Voices from the Past

Navajos in the Upper Snake River Valley

By Alice Juaniqua Chee

March 1982

Tape #4 C

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Devon Robb     October 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho
Before the settlement here in Rexburg and area occurred a hundred years ago, 1883, the Shoshone Bannock Tribal groups ran and utilized this area, this was their country, their hunting groups, their roaming area. They were placed on the reservation at Fort Hall about 1868. And from time to time groups of them would wander out and make their fall hunts and berry picking, etc. The pioneers from time to time became acquainted with quite a number of the Bannock Shoshone and Atendou tribal members. Of more recent years the Navajo people from Arizona, New Mexico, have come up into the Upper Snake River Valley seeking employment work and one of these families, the Juaniqua family, Junior Juaniqua brought his family up here and they have remained. Now specifically the parents have gone back to the reservation around Window Rock, Arizona but one of their daughters Alice Juaniqua Chee, C-H-E-E, is the subject of an interview that I had with her at the office and it was done on the spur of the moment when she was in concerned about one of her sons that was having some problems.

HF: [Inaudible] March 1982, to be visiting with Mrs. Alice Chee. C-H-E-E, of 406 West 3rd North St. Anthony, Idaho. This lady is here in my court room concerned about one of her sons. Now specifically Mrs. Chee, what Indian background do you come from?

AC: Arizona.

HF: You come from Arizona?

AC: Yes.

HF: And you’re a Navajo?

AC: Yes.

HF: And you were born on the reservation?

AC: Yes.

HF: Do you recall the date?

AC: October 20, 1943.

HF: October 29, 1943. Is that correct?

AC: October 20th.

HF: October 20, 1943.

AC: Yes.

HF: And how many brothers and sisters do you have?
AC: Me?
HF: Yes.
AC: Seven.
HF: Seven brothers and sisters.
AC: Yes.
HF: And one of these is George?
AC: Yes.
HF: And there was another brother, Junior.
AC: That’s my father.
HF: That’s your father, is Junior.
AC: Yes.
HF: I see. Now did your father rear all of their children on the reservation?
AC: Yes.
HF: What town?
AC: In Arizona, you mean?
HF: Yes.
AC: Window Rock.
HF: Window Rock. How far were you from Window Rock?
AC: About two miles.
HF: I see. Now at Window Rock or on the reservation did you live in a Hogan?
AC: Yes.
HF: And is that one room or several rooms?
AC: We got a cabin and a Hogan.
HF: And a Hogan, I see. What was your father’s occupation in those years when he was rearing your family?

AC: When I was young?

HF: Yes.

AC: He was a construction worker.

HF: He was a construction worker.

AC: Yes.

HF: That means he would go away and work off on construction.

AC: Yes.

HF: And then come back.

AC: Yeah, about every two or three weeks.

HF: I see and your mother stayed with the family and took care of the family.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Did you have any livelihood there at the Hogan? Such as, you had a garden I imagine?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Did you have sheep or…?

AC: Sheep and horses.

HF: And horses like that.

AC: Yeah.

HF: But you didn’t have a lot of farm land?

AC: Nope.

HF: Did you kiddies attend school at Window Rock?

AC: Yeah.
HF: How did you get to school?
AC: We walked to the road to chase the bus.
HF: I see. How far did you go to school Alice?
AC: Me?
HF: Yeah.
AC: About the seventh grade is all.
HF: About the seventh grade. Now when did your father and mother bring their family up here into the Upper Snake River Valley?
HF: In 1952, you were nine years old, approximately when they brought you up here.
AC: Yeah, we worked on sugar beets.
HF: Who for, who did you work for when you came up here?
AC: Oh, I can’t remember. It was all over the place. We worked for Leo Smith in Thornton, then over to Remington’s in St. Anthony and oh, I don’t know, I forgot all the ones that we worked for. That’s what we can up here for farming sugar beets.
HF: I see. Now who was old enough to work at that time? Your father and mother?
AC: And me.
HF: And you.
AC: And George and one of my brothers, his name is Paul.
HF: Paul. You were old enough to work in the beets at that time.
AC: Yeah.
HF: Now did he continue to live up here?
AC: Yeah.
HF: At St. Anthony?
AC: No, it’s right there, Teton.
HF: In Teton. You lived there in Teton and he rented a home.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Now and then the family went out and worked in the potatoes, I suppose and so forth.

AC: Yeah.

HF: But since 1952 you’ve lived here in the Upper Snake River Valley.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Now when were you married?

AC: October 19, I can’t remember, that won’t do either. Let’s see, ’59. Yeah.

HF: You were married in ’59?

AC: Yeah.

HF: You were sixteen years old when you got married.

AC: Yeah.

HF: And how many children have you had?

AC: Nine.

HF: You had nine children. And whom did you marry?

AC: Johny Chee.

HF: Johny?

AC: Yeah.

HF: J-O-H-N-Y. And C-H-E-E.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Who married you?

AC: Oh, we went back to Arizona.
HF: You went back to Arizona and were married?
AC: Yeah.
HF: And is he a Navajo?
AC: Yeah.
HF: He’s a Navajo. And, after you married did you come up here, immediately?
AC: Yeah. [Inaudible] in the reservation then we got married then we just came back up here then he got a job, a pretty good job so.
HF: What kind of work did he do?
AC: Tailored and home worked.
HF: And homework.
AC: And farm.
HF: Farm work?
AC: Yeah.
HF: Now have you as a family continued to work for the Waldridge produce for quite a few years?
AC: Yeah a long time.
HF: Your husband works there now?
AC: Yeah.
HF: And your son Edward works there?
AC: Yeah.
HF: Anyone else?
AC: And my first son Dennis.
HF: Your first son Dennis?
AC: Yeah.
HF: I see. Do you have any children that are married?

