INDEX

Bowlegs, Billy, 4
Brighton Indian Reservation, 12
Clans, 11
Crime and punishment, 9
Dress, 5
Everglades, 9
Food, 5
Generosity and hospitality, 9-10
Green Corn Dance, 9, 13
Hollywood Indian Reservation, 12
Hunting and fishing, 6-7, 11
Jackson, Andrew, 1-2
Land acquisition, 3, 6-7
Medicine and medicine men, 2, 4, 9
Music, 14
Osceola, 4-5, 8-9
Planting, 12-13
Religion, 2, 4
Respect for the dead, 5
Socializing, 13-14

Stories and legends
   Corn Woman, 10-12
   owl as bad omen, 14
   raccoon and the 'possum, 14-16
   soldiers and atrocities, 1, 3

Tamiami Trail Reservation, 12

Thompson, Wiley, 1-2, 8-9

Tribal council, 9

Wildcat [Coacoochee], 4

Wildlife and domesticated animals, 3
I had seen him often in the past, passing away his time by carving out wood images. I asked him if he would do some recording for me, and he said, "No, I would not like to," but he would tell me a lot of things if I would set down and listen to him. So I asked him to tell me about things that have happened to Seminoles in the past—stories that he might have heard as a young boy. Thoughtfully, he said, "I used to know a lot of stories told to me by the old people." I asked him if he often thought about the past. He replied, "Many times, when I was a young man. Today, I do not anymore, because when one grows a little older, one tends to forget. Today I know that the time is no longer here when I can tell the past to the present generation—especially the young people, because they will not listen. The atrocities that were committed to my people are too shameful to talk about," he added. "Even for me to think and wonder about the past is emotionally disturbing. So I can sympathize with the young people why they would not like to listen to the episodes of the death days of their ancestor."

I asked him if he was familiar with the names of Andrew Jackson, Jesup [Mar. Gen. Thomas S. Jesup], and Thompson [Wiley Thompson]. He thought a minute, and he didn't say a word. And then he nodded. In a low whisper, he said, "Yes. I have heard of those names. I have heard what evil men they were many, many times; especially when I was just a small boy." I asked him if he could relate one of his stories, and he said, "Yes." He had to think about it. We talked about thirty minutes, and then he said, "I believe I can tell you one story. This is one story I heard from my grandfather. A long time ago, on a bright, beautiful day, the village seemed to be in a happy mood, and the women were preparing a meal. Suddenly a burst of warning filled the air. Someone was running and hollering, "Run! Run! Hide! The soldiers are coming! The white men are coming! Everyone run and hide!"

"The women, the children, the sick, and the old aged started scattering, but they were too late. Here came the soldiers on their horses, throwing burning torches at the thatched huts. They caught on fire like lightning. They were the brave, courageous soldiers. Courageous, all right! Fighting helpless women and children, and the old people. They started shooting down the villagers like cattle sent to the slaughter. One could see chips of bones flying in the air, and the fresh smell of blood, enticing the vultures of the air. These vicious men would not stop with two or three shots. They would stand over the spread-out bodies and pour bullets into each corpse. They either would slit the throats or plunge the bayonets into the heart of the dying men. This was the way they destroyed one village. I'm sure many more villages were destroyed in the same way, but this particular village was the village of my grandfather,
He was just a small boy when he saw all this.

"My grandfather used to ask me, 'Do you think the soldiers were satisfied with all this brutality? No. The soldiers would turn over the cooking things where the women had been cooking; they would go into their corn bins and destroy all their corn. After the soldiers would depart from this disaster area, only the burnt villages, the smoke, dead bodies, and the smell of fresh blood flowing like brook water would be left behind. This was a sad enough scene, but sooner or later, as always, the scavengers would come to pick up the leftovers.

"Who were the scavengers? They were no other than the white settlers. They would come in, look over the place, gather the few scattered pigs, horses, hogs—gather anything they could find and claim them for their own. These heartless, cruel people would look over the village and stare at the dead bodies. But this meant nothing to them. They would walk over to the bodies and kick them around. After looting the dead, they would go back to their little, respected homes. This horrible sight at the village was then left for the Seminole warrior.

