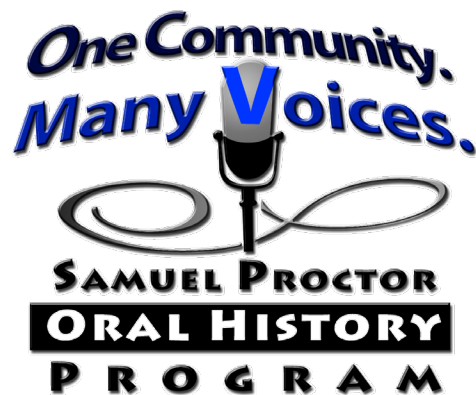


Kay Cabaniss Usher

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-025**

Interview by:

**Jerry Lee
February 20, 1972**



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CAT 025 Kay Cabaniss Usher
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35 minutes | 19 pages

Abstract: Kay Usher is a great-granddaughter of Chief Blue, a young dental assistant who lives on the new reservation. User discusses marrying her husband and what that meant for their families. Then, Usher recalls her childhood home, her parents, and her time in school. Usher then discusses the positive impact the Mormon church had on her life since she was a little girl and how she now plays piano for the church. She tells the story about her parents' marriage and the complicated restrictions on interracial marriage licenses. Usher remembers her grandfather and great grandfather's stories and shares what she knows about Catawba culture and her impression of the Catawba people.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Family histories; Communities]

ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M

University of Florida

CAT 025

Interviewee: Kay Cabaniss Usher

Interviewer: Jerry Lee

Date of Interview: February 20, 1972

L: I'm Jerry Lee and I'm interviewing—what is your name?

U: Kay Cabaniss Usher.

L: How do you spell your last name?

U: U-S-H-E-R.

L: And the day is February 20, 1972. I'm sitting in Ms. Usher's living room. It's a nice, modern, beautiful mobile home. How old are you?

U: Twenty-two.

L: What year were you born?

U: September 7, 1949.

L: Where were you born?

U: Rock Hill, South Carolina, County of York. York General Hospital.

L: Where were you living at this time?

U: Living on Green Street, Downtown Rock Hill.

L: Where your mobile home is here, so how would you say, you're about two miles from Rock Hill city limits?

U: Right, we're about three and a half miles from Downtown Rock Hill.

L: This is part of the new reservation?

U: This is the very first lot on the new reservation.

L: Who were your parents?

U: My mother was Marcel Blue Cabaniss. She was the granddaughter of Chief Blue. And my father is William Farce Cabaniss Senior.

L: How old is your mother and father?

U: My mother is forty-eight and my father is forty-nine.

L: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

U: I have one brother: William Farce Cabaniss Junior who was born August 23, 1947.

L: What part Indian are you?

U: Very little, really. Chief Blue was my great-grandfather and I guess you'd really consider me—probably, since his wife was not fully Indian—he'd probably consider me about eighth as far as heritage is concerned.

L: Is your husband an Indian?

U: No, he isn't.

L: How did you meet your husband?

U: Dale and I met through a mutual acquaintance, I guess you might say. A friend of mine introduced us, that I was working with at the time.

L: What's your husband's full name?

U: Odell Usher Junior.

L: Was any kind of prejudice or anything from his family? Did anyone even notice that you were an Indian?

U: Yes, the people that I went to school with and well all of the family know me really that I had Indian blood in me. I think it was probably a while before Dale's folks knew it. I'm not really sure. I don't remember it that well, but no one ever did cut me down about it or show any partiality toward me because I had Indian blood in me. 'Cause really with my complexion and all as far as looks, nobody would really know it any way.

L: How long have y'all been married now?

U: We'll be married two years this coming June.

L: You have any children?

U: No, we do not. We're expecting a child in a few weeks.

L: Well, I'd like to ask you about your early life. You say you were born in Rock Hill?

U: Right

L: Did you ever live on the reservation?

U: No, I did not.

L: And this was never the reservation here? You never lived here?

U: I lived here but it was considered the new part of the reservation. What I term as "reservation", I think about the old part where Chief Blue lived and things of this nature.

L: What type of home did y'all live in?

U: Well, when we lived downtown, it was just a small four-room house when I was a baby. We lived there 'til I was two years old. Then, we moved to the new reservation. My father built our home, and it was just a small, asbestos-siding house with two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. Just a small house—frame house that he built himself.