AC: Nope.

HF: I see. What’s your youngest child?

AC: Three years old.

HF: I see. Now the other children who are old enough, are they attending school in St. Anthony?

AC: Yeah.

HF: I see. Do you like it up here?

AC: Yes, very much. But I don’t like Arizona, [inaudible].

HF: You prefer living here?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Is your father still living up here?

AC: No, they went back to Arizona.

HF: Your father and mother. Is George back there with them?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Is Paul?

AC: Yup.

HF: And so you’re the only one of that Juaniqua family up here now.

AC: There’s another sister that lives in the Teton.

HF: A sister. A younger sister?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Lives over in Teton. So you two are the only— now to whom is she married?

AC: Murphy’s.

HF: To a Murphy.
AC: Yeah, from New Mexico.

HF: From New Mexico. He’s a white man?

AC: No, Navajo.

HF: Another Navajo. I see. Do you feel that the people up here in the valley, up here in the Snake River Country, treat you ok?

AC: Yeah.

HF: You’re treated kindly. How about your children, do they get along well in school?

AC: Yeah they are pretty good. They’re are all in Junior High now.

HF: In Junior High.

[HF: Side two of tape two]

HF: This is a continuation of an interview with Mrs. Alice Chee, C-H-E-E, a Navajo Indian who has been living in the area for a number years. Her former name was Alice Juaniqua.

HF: I see. Pretty tough I guess when you lived in the Hogan, wasn’t it?

AC: Yeah.

HF: You didn’t have very much.

AC: Nope.

HF: Did your mother make your clothes or buy them?

AC: No she made her own clothes.

HF: What did she make them off?

AC: Just bought fabric by the yard and she…

HF: She didn’t have a machine?

AC: Nope.

HF: But she had to hand sew them.
AC: Yeah.

HF: I see. Course, you don’t have to have so many clothes down there because it doesn’t get too hot does it? Did you own a pair of shoes when you were a little kid?

AC: No.

HF: Always went bare footed.

AC: Yup.

HF: I see. What religious group do you belong to?

AC: Christian.

HF: The Christian? You don’t belong to the Mormons?

AC: No.

HF: It’s called “The Christian”?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Are you able to attend church over in St. Anthony?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Is your husband a Christian?

AC: No, he’s a Catholic.

HF: He’s a Catholic. Any of you join the Church? The Mormon Church?

AC: No, oh, just one. One of my daughters did.

HF: One of your daughters did, I see.

[Another voice outside, “some girls crying.”]

HF: This insert is made recalling George Juaniqua, who is a brother to this lady and who has been in my court many many times because of alcoholism. I don’t think that George has ever stolen or anything like this but he has disturbed the peace many times.

[continuing the interview]
HF: Mrs. Chee, these are your two younger children and the youngest one is three and what’s her name?

AC: Chelsea.

HF: Chelsea. And the next one to her?

AC: Ronnie.

HF: And how old is he?

AC: Five and a half.

HF: Four and a half.

AC: Five and a half.

HF: Five and a half. I see, now tell me in your home in St. Anthony do you people as a family use the Navajo language?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Quite a bit?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Do you and your husband speak Navajo to each other all the time?

AC: Yeah.

HF: But the children, I suppose know both Navajo and English.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Because they get the English at school and then they get the Navajo at home and so forth.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Do you, of course, you and your husband each speak some English too don’t you? Does he understand quite a bit of English?

AC: Yeah.

HF: But between yourselves when you’re alone together, you always carry on your conversation [in Navajo].
AC: Yeah both.

HF: In both English and Navajo.

AC: Yeah.

HF: I see. Which one are you more familiar with, more comfortable with?

AC: Ohh, English.

HF: You would rather hear and speak English rather than Navajo.

AC: Yeah.

HF: Do you have any material in writing, any books or anything like that?

AC: No.

HF: In Navajo?

AC: No.

HF: You don’t?

AC: No.

HF: Do you read English?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Does your husband?

AC: Yeah.

HF: Now you people have a car and that’s how you got down here today?

AC: Yeah.

HF: I see. Do you own your own home?

AC: No. We’re just renting.

HF: You’re renting there and you have always rented.

AC: Yeah.
HF: Do you occasionally take a visit to go back to Shiprock and to your family?

AC: Every once a year.

HF: Once a year. Does your husband have people that live back there?

AC: Yeah his relatives down there.

HF: His relatives are there, and your relatives are there. You have Aunts and Uncles down there?

AC: Yeah lots of them.

HF: A lot of them, a lot of Aunts and Uncles. Do you have any Grandparents?

AC: No, they died.

HF: The Grandparents have died on both sides. But your parents are still there? Both mom and dad are living?

AC: Yeah.

HF: And you’ve told me about your family. Well, that’s interesting, I appreciate visiting with you. I don’t have a paper here but I would like to have you tell me that you would give your consent to have this kept, I would like to put it in the Historical Society over at the Library and if someone would like to read it, listen to it for history purposes, would you mind that?

AC: No.

HF: You don’t suppose you would mind that. Well thank you Mrs. Chee and I’ll let you take your two youngsters and you can go on home and when we… [End of the tape]