"Upon their return to the village, they stood motionless. All the hatred and revenge seethed through their bodies. They mourned over their loved ones, and buried them at their burial graves. When a person died, only the medicine man and certain people were allowed to go near the bodies, but when a village was burned up, one could not help but break the taboo. To see the ugliness of man's crime to another. If you were caught in the situation, one could not close their eyes to the death of their dear ones. They tell me that the Seminoles knew who was responsible for this tragic day. It was Jesup, they say, because it was an obsession with Jesup to kill and force the Seminoles out of Florida.

"This is the only story I know of Jesup," he said. "My people said it was he who massacred these men, women, children, and old people. Every time the Seminoles had to be moved out, he was in charge. And they always said it was him—Jesup."

The old man, my informant, said to me, "Jesup, Jackson, Thompson—whoever you may speak about to us, they are the same. They are all the reincarnation of the devil. They were the reincarnation of the treachery that befell our people.

"Then another mad passion that these white men had was to capture the blacks among us and make them into slaves. They would even take Indians—men, women, children—into captivity in order to use them as slaves. They would take them away so that they would never see their homelands again. These are the kind of events that went on in the early days of the Indians' relationship with the aggressors. Many times, thinking of this,
I often think of the grieved and the desolate, and the children that were left fatherless and motherless. How lonely they must have been, and what a struggle they had to come through so that my generation today could still yet remain in their ancestral land. The grief and the sorrow that my ancestors inherited was not in vain. Because of their steadfastness, we, the Seminoles, are living on our mother earth. I used to have dreams of helping my people—that is, if I were born at that time. But really, I probably would not have been much help. I would have been the first one to be killed at the hands of the aggressors anyway," laughingly he joked.

Then he said, "All the atrocities and land acquisition that the aggressor acquired was not through courage. They were not courageous at all. It did not take great courage to kill helpless persons when you have guns and cannons. These lands were taken in the name of cowardice. What chance does a group have in the face of cannons and long guns and trained soldiers? It is too bad that we did not graciously and generously hand over our lands to the aggressors. Our lands were the rich, fertile farm lands. We tried to defend to the best we knew how. That is why we met with disaster.

"Hearing stories of the days of my elders, and how they would be confused when the white man told them to move to the West, because they were to receive better land and money to go there, my people would think, 'How could these people expect a people to emigrate to a new dwelling when they had no interest of going anywhere but to stay in their ancestral territory?'

"The old people have often told me that we had so many things in those days. We had fresh-water fish. Today, the streams are now polluted. In the swamps, there was plenty of garfish. Now, we are lucky if we can cut through the water, it is so full of trash. I believe the garfish suffocate from this," he said.

"And in the old days, there were plenty of horses that belonged to the whole tribe—we were quite a horseman, then. We raised a lot of cows, pigs. We were especially fond of dried beef. We used to dry our beef, and we would leave them hanging on trees or on chickees. After working so hard at drying beef and making corn meal, and beautiful rows and rows of different crops, the white savages would come rushing into our villages. After scaring off the women and children, they would help themselves to our dried beef and whatever else we had. What they didn't want, they would destroy—like the big fields of corn.

"There were so many episodes...and the way our brave warriors were captured. Usually they were captured under the white flag of truce, which symbolized peace—that we were supposed to talk in good spirits. Under this symbol, we were to lay aside animosity
and arms, and talk together in order to decide what to do. But Osceola, Wildcat—respectively known as Coacoochee among the Seminoles—were all deceived under this flag. Now, tell me—how could any Seminole ever learn to trust any white man, then, and now?

"In spite of all the treachery and deception, the warrior—the heroes of those days—were shrewd men. The aggressor had to use these tactics in order to capture such men. The victory of the aggressor is not a victory. They think they destroyed the Seminoles then. But let me say this," he said. "The Seminole is not destroyed—his spirit is alive today, reflecting the heroes of yesterday, reflecting the hope and wishes of our ancestors. Today, we feel as though nothing can ever replace the bones and blood of our people. The only thing that could embrace them is our belief in ourselves.

