



Jeanette Walker Jones Oral History Interview

Ashley Minner Jones

October 22, 2024

Dundalk, Maryland

This oral history was recorded for *Beyond Baltimore Street: Living Lumbee Legacies*, a project of Ashley Minner Art, LLC, with support from a 2024 Library of Congress American Folklife Center Community Collections Grant.

Field Notes

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Interviewee: Jeanette Walker Jones [JWJ]

Age: 81

Sex: Female

Occupation: Retired Indian Education Coordinator, Baltimore City Public Schools

Residence: Dundalk, Maryland

Tribal Affiliation: Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Interviewer: Ashley Minner Jones [AMJ]

Location of Interview: Dundalk, Maryland

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Transcribers: Magdelene Jones

Key Words

North Carolina, East Baltimore, Watersedge, Lumberton, Lumbee, Baltimore American Indian Center, Indian Education, Baltimore County, Dundalk, church, Baltimore, Southern, cooking, peas, collards, cornmeal, sweet potato bread, work, community, neighbors, Native American, pow wows, family, culture, Christian

Abstract

Jeanette Walker Jones (Lumbee) is an 81-year-old retired Indian Education Coordinator for Baltimore City Public Schools. She resides in the Watersedge community of Dundalk, not far from where she originally settled in East Baltimore. She moved to this area in 1966, when her children were young, so they could go to school in Baltimore County. Jeanette remembers the layout of her childhood home in rural North Carolina, which she shared with her grandfather,

sister, and mother. She recalls what brought her to Baltimore and her first impressions of the city. She remembers seeing the tall buildings and people eating what seemed like bugs to her, which she now enjoys as crabs. She did not like the city. Jeanette worked as a babysitter and as a waitress at the Moonlight restaurant, which served many Native patrons. She described living in Baltimore as being very close together and lacking privacy, which was very different from her upbringing in North Carolina. Jeanette also described the Baltimore Native community as helpful in making sure fellow Natives got established. Around 1974, Jeanette began working in Indian Education at the Baltimore American Indian Center, where she helped Native students succeed in school. She worked in Indian Education for 25 years in all. Jeanette discusses customs she and the Baltimore Lumbee community have maintained from North Carolina, including ways they prepare certain foods like collard greens and sweet potato bread. She also keeps a garden where she grows produce as in North Carolina. Jeanette is still involved and in touch with Native people in Baltimore through the Baltimore American Indian Center and church. Today, she enjoys walking and engaging with her community in Watersedge, although she is affected by flooding due to her home's proximity to the water. Jeanette is concerned that the Baltimore Native community will stick together less in the future. She hopes that the youth will keep their relationships and culture alive, and be proud of their heritage. She emphasizes that Native Americans are survivors and have worked hard to be successful in life.

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- [00:25:00] Jeanette shares her message for Native youth and the world.

Transcript

Ashley Minner Jones [AMJ]: [00:00:01] Hello, my name is Ashley Minner Jones. It is October 22, 2024 and I have come to interview an amazing person for *Beyond Baltimore Street*, our oral history and photo documentary project that celebrates the vibrant, fascinating [00:00:16] everyday lives of Baltimore Lumbee Elders. What is your name, ma'am?

Jeanette W. Jones [JWJ]: Jeanette W. Jones.

[AMJ]: What's the "W" stand for?

[JWJ]: Walker.

[AMJ]: And where are you from?

[JWJ]: I'm originally from North Carolina. I was [00:00:31] born and raised six miles north of Lumberton, on the Prevatte Farm.

[AMJ]: How would you explain who you are to someone who doesn't know you?

[JWJ]: Uh.... that would take all day.

[AMJ]: Well, let's hear the short version.

[JWJ]: My [00:00:46] name is Jeanette Walker Jones. I am a Lumbee Indian. I was raised in a Native American community by my mother, my grandfather, [00:01:01] and siblings.

[AMJ]: And when were you born?

[JWJ]: In 1942.

[AMJ]: And will you tell me how did you grow up?

[JWJ]: Uh... Me and my grandfather, uh... my sister, [00:01:16] I had two sisters, but my one sister got left home when she was 16. So, it was me and my younger sister, which is 5 years younger than me, and my mother. We lived in a two room [00:01:31] house. Of course, the rooms were very long. And the kitchen part, one end of the kitchen, was the kitchen stove, the other end was a long dining room table. The other [00:01:46] room was where the heater was in the front room, and it also had a bed in that room, and then the other room had three beds in it. And we lived in this house, approximately [00:02:03] 'til 1955. Uh my grandfather died June 11 of 1955 and we lived there 'till he passed away.

