Ms. Williams Interview

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SC: [00:00:04:000] You’re a member of the Beaver Creek tribe?

MW: [00:00:04:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:00:04:000] Tell us a little bit about where you’re from.

MW: [00:00:04:000] Where I’m from?

SC: [00:00:04:000] Yeah.

MW: [00:00:12:000] Well I’m born and raised around—between Neeses and north Livingston. I was born off Livingston.

SC: [00:00:12:000] Livingston, okay. How far is Livingston from here?

MW: [00:00:25:000] Oh, pretty good piece.

SC: [00:00:34:000] So you grew up there. Tell us a little bit about growing up in this area. What was it like?

MW: [00:00:34:000] Well, it was rough. Had to work hard.

SC: [00:00:46:000] What’d you do?

MW: [00:00:46:000] Chopped, picked cotton, such as that and put up peanuts on poles.

SC: [00:00:46:000] You did what?

MW: [00:00:56:000] Put up peanuts—put them on a pole. And around—

SC: [00:00:56:000] Oh, okay. So peanuts and cotton.

MW: [00:01:06:000] Cotton seed, we put it in a bag and emptied it out on the street, at the end of the roads.

SC: [00:01:06:000] How old were you when you started?

MW: [00:01:06:000] I could pick 100 pounds when I was six years old.

SC: [00:01:20:000] Did you get paid by the pounds?

MW: [00:01:20:000] [*nods*].

SC: [00:01:20:000] 100 pounds, how much was that?

MW: [00:01:32:000] In those days, when I first got picking cotton, you pick 100 pounds, you get 50 cent.

SC: [00:01:32:000] How long would it take you to pick 100 pounds?

MW: [00:01:32:000] Beg your pardon?

SC: [00:01:32:000] How long did that take?

MW: [00:01:45:000] Well, you’d be there most of the day. But you had to stop and eat dinner and things like that. Had to go and get you some water.

SC: [00:01:56:000] 50 cents. 50 cents a day.

MW: [00:01:56:000] Yeah, well, that’s about what you made. That’s what you made. I did.

SC: [00:01:56:000] When you were six you started that. You were six years old.

MW: [00:01:56:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:02:11:000] And how long did you pick cotton? How old were you?

MW: [00:02:11:000] Oh mercy, I picked cotton for many years.

MW: [00:02:26:000] About forty years ago I started, working out of Pop’s mill in Springfield.

SC: [00:02:26:000] Springfield. So, did you go to school around here?

MW: [00:02:41:000] I went to school a little bit in Four Pines and I went a little bit in Neeses and Magnolia was a country school back over in town.

SC: [00:02:56:000] Four Pines was the Indian school?

MW: [00:02:56:000] Yeah, [inaudible].

SC: [00:02:56:000] When you went there, about how many students were there then?

MW: [00:03:06:000] Oh, I expect there was 100.

SC: [00:03:06:000] How many teachers?

MW: [00:03:06:000] Two.

SC: [00:03:06:000] Two?

MW: [00:03:06:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:03:06:000] Was there all the kids in one room or did they divide them up?

MW: [00:03:06:000] Two rooms.

SC: [00:03:17:000] Two rooms. Was that divided by age?

MW: [00:03:17:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:03:17:000] What’d you learn there? You remember?

MW: [00:03:17:000] Well, I learned a little bit [l*aughter*].

SC: [00:03:30:000] Is that the first school you went to?

MW: [00:03:30:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:03:30:000] And were the students there mostly from this area, Neeses?

MW: [00:03:30:000] Yeah, and that area in there.

SC: [00:03:48:000] Well, to go back to what you were talking about, the grave cemetery plots with the shells on them. Tell us a little bit about that if you’ve seen them.

MW: [00:03:48:000] Well, we don’t have none in our cemetery, but I’ve seen them in other cemeteries.

SC: [00:04:05:000] Just with the shells on the cement?

MW: [00:04:05:000] Somebody said cement but all I ever saw was just the dirt.

SC: [00:04:05:000] Just right on the ground?

CJ: [00:04:17:000] Just circling the grave itself?

MW: [00:04:17:000] [*nods*]

CJ: [00:04:17:000] You think that’s an Indian tradition?

MW: [00:04:17:000] I think so.

SC: [00:04:17:000] When you say not ours do you mean Beaver Creek or do you mean a specific church?