"It saddened me very much when I hear this is a great nation," he said. "It is not great when one is aware of the treachery that was used in order for them to have these lands. This great nation was built on the bones and the blood of my ancestors. It was built by deception, by chasing a group of people with thousands of foot soldiers, guns and cannons. Our Indian history is ours to remember and to cherish; and the white man's history is his to remember and cherish. Whatever we think is great is in the way we have been taught.

"In the days of Billy Bowlegs, Osceola, Wildcat, it was not safe to walk around the swamp alone at night, because there were the slave hunters. One could never know if there were a group of white settlers around. Many times a band of whites would catch a couple of Indians—or an Indian alone—and hit them until death was kind enough to claim his body. In spite of all the adversities, the Seminoles felt that the Great Spirit had protected them. Even though only a few Seminoles were left, this was meant to be.

"My people fought the long, hard struggle to retain ancestral land. This nation's foundation is built upon the crushed bodies of great people—the back of my people, the Seminoles. All the injustices—the theft, the atrocities, the conscious effort of exterminating our people physically and culturally—are forever imprinted in the memories of the Seminole. Those who suffered under the hands of the invaders are told in story forms, and part of oral history. These incredible episodes are passed on generation to generation."

My informant said that his grandfather claims he remembered one village that had been set on fire. He said only the unbearable stench of human flesh could be smelled. The scavengers of the neighboring whites, whatever they could find that belonged to the Seminoles, they took—like cattle, hogs, corn, squash and melons. And they would go to the medicine man and take his
The medicine bundle was very sacred to our people. It was through the use of the medicine that we could hide ourselves. It was through our medicine that we took that quenched our thirst and hunger and kept us well. The most desecrating thing a person could do was to abuse the medicine bundle. The fever that the white man had in taking everything that the Seminole had was incredible.

"My grandfather said he was a small boy, but it made him sick to see such animalistic behavior—like taking things off the dead. You see, the Indian has respect for their dead. If a man died, reverence must be given to this man. When an Indian dies, his dearest and closest belongings are left with him. His best hunting shirt, his best leggings, moccasins he wore on his hunts, everything that belonged to him are neatly bundled up and left with him. Even his favorite food is left with him. So, we honor our dead. But the white man, he gets much pleasure from robbing the dead. Today there are many white people who come to our reservation and look for our ancestral burial grounds, and they will take the bones of our ancestral bones. They have no respect. They have no reverence. They rob the dead, when the dead can no longer defend what is rightfully theirs.

"After the white settlers would deplete the Indians' gardens and their livestocks, our people would become very hungry. It would be awhile before their gardens would again bear fruit. Trying to retrieve what is rightfully theirs, a group of men would go to the white settlers' home, and loot whatever they could. Unfortunately, their bows and arrows were not a match for the many long guns that these people used. After their livestocks and gardens were destroyed, my people would have to move onto areas where there were a lot of natural food. We lived on blackberries, herbs, and brewed tea and swamp cabbage...and fish. Mother Nature certainly provided for all of our basic needs, although it was our belief that we must help Mother Nature along by planting our crops."

My informant was quite talkative, but he just would not speak into the tape recorder. Perhaps later he will consent, hopefully. I spent about four and a half hours with this old man. He enjoys talking. I had to stop him many times in order to understand some of his idiomatic expressions. Some of them were quite strange to me, and interesting.

I asked him about Osceola. I asked, "Who was this man called Osceola?" He began, "Well, during the war, the war which was forced on us by the white aggressor, a young man came on the scene. He was not a chief by choice, nor was he a member of the tribal council. He was a young man named Osceola. He was
to be a natural born leader, equipped with tremendous intuition. This intuition...we, as Indians, believed that medicine man had given him a medicine bundle that would enrich his intuition, and also give him special powers which would work wonders for Osceola. And it did. Much of his victories--Osceola--was due to his strong intuition. Without fully understanding and knowing the language of the foreign people, Osceola depended a lot on his intuition to give him foresight. He was quite clever in organizing his warriors. With his warriors, he had work divided. There were scouts who went before the warriors to prepare foods, such as fishing for fish, picking herbs and berries; always making sure that there was enough food for the warriors. Other scouts had to know every inch of the territory, so that they may not lose their way. The women helped out too. In their remote hiding places the women would dry fish and beef, and always have them ready when one of the warriors returned for supplies.

