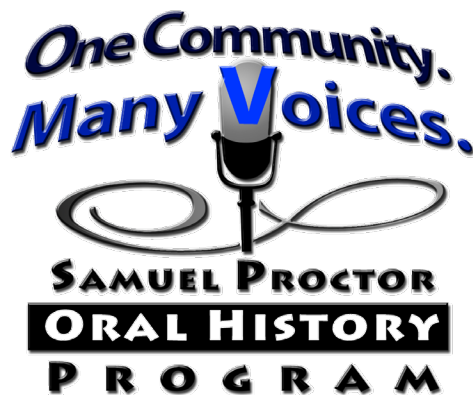


Ernest Gary Wade Jr.

Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-091

Interview by:

**Edith Frances Canty Wade
April 1, 1974**



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15 minutes | 10 pages**

Abstract: Gary Wade, a Catawba man who now lives in Florida, speaks about his parents and siblings and their jobs. He fondly remembers his childhood home and discusses his parents' attitudes about going to church and his experiences at the local Mormon church when he was younger. Wade describes going to school and facing bullying for being Catawba until he started to excel as an athlete in high school. He shares some of his experiences serving on a salvage boat with the United States Navy during the Vietnam War and speaks about how his work in the Navy helped him become a charter boat captain after being discharged. Wade mentions his wife and daughter and says he does not believe his daughter will be treated as he was in school because integration for American Indians has been happening for a while. He concludes the interview by saying that he has done many things in his life that other people would like to do and that he is proud of being Catawba. The interviewer briefly discusses Wade's love for hunting and fishing at the end of the recording.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Gary Wade Sr.; Florida--Lantana; Racism; Oral biography]

ORAL HISTORY
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CAT 091

Interviewee: Ernest Gary Wade Jr.

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: April 1, 1974

FW: This is Frances Wade. I live on Route 3, Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I am gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today is April 1, 1974. Today I'm talking with Gary Wade Jr. Gary, what is your address?

GW: I live at 910 West Blue Street, Lantana, Florida.

FW: I am going to describe Gary. He's a typical Indian: dark skin, dark brown eyes, dark hair, six-foot-three and he weighs two hundred and five pounds. Gary, when were you born?

GW: November 21, 1944.

FW: Who are your parents?

GW: Mr. Horace Gary Wade Sr., and Frances Canty Wade.

FW: What brothers and sisters do you have?

GW: I have an older sister, Sherry Geraldine Wade—well, Sherry Osborne now—and Michael Greg Wade.

FW: What work does your father do?

GW: My father has two jobs. His primary job is a cabinet maker, but he works at a textile mill on the third shift at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company.

FW: What work does your mother do?

GW: Well, my mother has two duties, too. Other than being a housewife, she's the seminary teacher here in Catawba ward.

FW: What do you remember about Christmastime?

GW: I guess the tree, how it was lit up, and the way we had to decorate it, and the presents we'd unwrap on Christmas morning. We'd have to fight over whose presents was whose and what we had in our stockings hanging from the mantelpiece over the fireplace.

FW: What childhood duties did you have to perform?

GW: Well, really, I don't consider 'em childhood duties. [Laughter] I had to cut wood, carry water from the spring to drink, to cook with, and to bathe with and to wash our clothes with. We had to cut grass around the house. Pick up all the cans and stuff that we'd throwed around and drink bottles that we had scattered all over the yard.

FW: What memories do you have of your early home life?

GW: Well, they were real good memories. We had an old house. I could lay in bed at night and count the stars. And every time it rained, I'd have to move my bed three or four times. It wasn't much, but it's what we called home. Sometimes I just wish we could be back and be happy like we were then.

FW: Did you go to church, Gary, when you were young?

GW: Yes, I did. There was a lot of times that my younger brother and myself, we didn't want to go. My father, he said we didn't have to go. My mother said we did. She said, "Your father won't take you, so I guess I'll have to take you." It was true, our father didn't take us. In fact, he didn't start himself until we were almost grown.

FW: Gary, where did you go to church?

