

# CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE

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Robeson County

"Building communicative bridges in a tri-racial setting"

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## 22 Year Search Ends In Reuniting Of Brothers

by Barbara Braveboy-Locklear  
Special to THE CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE

For Ronnie Williamson of rural Lumberton, a 22-year-old gnawing ended on August 16, when his search for his 34-year-old brother ended.

"When I get something in my head, I don't give up. I work it out," Williamson said.

In 1968, the late Alene Cummings Williamson, mother of 15 children, told her third born son, Ronnie, that she had given away three of his newborn siblings. She felt he was old enough to understand the reason she'd done so was because they were born during the post Depression years. Times then were hard and it became too much of a hardship to feed eight mouths, let alone three more.

Thus began Williamson's sole long search for his sister, Wynona and two brothers, Simmie Lynn and Jerry.

"I'm not an educated man," he said. "So I went to old people in my community and talked with them about what my mama told me. I got nowhere in getting leads." Years passed and leads led to deadends.

The gnawing wouldn't go away.

Three weeks ago he got lucky when he asked his employer for three days off from his year-round custodian job at Deep Branch Elementary School. It was during those three days he settled down to an intensive search of birth records in Robeson County's Register of Deeds office.

"I pestered and worried the four ladies in the department and they didn't seem to mind. They were as willing to help me in my research of documents as they could be," he smiled. "I got lucky when I discovered my brother Jerry had applied for a name change in 1974."

Feeling a ray of hope, Williamson asked Sheriff Hubert Stone to help him in locating his brother. Stone enlisted the help of Robert Ivey, the director of Robeson County Communications.

On August 10, Ivey notified Williamson of information he'd waited 22 years to receive. His brother had been located through a state-to-state driver's license check. With a name, address and telephone number in hand, Williamson nervously dialed the given number. When a voice answered on the other end he asked for Jerry. The voice said, "No Jerry lives here."

"I got scared and said nothing more. I hung up and told my wife the sheriff's office couldn't have been so off in giving me accurate information."

He dialed again and Kathy McClelland answered. This time Williamson asked for Don.

"When I heard the Southern accent, I knew something was up," she said. A moment later Don McClelland was on the phone, but would not confirm his identity. "I didn't confirm to Ronnie my given name of Jerry because in that shocking moment I wasn't sure how I felt about the situation at hand. I wasn't happy or excited, I was numb," McClelland said.

For all his life McClelland had been told by his adoptive parents he was half Indian, and was given away by his natural mother who was Lumbee. But after a few moments of dialogue with Ronnie he admitted he was indeed the Jerry Williamson he was trying to locate.

Raised as an only child, McClelland never knew he had siblings-14 of them. "I would have loved knowing about my natural family and would have contacted them...."

especially if I had known they cared for me. I was led to believe that the family who gave me away did so because they did not care (love) me," McClelland softly commented. "I couldn't see going out looking for someone who didn't want to see me."

So it was on August 16 at 11:02 a.m. Don McClelland's plane from Wisconsin set down at Fayetteville airport. There to greet him were his father, "Fishing" James Williamson, sisters, cousins and nine brothers. A sister and brother are deceased. It was a tearful reunion as each relative took turns embracing a long lost relative.

Last Sunday afternoon brought a continuous stream of relatives to the Highway 74 home of Ronnie and Nancy Williamson. Earlier in the day more than 100 relatives and friends had gathered for a covered dish lunch. Among them were 11 of the Williamson children. As they sat under shade trees outdoors, yellow ribbons tied to trees along the driveway blew in a soft wind. A hand painted sign welcoming a brother and his family stood at a mailbox beside the well traveled highway in front of Ronnie Williamson's home.

Late afternoon caught the Williamson clan gathered at nearby Deep Branch Elementary School. There they engaged in planned activities which included a softball game and a swim in Lumber River. Late Sunday night found another stream of visitors coming to Ronnie Williamson's home. Not much sleep was taken at the home during Sunday night because everyone knew that Don McClelland, his wife Kathy and children Jill, Julie and John would be leaving on a 10:05 flight Monday morning from Fayetteville airport.

There remained one final stop before McClelland and his family departed for the airport: that of visiting the grave of his natural mother Alene. Enroute to the airport, they turned into the entrance of Lumbee Memorial Gardens. In the quiet of the early morn Don McClelland visited the graves of his natural mother, brother and sister. There surrounded by a newly found family he paid homage to a mother who gave him away because of love-not rejection.

