to wear during the pageant. Contestants go through several stages of judgement and must write an essay on one of three major topics and present it orally—Lilly’s essay was about preserving Choctaw culture. She also describes her and her family’s reactions to finding out about her win. Lilly has studied in public schools and in Choctaw Central on the reservation and she uses her experiences to discuss the differences between these educational institutions.

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi--Philadelphia; Women; Education]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
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MISS CHOC 057

Interviewee: Karen Lilly

Interviewers: Annette Convey and Joanne Thompson

Date of Interview: October 1, 1979

U1: Today is October 1, 1979. We are interviewing Karen Lilly, the 1979-[19]80 Choctaw Princess. The interviewers are Annette Convey and Joanne Thompson. How were you chosen as the princess contestant?

L: To start off with, we had to be sponsored by somebody and **Uncle Down** sponsored me this year. Their duties as sponsors were to see that I get all the materials that I'll need, my dress, things to wear. [Laughter] Shoes and jewelry, anything I need. To make a slide for me, to get a car for me in the parade, and to help me during the night of the pageant. First of all, the sponsor chose us by the school grades, how they [inaudible 1:01] me, personality and our ability to write and orally present an essay. The essay covers three major topics: one on women's rights, the other was the advantages and disadvantages of living on the Indian reservation, and the third was on preserving our Choctaw culture. I chose to write mine on preserving Choctaw culture, 'cause I felt that was the most important thing that needed to be talked about now. We had to write and have our essay typed and presented to the judges on Wednesday morning. Wednesday morning, we got into a street dress and went down to the travel office, me and nine other people and we went down to the Colonial where we had a brunch and met the judges and talked for a little while. Then we came back and at two o'clock we started our interviews. They asked specific questions concerning school, after we get out of school, college, activities in school, being considered. And then afterwards, after we left, we came back at six o'clock in the evening and we started getting ready to be judged in our street dress. After we

were judged in our street dress, we put on our Choctaw dresses, and we went out and were judged on that. Then we had to present our essay orally that night, the night of the pageant.

[Break in recording]

U2: [Laughter] How do you— [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

U2: How do you feel about being the princess?

L: Well, that night I was surprised. I didn't really think that I would. I was hoping for at least second alternate, and I got it and I don't know. I didn't know what to think but now I really don't think about it all the time. Just like when you have to appear for something. I don't hardly think about it.

U2: Were you nervous?

L: Not really, no. Well, when I had to give my essay, it was taking me kinda long time for me to get up there, but when I got up there I [inaudible 4:33] it wasn't that bad.

U1: Who were your alternates?

L: First alternate was **Jessie Bacon** from Pearl River; the second alternate was **Sherry Robinson** from **West** [inaudible 4:50].

U2: How did your family feel about it? How'd they feel when they remembered that you had [inaudible 5:02]

L: Well, my brother, Tony, and Sherry, they were in Alabama at the time so they came down to see me 'cause I think they felt that I could do it so they wanted to

be there. My mother told me she went into shock. [Laughter] She didn't even know what to think. She was surprised. She was really happy for me.

U2: Do you do a lot of traveling now?

L: I've supposed to have went to Louisiana, to Memphis, and to Greenwood but all those were on the third of August and on the same day I was coming from Nashville where I attended a youth seminar for two weeks, so I didn't get to go on any of them. That's how I'm going back Memphis to some kind of boating event in Greenwood I'm supposed to go to, and Louisiana I'm supposed to go down there in a couple of weeks. And so far, they haven't let me know too much about what I'm supposed to be doing as far as traveling.

[Break in recording]

U2: Do you feel like you can help the Choctaws in any way?

L: Well, I don't know about being a princess, but I could help the Choctaws by representing them well, giving other people a good outlook on what the Choctaw people are, explaining to other people about what happens here and about the Choctaw Tribe itself. I would like to see the Choctaws get a better understanding of themselves and their Tribe and their culture. I think the Choctaws should try to strengthen their culture more geared to areas and if I could I'd hope there's some way I could start.

[Break in recording]

U1: Where are you originally from?

L: I was born in Meridian, Mississippi. I lived there in Meridian for one year, then I moved to Huntsville, Alabama where my father worked as a mechanical engineer

on **base on** [inaudible 8:30] So, I stayed out there for fifteen years before coming here to Philadelphia where I now live in **Program** Community with my mother, sister, two younger brothers, and me.

U1: Where did you attend school at?

L: I started in kindergarten. I went to McDonald Elementary School. Then I went to **Dalton** Junior High School, and I went my first year at Butler High School. Before coming here and starting my sophomore year at Choctaw.

[Break in recording]

U1: Do you plan to further your education? Which college would are you planning to attend? What are you planning to major in?

L: Right now, I've been thinking about going into the health field. I'd like into go into something more than social work, maybe psychiatry, child psychiatry, or something like that. And I'm planning to go to Arizona State for school. I'm planning to go as long as I can.

U2: Have your friends changed in any way since you've gotten that princess?

L: Not really. I've got a lot more friends, but my friends, they haven't changed. I try myself not to change so my friends don't have to change, too.

[Break in recording]

U2: Did you have to make any of the beads by yourself for that pageant?

L: As far as judging goes, it would help a lot if you did make your own beads. If you made beads, they preferred you to wear 'em. I, myself, don't make beads and I had made a few but [inaudible 11:04] I didn't make any of the jewelry that I wore that night.

U2: Did you make your own dress or did somebody else make it for you?

L: **Erica Convey** from arts and crafts made my dress. It took her one, two months to make my dress. It was maroon with white trim. My jewelry was made by **Marion Williamson**, and she spent a long time making the belt. And then I had earrings, too and [inaudible 11:42]

[Break in recording]

U2: In the parade, did you feel scared or anything different, riding all over the streets and everything?

L: Usually it's great. [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

U2: What kind of questions did the judges ask you?

L: Well, they asked me about my future plans. If I was gonna go to college, and why I chose to go on to some kinda trip together. They asked me about being in the dance and my practicing hours [inaudible 12:34] [Laughter] They asked me about what I thought the difference was between the public school that I went to and the school over here at Choctaw Central. They asked me questions like being a senior, what would I most want to accomplish in this year

U2: If you had a choice between going to a public school and a Indian school, which one would you prefer and why?

L: Well, while I was going to the public school, when I came down here to the reservation, I just visited how all the [inaudible 13:32] public schools are kept, you know, I didn't know too much about the school or too much about anybody around here. I'm afraid mostly I [inaudible 13:40]. Going to a public school, I

didn't really think there was gonna be any difference about coming here to Choctaw Central, but when I came, I was scared to death. I thought the teachers, and everybody was gonna be teaching in Choctaw and I just didn't know what to expect. But in a public school, the education was a lot better. They had more varied subjects to teach from, because just the whole education level at the public school is higher and I don't see the reason why the educational level couldn't be met by Choctaw Central too. The people here at Central—everybody knows everybody around here, and I guess everybody get along quite good. In a public school you know, you got your groups you hang around with, and you don't really get to know everybody until [inaudible 15:01]

U2: What kind of advice would you give a person that was gonna go out and try and enter that pageant?

L: Well, first of all, to pick out any like requirements for the essay, to get it done. This year, having my essay memorized helped me the most in winning the pageant. A few of the girls were, when they got up there, they floundered.

[End of interview]

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