Listening to Indians

JIM GARDNER, Choctaw

March 13, 1975

Pearl River Community, Mississippi

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

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NO. 8

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Glen Rock, New Jersey

Microfilming Corporation of America

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Sam Myers:

I'm talking today with Jim Gardner at the Pearl River Community, the Choctaw Reservation... is that the right term for it, Jim?

Jim Gardner:

Yes.

SM: And, Jim, I was just surprised to learn that you are ninety years old now.

JG: Ninety years old.

SM: Born in 1895?

JG: Born in 1895, March 10.

SM: 1895? You work here at the central office for the tribal headquarters?

JG: Well, first place, I raise on a sharecrop.

SM: You used to work on sharecropping?

JG: Um hm. One-half.

SM: Live in this part of the country?

JG: Yeah, about 15 miles south from here in Neshoba County, and I move here at the reservation in 1936, and I farmed two miles south from here. I farm and I retired and I quit farmin' and I end up on this program, Choctaw program.

SM: You're in a program here on the Choctaw... what do you call it here now? Is it the Community Center?
JG: Well, it's tribal office. This is Tribal Buildin'.

SM: And we're sitting in the office of the administrative assistant, aren't we?

JG: Yah, yah. Mr. Thomas.

SM: He's off to a meeting, and he let us use his office. He recommended I talk to you, Jim, because he said you probably know more about the history of the tribe than most people. Your memory goes back a long ways.

JG: Well, I remember . . . far as I c'n remember . . . I'll commence on that. All right, them days, Choctaw people was a sharecrop—all these Choctaw. They are sharecrop, and they have good time them days. I 'member that. They play every Saturday, they play stick. And Sunday play stick. And later they began to play baseball.

SM: Did you play stick ball too?

JG: Um hm, yah. I used to play stick ball.

SM: And then baseball?

JG: Baseball.

SM: Did you ever get hurt playing stick ball?

JG: No.

SM: Looks pretty rough.

JG: It's pretty rough, but sometime when I had the ball . . . 'course you don't throw a ball, when they catch it they gonna throw you
down. So, the way they do to me, so lot of times see Southern Star; and seem like them days Choctaw old people they good cooperate.

SM: They cooperated with each other?

JG: Um hm, good neighbors. And anything they want got to do, he'p, all get together. Just like stick game, you know. They want to start campin' over there Friday night and make hominy.

SM: How do they make hominy?

JG: Well, they had a pole, rounded, you know, and got corn . . . oak hollowed out. . . .

SM: A hollowed-out tree stump?

JG: Um hm.

SM: They put the corn in there?

JG: Put corn in there, put a little water in there, then pound it.

SM: Do you put anything else in besides the corn?

JG: Sometimes put sody.

SM: I heard once you put lye in it to eat the outside shell off.

JG: Yes, yeah, they do that, but. . . .

SM: But the hominy that the Choctaws used to make was just by pounding? I always wondered why they wanted to take the shell off, 'cause it has more flavor with the shell on.
JG: Well, when you beat 'em up, you know, spread 'em up, you know, hollowed out, I don't know, maybe too tough.

SM: Well, I suppose the corn was dried hard.

JG: Yeah, yeah.

SM: It wouldn't be like tender, green corn.

JG: So they eat their supper Friday night, whole bunch come, and then eat. When get through eatin' start adancin'. Dance all night.

SM: All night long? Did you ever do that all night long?

JG: Yeah, yeah.

SM: Many times, huh?

JG: Many a time. You know, that bunch, they're gonna have a ball game, 'bout a week, two weeks. Well, you can hear drum somewhar—that sounds a ball game, you know.

SM: Drum sound means ball game coming?

JG: People have drums—look like ever' house.

SM: Every house had a drum? If they hear the drum then they would beat the drum too? And they'd carry it on that way? Kind of like a drum-beating telegraph.

JG: Yah. Yah. We used to do that.

SM: Interesting. Did you have a drum at your house?
JG: No, I never did owned one, but I used to beat a drum.

SM: You used to beat one, but you didn't ever have your own?