"It was forbidden by the war heads that fish grounds would not be lying about. Anything that would give the slightest sense of whereabouts of the Seminoles hiding place was discouraged. Most of the time, they would eat raw fish, so that the odor of cooking would not give them away. They lived on the wild food of the land, like berries.

"I remember one time that my grandfather.... The white man showed no mercy to the Indian. If an Indian was caught by a band of white men, this would seal his doom. They would beat a person to death with chains. You see, the greatest happiness to a white man was to inflict harm on a living being. During the white wars, the Seminoles knew nothing of private property or any law that said a tiny piece of land belonged to one man. He did not know, or have any concept, of what law meant, so he did not accept a piece of paper that told him that this land was not his, because the only law he knew was natural law. And natural law said that all land belonged to everyone.

"My grandfather said the white man came on us like a storm, and tried to force us out of our homes. He told us to go west, but we refused, because no man had the right to take from another that is rightfully his. If one does try to take something away, then it is the right of the owner to defend. This land was rightfully ours, and we had to defend this land, because this is where we were born. We were to be buried here on our ancient burial grounds. We were greatly disturbed when the intruder came at us with guns and cannons forcing us from our homes, telling us we had to move. We did not understand. When they would talk of money, they would say, 'We will give you this much money,' but exactly what they meant we did not know for
certain. But one thing we did know; this land...it was the Great Spirit's natural law which gave this land to us. It was the Great Spirit's natural law, which is more supreme than the foreign people who said that they gave this land to the Seminole. All the Seminoles ever wanted was to live in peace and to die on their ancestral land. And to die, if needs be, by the hands of their enemies, who they knew quite well. This is the way the people lived and died, but this was not allowed by the transgressors.

"The transgressors said, 'You must move west. You can no longer be living here.' And they would promise the war leaders, saying that things would be better further west. But you see, they have lied so many times. They had captured Wildcat, Osceola, and others in the name of the white flag of truce. They had burned villages, plundered, raped and killed our people. How can we trust and believe in them? As they said our chiefs had said it was all right to move to the West. They moved our people by the wagonload to Tampa area to wait for passage to the West.

"As you can understand, back in Grandfather's days it was the total intention of the United States Army to exterminate our people. That's why there aren't very many Seminoles today. The thought of yesterday is unbearable. The injustices, man's inhumanity to another—all for what? White supremacy. Today, they have this. Today, we Seminoles have lost our manhood. We only live in the shadows of others. We are strangled by the white man's ways. For us to have shelter over our heads, we have to give money; and Mother Nature provided a chickee, which we did not have to pay for. To eat, we have to spend most of our earnings. Before, we could hunt. But outside a reservation, we have to have fishing license, and they aren't hardly any fish anymore. The river streams are too polluted."

And then he continued to say, "Before there were too many white people, I used to be able to walk and hunt and go as far as I wanted to. Even though I do not know how to read, when I see a big white sign with black lettering on white man's property, I know what it means. It usually says, 'No Trespassing.' Oh, before these changes took place, our people obeyed Mother Earth. They took care of her quite well. Even in my time, I remember quite well, our yards had to be swept clean so that the evil spirits will be kept away from our huts. But these days, the yards are unkept—perhaps this is the reason why there is so much evil.

"My relatives who claim to know the white ways do not understand the white ways at all. Because those that are in power are not the friends of the Indians. I'm not talking about the neighboring white man— I'm talking about white men who can make
big decisions for the Indians, and how they can improve the lot of the Seminoles. I am old," he said, "and no young person will listen to me. No one listens.

"My memories, some of them are forgotten. It is good to forget. There are some things I remember as though it happened yesterday. Many of the stories I am remembering today...today many old memories are brought alive. I cry alone sometimes, because we are not the white man's equal when it comes to making political decisions. The white man is trickier than the rabbit. At least the rabbit does not hurt anyone physically, but beware of the white man.

"You ask me," he said, "if the Seminoles have picked up the white man's ways. Yes, some of them have. They have a taste of liquor and white man's morals. Those are the worst kind of the white man's ways. There are other ways of the white man...which I feel it is necessary for our children to lie, cheat, equally as well as the aggressors, and they will be respected by the aggressors. There is no other way."

