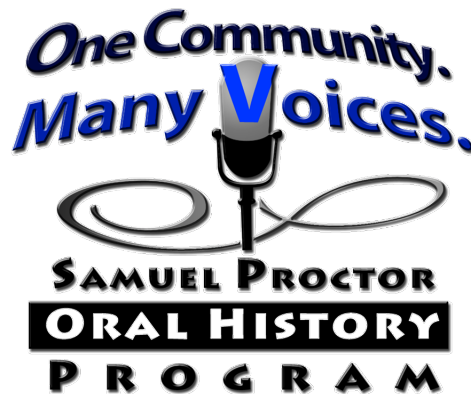


# Edward John

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project  
MISS CHOC-053**

**Interview by:**

**Vernon Tubby and Brenda Dan  
June 28, 1978**



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**MISS CHOC 053 Edward John**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**Interviewed by Vernon Tubby and Brenda Dan on June 28, 1978**  
**40 minutes | 11 pages**

**Abstract:** Edward John, a lifelong resident of the Pearl River community, describes his career as a photographer. He is mostly self-taught and never attended school for photography. He discusses the benefits and drawbacks of going to school and how he got started in the field. He discusses the equipment and darkroom he uses, how freelancing works, and his thoughts on starting his own business. He specializes in sports photography and also takes photos at weddings. Finally, he discusses his plans for the future and his advice to young people interested in photography.

**Keywords:** [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi--Choctaw; Photography; Education]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
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**University of Florida**

MISS CHOC 053

Interviewee: Edward John

Interviewer: Vernon Tubby and Brenda Dan

Date of Interview: June 28, 1978

T: Today is June 28, 1978, and we are interviewing Edward John on photography.

The interviewers are Vernon Tubby and Brenda Dan. [Choctaw spoken 0:15]

J: Photography school? No, I never went to school. The last school I attended was just the high school, and as far as photography school, I never been to a school. And photography, I just learned it by reading books, magazines, whatever I could get my hands on. And from there I started experimenting on how to take pictures and developing films and then the last part was how to print pictures. To start out it was hard, but as time went on, it became easier for me.

T: When did you become interested in this photography?

J: Back when I was in high school, I used to take pictures for the yearbook. One year I was the sports editor, but I took some pictures with an instamatic camera, and I used to read books when I was in high school on photography. I liked to take pictures and all that during the library periods. And after I finished high school, I didn't give much thought about photography after, I got a job at the travel office. They had this newspaper in the community news that was being published monthly, and I got interested in that job and started as a CETA title VI trainee. I'd been taking pictures, 'cause I didn't have a camera. The Tribe owned one camera, an old camera. Their director was Ben Harrison, and he had a camera I could use in case I needed it. And he had some lens attachments too. From the work that he was doing, I became back interested in photography. At that time, Don Alex was Ben Harrison's assistant, and I worked closely with him and Ben Harrison. And then the three of us sort of worked together. And then I

started learning the techniques that they were using. But my experience would be that I learned from reading books and experimenting in the darkroom. So, I don't consider myself as a professional, but I like the job of doing it. It requires skill.

T: How many years [Choctaw spoken 4:30]

J: I'll be working with the communications departments for about a little over two years. But as far as the director, I worked under Ben Harrison about a year, and then the new director Jan Warren, she's been the director for one year.

T: Communications [Choctaw spoken 5:05] The whole **Monarch** Program.

J: The **Monarch** program is the latest thing what's happening in the community. We try to get out the news of various events that happen during the month. Our paper comes out monthly, so whatever event comes during that month we try to put in the paper, but our personnel is kinda short, so we don't usually put the whole event in one paper and that kinda leaves us a whole lot but we try hardest to get out the news of an event. As much as possible, we do that.

T: Do you do layouts and stuff too? Layouts and hard work and whatever it takes to make a newspaper?

J: Not now, really. There was only three of us working the communication department. Jan Warren is the graphic artist, and Jan did layouts. We usually helped in putting out layouts and all that. It's fun to do, but sometimes it's boring, too. The job is an interesting job. To me, that is.

T: Do you have a lot of equipment to work with? Or do you lack some equipment?

J: Yeah, we don't have enough equipment. We use [inaudible 7:20] Like I said before, the Tribe loans us a couple of cameras, but they are pretty old. And back when I started working in communications, oh, about six months after that **Bud Malone** came [inaudible 7:46] And from then on, I've got a couple of lens—they're not really expensive lenses, but they take pretty good pictures. And a darkroom we're using at the high school—we used to have a darkroom back behind the science building. The only time we could work, came to work, they have a darkroom, but it'll have a [inaudible 8:30]

D: How much does a camera cost, thirty-eight millimeter?

J: It's a thirty-five millimeter.

D: [Laughter] Thirty-five?

T: How many cameras are there? How much does a well-known brand-name camera cost? Playtex or Cannon? Thirty-five millimeter?