JG: Nope, and in the mornin' 'bout nine or ten o'clock, 'long 'bout there, git women cook beef, 'bout four o'clock and eat 'bout nine.

SM: That night?

JG: Mornin'. Mornin'.

SM: Oh, in the morning. They had to get up early.

JG: When they git through, eat, now they gonna line up stick play and go ahead play. Had two pole and make score . . . make twelve, be game. That's what used to call it. Twelve score. That's a game. So they start 'bout 9:30, 10:00 o'clock, long 'bout that, well they play on till nearly sundown.

SM: All day!

JG: All day.

SM: Didn't they have a break for a rest?

JG: Noooo! They'd play on 'til they make a twelve sometime. Well, sometime just can't make a twelve score . . . well, one side get ahead of score, chief called it game, you know.

SM: Oh, if it went on too long without a twelve score, then the chief went to call the one who was ahead the winner?

JG: Yeah. 'Cause it would be late, you know.
SM: So then late in the afternoon or at night he called it off and said, "This is the end."

JG: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause it gonna be late. And they quit 'cause got to go home. Some of 'em goin' back home, some of 'em stay there, you know. Well, this manager--we called chief, you know--he gonna talk, tell 'em, maybe some eat little bit left, or some can stay here and dance if he want to. Well, they dance at night.

SM: All night then?

JG: Yeah. And Sunday, well, they turn around and play baseball. And what starts that good . . . good cooperation, you know, one guy, they gonna make up a ball game, you know. They go out to white neighbors, get the yellin' [yearling beef], maybe clear one acre land, good size yellin' them days, cheap you know. You know what I mean, cheap them days. Ever'thing was cheap. And this Choctaw, they goin' out their neighbors, deal with it, clear land.

SM: They'd clear the land for a low price.

JG: Um hm. They'd say one acre they can clear. Well, you know, all the bunch, they go out, get done one day, before night.

SM: Clear the whole thing.

JG: Yeah, even women folks.

SM: Help out?

JG: Yeah. Cook down there. That's what they used to do.

SM: And then they'd get paid from the white farmer for clearing the land?

JG: Yeah. 'Cause they get that yellin', you know, yellin' beef.
SM: Yearling beef, a young beef.

JG: Uh huh, yeah, uh huh. That's what the trade is on. Well, you clear a acre of land for me, you c'n have it. Well, they're gonna go after it, they have to butcher it, you know, and next week and speak out, so, tell 'em what day, anybody want to he'p me I want you to come out, and that day, you know, mebbe Wednesday, Thursday, mebbe two weeks, well they tell 'em what day, so whole bunch come in, even women folks come along, and they cook down there, cook coffee, and clear land, he'p it, some of 'em, trim up trees, you know, that layin' there, you know, the women he'p 'em out, and that's what I call good cooperate.

SM: Good cooperation. Everybody work together.


SM: Those are good old days?

JG: Good old days, them days.

SM: And then you were sharecropping in those days?

JG: All them share cropper too.

SM: So, did that work out pretty well sometimes, or was it always kind of hard times?

JG: Well, ever'thing was cheap. Cotton was cheap. But sometime I think 'bout that, way back yonder, I remember it, you know. Some things you don't get enough, mebbe charge your credit too much.

SM: You tend to spend too much then, or you were charged too much for it?
JG: I find that out. And some of 'em had own land in them days. They lost that land.

SM: By taking too much credit?

JG: That's what they said. They said I did not, but that's the way they got it. So, well, they lost out. So lot of them lost the land on account of that, I remember that. Making mortgages ... getting, you know, get little stuff to eat. So that's the way lotta Choctaw goes.

SM: Did you keep your land?

JG: Yeah. 'Course my father ... he was not on the land.

SM: That's why you were a sharecropper for a white owner. For half. Did they furnish the land and the seed?

JG: Furnish ever'thing.

SM: Furnished everything--tools, land, seed. . . .

JG: Mules.

SM: But you had to do all the work, and then you split the crop, fifty-fifty?


SM: That was yours?

JG: That was all ours. And peas. We had a pea patch, you know, that was all yours. And some of them, some people they want half of that
garden, half of the peas, you know, peanuts. But I think I live with a man doin' all right.

