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INTERVIEW WITH EMEZIAH BOHANAN
AGE 55 YEARS
LANE, OKLA.
FIELD WORKER PETE W. COLE
May 10, 1937

LEGEND AND STORY FORM OF THE OLD INDIAN DAYS.

I was born on July 1, 1882, in Nashoba County, what is now Pushmataha County, Oklahoma, near Nashoba, Oklahoma, a country postoffice. There were not very many people settled in this portion of the country in the territorial days, which of course was all in woods, and there were all kinds of game. Wild animals, such as wolves, were as common as dogs. The postoffice Nashoba derived its name from "wolf" translated into Choctaw, which is "nashoba". The county was called Nashoba County, before statehood.

I was raised an orphan, drifting here and there where I could obtain work. I first started working for an old man named Paul Stevens, another Choctaw Indian. He was not an educated man but a good business manager, who owned a big store, cattle, hogs and other stock, and was considered a well-to-do man in the vicinity. He used to drive his yoke of oxen to haul goods from Arkansas. I worked for him for about one and one half years, then I quit to attend school.

I first went to Spencer Academy, an Indian Government School which was located near Antlers, Oklahoma, now abandoned

when burned down several years ago. When I arrived at this school I was rejected on account of my age. Of course there was nothing for me to do but to return home, and afterwards I attended a neighborhood school for two terms of nine months each. Mr. D. Seth Noah, a Choctaw Indian of near Talihina, Oklahoma, was my teacher. Afterward through the influence of someone, the Choctaw Council permitted me to attend another Government School in Pennsylvania which was The Carlisle Indian School. Everything was arranged and an opening was made for me to enter. I was working at that time, and when I was notified of the circumstance, I was told to go on a visit for thirty days, and \$15.00 in money was furnished me to pay for my expenses while on a visit. I saddled up my pony and started for an extended trip to visit my folks, relatives, and friends. It must have taken longer than thirty days in making my visit because when I returned home to start for school. I was told that I had stayed away over the required time, and the expenses furnished for school by the government had been cancelled and the place in school had been taken by another applicant. I missed the opportunity of attending a government school and I regret to this day the chance that I missed.

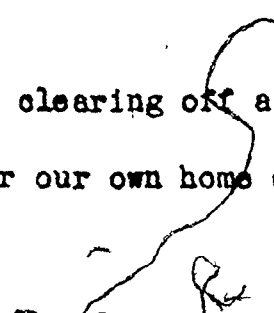
My only chance then was to paddle my own canoe for a

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living. So I worked around at different jobs until the year 1903 when I married and divorced my first wife after living with her a few days. I married again in 1904 to Sarah Potts, who was living near Yarnish, Oklahoma, in Jack Fork County. To this union there were nine children born, but only three girls and one boy are living, all married but one girl. My second wife died and in 1931 I married Narcissa Simpty Nohio, in Pushmataha County, and have moved to Atoka County near Farris, Oklahoma, and there is where we are making our home.

I first married when about twenty years old near Nashoba, . I lived in a log hut of one room, as that was the only kind of house that was built at that time. My principal food, as was customary with all Choctaw Indians, consisted of Indian cornbread, sour bread, or shuckbread (banaha), meats of all edible wild game and turkeys and fish. Now and then we bought a small bucket of syrup for a change, as we had honey at most times. Now and then we bought flour, sugar, and coffee,.

I began working on the farm by clearing off a few acres of land and raised a truck patch (for our own home consumption



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for two years. Afterwards I followed other means of making a living and started buying and selling cattle for a time, I was doing well until times changed, when I went bankrupt.

My father's name was Amos Tussahaya, but I was just a small lad when he died,. When I appeared before the Dawes Commission in 1902 to enroll and allot lands, I did not know my father's name or my last name, so some one of the force suggested that I be named "Bohanan" and I was accepted, adopted, enrolled, and allotted my land and today I go by the name of Emeziah Bohanan.