MW: [00:04:31:000] Uh, I went to Mt. Beulah – I was born and raised in Mt. Beulah church. Mt. Beulah Pentecostal Holiness church on (highway) 389.

SC: [00:04:31:000] And that’s not something they do there?

SC: [00:04:46:000] Where do they get the seashells?

MW: [00:04:46:000] Get those seashells? Down on the beach.

SC: [00:04:46:000] Oh, the beach, river.

MW: [00:04:46:000] Though I have got a few on the beach myself.

CJ: [00:05:02:000] The spiral ones, the spiral are conchs or whelks right? More of a spiral than a flat?

MW: [00:05:02:000] Yeah, yeah I believe so.

SC: [00:05:13:000] So tell us a little more about growing up. You worked and you worked a lot and you worked hard.

MW: [00:05:13:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:05:13:000] There were some times when you didn’t work?

MW: [00:05:13:000] Beg you?

SC: [00:05:13:000] You had some free time, though? What’d you do in your free time?

MW: [00:05:30:000] I had a playhouse and played in it some.

SC: [00:05:30:000] You did what?

MW: [00:05:30:000] I had a play house and played in it some.

SC: [00:05:30:000] Oh okay. What else?

MW: [00:05:45:000] I cleaned the yards.

SC: [00:05:45:000] You were talking about fishing and hunting and that sort of thing.

MW: [00:05:45:000] Yeah, I fished. I fished.

SC: [00:05:45:000] Did you fish with a rod or cane?

MW: [00:06:01:000] Cane.

SC: [00:06:01:000] Cane. Cane pole. What’d you catch?

MW: [00:06:01:000] I caught me a big old bass one time [*spreads her arms to show the size of the fish*].

SC: [00:06:01:000] Really? With a cane pole?

MW: [00:06:02:000] That was at a pond now. The man give me permission to fish in that pond.

SC: [00:06:02:000] What’d you use for bait?

MW: [00:06:20:000] Worms. Big worms.

SC: [00:06:20:000] I didn’t think a bass would bite something unless—did you move it or just drop it in the water and it went after it?

MW: [00:06:20:000] Drop it in the water and that bass had it!

SC: [00:06:36:000] How much did it weigh?

MW: [00:06:36:000] I think it said three pounds and something.

SC: [00:06:36:000] Oh, that’s a good size. What’d you do with it?

MW: [00:06:46:000] They cooked it and eat ‘em while I was in bed.

SC: [00:06:46:000] You didn’t get any of it?

MW: [00:06:46:000] I don’t believe I got a bit of it.

SC: [00:06:46:000] Who cooked it?

MW: [00:06:46:000] My momma and daddy.

SC: [00:06:46:000] Your momma and daddy cooked it.

MW: [00:07:00:000] Well, I’m gonna tell you, used to be some of my momma’s brothers would come to our house to play cards. They done eat that fish.

SC: [00:07:21:000] So your momma’s brothers helped themselves?

MW: [00:07:21:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:07:21:000] That’s a shame. That’s a shame.

CJ: [00:07:21:000] So they didn’t lose the fish in the card game. They ate it.

MW: [00:07:34:000] Yeah, that’s why they had it.

CJ: [00:07:34:000] Gotcha.

SC: [00:07:34:000] How do you cook a bass like that?

MW: [00:07:34:000] Just like you do any other kind of fish.

SC: [00:07:34:000] Fry it?

MW: [00:07:34:000] Yeah, yeah. In a pan of grease [*chuckling*].

SC: [00:07:50:000] So what’d you eat growing up? What’d you usually have?

MW: [00:07:50:000] Oh lord have mercy. Oh well, it was rough now. I’ll admit it was.

MW: [00:08:03:000] See, I’m 90 years old. I turned 90 years old the third day of July.

Everybody: [00:08:03:000] Congratulations. Happy birthday.

SC: [00:08:15:000] So you came up in hard times?

MW: [00:08:15:000] Yes I did. Yes I did. Now my daddy could make syrup out of cane juice.

MW: [00:08:26:000] And they would give him so much syrup, so we had some syrup then. Eat syrup and bread. We put fatback grease on it.

SC: [00:08:41:000] So white bread or corn bread or—?

MW: [00:08:41:000] White bread.

SC: [00:08:41:000] White bread. So where’d he get the cane syrup?