[AMJ] And then where did you go?

[JWJ]: Then we... My [00:02:18] older sister, her and her husband had moved to Baltimore and my mother decided that she was gonna move to Baltimore, too. So in 1959, we moved to Baltimore and that was a location on [00:02:34] uh... 1700 block of East Baltimore Street.

[AMJ]: Why did you move to that particular block?

[JWJ]: That was where my older sister and her husband and two kids live at the time.

[AMJ]: Why was she living on that block?

[JWJ]: [00:02:49] In that neighborhood, a lot of people who had moved from North Carolina settled in that block. So, it was basically people you knew, or you got to know easily.

[AMJ]: How many people from home were around there at the time, [00:03:04] do you think?

[JWJ]: Oh, there was a lot, almost every two houses were at least Native Americans uh... from North Carolina.

[AMJ]: Why did your sister move up here?

[JWJ]: Her husband got a job up here and that's why [00:03:19] they moved to Baltimore. He got a job paintin' for Maryland Paint Company.

[AMJ]: What was it like when you got here?

[JWJ]: I saw those tall buildings. And then I saw those people eatin' [00:03:34] bugs. And I did not like it here. So, in order to go back to North Carolina, the guy that I was dating says, "Marry

me and you can come back to North Carolina." So it sounded like [00:03:49] a deal to me. Only those bugs turn out to be crabs that I eat today.

[AMJ]: How did you get over that feelin' like they were bugs?

[JWJ]: Uh... everybody was eat—a lot of people were eatin' them around me, [00:04:04] so they saying it was good. So I finally had to try it. So now I eat those crabs, those bugs [laughing].

[AMJ]: So wait, did you go back to North Carolina?

[JWJ]: I went back to North Carolina [00:04:19] for 5 months and 20 days and came back to Baltimore. And been livin' in Baltimore ever since.

[AMJ]: How do you know exactly 5 months and 20 days?

[JWJ]: I counted 'em.

[AMJ]: So you weren't happy when you got back.

[JWJ]: I was happy when I got back. I wasn't [00:04:34] happy in North Carolina.

[AMJ]: Why not?

[JWJ]: I came back to live with my family, my mother, because I was only 17 at the time. All my family was here. And marriage just weren't for me. [00:04:49] I was too young.

[AMJ]: What did you do when you got back?

[JWJ]: I babysitted for my sister some and then I got a job at The Moonlight, as a waitress, and I work there for a while.

[AMJ]: Oh, what's The Moonlight? [00:05:04]

[JWJ]: The Moonlight's on the corner of Broadway and Baltimore Street. It was a restaurant. And most all the—a lot of Native Americans hanged out there, especially after the bars closed at night. They would come in there to [00:05:19] finish up their drinking and hang out and sometime to eat breakfast 'fore they went home.

[AMJ]: Was it a pretty good job?

[JWJ]: The tips was good.

[AMJ]: So you came to visit Baltimore before you came to live, right?

[JWJ]: Yes. Several times [00:05:34] I come up to visit before I come to live. I came out one summer to babysit for my sister. I really didn't like it. Uh... the buildings was too tall and they were... people was too close because I grew [00:05:49] up in North Carolina, you—the house was at least a quarter of a mile from the next house. And uh... I didn't like that. And I didn't like all—all the streets. It took some time to get used to it and [00:06:04] also to make new friends.

[AMJ]: And you told us what the house was laid out like in North Carolina, how was the house in Baltimore when you moved in? What was—what was it like when you first got here?

[JWJ]: Uh... Well we lived at a apartment up on the third [00:06:19] floor and my sister at that time had three kids and then it was me and my mother and my younger sister. So, the family was... had a lot of people [00:06:34] in one room and if you compared it to today, I would say it's

like what the Spanish are doin' now when they come to town, helpin' out one another 'till they get established that they can get their own place.

[AMJ]: [00:06:50] Was it a easy living situation?

[JWJ]: You didn't have any privacy, but we all got along and helped out one another. My mother got a job, my sister got a job, [00:07:05] my main job at that time was to babysit. And my uh... brother-in-law, he was a painter.

[AMJ]: How was it different in Baltimore livin' here? How is it different than it was when you were livin' in North Carolina?

[JWJ]: [00:07:21] Livin' in North Carolina you didn't—you weren't on top of one another. You were spread out and you got to see relatives maybe once a month. And in Baltimore, you just walk around the corner down [00:07:36] the street because most of the Native Americans kinda settled in the same location. So, you'd see 'em walking by your apartment or you could see 'em uh... walking down the street. And you couldn't do [00:07:51] that in North Carolina. There was too much distance between the houses in North Carolina.

