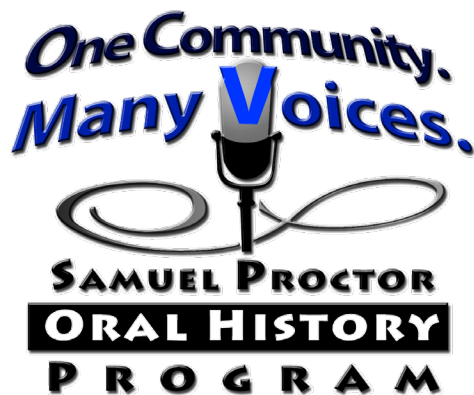


# **Ricardo Harris Cookson**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-148**

**Interview by:**

**Frances Canty Wade  
August 26, 1977**



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**CAT 148 Ricardo Harris Cookson**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**Interviewed by Edith Frances Canty Wade on August 26, 1977**  
**23 minutes | 13 pages**

**Abstract:** Ricardo Harris Cookson is a recently graduated student from York Tech. He studied to be a technical draftsman for twelve months and hopes to work as one. He lived in Catawba during his time at York Tech and is originally from Missouri. He is married with a six-month old daughter. Ricardo worked as a missionary for his church and spent time with Tribes out west in Arizona and New Mexico. He describes the Tribes as being very loving and welcoming, more so than any other communities he's lived in. He is very proud of his heritage and believes that the Tribes in the United States deserve freedom just as the Constitution intended.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Education; Indian reservations]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
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CAT 148

Interviewee: Ricardo Harris Cookson

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: August 26, 1977

W: This is Frances Wade. I'm gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today is August 26, 1977, and I am talking with Ricardo Cookson. Ricardo, you don't mind if I call you Ricky, do you?

C: No.

W: All right. And the tape I'm about to do, you don't have any objections to the University of Florida taking it and using it in any way, do you?

C: No, I don't.

W: All right. Ricky, would you tell me your full name?

C: Ricardo Harris Cookson.

W: And what is your permanent address?

C: 3173 Ridgeview Drive, St. Charles, Missouri.

W: When were you born, Ricky?

C: 1962, October 7.

W: All right, let me let you describe yourself just a tiny bit. I'll ask you the—how tall are you?

C: Five foot eight.

W: And you have dark brown curly hair, and you have a moustache.

C: Yes.

W: You look Indian, but you don't look too Indian. And how old are you, Ricky?

C: I will be twenty-five in October.

W: That means you were born—?

C: October 7, 1952.

W: Ricky, you are married?

C: Yes, I am.

W: Who did you marry?

C: Brenda Campbell.

W: Brenda is not an Indian?

C: No, she's not. Not in really any sense. She's got a little Cherokee in her.

W: Does she have any other blood that you know of besides just Indian? Is she German or anything or do you know?

C: I think she's Irish.

W: Okay. When is her birthday?

C: August 27, 1957.

W: And you have—do you have any children?

C: One.

W: What is it, a boy or a girl?

C: It's a little girl. Her birthday is March 3, 1977. She is six months old now.

W: And who are your parents?

C: Howard Herbert Cookson and Jewel Shirley Harris.

W: Are either one of these parents Catawbas?

C: My mother.

W: All right. Would you give me your parents birthdates so that we can connect up families as we go along doing these tapes?

C: For my mother it's August 24, 1928, and for my father it's September 13, 1931.

W: How many brothers and sisters do you have, Ricky?

C: I have six sisters and one brother.

W: Could you give me their birthdates and their names? You might start with your eldest and come down.

C: Shirley Lynn Kline. Her birthday is June 4, 1950. Then Beverly Ann Joiner. She was born August 30, 1951, then myself, then Denise Renee—I'll just call her Cookson—Denise Renee Cookson was born on May 22, 1955. Lisa Christine Cookson was born September 21, 1956, and Robin Jolene Cookson was born February 5, 1958, and Victoria Yvonne Cookson was born July 4, 1960, and Christian Darryl Cookson was born June 5, 1969.

W: All right. What kinds of work does your parents do?

C: My mother is a housewife, and my father is a truck driver.

W: He's in business for himself is he not?

C: Yes, he is. He owns his own truck and does most of the traveling for himself.

W: Now would you tell me who your grandparents are? First, we'll take your mother's side.

C: Benjamin Joseph Harris was my grandfather and ... I'm not sure the name of her. Bessie?

W: Bessie.

C: Bessie. Bessie Harris was my grandmother.

W: Benjamin was a Catawba?

C: Yes, he was.

W: And your grandmother was not. She was White?

C: Yes.

W: All right. Let's take your father's side.

C: George Allen Cookson was my grandfather and Lorena Barbara Cookson was my grandmother.

W: Ricky, what schools did you attend? Let me ask you first, were you born in Missouri?

C: No, I was born in Rock Hill.

W: How long did you live here in Rock Hill?

C: About six months.

W: And so actually you were a baby when you moved away?

C: Yes, I was.

W: So, would you tell me the schools you attended?