MW: [00:08:51:000] People would grow cane and get my daddy to make them syrup.

SC: [00:08:51:000] Oh, make it for them?

MW: [00:08:51:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:08:51:000] How’d he make it?

MW: [00:09:00:000] He had a big old family and you’d have a place to operate that stuff. People had syrup mills around.

CJ: [00:09:12:000] They’d cook it outside?

MW: [00:09:12:000] Um-hm. Um-hm.

SC: [00:09:12:000] It would be pressed or strained or something?

MW: [00:09:20:000] Yes sir, yes sir. Everybody had a mule [inaudible] but when I’m coming along there was a mule that pulled that uh— [makes circular gestures with hands].

CJ: [00:09:32:000] Pull around in a circle.

MW: [00:09:32:000] Yeah, go around in a circle to get that juice out of that cane.

CJ: [00:09:40:000] Okay. Now we were talking to Mr. Chavis about all of—he and his brothers sisters being born at home and the doctors would come to visit.

MW: [00:09:40:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:09:52:000] So when you were growing up, if somebody got sick would the doctor come to the house?

MW: [00:09:52:000] Yes, they was. Doctor out of the North named Dr. James A. Ford.

MW: [00:10:03:000] He come down to the house several times. And Doctor Connor would come down.

SC: [00:10:03:000] How big was your family?

MW: [00:10:15:000] There was five of us children.

SC: [00:10:15:000] Five children. So was there any time when you got sick that you’d go to the doctor? Or was there home remedies? Things like that?

MW: [00:10:26:000] Well, I’ll tell you. I never went to the doctor much. He come down some.

SC: [00:10:26:000] If you got something small like a bee sting—?

MW: [00:10:39:000] No, we didn’t go to the doctor for that. We’d do something at the house.

SC: [00:10:39:000] Remember what you had?

MW: [00:10:49:000] No, I don’t remember now. That was a good many year ago.

SC: [00:10:49:000] Oh yeah.

MW: [00:10:49:000] [*laughing*]. I forget. I forget now.

CJ: [00:11:02:000] Ms. Williams, did you always know you were an Indian?

MW: [00:11:02:000] No, I certainly didn’t.

CJ: [00:11:02:000] When did you find out?

MW: [00:11:02:000] Ain’t been too many year ago.

CJ: [00:11:02:000] How’d you find out?

MW: [00:11:15:000] With this ordeal here, I think.

CJ: [00:11:15:000] Sorry, what was that?

MW: [00:11:15:000] Messing with this ordeal here.

CJ: [00:11:15:000] Oh, messing with this ordeal here [l*aughing*]. She’s waving her hand at Louie’s office if anybody wants to know.

SC: [00:11:32:000] Louie’s office. So they told you you were Indian? What do you think about that? I mean, you grew up not knowing you were Indian.

MW: [00:11:50:000] That’s right.

SC: [00:11:50:000] But you went to the Indian school.

MW: [00:11:50:000] Well, there was other people there that was not Indian, in that school.

SC: [00:12:03:000] And so when you recently found out—

MW: [00:12:03:000] I didn’t know about it when I was going to school.

SC: [00:12:03:000] But now, a few years ago.

MW: [00:12:03:000] Yeah, yeah.

SC: [00:12:03:000] So what do you think about that? Is that important to you?

MW: [00:12:19:000] Whatever the Lord made me.

SC: [00:12:19:000] Yeah. What about for your family? Have children?

MW: [00:12:19:000] [*shakes head*] I’ve never been married.

SC: [00:12:33:000] Smart move [*laughter*].

CJ: [00:12:33:000] It’s just less complicated.

SC: [00:12:33:000] Well that’s what I meant. Okay, you’ve never been married.

CJ: [00:12:47:000] You said your father worked in a mill in Springfield.

MW: [00:12:47:000] No, not my father, but me.

CJ: [00:12:47:000] Oh you did. What kind of mill was it?

MW: [00:12:47:000] Meat boxes.

CJ: [00:12:47:000] Meat boxes?

MW: [00:12:47:000] Yeah. Yeah, to ship things in.

[Older woman off-camera]: [00:12:47:000] Crates and boxes [inaudible].

CJ: [00:13:02:000] Makes crates, okay. What was your job there?

MW: [00:13:02:000] I was a cleat layer and one of the best to have, in fact!

[Older woman off-camera]: [00:13:15:000] Cleat layer, you know what a cleat is?