My informant was certainly anxious to say more, and I'm hoping later on I'll be able to get his voice on tape, because he says a lot more things I would like to put on, but he discouraged me from repeating some of the things. One thing I asked him about—how did...people in the old days know how to get to certain festivities when they didn't have calendars? When did they know it was the right time to go to the big dance? He told me that each leader of the different camp would be given a bundle of sticks. And as each day went by, they would throw away the stick, and when the last stick was thrown away, this was the time for the big get-together.

There was one story he really enjoyed telling me, and it went something like this: I had asked earlier if he had ever heard of Thompson. "No, I don't believe I have ever heard of Thompson," he said, "but I have heard of Tomsie. One day, during the time when Osceola was a young man, he went to a place where there were many white soldiers. Osceola wanted to find his wife....

[Here there occurs a break in the narrative, occasioned when the tape ran out on one side and was turned over.]

...Indian women, men, children, or anyone they could get a hold of who looked healthy and strong. Because they could sell them like cattle and they needed them to sell for slaves.

"Osceola was certain that his wives had been captured by these slave hunters. He was angry—very angry. He took off for this place where Tomsie lived. This man Tomsie didn't like Seminoles. He hated them with a passion, and he would kill every one of them if he had a chance to. Osceola had an oral fight
with this man. Tomsie became angry, and he called for his soldiers to arrest Osceola and to tie him up. Here came the soldiers at their captain's command--about four of them. They all started fighting, wrestling with Osceola. Osceola fought like a tiger. He maneuvered among, around these men. Finally, with one man, they overpowered him and chained him and took him to prison. They didn't give him anything to eat or drink. And besides, Osceola would not have accepted it. Osceola had medicine with him, strong medicine, medicine that would quench his thirst and hunger. They chained his ankles and wrists so bad they tore into his flesh. They were bleeding. And they say that he carried these scars for the rest of his life. I know this story because I heard it many, many times. The white man had no respect for the Indians.

"Osceola and others were tricked so many times by the white men. In those days, we lived in the worst possible conditions. But they believed that the Great Spirit didn't want all of them dead—otherwise, the Seminoles wouldn't be living today."

The land in the Everglades were not fit for planting. One may wonder what kept these people alive. It was the medicine, the sacred herbs that the medicine man prepared. The medicine gave them protection. This is the story he seemed to enjoy telling, and he recalled then the story that was told to him by his grandfather. When Osceola got out of prison, another time later on in his life, he killed Tomsie. He shot him for something.

Another question I asked: "When you were a young man, was the Green Corn Dance more meaningful than it is now?"

"Yes," he said. "But these days, I don't go to the Green Corn Dance." He said, "During the Green Corn Dance, it was the appointed time to discuss matters that would concern the tribe." This was the place and time to express one's opinions and grievances. Also judicial matters were presented. If someone was accused in carrying false stories, lying, committing adultery, they were on trial before the tribal council. The tribal council would judge what kind of punishment the crime fit. Also marriages and divorces were carried out during this time. Punishment for lying, adultery...one form would be to cut part of the ear or part of the nose. When a Seminole does wrong and breaks the tribal law, he is punished by the tribal council. If he is convicted of some petty crime, he is steamed. This is supposed to squeeze out the evils from his body. But if he continued to lie, cheat, he would be completely banished by the tribe, and must live by his own wits and never to return to his own people."

I was always impressed by what they had to say about generosity—their concept of generosity. I would often ask the young people as well as the old people how generosity played its
role within the tribe. They would talk about it in the past tense; it seemed as though it has sort of vanished. Here is my informant's concept of generosity:

He said, "Generosity was not an ideal to be aimed at. It was a way of life that was taught from the time a child is born, and practiced until life is ended. This was prestige—generosity. The Indian's reward was not how much wealth he had, but how generous he was. It was the obligation of the strong and the skillful to share his provisions with those who were sick and unable to hunt for their needs. One of the many sins was to be stingy. If a person was stingy, it was a disgrace. It was a disgrace to keep everything to one's self, that which another may find useful. It was a disgrace from withholding from another what one can give. This is not to say that the Indians were all free-hearted. There have always been men of greed and selfishness in our midst, too, but these kind of characters were usually ostracized by the tribe. There was no place for selfish men.