As the plane lifted off its runway, Ronnie Williamson waved a tearful good-bye to his brother. Then a new gnawing began within him--that of locating a sister and brother. The 42-year-old Lumbee has begun in earnest to locate his sister and said strong leads have developed since Monday. He continues to pursue each of them. He says he won't rest until he has exhausted all avenues in his search. "Even though I've never met Wynona and Simmie Lynn I feel a close connection to them," he commented. She would be 35 years old and he 34 now.

As Ronnie Williamson and his four children returned home from Fayetteville airport Monday, yellow ribbons continue to blow in the trees alongside his driveway. They blew as a reminder that one long search had ended and that two more will continue, along with a gnawing that won't go away until a brother and sister are found.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Anyone with information about Wynona Williamson and Simmie Lynn Williamson are encouraged to contact Ronnie Williamson at Route 4 Box 212-D, Lumberton, NC 28358.

## FIRST HAROLD B. WYNN SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED



The United Saddletree Center began its annual Harold B. Wynn Educational Scholarship for Deserving Students of the Saddletree community. The first recipient was Jason Edward Chavis, a 1990 graduate of Magnolia School. He is the son of Mrs. Della M. Chavis. He is shown above with Mrs. Janet Wynn, widow of Harold B. Wynn, who made the presentation. The presentation was made at the recent graduation at Robeson Community College.

The late Mr. Wynn is being honored in this way by the United Saddletree Center because of his dedication to education. Harold Wynn's commitment to education is best exemplified by his own determination to overcome poverty to obtain a college education. The son of tenant farmers Wynn served for many years as assistant principal of Magnolia School. He left the area to obtain his education and returned to his native Saddletree community and inspired

other students to achieve academically. Wynn spent many years dedicating his life to teaching, guiding and being an example to the young people of Magnolia School. His life

was a statement of what one can do with determination and perseverance. His life demonstrated that no circumstances should prevent a child from the quest of knowledge. He believed and lived by the Jaycee Motto "Service to Humanity is the Best Work of Life."

The United Saddletree Center has determined to honor the memory of Harold Wynn each year by giving a scholarship based on academics and financial need. Contributions to the scholarship fund may be sent to the United Saddletree Center, Route 8 Box 289, Lumberton, NC 28358. Checks should be made payable to the Harold B. Wynn Scholarship Fund.

Chavis, the first recipient was ranked fifth in his graduating class. He plans to attend East Carolina University and major in engineering.

Wynn was a charter member and founder of the first rural Jaycee Chapter in America, the Saddletree Jaycees. He also served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Pembroke State University. Wynn succumbed to a heart attack in 1978.



This painting by Gene Locklear of the 1988 Super Bowl honoring the memory of Walter Musgrove, PSU librarian, took place Monday. Musgrove, 55, died of cancer June 18, 1989. Shown with the painting (left to right) are his wife, the former Maria Guadalupe; his mother, Kathryn Lange of Columbus, NC; and his sister, Patricia Jones of Saluda, NC. Mrs. Musgrove holds a commemorative plaque which will be hung near the painting in PSU's Mary Livermore Library. Musgrove was a great sports fan and therefore the sports painting was dedicated to him.



Dedication of this painting by Gene Locklear of the old train station at Pembroke took place Monday honoring the memory of Dr. Robert Hersch, Pembroke State University librarian who died last Oct. 19 in an automobile accident. Hersch, 48, was an ardent student of history. Shown with the painting are Hersch's wife, the former Jane Preston Buckles, and his son, William Preston Hersch, 12. Mrs. Hersch holds a commemorative plaque which will be hung near the painting in PSU's Mary Livermore Library.

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THE CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE  
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## Church News

Revival at Elizabeth Heights Baptist Church  
Revival services will be held at Elizabeth Heights Baptist Church August 26-31 at 7 p.m. Sunday

and 7:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. Speakers will be Rev. Michael Cummings and Rev. Jimmy Strickland. Pastor is Rev. Horace Oxendine.



Ronnie Williamson, center, greets his brother, Don Williamson, for right, stands with open arms ready to McClelland, left, for the first time. "Fishing" James greet his son.