J: My camera is a thirty-five from Minolta, and I bought this camera helping a friend, who went to service, and got this camera on a discount. He said he didn't know how to use it, so he said he could sell it to me. And I offered him a price and he sold the camera to me. I've been checking around the stores, and I would say this camera would run about two-fifty to three hundred dollars.

D: That's the most expensive kind?

J: Well, let's see, the camera, that one would be expensive. It depends on the camera body, and the lens, 'cause the lens are the most expensive thing on the camera body itself.

T: [Choctaw spoken 10:25]

D: What do you do in your spare time?

T: [Choctaw spoken 10:43] Is it easy by learning yourself? You know, taking your time to learn instead of school, they throw it at you.

J: Right, to me, it would be much easier to learn a person by himself rather than to go to school, because I don't think the teacher would read your mind and what you wanted to learn. I think that if you have a good camera and darkroom, I think it would be best to go out, take pictures and experiment, and read books. Do what you want. But some other guys would probably think that it is best to go to school, but I've known a lot of photographers that never went to school, and still get a fairly good job in the business of picture-taking. But, right now, let's see, I think if I had a choice, I would go on to school. Because black and white is easier and I think anybody can learn the basic, but colors are much difficult. So, a person wants to go into professional color picture-taking, I think this person should go to school, and if I get a chance, I would go to school too in the future, but right now I'm satisfied with what I'm doing. I've had some people call me or see me about taking pictures of their families or babies or whatever event, and I think people that I like taking pictures for are satisfied with the kind of pictures that I'm taking.

T: Are there many ways you can take pictures, like, you can double-expose film and make it—

J: Yes, there's a lot of different styles in picture-taking, like what I'm in now. A person who went to school, a person who wants to get real good at picture-taking, and taking various types of pictures like double exposure or whatever. Of

course, there's a lot of money that requires, to do that. A person goes to school and learns, I think it's much easier, but I think though in black and white just—color pictures I think a person can learn by himself.

T: Have you ever thought of starting your own business some day?

J: I've had that thought many times, but I don't know, I've never given much thought about it. But the thought has been on my mind. Probably, if I could, I would like to start in this business, but not right now.

D: Would you be making a lot of money if you started your own business?

J: A lot of money, I don't know—it kind of depends on the business. There's a lot of—I think there's good business, but I don't think it would be a big money-making profit. I don't think that would be the case. I would have to say that businesses located in a big town or a city, I think it would be a good profit. As far as this community, I don't think would be that much.

T: How much does a professional photographer get in a year, on salary?

J: I don't know.

T: Does it vary?

J: Yeah, it varies. I think that the professional salary varies in the amount, like some professional would charge about 250 for just taking the wedding pictures.

I: That's color pictures?

J: Colors, and probably some would charge as much in black and white too. Up to now I've taken about four wedding pictures on different occasions, and I've been charging this. It's more for fun—taking pictures—than making money. But later on, I might be interested in making money. [Laughter]

T: Did you ever think about starting early life, you know, starting photography, wouldn't it be to your advantage to start young—a young age?

J: It would be an advantage, but it depends on the person. A person who is really interested in photography, I think this person himself would know that his main interest is photography. From then on, he could probably go from there, but as far as teaching in the older age, there's someone, but you wouldn't want him to be a photographer. I don't think that would work, 'cause he'd be pushing this person, and this person might have some other interests. I could say that I would have been better, personally, if I had taken photography at an early age. As far as an early age, I would say it would be an advantage.

T: Are you married now? Do you have a family?

J: Yes, I'm married. It will be about six years in July, and we have four kids.

T: And you live in Pearl River all of your life?

J: Yes, that's where I've lived all of my life.

D: Are you going to make a career out of photography?

J: I'm hoping—like I said earlier, if I do get a chance, I would like to go to school and learn studio work. Portraits and so forth. And hopefully become a professional and freelance photographer. And I'm just hopeful that I can make a career out of photography.

T: Freelance photography, what's that?

J: Freelance is a photographer works on his own time, and takes pictures, and he sells his pictures to large corporations like a magazine, a newspaper, whatever. But, maybe publishers—book publishers that needs some kind of pictures—and



freelance, they go by selling their pictures through the market, and if the pictures are good, I would have to say what's a good price, maybe one black and white picture would sell a hundred dollars, or whatever, maybe color. I've had some people just come by the office and ask me the photography school that I went to, what kind of a certificate that I have, or degree. And I tell them the same thing, that I didn't go to school, and I don't have a degree in photography.

T: Do you have any pictures of your [Choctaw spoken 22:34] Describe the picture, and, you know, why you took the picture [Choctaw spoken 23:56]

D: Do you only take pictures of people or trees or—?

J: My main interest would be sports. Like football and baseball. But football is an action sort of sport—it's rather difficult to take pictures of football, whereas in afternoon games like that, it wouldn't be much fun. But baseball, I'd say it's better, because usually the high school games will be played during the afternoon. Much more difficult would be the stickball games.

