

Epps, Lois: Zan Epps' Daughter ^[1]

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Lois Epps: Zan Epps' Daughter

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 4/11/1999. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

I visited Lois Epps Jones in High Plains, an Indian community north of Roxboro, in Person County. Her great-grandfather found refuge in High Plains during the Cherokee Removal. Now she is one of the community elders seeking federal recognition for the High Plains Indians.

Like so many rural women before and since, Jones had to leave a beloved community to gain her own freedom. In 1941 she left High Plains to become an Army nurse. She would not return home for good for 35 years. It was the turning point in her life.

The hardest part was saying goodbye to her father, a tobacco farmer named Alexander Epps.

In Lois Epps's words:



Lois Epps. Photo by Chris Seward, 1999. To request permission for further use or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

I used to love sitting outside when my dad was curing tobacco. We would sit out in the moonlight and roast apples and he'd tell me about the things that happened when he was growing up. Naturally, when we were working in the tobacco, we

We Indians lived separate and apart. We were set aside because of the color of our skin. We could not go out and eat a meal in public. We could not go in the restaurants because they only had white and colored sections.

We weren't colored. We weren't white. We were neither. Blacks had least had a section at the theater - there was no place for us. If we needed to go to the bathroom, right up on the door: white, colored, but no Indian. And for me, as an Indian

We had our own church, our own school. We'd go to Roxboro maybe once a year if we were going in after a pair of shoes. We never had any use for the law. We weren't calling the police, and the police wasn't coming.

Growing up at the farm, we didn't have time to get out into other things. We were too busy trying to make a living. Mom couldn't have taken care of 10 children if everybody didn't have a job. We didn't have running water. We had to carry water

By the time you did all of that, and take care of your cows, your horses, your pigs, your chickens, you didn't have a lot of time to think about entertainment. You were so glad to get finished with what you had to do! There were no weight problems

We were brought up in church, believing in the way of life that the Bible taught. Never a day started that my parents didn't ask God's protection for us and them. It was instilled in us to know that as we lived, so would we die. You don't live alone

If you and your wife work in public, your child will never have the connection with you that we had with our parents, daddy being a farmer. We were taught things. We were around them. If I had a problem, I didn't go to my peers or call the school

I had a beautiful childhood. I wouldn't trade it for nothing! No child could have been happier. You see, I didn't realize how disadvantaged I was because I had so much of the things that are essential. I had love. I had security. I had encouragement

I would have preferred to stay, but I knew I couldn't. If I could have lived right here in Person County and taught school at Bethel Hill or Roxboro, that would have been different. But I couldn't, not as an Indian. I knew if I ever were to accomplish

I was the first High Plains girl that ever went away from home, that wasn't married and moved with a husband. My parents knew how much I wanted something for myself, but others laughed at me. Yes, I was the laughing stock! The dreamer

I felt there had to be somewhere in this world I wasn't going to be treated any different because of who I was and where I came from. When they asked, "Who are your parents? Where do you come from?" there had to be somewhere that it didn't

I wasn't ashamed of being Zan Epps' daughter. I was proud. I had one of the greatest dads. Daddy didn't go to college. He couldn't read nor write, but he was one of the wisest guys I've met. Education is from a book. Wisdom is from God. And

And let me tell you: If you could have seen that old man's face the first time when I came home from the Army! When I stepped off that train, oh, the look on his face! The pride, the joy. Words cannot express it.

Somebody said to him, "Who are you looking for?" And my daddy raised his hand, proud as a peacock, and said, "That's my daughter."

This is an excerpt from the "[Listening for A Change](#) ^[3]" project of the [Southern Oral History Program](#) ^[4] at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Additional Resources:

[Audio Recording](#) ^[5]: Interview with Lois Epps Jones by Kathryn Newfont, 11, 16, and 25 February 1999, K-0259, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sohp/id/13129> ^[6]

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