L: Did it have indoor plumbing and all?

U: At the time, it did not.

L: Were your parents strict in the sense that—well, you just answer the question. I really don't know how to say—were they strict parents?

U: I would say that to a certain extent I did have strict parents. I feel that any parent that cares about their child has to be strict. I don't mean that they were overprotective because I don't think they were. I think in my opinion they're tops as far as parents are concerned. I feel like they've been a big influence in my life because they set proper examples for me to follow rather than trying to tell me how to live. They set the example for me to live by.

L: Do you plan to be this type of parent in your life?

U: I hope to be.

L: Could your parents then encourage you to go to school and get an education?

U: Yes, they did. I have to admit I didn't really have a desire to go on to college and they did not force me to do this, which I think a lot of children are pushed into going to college and regret it later and a lot of times when their parents really don't force them they regret it later too because they can halfway blame their parents saying it was their fault because they didn't go but I didn't go to college. I have a high school education, but my parents didn't force me to go in any respect as far as push me to keep me from going or to go to college and I can say I'm happy with my education I do have.

L: What schools did you go to as a child?

U: In grammar school, I went to Northside Elementary School. I started in September 1956 and graduated from high school in [19]67.

L: Were there any Indians who went to Northside?

U: Yes, there were several that lived here on the new reservation. This area. Well one of my best friends at the time that went all the way through school, she and I

together, was Geraldine Canty. We started together in first grade there and went all the way through school together. She lived about a mile from here.

L: Who were some of the others?

U: Well, let's see. At Northside of course the rest of her family, the Canty family. Her father was Billy Canty and then the Blues, all cousins of mine, Carson Blue, Shirley Blue, Priscilla, Harry. They were sons of Leroy Blue. And also, let's see, Larry Thomas went to Northside. There were several others, but I can't think of their names right now. But these were the ones that lived the nearest to us.

L: How about church? Did your parents try to go to church or join church?

U: Right my mother was a Mormon, and brought up in the Mormon church, raised in the Mormon church all her life. My father had never joined any denomination. When he and mother were married, he was attending the Baptist church, but I had started attending with her some and then was baptized in the Mormon church when my brother was baptized at the age of nine. But they both did set the example for us to go to church. Mother took us when daddy didn't go, he'd always take us or made sure we had a way when she was unable to drive. But we did attend church and my family is still real active in the church today.

L: Where did you attend church at?

U: We attended church at Catawba. The branch at Catawba, which is now Catawba ward until about eight years ago we started attending a church in Rock Hill right after the branch was organized there to help out because I play the piano and they needed some musical help, so we started attending up there to try and help out.

L: But the church you went to first was on the old reservation?

U: Catawba, right.

L: Would you say the church has helped or hindered or how has the church role played in your life? Is it a big part or any part?

U: I would say that the church has helped me in the respect of teaching me the way to live. When I was little, I attended primary, which is an organization for the smaller children around age three to twelve. And then when I was twelve, I attended MIA, organization for the youth, and of course these were on weekdays meetings that we went. My mother always helped both in my primary and held an office there. And of course, we had Sunday school on Sundays, and I'd say that the church has definitely helped me to be a better person.

L: As you were growing older and started going to high school, you went to Rock Hill High School?

U: Right.

L: Did any of the Indian children go—I know a lot of 'em that time were dark-skinned—did some of them have a hard time or catch a lot of **kidding**?

U: Well, I don't really think in my age group, I'd say that a majority of 'em didn't. Of course, you know, were kidded sometime but I think it was more or less in fun because my brother is dark-skinned, and **he would go around to tell me** that he had more Indian blood than myself and you would know it—kids that associated with him sure don't—and they might get kidding about it, but I don't think anybody was cutting him down when they did kid him about it. Not in my age group now I think that maybe, you know, a few years earlier they may have but not with mine.