C: Let's see, the first grade school I went to was Pittsman and then I went to Penman Grade School. Then Elizabeth Morris Grade School and then I went to North Junior High School in Collinsville, Illinois, and then Collinsville High School in Collinsville, Illinois, and York Tech in Rock Hill.

W: All right, we're going to talk about York Tech in just a minute. Of all the subjects you've taken, which subjects did you like best?

C: In high school, I liked English the best. It was my favorite subject.

W: Which was your least favorite subject?

C: Math.

W: [Laughter] That seems to be the problem with many of us. You just mentioned you went to York Tech. Would you tell me what you're doing way back down here in Rock Hill going to York Tech? Would you just then start from the beginning as

to when you became interested in going to Tech and why you were interested, and just take it on through until last week when you graduated.

C: The reason I came to Tech is because I understood it was a very good school and that they had opportunities for the Indians of the Catawba Tribe to go to school and get their tuition to be taken care of. And I went through Tech and took the technical drafting program and I enjoyed it very much. I was in the top ten percent of my class in the drafting alone and I enjoyed it. I'm pretty sure that it helped me in my future, and I graduated on August 19, 1977. I really enjoyed the school.

W: How many months of schooling did you get, Ricky?

C: I took a full year, twelve months of it.

W: Do you think that it was worth your while to stay away from your home for a year to come and take this course?

C: Yes, I do. I believe it'll help me get a good job for my future and for my family.

W: What do you know about the Catawbas even though you are a Catawba yourself? What did you actually know about the Catawbas before you came down here?

C: I just knew that they were an Indian Tribe and that they were a small Tribe and that they had broken their reservation ties with the government in 1957 or [19]58. I knew about Sam Blue, who was one of the best-known Chiefs of the Tribe.

W: Did you know about any of the individuals down here? Did you know any people down here?

C: I knew Isabelle George and Frances Wade and a few others. I can't remember all their names.

W: While you were growing up—I know your mother really well—did she ever tell you children about the Catawbas or anything about what it was like when she lived down here?

C: She told us about how she went to school, and she had to walk all the time and how they lived in the houses and didn't have running water and electricity. And she told me she wouldn't trade her childhood for anything.

W: You've been down here now for a year, and you've got your van in the front yard ready to go back to, did you say Missouri?

C: Yes, I did.

W: And you'll be leaving in the morning, and you spent one year with the Catawbas, even though you are a Catawba yourself, you spent this year with groups of people. What did you find the Catawba people were like?

C: They were kind, and they were open, and they love their own and they really take to other people.

W: They really love their own. I like the way you said that because this is true, isn't it?

C: Yes, it is. It's very true.

W: I mean, if you seem to communicate with other people once they know you're Indian and you're one of them, you get special treatment almost.

C: Oh, yes. I got special treatment since I've been here.

W: Do you find that there's much selfishness down here among us?



C: No, I don't. I understand the Indians are very open and very considerate to each other.

W: Do you think we're jealous very much of each other?

C: I couldn't say anything about that because I really don't know.

W: You just maybe haven't been around enough to really—this is the type of thing that I'm very interested in knowing, I know what I think, but I'm interested in knowing what many other people think. What church do you belong to, Ricky?

C: I belong to the Mormon Church, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

W: Are your parents members of the same church?

C: Yes, they are.

W: And your wife also?

C: Yes.

W: Now, I know that you served on a mission for the church. Would you tell about where you served and anything that you want to pertaining to your mission?

C: Well, I served in the southwest with the Hopis, the Navajos, and Apache Indians of Arizona, New Mexico. And the Indians out there are the same anywhere. They're loving people. They have an extra sense about them. They can tell when something's wrong and when you're in a really good mood. The Indians out there treated me like I was a long-lost brother, and they knew that I was Indian. They were, like I said, considerate and they did take to the gospel sometimes, and most of them when they did take it, stuck to it all their lives. And they are very true and loving people, and they love their heavenly father.

W: Did you have to learn any Indian language in order to teach those people?

C: I didn't, but I should've. I would've liked to learn how to speak Navajo, but I didn't get sent to the Navajos mainly. I got sent to the other Tribes.

W: You are a nice looking, strapping young man. Do you take to sports?

C: Basketball is my favorite and I play it as often as I can.

W: That's good. What about hunting and fishing? Are you active in any of those?

C: I like fishing, but I've very seldom gone hunting. I've got to try it someday. When I do I hope it's something that my wife will let me do. [Laughter]

W: Now, we want to talk just a tiny bit about politics. I've heard many people say that Indians are not interested in what goes on in politics and I found here on the reservation especially, that many people that I've interviewed, especially old people, they have never voted. When I ask if they want to vote, they say no, and I ask the reason why and they said it's because when they were young, they were not allowed to vote and so now they don't want to vote. What do you think about politics? Do you vote?

C: I haven't voted yet, but I do want to vote. It's just I've never been able to be registered at the right time, and I'm very interested in politics. I want to find out, make sure this country is running in a good, orderly fashion like it should be. Like the Constitution has it set up to be.

W: And so, you are interested in what the government is doing?

C: Yes, I am.

W: And you do intend to vote?