GW: I went to church down here on the reservation. It was an old church over the road or over the hill. I can't think of the name of it. I can remember the building

distinctly and the high-pitched roof it had on it. Out in the front it had a big bell tower and from the bell tower hung down this rope. Every time it was time for us to go to church you could hear the bell ringing and we'd just start walking across the hill to church.

FW: And then when any Indian died that bell rang also. Gary, have you always belonged to the same church?

GW: Yes, I have.

FW: What church do you belong to?

GW: I belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

FW: How old were you when you started to school?

GW: I was seven. My birthday's in November, so I had to start a year later than the other kids.

FW: Would you just go ahead and tell all about the schools you went to and the things that you done?

GW: Well, first off, I started going to a school here on the reservation. It was called Catawba Elementary School and it had grades one through eight. When I got there, we had two big classrooms, and in each classroom we only had one teacher in each room. Well, she had two or three different grades of children to teach, and she would start one doing one thing and one doing the other. That's the way it went the whole time. I graduate—well, I didn't graduate, but they had only four grades that you could go to when I was going there. And I had two teachers. I had Sarah Robinson and **Faye Cornwall**. But I left there and went to a school called Lesslie. Well, I wasn't well liked at any of the schools even while I

was in elementary school. So, I left there as a football player. I had started playing in elementary ball.

FW: Why were you not liked at those schools?

GW: Well, the reason I wasn't liked, I guess, was because everyone called me Black.

They said, "We don't want a Black Indian going to school with us. We're White people. We're better than you are." I look at it this way: I'm proud to be what I

am, that I am an American Indian. I guess it was instilled in me that nobody was any better than I am, but that I'm no better than anybody else either. I started

playing football when I was in Lesslie and played in—well, I wasn't great, I was fair. Then I went from Lesslie to a school called Central. Well, I went to Central.

That's where I had my eighth grade at, and from Central I went to a place called

Sullivan Junior High where I started my first year in high school. There I played football and things began to change. People started liking me because I was

doing real well on the football field. They did not call me as Black or this or that anymore. They said, "Hey, Gary, look at this big Indian. That boy sure can play

football." Well, it was the pride that I had in myself, and I had been pushed

around and degraded so much that anytime anybody was on the football field

and he told me he was better than I was, I didn't say I was better than he was,

but I just went out and I proved to them that what they could do, I could do just as

good or better. And that's the way I still am. I still have pride in myself and in my

parents and life in general. I enjoy everything about life and even when I was in

high school playing football, like I say, I was the only—well, I played four years. I

was a four-year letterman in Triple-A and Four-A ball the whole time I was at school.

FW: Gary, did you have lunch at the Catawba Indian school?

GW: Yeah, we had lunch there and I guess you're going to ask me what kind we had.

[Laughter]

FW: Yes.

GW: Well, we had the good old home-fashioned meals—is what I called home-fashioned. You had your good cornbread, biscuits, beans and stuff. It was real good. We had a Indian cook. Her name was Arzada Sanders. In fact, she was one of my aunts, I guess. Aunt Arzada is what we all called her, and she cooked for us.

FW: How much did you have to pay a week for your lunch?

GW: I think it was a quarter a week, something like that. I didn't pay anything much at the time because I was washing dishes and helping clean up after everybody else had eaten and taking a few of the things that were left and filling my face up with 'em.

FW: Did you graduate from high school, Gary?

GW: Yes, I graduated in 1964.

FW: Well, while you were in high school, you took part in other sports other than football, didn't you?

GW: Like I said before, I was a four-year letterman in football. One of the first to ever do that at Rock Hill High. I played baseball and I ran track. In baseball I was a pitcher. When I wasn't pitching, I was playing left field. One year I would play

baseball, the next year I ran track. In track I ran what they called a tiller race. It was a 440. It's the hardest race you can run and the most enduring as far as speed goes. I ran the 220, the broad jump, and to increase my speed for football I ran the 100-yard dash.

FW: Were you in service, Gary?

GW: Yes. After I graduated from high school I went in service.

FW: What branch of the service did you go in?

GW: United States Navy.

FW: Where were you stationed?

GW: I took my basic training at San Diego, California. San Diego was my home port the whole time I was in there. But I spent most of my time—well, I spent around thirty months out of forty-eight over in Vietnam.