SC: [00:13:15:000] Yeah, what is that?

[Older woman off-camera]: [00:13:15:000] [inaudible]

CJ: [00:13:23:000] So you used the wires that held the box together? That was your job?

MW: [00:13:23:000] I put them wooden sticks in there.

[Older woman off-camera]: [00:13:23:000] [inaudible]

CJ: [00:13:38:000] How long did you work there?

MW: [00:13:38:000] Seventeen, eighteen years.

CJ: [00:13:38:000] Okay.

SC: [00:13:38:000] There a lot of folks from this area that worked there?

MW: [00:13:38:000] [*Nods*].

SC: [00:13:50:000] When you were working there were there already folks from around here working there or were you one of the first to work?

MW: [00:13:50:000] No, they were there.

SC: [00:13:50:000] They’d been working there. You know when they started this mill?

MW: [00:13:50:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:14:02:000] Round about? When did they start the mill?

MW: [00:14:11:000] I’d say about forty years ago.

CJ: [00:14:11:000] So they would mill the wood there? Bring in the logs and mill them there or was the lumber all brought there?

MW: [00:14:20:000] They cut the logs and then brought them down there [*inaudible*].

CJ: [00:14:38:000] What else would you like to tell us about late in life learning that you’re Indian? What does that mean?

MW: [00:14:50:000] I didn’t know my nationality until a lot of years. Well [*inaudible*].

SC: [00:15:08:000] So, it wasn’t until later in life that you knew you were Beaver Creek.

MW: [00:15:08:000] Real, real late.

SC: [00:15:08:000] Very late. Recently.

MW: [00:15:08:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:15:20:000] But your mother and father, you think they were Indian?

MW: [00:15:20:000] No, my daddy wasn’t.

SC: [00:15:20:000] Your daddy wasn’t. But your momma was?

MW: [00:15:20:000] [*nods yes*].

SC: [00:15:28:000] Did she ever talk about that? Mention it?

MW: [00:15:28:000] [*nods no*].

SC: [00:15:28:000] That’s something you just know from remembering what she looked like.

MW: [00:15:28:000] [*nods yes*].

SC: [00:15:28:000] Where was your daddy from?

MW: [00:15:28:000] Oh, around, about. Not far.

MW: [00:15:43:000] They were kin. You know, everybody knows everybody.

SC: [00:15:43:000] Very funny. What about your brothers—you had brothers and sisters? Five of them?

MW: [00:15:43:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:16:01:000] Did they—have any of them known they were Indian?

MW: [00:16:01:000] No, no, I don’t think so.

SC: [00:16:01:000] Are they still with us?

MW: [00:16:01:000] [*nods no*]

SC: [00:16:14:000] You’re the last of the family?

MW: [00:16:14:000] [*nods yes*]

SC: [00:16:25:000] Well thanks for staying and very much for helping us.

MW: [00:16:25:000] I’m sorry I couldn’t do no better.

SC: [00:16:32:000] Oh, you did just fine. Oh let me ask you. I always ask this question. You said you picked cotton, or maybe picked cotton.

SC: [00:16:45:000] Did you have a farm in your family?

MW: [00:16:45:000] Yeah, we farmed.

SC: [00:16:45:000] Did you grow vegetables?

MW: [00:16:45:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:16:45:000] Okay, did you grow potatoes or sweet potatoes?

MW: [00:16:45:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:16:54:000] Alright. When you—did you ever bank potatoes?

MW: [00:16:54:000] Yes.

SC: [00:16:54:000] Okay, explain that to me. Tell me about that.

MW: [00:17:02:000] Well, we had plowed the potatoes and we tried to get them in the ground, in the banks we made for them, before the frost get the potatoes.

SC: [00:17:18:000] Oh, okay.

MW: [00:17:18:000] We put them in banks and well, we ate in the winter.

SC: [00:17:18:000] And the bank, did you dig out—you dug out a hole?

MW: [00:17:31:000] Um-hm. And we had to put like this [*makes pyramid with hands*] and put that dirt on them.

SC: [00:17:31:000] Did you put anything in there with them?

MW: [00:17:31:000] Um, straw.

SC: [00:17:31:000] Pine straw?

MW: [00:17:31:000] Pine straw.

SC: [00:17:43:000] Then you put them on top of the pine straw and then you bury them.