"Hospitality, naturally, was another form of generosity. One must share what one had. If an enemy who came in peace, or a friend came to the house, it was the duty of the household to treat him as a member of the household. And one must never be rude or raise their voice to an enemy who came in peace to the house. They shared everything. When their food ran out, or the woods fire, it was everyone's obligation to go out and hunt for more food and firewood. That is, if one accepted being part of 'the family.'"

Here is another story, or another legend of the Corn Woman. There are many, many stories of the Corn Woman. They say that an old woman and her grandson were going from Indian camp to Indian camp. No one seemed to know who they were, or what clan they belonged to, or what they were doing. Was in the wintertime; it was quite cold. The grandmother and the grandson were looking for shelter—a place to keep warm and to eat. So she decided that she would go from house to house, and hopefully find someone who would share their food and fire. But that was the time when the Seminoles had been in contact with the white people, and had learned some of their ways, so that every stranger was thought of as being an intruder. Disappointed and disheartened, the little grandmother said to her grandson, "I cannot believe these people would be so selfish. Every other camp we have been to, they have been friendly and accepted us as members of their camp. But I just don't understand why this camp would be so selfish and suspicious."
Then, gently, she said to her boy, "Don't worry. We will find some food and fire soon."

They left the camp, and they were in search of another village. They fought their way through the swamps. The gnats and the mosquitoes seemed to be nibbling away and having a great feast on them. The alligators they had to be careful of. If they disturbed their sleep, that would be the end of them. For many days they walked, until they reached the camp of the Wildcat Clan. They were very receptive, good-hearted people. They invited the grandmother and grandchild to sit down and eat, and to warm their cold bodies.

The uncle of the household said, "If you like, you may stay with us as long as you wish to. But let me warn you. It is not always that we have enough food to eat. But you are welcome to stay, and share in things we do have here."

"We shall be happy to stay here," answered the grandmother. My grandson is learning to hunt, so he can help you hunt for game. And as for me, I'm a storyteller, and I find much pleasure in playing with the little children. If you allow me, I will take care of the little ones, and will tell them my stories."

"If it pleases you," the uncle replied, "I would appreciate your doing that."

The following day, before the sun peeked over the fields, the young men were already hunting, and the women were out to pick berries, and to fish, which was customary within the tribe. It was the duty for the older children to take care of the younger children when the parents were out. Usually, they would play all day, and sometimes forget to eat. But things were different now, as the grandmother was around. The children ate on time, and they sat around and talked to each other. Especially, the children would love to gather around the grandmother and listen to her stories. The old lady told them stories of how the Indians got the sassafras root; that was a good root that would cause people much enjoyment in drinking this root drink. And she told them of different healing herbs that the medicine men used; that if a person was very, very sick, the medicine men would give them different kinds of herbs. How she enjoyed telling these things to the children. When the children said they were hungry, she vanished for a little while, and she brought back a big bowl of soup made out of corn. It was the best smell that the children ever smelled. The soup was the finest soup they had ever tasted, and they kept asking for more. She explained, "Now, my children, as long as you behave yourselves, and do as you are told, you will get some of this delicious soup every day."

The children did everything that the grandmother asked them to do. They swept the yard to keep the evil spirits away; they went out picking berries, so when the parents would come back from their hunt and from fishing, the parents could enjoy the berries. So the children were very happy and did exactly what the grandmother asked. They were so contented; and, for
this, she continued to make this delicious soup for them. But being so old, her strength began to seep away.

One morning, she could no longer get up from her bed. She called to her grandson, "Grandson! Grandson, come here. I have something to tell you, something very important." And then she told him that she was very sick, and that she must go away. "Grandson, you must follow my instructions. I have planted out in the field some grain. It will take root, and it will sprout in the spring. I have taken care of this field. I have watered it, and I have pulled out the bad weeds from this field. You must continue to do the same. And if you do this, you will have a nice garden that will feed all the people." And then she fell asleep.