[AMJ]: Do you still keep in touch with other Native people in North Carolina?

[JWJ]: Uh yes, as of now, we goin' down four or five times a year [00:08:06] to North Carolina. Because at mine and my husband's age now, we don't work, so we have the time to run to North Carolina. So, so far this year, I think we've been to five funerals in North Carolina. And this [00:08:21] is only October.

[AMJ]: How do you get there?

[JWJ]: We drive down.

[AMJ]: Is that a long ride?

[JWJ]: That is a seven-hour drive. Sometimes eight, dependin' how much time we spend when we stop.

[AMJ]: And how old are you today, Aunt Jeanette?

[JWJ]: [00:08:37] I'm 81 years old this month, and I will be 82 next month.

[AMJ]: Do you still keep in touch with other Native people in Baltimore?

[JWJ]: I'm very active with the Indian community [00:08:52] and the Indian church.

[AMJ]: Have you always been?

[JWJ]: I... have a perfect record. I started going to church in 1974. Never missed a Sunday.

[AMJ]: Are you [00:09:07] involved with the Baltimore American Indian Center?

[JWJ]: Not as much now as I used to be, I started out back in '74... uh '73, '74, workin' with the Indian Education Program, and [00:09:22] it was housed in the Baltimore American Indian Center, which is the church today.

[AMJ]: What was it like workin' for Indian Education?

[JWJ]: I was helping my people and it was very fulfilling because [00:09:37] I was helpin' them to achieve a education. And that was... that was my heart. Was to help my people.

[AMJ]: Why did Native students need someone to help them in Baltimore? [00:09:54]

[JWJ]: Well, they sit in a classroom where they were the only Native and some of the questions was not comfortable always being able to answer em. “What are you? Who are you?” [00:10:09] Uh... and um... that made it uncomfortable for 'em and they always took a back seat. But I didn't want my people to take back seats. I wanted them to be achievers. So I worked very hard at makin' sure [00:10:24] that they got involved with the right programs, that they passed their grades, I organized tutoring programs, I got students from different places to come in and help tutor the students. And I would identify the problem [00:10:39] from their teachers. If it was a math teacher, I went to the math teacher and “What do Johnny need? Where is his weakness at?” And then we will work on that. And as he achieved, he become more satisfied [00:10:54] with hisself and he involved... got more involved with what was going on in their community, what was going on in their school. And they wind up being more successful, academically.

[AMJ]: [00:11:09] How many years did you work on Indian Education?

[JWJ]: I put in all together 25 years, here and there. I w—I started out workin' with the Indian Education, then I left [00:11:24] there and then uh—the Board of Education, want me to do another program. I did that program and then I left and then I did another program... uh for—I did two programs for Baltimore City and then I went and [00:11:40] I was doin' another program for Baltimore City at a middle school, not workin' with Nat—I had some Native students, but it was the students I work with there, they would pull from the computer 50 families. And it was me, [00:11:55] a psychiatrist, and a social worker. And we had 50 families and I was workin' with them. We went into the homes and I may tell Mama, “You cook today. And so and so, you wash the dishes,” and I'm gonna lay it out [00:12:10] for the family. And we would talk about any problems they were dealin' with in the family, anything that affected that student's education, I addressed it with 'em. And I got to the point... I'm [00:12:25] doin' all the work. The social worker with me, sittin' over there and not talkin', and I'm doing the work... I'm gonna go get me a job and make money. So I went and applied for a job at Western Electric. They hired me. And so I [00:12:40] went to work at Western Electric. And I was there 14 months before they started shuttin' down the plant. So needless to say, I was one of the first ones that got laid off. So when [00:12:55] I got laid off, I was laid off for a while, and I went back to the Indian Education program again and—and worked with them.

[AMJ]: Do people remember you workin' with them and come up to you and say anything [00:13:10] when they see you now?

[JWJ]: Uh yes, they will come up to me and say, uh... "If it hadn'ta been for you, I woulda never graduated." A lot of 'em tell me that, and then sometime, they talk about the way I would get 'em [00:13:25] to school, cause I would go in the homes and run 'em out of bed. Uh... one young man, he really gets kick out of it now when I see him. Uh... his... I called his mother, his mother said, "I can't get him to get out of bed." So, [00:13:40] I got in my car, went to his house, went in the frigerator and got me some ice water, and I went and dumped it on his bed, so he had to get up then. And he still remembers that every time he sees me, me throwin' ice water to get him out of the bed. [00:13:55] And you probably wonder why, why I could do that. The kids really the bottom line was, they knew I loved them. And parents most time would tell me, "He's yours, do whatever you need to do." And [00:14:10] so I treated them just like they were mine cause it— 'cause I wanted them... I wanted my people, the Native American young people, I wanted them to have a good education. And in order for me to fulfill [00:14:25] that, I had to push them to be their best.