It has often been repeated that the Indians are great believers in The Great Spirit, and the Choctaw Indians are no exception. At a meeting of any Indian Church, the campers of old days would put up their sheds by placing two corner posts in front and two in the rear some six to ten inches lower than the front posts, nail cross pieces and boards across, and cover with boards. The different campers, depending on the number of camps to be erected, would arrange their sheds in uniform lines near and around the church, and would be ready for the occasion on time. Usually they would move to their camps on Thursday before the preaching. The groceries would be bought, the meat killed, the wood hauled, and everything

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planned for the meeting would be ready and carried out to the letter, and not a hitch would be made during the stay, such as killing meat on Saturday or Sunday or going to town for more groceries. It was the custom that everything must be arranged and ready to last for several days. If in winter, the campers would drag heavy logs and haul the wood with oxen, which were common in those days. This work must be finished by Friday 12 o'clock noon.

At any time after Friday noon to six o'clock P. M. the minister would arrive. As soon as he arrived, the deacon or elder of the church would ring the bell for the church service, which would continue until the breaking up on Monday morning. Sunrise service was conducted before breakfast on Monday morning, farewell handshaking of all persons at church, then breakfast, after which each family would start on their journey back home. Every body went away happy after enjoying the meeting, and love for their neighbor and respect for others was exchanged and acknowledged. Occasionally one could notice a string of wagons filing down the road, while riders on horseback would follow behind. Women riding horseback on side saddles were common in those days.

Where there was just one horse in the family, the husband would ride, carrying the baby or bundles; if more than one child, the others would ride behind, and the woman would walk ahead on foot. If they had to go any distance the man would walk and the woman ride. This was the only way of traveling in those days.

Each individual believed that a promise or idea planned ahead must be carried out when the time arrived. Therefore, knowing that it was time for a big meeting at any certain place, he went or took his family in a wagon or horseback and went regardless of weather.

Very often where there was no church bell, the deacon usually had a ram, cow horn, or oyster shell which he blew for church service. At the last blow of the horn, each person or crowd would leave for church. Each one would fall in line in the direction they came; the first line arrived will march in order, then the next line until the last line marched in before the minister would make any attempt to make announcements or to proceed with the service.

I knew of a minister who always expected to be at his appointment by Friday noon or before, and on his arrival,

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expected service to open immediately,. Between services they would gather around the pulpit and practice singing out of an old songbook, "Christian Harmony", which contained only notes. Very often they would stay up all night.

The deacon usually had a place reserved in the churchhouse for some peace officer, and at the beginning of the opening service he ^(the peace officer) would announce to the congregation with reference to law and order that there would be no drinking nor disturbance permitted around or near the church or premises, after which he would take his post near and around the church, where service was being held. After service he would stay some distance from the church to see if any drinking was going on, or very often some horse thieves would take advantage of the meeting and steal some belongings or horses. It was the duty of the officer to be on the watch and protect belongings and property.

Before leaving for church the mother of children would warn them to behave while in church or else the officer would take them to the jail. This was deeply impressed on them that they would not dare to leave church until the service was over.

The boys up to eighteen years would enter church with their father and remain by side of him until dismissed; and girls with

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their mother did' likewise. This was in tradition with the "Puritans".

For lamps we burned mutton grease poured into a bored wood about four inches in diameter and three to four inches deep. A bundle of yarn or twine was saturated in grease until hardened. Another bored block to fit the first block was nailed to the wall and the candle block fit to it. When lighted it gave good light.

One cold winter I attended a meeting when there was not enough rooms to ^{sc}commodate all visitors, and my father and I were obliged to make a pallet on the ground and went to sleep. Having my head covered up, it snowed during the night that I did not know anything about. Woke up the next morning, noticed something heavy on top of blankets, to my surprise there was about four inches snow over us. I hated to get up the next morning as it was so nice and warm under the snow.

FOOD

Indian corn is a native of North America as far as we know and that no other country or nation ever knew what corn was until they came to this country. It is true that the Indians have learned things from the other races of people, still the other races of people have learned from the Indians the different ways

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of cooking and on this instance we have food made from corn in several different dishes that the other races of people are not familiar with.