SM: He was fair?

JG: He was fair.

SM: So he didn't try to take your vegetables?

JG: No. No. I had potatoes, sweet potatoes . . . sometime I had two banks. And sometime jest set out bushel potatoes, so, well, I banked that too. And garden . . . we had good garden--some of 'em don't--all you do, just use your head. But nobody gonna plant it fer you, you know. So I had . . . I was a good livin'. I was sharecrop. 'Course I killed, raise hogs. I buy two pigs and kill hogs, time comes. And I had a cow. We drank milk . . . we milked it. They furnish me pasture; they furnished me wire, and build it around so I allus thought I had a good time. 'Course I lost that work I done--half. And school establish here 1919, along there, and man come over there start buildin' over there--40 acres of land--start with 40 acres of land. So they got the school built and I work at it too. I boardin' over here, and work over here at the school buildin'. So, that is summer. So I went back and they want me move over here--agency did--well, it take about five year, git me move over here. Well, you know what I based on it m'self, 'cause I said, "Forty acres, you want me move in 40 acres?" You said, "yes." Well, let me tell you some . . . I'll ask you . . . Choctaw people suppose to get 160 acre. I said, "You know?" Yes you are, you know all about. So I ain't gonna move 'til I get 160 acres.

SM: Instead of the 40 that he offered you?

JG: He offered me 40 acres.
SM: Now this man, was he a farmer, or was he the Bureau of Indian Affairs?

JG: Agency.

SM: He was an Indian agent here?

JG: Yeah, he was the Indian agency.

SM: And he said you were going to have 40 acres, but you said, "No, 160?"

JG: Uh huh, that's what I told him, and they said, they come again, same thing. I said, "Where you learned all of that?" They said, "That's all right." and . . . well, you know, I said, "I know you know, but you jest don't wanna tell Choctaw people. I think that's it. So, lemme tell you sumpin'. This belong to Choctaw people, this country—what they call hunting ground. Choctaw, they sign a treaty." So I went over to 'Homa—that's what they want to call a hunting ground over there at Oklahoma—some of them maybe don't want to go.

SM: Yes, that's interesting now. They were all supposed to go, weren't they?

JG: Yes.

SM: But some didn't go. Some of you stayed here—your parents, I suppose your grandparents? How did they manage to stay here? Did they hide out, or refuse to go?

JG: No, no, well . . . some white people he'p them out.

SM: So all the white people weren't bad?

JG: Yah. So, they talk kind of sweet, you know. You gonna get good land—
you gonna git ... money. So lot of 'em went, and some of 'em, they didn't go, so us Choctaw as a race ... Choctaw people, here we are now.

SM: So they just stayed here and have grown in number?

JG: Oh yeah, yah.

SM: How many would you say stayed here in the beginning? Have you any idea?

JG: Well, I think about 300.

SM: And the rest all went to Oklahoma?

JG: Um hm. 'Course now, it's a more now.

SM: Anyway, you have grown from 300 to these seven communities.

JG: Oh yeah, it's about 3,000 I think.

SM: Three thousand or more maybe, because you've got seven towns.

JG: Yes. And 'bout the movin'. I move here in 1936.

SM: Now this is back after your sharecropping?

JG: I move from that.

SM: Did you ever get your 160 acres?

JG: No. Well, last time he said, "I found a land just about your size you need." "Well," I said, "160 acres?" "Oh," he said, "Can't you
forgit that?" 'Cause I got paper home, you know, I didn't show it to 'im. And I told 'im, I said... 

SM: You told the agent? 

JG: Yeah, I told agency, I said, "Choctaw people supposed to git 160 acres, that's what the Congress discuss in that 1911-12, long 'bout there, didn't they?" "No," he said, "they didn't know nothin' 'bout it." Well, so even infants, 24 hours, s'posed entitled 160 acres, 'cause Congress come down. 640 s'posed. Well, they figger somethin'--Choctaw was a few--white people too rough, so they might not like it, see. That's how come Congress come down to 300 acres. Then call meeting again, veto, they think about it, you know; well, they come back next meetin', come down 200. 