[AMJ]: Do you still keep in touch with other Native people in Baltimore today?

[JWJ]: Uh yes, I go to church with Native American people. I have friends, I have neighbors [00:14:42] uh... that are Native American. And um... I go to Baltimore American Indian Center and for 45 years I've worked every time they put on a powwow. I was always on the gate.

[AMJ]: [00:14:57] So what kinds of things did you pick up on as a result of having moved to Baltimore? Do you eat different foods or did you change the way you dress? Or is the way you talk any different?

[JWJ]: I still like the foods of North Carolina, [00:15:12] especially since I go down there four or five times and at one point in time, we were raising some of the peas. And I have a little garden in the backyard and I still raise the... and eat the produce [00:15:27] and vegetables that I did in North Carolina.

[AMJ]: Do you feel like the way you talk changed at all?

[JWJ]: I think so. I think I don't talk as slow as I used to.

[AMJ]: Did you ever go home to North Carolina and people say [00:15:42] you talk different?

[JWJ]: Most people in Maryland tell me I talk different, in Maryland, c'ause I still have that Southern accent.

[AMJ]: Do you notice any influence in North Carolina from Baltimore? Like, can you say anything's [00:15:57] different there because so many Indian people lived in Baltimore and then went home?

[JWJ]: Yeah, the ones, like, when they come up here and get a job and they would retire from their job, they would go back and settle back in [00:16:12] North Carolina and buy homes in North Carolina. So the difference is coming here to the factories and all the opportunities to work and make money, it afforded them to buy and have their own homes.

[AMJ]: [00:16:27] So basically Baltimore caused there to be more wealth in North Carolina?

[JWJ]: A lot more. Uh... individual homes and not only that it [00:16:42] helped our race of people to prosper. We have a lot now that are doctors and lawyers more than I don't—I don't know how to count 'em, but we have a lotta people in the medical [00:16:57] field and the legal field now.

[AMJ]: What kind of things did you bring from North Carolina with you here that you still do, like things that other people here don't do that you brought with you from where you're from. Like, [00:17:12] do you still have any of the same customs or...?

[JWJ]: Some of our foods, like the way we prepare... uh collard greens, sweet potato bread... Nobody in Maryland knows what sweet potato bread the way we make [00:17:27] it. They—they make it, but you—that ain't somethin' you can go to the store and buy. But we—uh... sweet potato bread, turnips, you know, and we bring uh... Some people gro—uh...grow... uh... green peas here. [00:17:42] But most of those are grewed in North Carolina and we go down there and when it's the crop is comin' off, we uh... buy green peas and stuff like that and bring it back and put it in our freezers.

[AMJ]: You know what [00:17:57] I noticed you have one of those “Thank You, Jesus” signs out front? And it seems like just people from North Carolina have that. What's goin' on with that?

[JWJ]: Well, some company in North Carolina um... makes those and my [00:18:12] nephew by marriage, he has this store and he always has 'em in there for sale and I—Lord knows I know he's been good to me, uh...so I like to advertise that. And I have one [00:18:27] neighbor down the street. I really don't even know where he's from. He's white. Every year he asks for a new sign, if his gets messed up from the rain and the snow. I have to bring him a new sign that says, “Thank You, Jesus.”

[AMJ]: What [00:18:42] do you like to do for fun these days?

[JWJ]: Well, Monday through Friday, I go try to walk at least two miles a day and I go different places uh... dependin' on what the activity is in the community. [00:18:58] Um... We have a very nice community association and I go to the community association and see what's going on, participate in it. My husband always does the car shows and different activities [00:19:13] that's going on in the neighborhood I'm involved in.

[AMJ]: Yeah, what's the community you live in? Where do you live now?

[JWJ]: I live in the community that's called Watersedge and I've been here since 19...6...6.

[AMJ]: [00:19:29] Where is Watersedge? If you had to explain it to someone in North Carolina who didn't know.