For sour bread, certain amount of corn is shelled and poured in a prepared block of wood about three feet high known as mortar, and a prepared pounder or pestle made out of green timber for this purpose used to beat corn. Different ways of handling is necessary depending on how and what the beaten corn is to be used. In this case small amount of water is poured on the corn and about one tablespoon full of dry ashes mixed in which water tends to soften the grain and the ashes to loosen the husk which when cleared and beaten, the grain is about the size of pearl hominy we buy in stores.

When this is done it is put in kettle or stone jar in warm water and let it stand to be soaked for one night in summer time or two to three nights in the winter. When soaked it is emptied in mortar and beaten to meal. When finished it will be as fine as meal, after which sour bread and shuck bread is made.

There are several ways of cooking corn after it is beaten depending on how and what kind of dish one may want. Corn can be roasted and beaten to meal, can be served by

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sweetening with sugar and water to taste and drink as tea is a fine dish.

Sweet corn dried in cob during summer, shelled when ready for cooking, boiled and cooked in grease and salted to taste or can be cooked in any kind of meat is a very good dish.

HUNTING.

In my young days, I hunted very often and have killed many deer but to be a good hunter one would have to get accustomed to their range, where they feed, etc. It may sound foolish and ridiculous for me to expose my way of hunting wild games yet true. It is known to all intelligent people today, that every living being, animal, plants, or mineral was placed here for a cause, and unless we understand its purpose and its use we cannot prosper much without it. It was placed here for us by nature and is at our command; therefore when I wanted to be a hunter I went to a person whom I knew that this party knew where I can get assistance for this purpose.

I was farming that year, but did not have much provision to tide me so one day I shouldered my rifle, went hunting and lost a day from my work but I did not kill anything that day.

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On the next day I knew of a woman who was an herb doctor. My only wish was that she would treat me so I can be a great hunter and with this in mind, I went to her home and explained to her my mission. After a long conversation I was told that after the treatment all of my hair will turn gray but I insisted and took the treatment. She went and gathered some kind of weeds and smoked me with this herb once a day for four days. She told the truth as after the treatment my hair turned gray as she said it would and today my hair is snow hair caused from this treatment.

This was in the year 1907, and after instructed what to do and how, I have never missed killing a deer. I kill only what I need because I was taught to never kill a deer for sport or waste. After knowing where they range I can go to the place and wait. After a few moments I can see one coming up the hill or down depending on where I am hiding and one would walk as close as ten and fifteen steps from me and of course he was killed and today there is no trouble for me to kill when others fail.

The best time for deer killing is in July or August. He ranges out to graze early in the morning to nine o'clock.

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After this hour he hides in bushes or in tall weeds and is seldom seen unless one accidentally walk up on him. Usually he remain in hiding until about three o'clock in the afternoon when he takes to water and to graze again until about eleven o'clock at night.

Night hunting usually starts about nine P. M. to 11 P. M. but after this hour there will be no deer to be seen. He sheds his horn from February first to the fifteenth and it has been said that after he sheds his horn it is difficult for anyone to find the broken horn.

There is an old saying among the Choctaw tribe of Indians that when one hears a quail on the ground, the deer has grown his horn to about one and one half inches, or if one hears a quail sing or call, resting on a bush about four feet high, the deer horn is nearly grown and is getting fat or when a quail perches high up in the tree, the horn with prongs have grown to full growth and are fat. There is no gall in a deer. Amateur deer hunters do not know this.

A bear is one of few animals that has more intelligence than most animals. He will run from you but when wounded or crippled he is dangerous. The bear usually enters his den in

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December. Other times he roam around and find a place under rock or under roots of trees or on a side of a hill or mountain. If he is found in his den, it takes two men to kill him. One of the men must enter the den where the bear is. If he is to enter the cave, he must be a man with strong nerve, because it is not everybody that can enter a den. He must be prepared with a torch or flash light to locate him to get his position to shoot. After he is located, the hunter aims and fires at the animal. If he is wounded he is going to rush out of his den. If the man does not have time to get out of his way, he may fall down and lie flat on his stomach and lie still, but, if he moves and the bear sees him, it is too bad for he will surely kill the man. But if he lies still and not move, the bear will run by him and will not hurt him. As soon as the bear come out of the den, the man on the outside will shoot him on the hip or the kidney will cause instant death but if only crippled or wounded, he is sure to get away.