SM: Two hundred acres? 

JG: And 'bout fourth time, come down 160 acres. And then they made it, infant babies, 24 hours old, entitled 160 acres. Now that mean... if have a bunch of kids, entitled 160 acres. Well, that'll go, almost to... 160, see. 

SM: Get a lot of land that way? 

JG: Yeah. So that's the way it was. I told 'im, and he say, "No, I don't know." Well, this man they want employers, a commissioner, come over there after meetin' in the church. I went there; I listen; they gonna be talkin' 'bout the school, you know. So I went there, listen. They bring it out how he wanted to start. Well, he said he wanted start 40 acres. So he went 'round here, buy land, and have a bunch of Choctaw get around so they close together, well, he want build a school. Which he did.
SM: The agent?

JG: He did. Yeah. That was agency from Washington. That was 19. 17, along there.

SM: 1917?

JG: I think. School established on '19. So they got it a start, so. . . . I like the school. I never have been to school in my life.

SM: You didn't go to that school?

JG: No.

SM: But you liked the school?

JG: I like it, yeah.

SM: You never did go to school you say?

JG: No. Only in night time.

SM: Oh, you went to night school?

JG: Um hm. Yeah, here.

SM: You learned to read and write English? You wrote your name very nicely on that paper a minute ago.

JG: Well, I learnt that before I move up here. Mostly I learnt the Choctaw--my language.

SM: Now you speak the Choctaw language yet, don't you?
JG: Yeah, yes.

SM: And you also speak English, as we're hearing. Can you say something in Choctaw so that my listeners who probably never heard it can hear it spoken, and then say the same thing in English?

JG: Yes.

SM: Anything you'd like to say.

JG: Yeah. Well . . . (Jim Gardner speaks in Choctaw)

SM: All right. Now, what did you say?

JG: I hadn't been to school in my life. I said that, but I went to night school over at the school buildin' . . . which I liked to go to school. I believe all Choctaw kids should attend school so they c'n learn, so that he'p us out, and they be lots of he'p we c'n git. But anybody like, go school, go college, finish. Mebbe that wuth more to 'im, and then anybody . . . kids, parents, oughta push their kids to the school ever' day. Might be worst time, but . . . education is good. That is, if you use it right. You don't use it right, well, then, mess you up. That's way the people goin' on now, 'cause sometime they know too much, they think, so, lot of things--mebbe just don't care, don't care what they do, something like that you know--well, gonna get trouble.

SM: Is that about what you said in Choctaw?

JG: Yah.

SM: And now you said it in English too. You think it's good for kids to go to school then?
JG: Oh yes!

SM: Do you think everybody should go to college?


SM: Because it pays?

JG: So it pay. And then, you wanta finish. If you want a job, they know what they c'n do. Lotta time have to fill out application.

SM: And they don't have to farm on shares anymore.

JG: That's right, unless you want to.

SM: But now, you've lived a good long while, and you've enjoyed it, haven't you?

JG: Oh yes, I hope I live . . . 125.

SM: Well, you might. You look good right now. Do you feel good?

JG: Well, I had good health allus, but, 'bout three years I been operate.

SM: Oh, you were operated on? Successful, I guess.

JG: Yes, and now I got eye. I can't see with one of my eye.

SM: The left one? What happened to it?

JG: Well, I went to doctor. Said, la . . . lacoma.
SM: Glaucoma? I didn't know that produced that kind of condition, but apparently did.

JG: Well, it did. I can't see with it. But still, something grow yet.

SM: On the other one?

JG: Uh huh. And I went to doctor, and they send me to Meridian Hospital, Mississippi, and he examined my eye, and he told me, "I have to work on it, so you gonna have to make 'nother trip here, so I'm gonna write down and you gonna write down and send to 'im, or you want me to take it to him?" "No," I said, "I'll mail it to 'im." So, I ain't hear from 'im since then. And later I went to doctor, well, he hadn't hear from it, and I ain't hear from it, so ... it take a note down, like I said, they gonna write to 'im, and I ain't hear from it yet.

SM: So you're still waiting to hear about how your eye came out. What else would you like to talk about? Did anything ever make you mad?

