

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

North American Indian Project

Personal Experiences

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CHERYL SCHAPP

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: CHERYL SCHAPP

INTERVIEWER: Jay Toth

SUBJECT: Longhouse ceremonies, Indian jewelry, crafts

DATE: October 20, 1979

T: This is an interview with Cheryl Schapp for the Youngstown State University Program on the North American Indians project, by Jay Toth at the Allegheny Reservation Salamanca, New York on October 20, 1979, at 3:00 p.m.

Give me some background on your family, grandparents, or parents.

S: My mother is Indian and my father is white. He is French-Dutch. My grandparents on my mother's side of course, they were Indian. That's about all I know about that.

T: What about you mother as far as clanwise?

S: The Deer Clan.

T: Tell me about yourself then. Where did you go to school?

S: Salamanca, Red House School Elementary. It was an all Indian school. The only non-Indians that they had there were missionary kids, daughters or sons of the missionaries. From there I went to Randolph; it was an immigrated school. There was a children's home there. They had a bunch of black kids there. That was the first time I ever saw black kids. Actually, it was the first time I went to school where there werenon-Indian kids in my class. I was the only Indian kid, so it was like culture shock. Suddenly your surrounded by a bunch of people you don't know and it was strange.

T: What came to your mind when you saw colored kids?

S: Nothing really. I didn't really think about it. They were just a bunch of strange kids.

T: Your experiences in school . . . You graduated from . . .

S: Salamanca.

T: You were born in Salamanca?

S: Yes.

T: What was school like?

S: Well, I only went to Randolph for two and a half years. That was after I got to know different people. I found that mostly the kids from the home were your more racist, I would say, than the children's home. Of course they had to put up with everybody. All kinds of kids were there. Afterwards, I got to know that I wasn't the only one there. There were five other Indian kids. They weren't in the same classes that I was, but they were there. After I got into seventh grade, I got to know who they were. I guess the thing that hit me the first day of school was, "Hey, I want to go home. This is not school." It took about three weeks to adjust to all of that. It was really different, strange. After two and a half years I came back to Salamanca. I don't know if it was because I was more at ease because I knew the different kids. The only kids that I knew were the Indian kids that I had gone to school with before. But I felt more at ease I think, because I knew somebody there. They weren't all strange

T: In Salamanca, the school you went to, did you find there was a line drawn between the Seneca kids and the children of the city of Salamanca?

S: Not very much.

T: It seems from other Indians, earlier than you there was . . .

S: Yes. We had different problems in school, like seeing what teachers you could talk to, and which ones you couldn't. It is still that way. There are certain teachers that you could get all your work in and still not get anywhere. You could do everything that they asked, and do it perfectly, and still not get anywhere.

T: That was the only problem for you as far as school?

S: Basically, yes. It was the only funny thing about school here. They had talked about integrating the school here because this one didn't have enough Indian kids. Kind of like what they did with the black kids, shuffle them around.

That didn't go over too great. That's about the only other thing that I remember about school here as far as problems.

T: You didn't go any farther than high school?

S: No, I'm taking up college courses now one by one.

T: Where?

S: Jamestown Community.

T: That's a little ways off?

S: It's forty miles one way. It's not that far.

T: How do you like it?

S: It's all right.

T: What did your father do?

S: He was a painting contractor.

T: What was a typical day like in your home?

S: Now?

T: Or when you were younger.

S: Get up and go to school and come back.

T: How about in the summer?

S: Grabbed a gun and went for a walk. It's not the same. I always had animals to feed and stuff like that. In the summer we had a garden. When I was little we were expected to spend a certain amount of time in the garden weeding. I always liked to grow tomatoes, so I took care of the tomatoes when I was little. Most of my time, when I was really young, about twelve, I started cooking. I learned how to cook. My uncle was sick and my mom was gone half the time so I had to take care of the other kids and cook. I cooked supper and made sure they were in bed. She went all the way to Buffalo to the hospital. When she would come back, of course, she would expect everything to be done. That only happened like maybe twice a week. After that was all over, we moved up here to Salamanca. Most of my family has been hunting.

T: Hunting, such as what?

S: Deer.

T: With a gun?

S: Yes.

T: When did you stop hunting?

S: The average would run five or six a year. My dad, he was kind of strict about it. You didn't hunt until October and then you could hunt to mid-December. Before or after that was unheard of to him. He encouraged us all to hunt. I think we were around eight years old.

T: Did you learn to trap?

S: Yes, I learned to hunt and trap.

T: You're married now?

S: Yes.

T: Do you have any children?

S: Three. I got married right after high school. I was eighteen. I got married in August and the first girl was born in July. It was fast.

T: Do you attend any of the Longhouse ceremonies? How do you feel about them?

S: I would like to get into the religion itself, but there is no way I could do it now. I would like to get into the Longhouse religion. I know enough about it, but I wasn't brought up in it. So on that basis, I can't get into it.

T: All you can do is be a participant?

S: Yes, mostly at social ceremonies. From my standpoint now, I'm not supposed to even know about a lot of the Longhouse ceremonies.

T: You talked about having horses.

S: Yes.

T: How many horses?

S: One. I had two Apoloosa's. We had lived in Rochester at the reservation and we bought twelve Apoloosa's. We moved down here and neither one of us were working. They were a lot, like \$140 dollars a month, to take care of. We couldn't find anywhere down here. One was a stud. No one could handle the stud. It broke my heart. Even though he was a dumb horse, a dumb dorrel, he liked to go. He was

really frisky and everything.

T: How did you get this job you're at right now?