When he enters his den in December one can hear him as he gnaws his claws he makes a funny noise. The female bear makes her den about January and brings her young cubs in February.

The hunters usually listen for the noise and cries of young cubs as they make a noise like a screech owls and by

this means he know when he hears one. The mother bear will run out when found in den or if a hunter enter her den to shoot her, she would huddle her young cubs together and hold her head over them. When shot at she will only clasp her young cubs together and held her head over them until she is killed. It is pitiful for any one to shoot an innocent mother of young cubs in this position but she will not make any attempt to run or leave her young ones. This is the way they used to rob her of her young cubs.

FISHING.

Beside poisoning streams for fish with roots of devil's shoestring, we had another method of catching them. When creeks are dry and water low, a great fish fry day is set and when people gather at a place selected we would cut and pile branches and limbs of trees across the creek and bind with vine by men pressing down or jump up and down as to make the limbs press tight.

When all set, enough men are required to lift up while the rest of boys start from other end of stream and scare them toward this brush net until the swimmers reach to net. They would let the net drop which heads off fish from going back to

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deep water and of course they would be in a shallow water where bows and arrows come into play. We were ordered to kill only the best and large fish. This was a great sport.

The Choctaws were very particular in those days as to who (men, women and children) were eligible to the great fish fry. They believed in signs and if one present without having been invited, usually he is promptly excused and would not be allowed around the premises. After gathering at a place located one man or woman was selected to initiate all those present by using a black or red powder to put a mark on their face and those not having any black or red paint were not allowed and be ordered away as he was not a member of the fishing society on that day. It was strictly against the fishing rule for an expectant mother or parents to be present.

Dyes

To make bluing we boiled maple trees in copper. Continue boiling until it boils down to the thickness of flour gravy, remove pot away from fire, and let it cool down gradually until it hardens. We use bark of walnut to make black, same process as making bluing. We used a certain kind of weed with large yellow flowers which grows to about three feet. By boiling the liquid it turns yellow and by continuous boiling until jelly like, let it cool gradually and hardened and it will have this color.

Powder of peanuts is similar to red pepper. Ground when it is dry has reddish color. This was commonly used in the olden days.

As nature would have it, some of the Indian herb doctors of the olden times were just as smart as our best doctors, and smarter than most of the quack doctors of our present time. He used herbs that he knew for each case of sickness as there were only a few severe sickness known in those days. As time changes civilization became more intelligent, more and different cases of sickness, epidemics and contagious disease has been found by scientist, it is now necessary that we have learned doctors who is well posted and scientists to find remedy and control the different cases.

The herb doctors of our days knew how to cure pneumonia by treating with a certain kind of weed which grows only in a certain place. It does not grow or found everywhere. One can take this bush and boil in water, give the patient about one third cup full while warm. Then he goes out in the yard to find a suitable place and dig down a hole about twelve inches deep, place in this prepared hole the herb in a

kettle or pot, lay across strips of planks or board over the pot and make a pallet for the patient and have him to lie down over the kettle with where the pain is and smoke him four times and return him to bed until the next morning. Continue the same process for four mornings and give him a warm tea to drink and he will soon recover.

For cough, a bark of sycamore tree is used in one gallon of water, when boiled sweeten with sugar to taste desired and give patient one tablespoon full at any time.

We used clean rags to smoke and inhale through nose to break up a cold. After the smoke the discharge from nose runs freely, which after a while one feel better and soon recover. This was the best method to rid of the cold.

Instead of using sugar coated pills or some sweetened liquid purgatives to clean out the system, we used the roots of blackroot by boiling and make tea. When lukewarm give patient one cup full every hour until bowels act. After the bowels start acting, give one-third full three times or once a day for three days, which will have him straightened out.