JG: No, no.

SM: That's probably why you're in such good health--you keep your temper.

JG: Yeah.

SM: Have lots of friends in the neighborhood?

JG: Oh yeah, yeah.

SM: I think so, because I know the people here in the headquarters building, they all like you. You're popular with them all.
JG: Oh, they all of them, they know me.

SM: Nice folks?

JG: Yeah.

SM: You have your tribal chairman and the tribal council here in this building. Do they function pretty well as a government for the tribe now?

JG: Yes, yes.

SM: How's Washington? Have they given you trouble, or helped you out?

JG: Well . . . one thing . . . 'course I'm workin' here. 'Course I used to travel and counsel too.

SM: For the BIA?

JG: No, for the tribe. But . . . I been on the council now, I reckon, 'bout four years, and then, I change. I mean, people change me. I didn't elect, so some of 'em want me to run again since then, but then I told 'em, "Well, I got to where my mind . . . can't think much now."

SM: Well I think it's doing pretty well.

JG: Well, thank you.

SM: Did you say you were on the tribal council?

JG: Yes.
SM: Were you the chairman once?

JG: No, just the council. I like that. That was 'bout 1940-42, long there.

SM: Now are you elected by the people to serve on the council, and then you have to be elected every year?

JG: Every two years.

SM: So you were elected two times for two years each, and served four years?

JG: Yeah.

SM: You liked that job?

JG: Well, I like it all right, but, just like I said a while ago, it's things sort of has to be understandin' what they're talkin' 'bout. That's where lot of 'em make mistake.

SM: They didn't understand so they'd make mistakes?

JG: You know, lotta times when I was council, when I speak to Choctaw, I turn around and talk to 'em Choctaw. 'Course, lot of 'em ... even I don't understand much either, but then, I'm just tryin' to he'p 'em out, you know. "Things you don't understand," I said, "speak up, and ask. And that's what you should do. 'Cause we talkin' and blowin' 'round there," I said, "you might think we makin' good talk. Mebbe we jist talkin'. So you go 'long with it, vote" I said, "you might've voted wrong (chuckle) as you must understand."

SM: About understanding, does "Choctaw" have any particular meaning?
What does "Choctaw" mean?

JG: Choctaw? Jist the name of the people.

SM: It doesn't mean anything like . . . "the people?"

JG: No, no, no.

SM: Well now, how would you say "hello" in Choctaw?

JG: Ha-li-to.

SM: Ha-li-to means hello. So if I come up to you, and I say, "Ha-li-to". you might say "Ha-li-to" back, or you might say "hello."

JG: If I say, "Hello," and (Choctaw expression)

SM: What does that mean?

JG: It mean, "You all right?"

SM: And then somebody says, "Yes." How do you say "yes" then?

JG: Aah.

SM: "Aah" is "yes." How do you say "Good bye?"

JG: Yah-leh Yah-lish-gay. That means "Good bye." Some of 'em say "Yah lish gay" and some of 'em say "Yah-leh."

SM: What is that?

JG: Just . . . short words.
SM: You could say it either way. How do you say, "Thank you?"

JG: Ya-ko-kay.

SM: That's interesting. Can you think of any other words we ought to know? For instance, I want.

JG: Sa-na sa-ba-nah. Two words.

SM: That's "I want." "I want more heat in the house?"

JG: La-bish-sa-ba-nah, la-bish-a sa-na, meaning "I want warm"

SM: That's interesting. Now you know two languages. You speak two languages well, you understand two, maybe a third one. Any others?

JG: Well, I was talkin' 'bout school, you know. I was sharecrop. And this man had a bunch of kids, girls. And we all playin' together, you know, and you know with white people, they have night work, lesson you know, so them children, they goin' school.

SM: Like homework?

JG: Yeah. And he come in--I work with 'im, you know--and, what I mean, I worked wages, so I eat there and I make crop--the man boarded me. So this children say, "Jim, I want you come to our room when you get through eat." But he said, "You come round other door and come in, don't go through here." I said, "Why can't go through here?" "Well, Daddy might not like it, see?" (chuckle) So, go out, and come in other room, other door.