MW: [00:17:43:000] No, we didn’t bury them.

SC: [00:17:43:000] You just leave them in the hole.

MW: [00:17:43:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:17:52:000] And why do they keep? Why don’t they rot? Or why don’t they grow?

MW: [00:17:52:000] [*laughing*] I don’t know but they didn’t.

CJ: [00:18:02:000] What did you build over it? Was it like a cover?

MW: [00:18:02:000] Um-hm.

CJ: [00:18:02:000] Was that made of wood?

MW: [00:18:02:000] No. Dirt. Wood to start with and then put dirt on that wood.

SC: [00:18:02:000] Ah.

CJ: [00:18:22:000] So it’s kind of sealed off from the outside moisture. They stay kind of dry and warm. It kind of keeps—

SC: [00:18:35:000] And then in the winter you just go out and get what you need.

MW: [00:18:35:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:18:35:000] Did you keep anything else like that?

MW: [00:18:35:000] Unh-uh.

SC: [00:18:35:000] No, just potatoes.

MW: [00:18:35:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:18:35:000] What about hogs?

MW: [00:18:48:000] Yeah, had hogs. Had cows.

SC: [00:18:48:000] Did you ever cure, soft cure the hogs?

MW: [00:18:48:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:18:48:000] So, your family did that?

MW: [00:19:00:000] Um-hm. When I was a kid; a small kid, five or six years old.

SC: [00:19:00:000] So, they slaughtered, they killed the hog.

MW: [00:19:00:000] Yep.

SC: [00:19:13:000] And then—would they make country ham? Make ham out of the—

MW: [00:19:13:000] Yeah.

SC: [00:19:13:000] Okay, what’d they do with the rest of it?

MW: [00:19:13:000] We’d eat it.

SC: [00:19:13:000] Yeah, you’d eat it right then or would you make—?

MW: [00:19:25:000] No, we kept it a while.

SC: [00:19:25:000] Yeah, you make sausage?

MW: [00:19:25:000] Yep, yep, liver pudding.

SC: [00:19:25:000] Oh, okay. Is that a Neeses liver pudding? Or is that Neeses—

SC: [00:19:47:000] So, did you make the piggy hash?

MW: [00:19:47:000] I don’t know what we did. I can’t think right now.

SC: [00:19:47:000] You eat a lot of rice up this way.

MW: [00:19:47:000] Um-hm.

SC: [00:20:02:000] Down toward the coast you get the barbeque hash rice and they’ll make it with the ears and snouts, whatever you could find?

MW: [00:20:02:000] Yeah, like we used to.

SC: [00:20:12:000] Put everything in a big pot.

SC: [00:20:12:000] [to CJ] Any other food related questions?

SC: [00:20:24:000] Since we’re talking about food, do you know any folks around here—and I’m sure they’ve passed on—but any folks around here who made their own liquor?

MW: [00:20:24:000] Yes, they did [laughing].

CJ: [00:20:40:000] Let the record reflect the smile.

MW: [00:20:40:000] No.

SC: [00:20:40:000] So, you make it with corn or did they make it—?

MW: [00:20:52:000] I’ll tell you what a man done. We got what we call a family cemetery. It’s called the Chavis Cemetery in the Cedar Creek Cemetery.

MW: [00:21:03:000] It’s not far from Mt. Beulah Pentecostal Holiness Church. Some of the neighbors round there, it’s said, made liquor. Now I saw where some wood had been burned.

MW: [00:21:15:000] Pieces like that [*gestures*]. People come rushing and told me what they done. Made liquor in that cemetery.

CJ: [00:21:15:000] Back in that cemetery? Wow.

SC: [00:21:29:000] Well did the police give them, remember if the police gave them any trouble?

MW: [00:21:38:000] I don’t know. See, I don’t live down in there anymore. See, I live a long walk east of there now.

CJ: [00:21:38:000] Most people probably wouldn’t go into a graveyard at night, right?

MW: [00:21:49:000] That’s right.

SC: [00:21:49:000] Yeah, it’d be easy to scare them away.

SC: [00:21:55.000] [SC talking quietly off-camera]

SC: [00:22:02:000] Alright, well thank you very much for talking with us.

MW: [00:22:02:000] What little bit I know to tell.

SC: [00:22:02:000] I appreciate it. And congratulations again on your recent birthday.

MW: [00:22:02:000] Thank you.