C: Oh, yes. I very much intend to vote.

W: Well, I think that it will be a good idea. Many of our young people really get signed up to vote because, like I say, our older people, they are not interested in voting. They say it don't make any difference anymore and it really does. But I guess after being denied the right to vote for such a long time, it doesn't make a difference to them. What are your thoughts, Ricky, on the drug problem?

C: I feel that the drug problem doesn't have any effect on my life, but I feel that drugs should be run in—the people that use drugs should be run in by the law, especially those that are illegal drugs like marijuana and LSD and those, the illegal drugs. I believe there should be strict laws on them. If we don't have laws on them, the country is gonna go down the tubes and we're not going to have anything worth showing for.

W: And how important do you think families are today? When I say families, I mean families with both parents.

C: I believe that we should have families in this country. It's the American way just to be a family because it's the backbone of America, the family. Without families there's no ties that you can relate to.

W: All right. How do you think the Indians compare with other people? Now, you have lived among other people other than Indians all your life. How do we compare?

C: Well, to most people you compare very good, because they, the Indians, most people that I know are very friendly. They show their affection openly most of them that I know. But living in the society that I have lived in, you find cold shoulders and people that're just not interested and not wanting to get involved

with others. But the Indians, they want to get involved with their friends and with their relatives and let them know that they really care.

W: I don't know if your mother knows how to make pottery or not.

C: No, she doesn't. She never did learn how, but I believe she'd like to learn someday.

W: Well, let me ask you this. What about you? Do you think that it's a good idea for us to keep the art of pottery-making alive or should we just let it go?

C: I think if we kept our pottery, the Catawbias would be well-known across the country again and that they would be—people would want to get the Catawba pottery because it is some of the best that I have seen in the country.

W: All right. Now, let's get down to today. Let's talk about this settlement that we are so interested in and everybody else is interested in. Now, I know that you are like me. You don't know everything that goes on about the settlement that we're seeking. But from what you do know, do you think we have a legitimate claim?

C: I think we do. If what is said by our Tribe is true, then we do have a legitimate claim because the treaty was broken when we sold the land and our lawyers held it for us, I guess, back in the fifties. We do have a legitimate claim that—I believe if we had the backing of the government that we would be a strong Tribe again. The people would want to be together, and we would want the things that are helpful for the Tribe.

W: If you had the opportunity to take—if you knew that we were going to get a settlement, and I'm sure we are, but if you had the opportunity to take your choice such as land, or programs, or money, which would you take?

C: I'm really not sure. I have often wanted money, but I've often thought that the Indian Tribes need these programs and the money for sustaining other Tribes for itself instead of letting the individuals have it. But I would think that if there was enough money that it could be divided up after everything that they wanted to do was taken care of, if there was money left over the Indians should be able to use part of it the way they want to.

W: Do you think that we should continue to have a reservation, or do you think we shouldn't?

C: I think that the Indians that are here should have the reservation and that they should be recognized as a reservation and that the Indians that are off the reservation should be able to come back and live on the land if they want, if they have the choice to.

W: Well, they have that privilege now. Just take you for instance. If you today decided not to go back home and you wanted to move on that reservation, you could do that immediately if you had a trailer or if you wanted to build a house. That would be your privilege. If you had the opportunity to live on the reservation and to get a good job, would you consider moving back on it?

C: If the Tribe would help me find a job that I am trained for, yes, I would consider moving back.

W: Well, I think that you would be a great asset. I have the feeling that in time to come, it's people like you who have taken the time to go on and get more education that will be called upon to run the programs when we get them. And I'm sure—I feel sure that the federal government will not just hand over us

money, because they found that that doesn't always work. What kind of work are you going to do when you return home, Ricky?

C: I plan on having a job as a draftsman, either at McDonald-Douglas Aircraft Corporation or wherever it is possible that I can get a job. I've been trained for a job for when I get back. I should have one within a couple of weeks after I do get back.

W: All right. If you would sum up what it means to you to be a Catawba?

C: It means to me that I should be a proud person and I should let my heritage be shown out and let people know what I am and what I stand for. Not just only that I am Indian, but that I am a true American and that my country is what God wants it to be. A free country. And I want to stand up for that country. Just as the Indians should.

W: If you were head—if you were Chief of the Catawba Tribe, what is one thing that you would do to change things right at present?

C: Well, right at present I'd change it to where the Indians would have a chance to really go and really further their education when they got out of high school. And let them really further their education, be able to let them have the money that they need for their education. I would like to see a change in that. Where they would be able to get low-cost loans and be able to repay them after they got out of school. The Indians really do need that.

W: I think that that might be one of the things that we are asking for. Maybe in the final settlement, because I too feel that education is the key. We have so many

people who don't have even high school educations. Do you think that we have good men representing us today as far as the Tribe is concerned?

C: Yes, I do. I believe we have a good Chief, and his council are right there behind him and helping him in any way that he needs it.

W: Well, Ricky, I really appreciate you allowing me to do this tape on you today, and many years from now you might come back to Catawba and be able to go into, hopefully, a library that we will have on the reservation and hear yourself.

[End of interview]

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