If patient seems to have or show symptoms of pneumonia, and if waiting on a doctor, for temporary relief or first aid treatment, have seen them to hold the head of patient while

the other party take a sharp broken piece of glass and scratch lightly enough to draw blood on the tip end of nose. If as much as two or three drops of blood can be procured in a teaspoon, add two or three drops of turpentine and give the patient with water. Usually this will bring temporary relief until the doctor arrives.

Rheumatism is caused mostly by bad blood and kidneys not functioning properly. So to give relief I have seen them to break a black or bluish looking bottle, pick out a sharp piece fasten to a piece of stick about half size of a man's small finger about six inches in length place a tourniquet under arm pit and around arm until vein is plainly seen, cut the blood vein, and let blood run. The first operation the blood will be blackish looking and will continue until reddish color of blood shows, when enough is run or until reddish color shown the tourniquet may be loosen and the flow of blood will be checked instantly. For severe headache same process is necessary only the tourniquet can be placed either around the chest or under the armpit or around the neck, and the operation can be on the forehead or on top of head. This will relieve severe headache but after once operated, same spell will come every year and of course same

process is necessary.

For broken bone a plaster of clay bandaged or tied around the wound and drop cold water constantly to keep moist as if given a chance to dry will cause severe pain. One can take a certain amount of bark of cottonwood and boil to certain degree and steam the wound will relieve pain. Bandage may be changed but must keep tied until well.

For joint thrown out of socket I have seen them to take a bunch of roots of cottonwood, boil in water and steam the injured part four times a day for four days, and on the fourth day the socket will automatically slip back in place. By steaming with this solution, it takes the swelling out and by some method tends to throw joint back in place.

All basket work that I have ever seen done by Choctaws and nice finishing as well as pretty work depends on those that are expert in handling. As far as cane work is concern, one can cut any amount of cane switch about four feet in length and about the size of a man's small finger, put it away until seasoned. When ready for use or to tan, split in two and boil or steam in hot water until limber then it

is ready for basket work or whatever one desires to make.

There were few epidemics and contagious diseases in those days, because the old Indians always had a certain kind of herbs which was boiled to tea and a dose taken two or three times a day by the whole family and of course by keeping the system in order, we were healthy and strong and were not subject to sickness. Now and then one would contract tuberculosis or consumption when one starts to have a bad cold, developed into cough, lungs all clogged up, wrong treatment given or no treatment at all or the patient himself tries to treat himself, waited too long for proper treatment or something until it becomes chronic and will be beyond control. These are some of the diseases that were beyond control and caused death.

I am 35 years of age and in all these years I have seen only two adult men had on diapers. Of course this was common in the old days that more or less has ever been said or written in history as to our wearing apparel and most people today believe we wore buckskin breeches and shirt throughout the year. But in the summer time men wore nothing but diapers and more so when there is to be a big fish fry and where water are to be poisoned by beating the roots of the devil's shoestring

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to make the fish sick as this saves all time to undress or jump in water with clothes on.

There had been some political talk amongst the Choctaws in the territorial days when they were running their own form of government until statehood in 1907. There were two parties formed in the country—the Eagle or Tuskahoma party and the Buzzard or Union Party. The last and main fight was whether or not the Indian Territory to become as a state. At times there were riders formed and some trouble happened and for a while the people were very hostile but soon went back to normal.

I have told all I have seen and have known of my own experience and in conclusion I say that after I was married in 1904, I became a member of the church and joined the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, was ordained as minister in 1916, at Good Spring Church near Albion, Oklahoma (the church is not there anymore now), am a pastor of Cass Church, near Stigler, Oklahoma, Haskell County, Panther Creek (Kowi Bok), Leflore County, Heka Bok (Gum Creek), Latimer County near Damon, Oklahoma.

Typist's note---- I have corrected this manuscript as little as possible, because Mr. Cole's Indian form of expression gives a distinct flavor to his account.