- L: I know you mentioned you played the piano at church. Do you play any other musical instruments?
- U: No, the piano is really the only musical instrument that I play. I can play the organ once in a while but I'm not too great at it.
- L: How did you decide to play the piano? Did your parents when you were younger try to get you to play or did you have a desire to play?
- U: When I was real little, about four or five years old, I used to always go to my aunt's, my mother's sister Virginia Trimnal, and they had a piano in their home. And my cousin Gloria was playing, and I used to love to go over there and bang on the piano more than anything. So, when I was eight and I still had the desire to start, so mom and daddy started having all lessons for me and I took music for six years.
- L: What type of work does your parents do?
- U: Both my parents work at Rock Hill Printing and Finishing which is a **textile**. My mother works in an office. She does office work. And my father works in the print shop.
- L: How did they happen to meet? Do you know?
- U: Yes, they met with their presently employed. Mother was at that time working at the plant and this is where they met.
- L: About what year was that?
- U: Around 1945, [19]44 somewhere around that.
- L: Do you happen to know how much either one of 'em made at the time?

U: No, I don't. I would guess probably about fifteen to eighteen dollar a week. For forty hours.

L: Was there any opposition to their marriage as far as his family being White and hers Indian?

U: I wouldn't say that there was. Well, at that time, momma and daddy were married in 1946 and at that time, right before and around that time in York County, it was where you were unable to get marriage licenses between anyone with Indian blood and White. That has been changed in the last few years. You had to go to another county to get a marriage license. Mother and daddy, I believe, got their marriage license in Chester. Chester County did issue them for South Carolina marriages. But in this county, they would not issue them. I don't really think it was so much of a county law, I think it was more or less the man who issued the license I think was against what he considered interracial marriage. I don't think it was the county law. I know it but as far as their families are concerned, I don't really think that mother's family was opposed to the marriage, and I don't think Daddy's were either. Mother still received some opposition from some of daddy's relative to a certain extent I think maybe because she does have Indian blood in her but as far as efforts, ever saying anything about it, no one's really ever said anything about it to my knowledge.

L: They're just as friendly—

U: Right—

L: And act accordingly as they would be to towards anyone else. Do you remember the earliest job you ever had?

U: Well, a lot of kids go to work while they're still in school, but I didn't. I've only had two jobs. First place I worked was Rock Hill **Typing** Company. I was a telephone operator, and this was June 1967. I went to work right after I finished high school.

L: Do you remember how much you made at that type job?

U: Right. My starting salary for a forty-hour week there was minimum wage, which at the time I believe it was sixty dollars a week.

L: What about your second job?

U: Where I'm presently employed is Wilson and Baker Dental Clinic. I'm a dental assistant and I've been there a little over two years.

L: Did you have to have any special training for this job?

U: We received on-the-job training as well as taking a course from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Extension Course. But we mainly received on-the-job training by the doctors and the other girls who were working there at that time.

L: And what is your title now?

U: I'm a dental assistant.

L: Do you feel there's been any discrimination against you because you're being an Indian? But, as you mentioned before with your complexion, no one can even tell you had any Indian blood in you. Has this ever came up in any of your jobs or applications or anything?

U: No, as far as where I was going to work and putting in applications or anything it hasn't. It's come up later on when people would ask me who my parents were and things of this nature, thinking they maybe knew my parents or maybe my mother before she was married, they ask me who she was or something like this.

But I was never discriminated about it you know they were just interested in who my family was and things of this nature. Never cut us down.

L: Do you ever remember any problems or troubles between the Indian people and the White people of Rock Hill? When you were a little girl or just heard someone talk about it? Experienced anything?

U: No, I don't recall any of it. It was all before my time. I've heard my grandfather Herbert Blue tell some stories which I really can't relate. And then I've also heard my great grandfather Chief Blue relate stories, but I don't remember them enough to say anything about them really.

L: How about the relationship between the Indian people and the Black people? Have there ever been in intermarriages?

U: To my knowledge, there have not in this area. Maybe in some other areas, possibly so, but in this particular **section** I don't believe so. None that I know of, let's put it that way.

L: There's been very much socialization between?

U: No, not to my knowledge. I think possibly when we used to have a ball team down at Catawba and there was, I think composed of maybe some of the Indian boys, maybe some of the Negro race, and then Whites. Something like this, but not any more than that I think.

L: You mentioned earlier your brother William. He went in service, right?

U: Right.

L: Was he drafted?

U: No, he was not drafted. He joined the Air Force in November 1967. He just received his discharge in November [19]71. He's only been out about three months.

L: Well, do they draft Indians?

U: Yes, they do.

L: They always have?