SM: Come in the back door? That wasn't very nice now, was it?

JG: That's a nice.
SM: Why wouldn't "Daddy" like it?

JG: I don't believe he would like it nohow. Mebbe they know it. So they call me, and I went in there, and they say, "Jim, somethin' I want you do." "What?" "I want you to learn ABC."

SM: He wanted you to learn the ABC's?

JG: Uh huh. And add. "We may need you. We hire somebody weigh cotton. I want you understand it." I was just a boy, see, so . . . "Yeah," I said. "You teach me some, mebbe your daddy might not like it, don't let 'im know it." So, all right, 'course I already know my language, you know. So, I . . . like this, see, you know [he made a sign like an "A"]

SM: That's an "A" in English, right?

JG: Um huh. But this is "uh." See, that's it right there, "uh" "A." That's alphabet in the Choctaw language. So I got a ABC and they wrote me down, so I changed this, so this is "A" in English, ain't it?

SM: Yes.

JG: And that's "E" you have. I drew my . . . this. I studied on it. I found out ABC.

SM: So you learned that with the other children?

JG: Yeah. I was just one. My father, mother died, and I'm jist the one, see?

SM: You were an orphan?

JG: Um hm. So I he'p 'em with it, and they told me this, and wrote
me down mebbe 50, mebbe 56, mebbe 29. Well, nine and six is 15, one carry, three and five is eight. I caught on.

SM: You caught on quick.

JG: Um hm, and that's way I want. I want the school children, I want them to learn. If you want to learn, I say, you can work.

SM: What are some other experiences you've had, Jim, that you can remember? You've always lived in this area, haven't you?

JG: Yes, 15 miles. Fifteen miles south from here to the school, central School.

SM: Do you like this part of the country?

JG: Well, I like it all right. I like it fine.

SM: Have you been up north ever?

JG: N...no.

SM: It's cold up there. You don't like that, I bet.

JG: I haven't been travelin' much--only in Delta, in Alabama.

SM: Down to the Delta--down to New Orleans and Alabama?

JG: Alabama. You know I haven't been no trip. That is, we jist vacationed from the school, you know, just sort of look around.

SM: Well, your community here is being built up quite a bit now, isn't it?
JG: Well yes, yes.

SM: You have a lot of nice new homes.

JG: I wanna talk about somethin' This land ... mebbe mistake. I don' know. Like I said, treaties ... this man, when come up here talkin' 'bout the school business here. That was Dr. McKinley.

SM: Recently?

JG: No, before this school establish.

SM: How long ago was that?

JG: That was 'bout '17.

SM: 1917?

JG: Yeah, 'long there. Not exactly, but some 'long there. And he told us, "This is you land. So treaty, you gonna get your land back. So we gonna start this way, 40 acres, and later you c'n git more," and they said we jist gonna work out ea...sy. So that's how come I base on 160 acres, see? So, and I'm gonna come down to Choctaw now. Just white people gonna hear this or not?

SM: Yes.

JG: Northern?

SM: Yes, up in St. Louis and other places, students mostly.

JG: Oh, (Choctaw phrase) I believe we're gonna ... now they talkin' 'bout land--ever'body talkin' 'bout get it back. Choctaws--we don't
try lookin' into good. More we're thinkin' background--that's why we didn't take off. So . . . this is people idea. People made a rule, a law . . . and sometime, a little bit go too fast for us. (Speaks in Choctaw) Each community, they supposed to tell their people in their community, "Speak up." We drive . . . (Speaks about a page of comment in Choctaw) Lotta time we hear somethin' wrong, wrong, wrong. (Speaks Choctaw again)

SM: Could you translate that for us now?

JG: I think the Choctaw people should git together and work together, so think comin' up, head up. We hear lotta things . . . so we might solve them. I don' know, but we c'n try. So, lot time I think 'bout it. Old people . . . they was about 100 years old--my great, great father--they was talk. He told me--he didn't know nothin' 'bout this school, but he said, "They gonna build you a school." And then, "People they gonna have a head . . . cross . . . and arm cross mark." Well, I didn't know what that mean, but later I found out. That was soldier clothes wear . . . cap, you know. Wear cap? That's what he talkin' 'bout.