S: I work for the coop, the arts and crafts coop. They wanted a shop in the museum, so they talked to us and asked us if we would be willing to bring our material here to sell.

T: Do you make some of the material?

S: Yes.

T: Beadwork or . . .

S: Yes, beadwork and some other work. The chemicals in it makes my hands break out, so I got away from that quite a bit. Ribbon shirts, they have ribbon on them and some beadwork.

T: Do you have any ribbon shirts right now?

S: Yes, they are more universal. Everybody says they are western and then you get out west and people say they are not western. I don't think that anybody really knows where they came from. Some are just ribbons across the front and the back hanging down. Others have just ribbon on the collar. They are all different. Different tribes have their different ribbon shirts.

T: What about Senecas? You said each tribe has their own ribbon, what about the Senecas?

S: The way I make mine is beadwork on the collar and cuffs, pullover shirt with ribbons on the front and back hanging down.

T: Who taught you to do that?

S: Me.

T: What do you see as the future? Do you think it is being built up too much to tourism? What do you feel about tourism?

S: I don't think they have built up tourism enough. I don't like the Hopi dances. They are too showy or something. That doesn't appeal. But we get a lot of people who come down the road and see the sign--Indian reservation. They get in here, and a lot of them the first place they go is into the shop. They'll say they saw the sign Indian reservation, but we didn't see anything. You know darn well they are coming up the road just to see the houses. I often wonder, what the heck are they looking for. They

don't see barbed wire fences because they are all basically ranch style homes, very modern. What do they expect, shacks out in the woods or what?

T: I see you have rings on, they're western?

S: Yes, they're silver and turquoise.

T: That's not typical western.

S: No, just the silver. We went basically with the silver and of course the shells, the mother of pearl, the onyx and the coral. They use a lot of coral but coral isn't western either.

T: It has become universal?

S: Yes. We have our people, the Senecas who work with silver and turquoise too, but it is not traditional, that's why I can't sell it in the shop. It's not traditionally Iroquois. Silver broaches and rings are, but not the turquoise.

T: What would you like to do in the shop, something to improve it?

S: I don't know. Actually to tell you the truth I'm getting bored with working here.

T: Do you feel you're coming across to the people that walk through that door?

S: Some of them, yes. Some people have their own idea already. We get a lot of older people that already have their own idea; this is the way it is supposed to be no matter if it's not. Some of them leave really impressed, and other ones come in and get all upset. Amazingly enough, it's the non-Indians that get upset. It will be little things like a bumper sticker. There's a bolas tie in there with a cartoon character, of an Indian Red Eye, and it's the guy that follows along with Red Eye. The gentlemen come in and get very upset and say that the Navajos would never have anything like that. He kind of caught me off guard, and yet I thought to myself, we're not Navajos. To me you have to have a certain amount of humor.

T: I think that Navajos would.

S: Who is he to say? It just catches you or it may be a bad day, or well, who do you think you are. It's crazy, people that come in and say stuff to you.

T: What are some of the things they say? I want the university to hear this.

S: Just the thing I was talking about, the sign. They wanted to know when was the reservation open? Could they go down and look at where you live? I had people stop me, they want to know where the Indians live. This is my parent's house and you have to come right through there. They come right through the project.

T: Do they live in Jefferson?

S: Well, yes, it's just past Jefferson town, right below it. They have to come right through the whole place to get to where we are. They want to know where the Indians live and they figure they couldn't have lived up there because there are no horses. We have this thing going now where a lot of the kids that want horses can get them now. There is a man in Jamestown, Pennsylvania who has a riding stable set up and the kids just take their horses there where they take care of them. It gives them some experience and responsibility.

T: Did you ever think about asking them what they are looking for? Have you ever thought of that question?

S: I've thought about it but . . .

T: Why don't you try it?

S: The director wouldn't like that too well.

T: Say "What are you looking for? Maybe I can direct you," just to get your answer.

S: They wouldn't tell me, and I would get mad. It's just strange little things. I've worked here for two and a half years maybe, and I'm ready to strangle some people. You do put up with a lot of crap. But as far as the shop goes, I'm not the kind of a person that just can stick with one thing for so long. I took the job basically just to tie everything over. I planned on working for about a year and that was it. I'm going to school now at twenty-five. I figure if I don't hurry up in another five years I'm not going to want to go back. What I would really like to do is go to school and . . . This other kid and I are going to try to start a business, a tact shop and riding stable business.

T: What does your husband do?

S: He is a disabled veteran.

T: Vietnam War?

S: Yes.

T: Where did you meet your husband?

S: He was engaged to my cousin.

T: How did that come about?

S: That was quite a while ago. He is eight years older than I am. Things just didn't work out, so they called it off. Of course I knew him way back then and my parents knew him and liked him. He came down to go hunting, so we just starting going out, me and him, a friend of his and a girlfriend of mine.

T: You were talking about your ribbon shirts. That's your own personal business right now?

S: Yes, as far as a hobby. I like to sew. It relaxes me; the beadwork does also. If something is really bugging me then I like to do that. It's time consuming.

T: Do you have a large order form?

S: No, I just make them for individuals. If somebody comes to me and they want one, they tell me what color they want. They are all like little prints. Nothing really large or plain color. They tell me what color scheme, blues or greens, or just blues or whatever they want.

T: If I asked you to do one would you do one with my specifications?

S: Yes.

T: How do you price them?

S: Twenty-five dollars a piece. Then there are smaller ones like kids up on to size twelve and I sell them for twenty.

T: What would I have to tell you? What would you need to know?

S: Just your size and your color.

END OF INTERVIEW