U: I assume. I'm not really sure how long they have been taking anyone with Indian blood into the armed services, but he was not drafted he volunteered but I don't really know how long they've been.

L: How does it feel being Indian?

U: I don't think it feels any different than anybody else truly.

L: Do you have any prejudice against White people?

U: No, I don't.

L: That's kind of a loaded question. I mean do you take up the Indians in certain instances or do you find yourself pulling for the Indians to win in some of the movies?

U: No, not really. I don't really think of myself as having Indian blood in me too much. Mostly I'm thinking about that thing in particular and something brings it to mind because like I said, I don't look like and unless somebody makes me think about it, I very seldom do.

L: In accordance with that answer, are you proud or ashamed of the Indian heritage which you are a part of?

U: I'm proud of it. I mean, as far as, I won't say that—I don't roar in telling people I have Indian blood in me but it's not because I'm ashamed of it. Because I don't really see a point in going around saying I have Indian blood in me when everybody else in the United States is composed of French and English and everything else, I don't feel like it's any different really

L: What kin were you to Chief Blue?

U: Chief Blue was my great-grandfather on my mother's side.

L: Were you close to him?

U: I remember Chief Blue well in some respects and not so well in others. I was a child when he passed away, but I do remember some of his Native dances and hearing him talk and tell the stories of Catawba Indians and things of this nature and visiting in his home and at the time I really felt like I was close to him but today I have to say that I wished I had known him more and can remember more things about him.

L: Did he teach you very much about the Indian way of life?

U: No, he didn't because I did not live down that near to the old reservation and I really think that the kids who lived down in that area although they weren't as closely related to him probably knew more about him than I did.

L: Do you know any of the Indian language?

U: No, I do not. I've heard it spoken but I haven't been able to speak it.

L: Who did you hear speak it?

U: I heard my grandfather, Herbert Blue, speak a few words not anything to make any sentences out of, but just asking him what word were in the Indian language

like I've heard him say "salt" in the Catawba Indian language. And then I also heard Chief Blue, my great grandfather, but those were the only two I ever heard speak it.

L: Do you know any Indian songs?

U: No, I do not.

L: Do you ever remember hearing Indian songs?

U: I remember 'em probably when I seen my grandfather do the dances and all but I can't relate any of them or tell you that much about 'em.

L: How about poems or Indian folklore? Stories like where the Indian came from? Stuff like that.

U: No, nothing of this nature. Like I said I was a child when this—I have to say I wasn't very alert on learning too much about it most of the time.

L: Have your parents taught you very much about the Indian heritage?

U: No, not really. Since we weren't associated down in that area that much, we'd go down there for church, but we weren't around too many of our relatives—as far as the ones with Indian blood— that often and we just never really talked about it that much as far as the family's concerned.

L: Does your mother know how to make pottery?

U: To my knowledge she doesn't. I've seen it made and I know she has, but if she knows how, I don't know what it must be that way.

L: Who did you see make pottery?

- U: I remember my grandmother, Chief Blue's wife, making pottery. I've seen some that she made and then I've seen one of her daughter-in-laws makes some pottery that she lived with at the time.
- L: Who was her daughter?
- U: Mrs. **Leanne** Blue. Then I've also seen a couple of the other ladies make some. Mrs. Sanders from down on the reservation. A couple others made it.
- L: Who makes it now? Does anyone make and sell it now?
- U: To my knowledge, Mrs. Sanders—I can't think of her first name. Arzada?
- L: There's one Sanders.
- U: I think is about the only one to my knowledge that still makes it. Edith Brown, I think probably used to. Some of the Browns used to but I don't know I haven't seen very many of those people in the last few years and they were getting on up in age, so I am not sure if any of them are still making it.
- L: I was talking to Martin Harris. He is the oldest man I've ever heard of that makes it. Occasionally he does make it, and I think he's gonna make some on tape. To Cherokee, that's about the oldest market they have for it now besides the little store down on the reservation. Do you think the Indians have been mistreated as a whole by the White society or the government?
- U: To a certain extent, I'd have to say yes. I'm not referring to early Catawba Indians but the Indians all over the nation because this—no matter what anybody says you have to say that really the Indians were here first, and people try to say this is what the White people or whatever did—Columbus did find America and all this, but the Indians were here first, and I don't think they give credit where credit

is due in a lot of respect. And although the Indians were a war-type, several years ago they were driven from their homes in a lot of cases, and I'd say there was a lot bloodshed where it probably shouldn't have been and wouldn't have been, but I guess it was all for a purpose so.