SM: Oh, he was predicting that these things were going to happen?

JG: Yeah. I said, "Now, I see." And he said this: "People are goin' drive house that built on it, goin' down the road." He said, "No pullin', no pushin'." A car.

SM: Automobiles with a trailer. Was he sort of a prophet?

JG: Yeah. Well, he just old man. I don' know how he did know.

SM: You don't know how he knew, but he seemed to know.
JG: Yeah. Everything what he said. . . .

SM: Was he a religious man?

JG: No, wasn't no religious man them days.

SM: I see. You had shammans in the tribe, or religious people?

JG: No, no. Just old. Like community, they had a chief. Oldest one in a community go lotsa time to houses, all close, to move in, you know, sharecrop. So this old fella, they call the chief, is sort of a leader.

SM: Leader of all the people?

JG: Uh huh. In a community. That's one of them called community now. We say Pearl River Community now. Well, chief . . . well, 'course they just movin' out once in a while, see, and when they move, one move over there, well all want to move close together. So that always have the old folks, old man in there called "chief."

SM: And the chief was the leader, and sometimes he would prophesy what was to come?

JG: Yeah. They had to do an' thing that he wanted to do--that stick ball game, see, and they go out and trade, you know. And then, this old man we was talkin' 'bout, the car, I didn't know, but that was a car he talkin' 'bout, I learnt all right. Next he said, "Man goin' fly around, up in the air." I didn't know that, and he didn't know that, but that was air plane I figgered.

SM: Yes. He seemed to have these things in mind before they happened.
JG: And when I was 'bout eight years old, talked to that old man, and I laughin' at 'im. "If you live, you gon' see it." That's what he said. "If you live, you gon' see it. You gonna see the school too, if you live."

SM: And you saw it, didn't you?

JG: Yeah. And ... "How you know all 'bout this?" He said, "A star."

SM: A star told him?

JG: Um hm. Mebbe a religious somethin'. And, some old folks, them days, they're pretty good on weather signs.

SM: Could predict the weather too?

JG: Yeah. And one o' my grandpa is pretty good to predict the weather. He told me this ... that was little after Christmas mebbe 'bout this time. No, this is March, ain't it? About February. And that old man, he sit there ... night ... little bit warm, you know, outside on porch ... talk ... and he ask me, "How many acres you gonna plant cotton this time?" He ask me that. I tol' him 'bout 13 acres, mebbe same land. And he just sorta laughin' at me. He said, "You gonna lost crop if you do that." "Why?" He said, "It gonna be bad year this year. It gonna rain 'til July." And it did. "And cotton grow and grass gonna be right even with it." And it did. 'Til July.

SM: Somehow he knew.

JG: He was good on that. So I cut down. I went to my man, he want work the same land. "No, I won't come down." But I said it gonna be bad year. I said that, you know, to landlord. He said, "Who tell you?" I said, "Grampa told me." Well he believed him too, see.
SM: The landlord believed it all?

JG: Uh huh. Eight acres.

SM: Well then, you reduced the acreage to eight, and did you lose that?

JG: Yeah. No. Well, I didn't lose it, but still, cotton way up, grass right with it.

SM: It wasn't a good crop then. So he was right again, wasn't he?

JG: Yeah.

SM: You are one of the elders of the group now, aren't you? That's why they suggested I talk to you, because you remember more things than most people about the Choctaw people, going way back. We have just a few minutes on the tape, Jim. What else can you think of that you can add here before I have to turn it off? Any advice for young people? You've already told them to go to school.

JG: Yeah. Choctaw had a stick ball game and bettin'.

SM: Betting on the stick ball game?

JG: We talk about that. During the (Speaks Choctaw but did not translate)

SM: Jim, it's been very interesting talking to you. I wish we had more time. There are many things that you remember that we all should know, but we're running out of tape, so we'll have to say good bye for this time. Maybe we can see you again, and learn more from you, and from all the years that you have lived. Thank you very much, Jim Gardner, for helping us.