Many days went by, and the grandson mourned for his dearly beloved grandmother. And daily, as his grandmother instructed him, he took water to the fields, and gave it water, and he would tear the bad weeds out. One day, when the first ear of corn ripened, the people of the village thought that they saw an image of the grandmother in this corn—and perhaps that she was the Corn Woman. They started telling each other that the corn was the grandmother. As they looked over the fields, it was ripe with beautiful corn. As the breeze would gently breathe across the fields, it would make the corn stalks dance. Then, they say that the grandmother was so happy with the hospitality that the village had given her, she had repaid them with a rich harvest of corn. They also say that you will notice the white hair that sprouts from the green ears of corn—that this is the white hair of the old grandmother, and that she was the Corn Woman.

Often, talking with the Seminoles, they would talk more or less in fragments. They would start out telling a story, and they would lead on to something else, and it would be about half an hour before they would get back to the stories. Everything was done quite informally, and as a result, I felt as though I benefitted by it.

I had a chance to visit Brighton Indian Reservation, Hollywood, and Tamiami Trail. And each place, I would notice that there weren't any gardens—perhaps they had their gardens in remote areas. But as far as I was able to observe, I did not see any gardens. I asked why, and my informant said that he thinks perhaps people have grown old, fat, and lazy. That was his answer, and he thought it was rather funny. But he said in his days, when he was a young man, about fifty years or so ago, he said he remembers different families having their own garden plot. They were always near chickees, and people were always out planting corn, potatoes, different vegetables. Today, you just don't see this. He said other than this family garden
plot, that there was a large common field that the whole tribe worked on together. This garden, or this field, belonged to all the tribe. This is where they planted beans, squash, melons, corn, pumpkins—and they really like pumpkins. They said they delighted in pumpkin bread.

If a harvest was a good harvest, then everyone had plenty enough to eat the whole year. Then, what everyone looked forward to was the Green Corn Dance, and celebration of the harvest. But for this field, the people who took care of it were different members of each clan. An overseer was appointed by the chief to look after these fields. When it was time to plant, and to take care of the fields, he would call in the men. And how did he get the attention of these men? Well, jokingly he said they didn't have a telephone or radio, but they had a man called the town hollerer, who would go through the village calling everyone, "It's time to plant. It's time to start the fields." If a person who was a little bit lazy didn't want to help in the fields, he was fined. And how was he fined? He had to do twice the work of the men. So when the town hollerer would go through the town asking these men to start on the field, they would come out with their axes and their hoes, and they would start hoeing the garden. That's how they worked together, he said.

The crops would grow, and the young people would take turns watching them, and then the men would take turns watching them at night. This is the way they drove away the wild animals, especially the birds. The birds were quite a nuisance to them. They would throw rocks, bows and arrows at the birds. This is how they kept their garden going. And after everything was planted, and harvest time came, they ate the first [corn], and this was done at the Green Corn Dance.

It was really fun to work out in the fields, he said, because out in the fields someone would start singing. Everytime the hoe would go into the ground, they would sing, and as they would pull up, they would sort of grunt. It was just more or less a sort of social outlet for them, he claimed. Even though the sun would be hot, they would try to get up early in the morning before the sun even started getting up, because breakfast time...they would have their morning meal out of the way, and then they would be out during the cool period of the day. This was really something that was sort of a joy, but today no one seems to really want to bother with a garden. These were the good old days, he claims.

I asked him how he courted the girls. "How did the Indians sort of go around with each other?" And he said in those days, when he was a young man, in his teens, probably, he said, they
were making a lot of flutes in those days, a lot of flutes. He never sees them these days. But these flutes had special meaning to them, because a young man would learn to play his own love-charm music on them. He would practice many days. Whenever he would court a girl to his liking, and the tribe would know that he liked this particular girl, the uncles would make arrangements that they could talk together and see each other. If the boy was from a different village, or maybe from a different chickee that was far off, the way this boy would send messages to his girlfriend that he was coming to see her, he would play the flute. When he played the flute, this girl knew that this music was only for her—for no one else. Only for her, and she would come running out and join him, and then they would get together. So this was sort of nice, he said. But these days, it's not longer practiced, and he doubted if anyone remembers this thing. He said, as for himself, he's sort of sentimental, and he remembers this thing, courting a girl this way.