T: Do you use some kind of special camera for that—night, at nighttime?

J: There is no special camera that I use. I use the same ones that I've been using. The only thing different that I use is the lens. I have two different lens attachments. One is a zoom lens, and then one is a telephoto lens. In baseball, I would use the zoom lens, and in football, sometimes I would use telephoto lens.

T: What's a zoom lens?

D: Zoom?

J: A zoom lens is a lens where you want to take pictures of something, and the subject is farther away and you don't have to move, you can just zoom your lens and the subject will come closer to you, without you having to move.

D: What about the other kind?

T: How many kinds are there?

J: What?

T: How many kinds of lenses are there?

J: Oh, there's a lot of different types of lens. A telephoto lens comes in various sizes. The one that I have is a 135. Some would be two hundred, five hundred- or one-thousand-millimeter telephoto lens. But would these—

D: Why different sizes of the lenses?

J: I guess it would be that the person taking the picture that's a distance away. Like I said, these lens are great for sports action picture-taking. And, to me, I think the photographer needs these types of lenses to get closer to the subject. Instead of just moving around with the subject, the photographer would just stand and be close to the subject while they play, or whatever they're doing.

T: How would you take a picture with a lot of people standing in line and you couldn't get all of them all of them at once—if you move back, you know, you're going to get the picture, but you know, farther away. So that means you use zoom lens also, or what? If you want a group picture?

J: That's a difficult thing to do, is taking a group picture. I would say you would need a wide-angle lens for taking a group, because wide angle lens, it widens the whole area. The zoom lens, you just zoom your subject in, and you want to get

the whole group. So, I would say a wide-angle lens would be a much better lens to take a group picture.

T: Do you take color pictures at weddings and stuff, or just black and white?

J: Yes, so far, I've taken wedding pictures in color.

T: Do you use your own money, or do they furnish the lens and the stuff for you?

J: Well, I have my own camera, so I use it. I buy my own color films and pay my own processing.

D: Okay, how much do you charge them a year?

J: It depends on how far that I'm going. And I couldn't do any in color because I don't have the money to be buying and processing colors and just give them to them free because the kind of money I'm making, there's no way I could do that free. So usually I charge them them—oh, about fifty dollars, or maybe less.

D: Are you going to be taking pictures at the fair?

J: Yes, I hope so.

D: Do you work on your own time or—

J: No, I'm working for the local newspapers, though. I'll be working overtime. I'll be taking black and white and color slides.

T: Will you be working overtime during the fair?

J: No, I don't think this would consider it an overtime, because the Tribal employees are—their job is assigned to them in. But they work at least four hours doing various different things [inaudible 32:16] and I think my job will be taking pictures so I wouldn't consider it overtime, 'cause that's my job. And taking pictures is—I love it, really, just taking pictures and developing.

T: Is developing the film pretty hard, or is it easy once you get the hang of it?

J: To start off it's difficult—it's hard to start out—but once you get to know how it works and how much time needs to be developed normally, and you get the hang of it, it's easy.

D: Are you planning on living here the rest of your life and working with the Tribe? Are you thinking about moving?

J: I would move if I could get a chance to go to school, hopefully in the photography area. Who knows, it might be in journalism too.

D: Would you say photography is an easy job?

J: It depends on the person or the photographer. It's not easy sometimes—like the times like these, during summer, and so on. Really difficult. Sometimes it's boring, but it's exciting job.

D: Would you ever think of becoming the director of the communication department?

J: Yeah, but not right now. I don't have the qualifications.

T: How long has the communications department been running—ever since you've been working?

J: No, it's been there since 19—... I think the first paper was published in December 1968. Before then there was a newspaper called *Choctaw Times*, *Chahta Anumpa*, was published in Nashville [inaudible 36:18] papers put out. In [19]68, community news started publishing their own papers.

T: Who does the printing for you? Do you guys do the printing yourself?

J: Our printing, we usually do our layouts in the union, and we print at the union.

We have done this in Philadelphia, but right now we do most often at the union.

T: Where does the communications department get their funds—from the Tribe or from the—?

J: It is funded by federal funds. I think it's funded through what they call a [inaudible 37:31] Hopefully, we can get some money to put up our own darkroom. One time we asked the Tribe for the money to help us in putting up the darkroom, but they said the funds were short, so they couldn't help us.

T: Do you have any closing remarks?

J: In my closing, I would like to stress to the young people, photographers to be, that whatever area they are interested in picture-taking, I would tell them to go ahead and just learn as much as they can on their own. School, there's a lot in photography you can't learn. Photography—because there's so much to learn. You can learn a different style, different technique, but the people you take are not inclined to learn. If they make want to make a career out of it, it's up to them because it's really an interesting, exciting career, because you meet a lot of people you don't know or the things that they do. And you meet these people.

[End of interview]

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