L: Do you think the government could've helped the Indians? So, they would we better off today? I mean as the Indians as a whole.

U: As a whole, I think the government through the years has tried to help the Indian people. In the last few years I'd say, the last hundred years or so I'd say, more so than a couple hundred years ago. But they have set up reservations for some of the Indians that are still living in some of the fairly primitive ways and things of this nature. But they do have schools and are sending help to send a lot of the kids to school, but in my opinion an Indian person or someone who has Indian blood in them has just as much willpower or know-how or can get the knowledge to earn a living and take care of themselves as a White person, but Indians are terminally lazy people in a lot of respects, and I think if the government would do too much for them that they would probably come to depend on it, and I think this is the case for a lot of them. They feel like somebody can do it for them, so they don't have to.

L: How were the Indians treated on the reservation? The Catawba Indians here in the way of doctors or dentists, food and medicine?

U: As far as the doctor was concerned, Dr. Blackman was the reservation Indian doctor. He was paid a salary by the government to look after the Indian people as long as he was in practice and I'd say that he did deliver a majority of the children

that were born during my lifetime. He delivered my mother, myself, my brother, so he was the Indian doctor for several years and then Dr. Patton took over and Dr. Blackman retired. But as far as food and things of this nature as far as I can remember it was just you worked for you own as far as I was concerned you didn't receive help; I know that my family didn't as far as receiving food or anything like this from the government. Medical attentions were, as far as the doctor bills, but the medications you got on your own.

L: Was this due to the fact that there only needs to be cut out and worked and had jobs?

U: As far as I know, you didn't get, even if you didn't have the willpower to go and do it for yourself, you didn't get it. Now possibly some of them did but as far as I know they didn't.

L: Will you teach your children about the Catawba Indians or as much as you know about it?

U: I feel that I will teach my children that probably the main thing and what means more to me is the fact that I was the great granddaughter of Chief Blue but as far as—

[Break in recording]

L: Which is why some of the Indians are darker than others, for example Howard George and his sister and all.

U: I believe that probably the Indian people as well as anybody else get a bit of their darkness from the sun, and Howard and the type of work that he does he's out in the sun a lot. And I think this accounts for him as well as a lot of the other Indian

people. If you would stand Howard out in the sun with a Colored person, you probably wouldn't know a difference but if you take a White person and leave them out in the sun for a certain period of time and put them beside an Indian person, you probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference in them either, so I think the sun does a lot of it.

L: I have one last question. Do you have an overall opinion or statement about the Catawba Nation as a whole? Such as, are they just an average people? Are they lazy? Hard-working, **industrious**, ignorant, educated or will things get better for them? Will they just absorb in our society? Or what? Do you have any general opinions?

U: In my opinion, the Catawba Nation as a whole is a good nation but not very industrious. I would term the Catawba Indians as a lazy people as far as education, they aren't well educated, the older ones. My mother was the first to finish high school of Catawba Indians and I think it was she and just a couple of others at the time were the first and since then the young people are attending public schools, but I think there still are a good many that quit, drop out of school, and very few that go to college. So, as a whole, I would say the Catawbas are lazy and not very industrious and don't particularly like to have to put forth too much effort. They like to be given things rather than having to work for them.

L: Is there a chance there for education as far as grammar school, high school, and college? I know like the Mormon church, anyone with Indian blood can go to Brigham Young University on scholarship.

U: Right.

L: Do you think the opportunity is open to the Catawba Indians?

U: Right. The opportunity is there, I just think it's just the fact that a lot of the kids don't want to take advantage of it. Any child is open or welcome to attend public schools to my knowledge and the Catawba Indians of course in this area can attend the public schools and have been able to for several years, so any child with any Indian blood in them now who doesn't get an education is really their own fault or their parents to a certain extent for not encouraging them to go.

L: Well, I appreciate very much your time, Kay, and I know this is gonna turn out to be a good tape. I hope there's no difficulty on the other side and we'll close now, thank you very much.

U: You're welcome.

[End of interview]

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