[JWJ]: It is approximately 13 to 14 miles from where I originally started at in [00:19:44] Baltimore, from Baltimore Street. It's out in the county. And I moved to the county when my children were small. We come out and purchase this house when my kids were small 'cause I wanted my kids to go to school [00:19:59] in Baltimore County. Our house backs up to a stream of wa—body of water that runs into Chesapeake Bay. Of course, that, over the years, has been good and bad. And at the time when [00:20:14] I moved here, uh... the kids could go swimmin' in the water back there, or you could put your boat. The young man up street from me, he even built a—a pier and had his boat there. But now, since everything's [00:20:29] fillin' in, the creek is fillin' in, uh... no longer can have a boat. It's not deep enough anymore.

[AMJ]: Do you ever worry about flooding?

[JWJ]: Yes, I do worry about flooding. [Hurricane] Isabel was not a friend of [00:20:44] mine. She come in and 12:00 at night and I hear this noise comin'. I woke up and—and I got up and I went to the window and water was comin' through the window. And at that point in time, [00:20:59] my husband had had a stroke, and he was paralyzed on the left side. And I got him up, got him in—in the vehicle and uh... We went approximately two miles away to [00:21:14] a friend's house. And then I come back and I moved the church van was in the driveway. I moved the church van out. And then I went back, when it got day, then we started cleanin'. [00:21:29] It took me probably about six, nine months in order to get back in my house. Had a lot of good friends come and help. I had 36" of water in my livin' room. And [00:21:44] they brought a garbage truck uh... out front and everything on the ground floor of my house went out, and went in the garbage. Um... The estimator come by and estimated the damage for me and he said it was [00:21:59] around \$66,000 worth of damage. And also, back in April of this year, I got some water damage to come in my house. It came from the street, overflowed [00:22:14] 'cause the drains are all clogged up and they don't work very well anymore because they filled up with trash and litter from over the years. And uh—it cost me around \$3,000 [00:22:29] to redo the house again.

[AMJ]: What do you think the Indian community in Baltimore will be like in 10 or 20 years?

[JWJ]: 10 to 20 years from now, we'll be blended in the community. I d— don't think we'll [00:22:44] be stickin' together like we used to when we first come to town.

[AMJ]: Yeah, what was it like when everybody was stickin' together?

[JWJ]: It was a warm feelin', comfort feelin' because you know each and every one had your back [00:22:59] all the time, so you—you live comfortable.

[AMJ]: And it's not like that now?

[JWJ]: Yes... because I've been in this neighborhood so long that I know my neighbors. We're—we're comfortable. And I got family in the neighborhood, right across [00:23:14] the street.

[AMJ]: What do you hope for the Indian community in Baltimore?

[JWJ]: I hope we keep—we keep our relationship and our culture alive. That would be one of the things [00:23:30] because we understand one another better than—than we do other—other races don't understand us as well because they have never been... as... [00:23:45] what would be the proper word? They don't understand how we have lived and how it was. Because we grew up only goin' to Indian school, [00:24:00] all Indian church. But yet, in our school, you knew everybody and everybody was like family, where today, I walk in a classroom... When I was work—doin' Indian [00:24:15] Education, it may be just one Indian kid. And today, the Indian kids and the non-Indian kids don't understand... and they question, "Why you that way?" Um... [00:24:30] My grandson told me his school, that the kids said to me—to him, "You ain't white, you ain't Black. What are you?" And students havin'—havin' to answer that question can [00:24:45] sometime make you feel uncomfortable of who you are, cause you're so different.

[AMJ]: So, with that in mind, is there anything you'd like the young people of the community to hear from you?

[JWJ]: Is that... Learn about [00:25:00] my culture, learn about my race of people. We are a forgotten race of people. And if there's anything that you could do, I would want young people to

be recognized, so they can feel good [00:25:15] about their race. I want 'em to learn about their race. They have a good, strong heritage. They are survivors. They're more of a survivor than any other race in this country, to me.

[AMJ]: Is there anything else you'd like [00:25:30] to tell the world?

[JWJ]: Native Americans did not have anything handed to 'em on the plate—on a plate. They had to work very hard, very, very hard in order to accomplish what they [00:25:45] have accomplished today. And today they have their own homes, they have their own schools, they have their own law offices, they work in Washington, D.C., they have jobs... Anywhere everybody else has jobs, you might find [00:26:00] a Native American there with a job. And one thing about the Native Americans, they are hard workers.

[AMJ]: Thank you, Aunt Jeanette. Is there anything else you want to say?

[JWJ]: I'm very proud of my niece.

[AMJ]: Thank you. I'm keeping that [00:26:15] forever and I'm gonna make it my ringtone when you call me. [You] did great, Aunt Jeanette.