There are some things that are very sacred, and there are some things you just don't talk about, he was saying. For example, some of their superstitions that they believe in. And the types of animals that brings bad omens, and the animal that brings good omens. I asked him if he could tell me a few, and he was a little bit hesitant to. But I told him what I have heard among our people in Oklahoma, and he said there are a few. For example, the carrier of bad message is the owl. "If an owl is setting up on your rooftop making sounds, this means that there will be death in the family," he said.

And I said, "Well, what else does the owl do, besides bringing bad messages?"

He says, "Well, the owl will steal the heart of a man, especially a person who is dying, and this will increase his age. In actuality, the owl may not be a real owl. He may be a man who has turned into an owl."

These sort of things, he didn't care to talk about. But one story he was telling me, which I thought was sort of cute, was about the raccoon and the 'possum. At one time, the 'possum had a little hair on his tail, but not as much as the raccoon. Every day he would look at the raccoon's tail. Poor little 'possum—he was really envious of this big, thick, bushy tail of the raccoon. So the little 'possum walked up to the raccoon, and he said, "Hey, raccoon, how did you get your beautiful, bushy tail? You know, I have a little hair on my tail, but not as much as yours," he said. "I sure would love to have a big, bushy tail like yours."

And the raccoon sort of danced, and he sung a few songs, and he said, [chant in Seminole language.] The song went something
like that. And poor little 'possum said, "You know, you're so
jolly, and you're so happy. Is it because you have such a
beautiful, bushy tail?" The raccoon says, "Yes, I'm just
beautiful all over."

And the 'possum asked, he said, "Tell me the secret of how
you got your tail."

The raccoon said, "Well, one day I was walking through the
woods, and I suddenly saw a Spanish moss hanging, drooping down
from the trees. And I took this Spanish moss, and I wrapped
it around my tail. I wrapped it, and kept wrapping it, and
wrapping it. And then my tail looked, you know, sort of bushy.
But one thing was wrong. It kept falling off. Then, I decided...
well, how could I keep it together? Then I remember that some
things you can heat, and then they will stick together. So I
wrapped a little bit more Spanish moss on my tail, and then I
built a fire. In this fire, I let my tail be heated a little bit,
and then when I pulled out my tail, sure enough, the heat made
the Spanish moss stay on my tail. This way, I've never lost it."

The 'possum listened. He said, "Are you sure this is the
way it really happened?"

And the raccoon said, "What? Do you think I would lie to
you?"

And the 'possum said, "No. No, I don't think that at all."

So that day, the 'possum went looking for trees that may
have Spanish moss on them. He looked and looked. He was fini-
ally becoming a little discouraged, because he couldn't find
any Spanish moss. As he was setting down, he thought, "Well,
I'd better go a few more feet further away from where I'm sitting.
I may by chance run into the Spanish moss." And sure enough,
he did find some Spanish moss. He was so happy, he was just
jumping up and down and singing. Then he took a handful
of Spanish moss, and wrapped around his tail. He said, "I
must make my tail even much bigger and bushier than the
raccoon."

He finally got enough Spanish moss attached to his tail...
which made his tail look even bigger than he was, and then he
built a fire. Then he stuck his rear end towards the fire, and
he smelled the Spanish moss burning. He says, "Oh, well, maybe
it'll take a little while before the heat can keep the Spanish
moss attached to my tail." But he finally discovered that the
Spanish moss was actually burning, and it was burning his tail
also. He started hollering and yelling, "Help! Help! Somebody
help me! I'm burning my tail up!"

He couldn't get the Spanish moss off, because he had wrapped
it around too tight, so he grabbed, and he grabbed the Spanish
moss, and then with his tail he started flapping the burning
Spanish moss around.
And then finally the fire died down. But it was hot. The poor 'possum kept jerking and pulling on the Spanish moss. Finally, he pulled the Spanish moss off of his tail. To his disappointment, there wasn't a single hair left on his tail. So to this day, if you ever notice a 'possum...his tail, he does not have any hair on. This is the way the poor 'possum got his tail.