FW: You drove a boat in Vietnam and it had two big holes in it. What did you nickname that boat?

GW: Well, my call sign on that boat was "Cowhand Heavy." It was a salvage boat. Anytime a boat got broached or turned sideways on a beach or shot all to pieces and it couldn't get off, my job was to go in and pull it out through the fire or combat zones, being shot at and all, that was my job. I had a job to do and I done it. But the boat you're talking about, it had four holes, not two. The two you could see mainly is where it got its name. We nicknamed it "Sweet Eyes" because on the **ramp** of that boat, those holes from the Vietcong where they shot at us on numerous occasions and two of the other holes there are shrapnel from our own destroyers. They were trying to blow up a machine gunner's nest when we were

trying to get into the beach and they dropped a few rounds short and they hit us instead.

FW: Gary, what was your relationship to the Whites and Blacks in service? Did you get along well with them?

GW: Well, I don't know. I just fought 'em all. I didn't care what color they were.

[Laughter]

FW: Where were you discharged?

GW: San Diego, at Coronado Island.

FW: What year?

GW: 1971.

FW: Did the work that you performed in service help you find work after you got out of service?

GW: In a way it did, because right now I'm a charter boat captain in Florida. And I think this tape is going to Florida somewhere. Well, you know, up and down the coast there's nothing but fishing galore. You have all types. I fish mainly in the Bahamas and around Bimini and some of the smaller places, Walker's Cay. But I also fish out of a place called Boynton Beach on the Sea Mist III Marina. Well, you asked me if it helped me get a job, right?

FW: Yes.

GW: It did, because, like I say, I drove the boats while I was in the Navy and if it hadn't been for my time in service in driving those boats, I would still be mating on a boat instead of being a captain now.

FW: Where were you married, Gary?

GW: I was married in a place called Chester, South Carolina.

FW: To whom were you married?

GW: I was married to a girl named Brenda Neal.

FW: How many children do you have?

GW: We have one daughter, Rhonda Denine Wade.

FW: Do you own your own home or do you rent?

GW: Well, where I'm at in Florida I don't own a home. I'm renting.

FW: Do you think that Rhonda has more opportunities for advancement than you had when you were coming up?

GW: Well, sure, she does, because she's going to school now and times change—education should be better—but you ask if she would have problems like I had when I was going, no, she will not because integration is one of the things that has been out now for a couple years. I think people would mainly be more interested in the Blacks than they would the American Indian going to school with 'em now. They'd be thrown off more on the Black—well, they used to call me Black when I was going to school. Now they really are going to school with the Blacks. So, you can see what an American Indian would have when the problem would arise.

FW: Have you always been a member of a church?

GW: Yes.

FW: Are you active in church now?

GW: No.

FW: Have you ever registered to vote?

GW: Yes.

FW: Have you ever voted?

GW: No.

FW: Why?

GW: Well, for the very simple reason, I just never did. I registered and voted—I voted one time while I was in the navy.

FW: Do you have friends among the Whites?

GW: Yes.

FW: Do you have friends among the Blacks?

GW: Yes.

FW: Do you think that in your lifetime you have accomplished very much?

GW: Not much. [Laughter] I've done a lot of things, but I haven't accomplished a lot. You see a lot of people that would like to have done some of the things I've done, but yet still they never do. I've accomplished a lot of things as far as seeing things. But as far as just being a down-to-earth good man that stays home and all of that, I don't. [Laughter]

FW: All right, let's talk about you being an Indian. Are you proud to be an Indian?

GW: Yes, I am. I can't see being anything else. I would like to change a statement I had made earlier about the teacher that I had when I was going to Catawba. Her name was not **Faye Cornwall**, it was Faye Cornish. Faye Cornwall, I had at Lesslie after I was in the fifth grade.

FW: I've been talking to Gary Wade Jr., and I would just like to say that beside taking part in sports in high school, he loves to fish. He also likes to hunt. He's an expert

bird hunter and when he was small, he made his own bow and arrow. He learned to shoot it real good. He would bring birds to the house almost by the dozen that he had killed with his bow and arrow.

[End of interview]

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