

## Ozark Chinquapin Interview

by A. J. Hendershott

**Kenneth Ruark.** (Pronounced RU- ORK) Wife's name Barbara

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Born in 1934 and was 77 at the time of the interview 7-16-2012



I live in Barry County which is in the southwest corner of Missouri. This area is hilly with rocks; mainly flint rocks.

### Memories of the chinquapin:

I first heard about chinquapins when I was 3-4. Dad lived through the Depression when nobody had anything. My dad liked to make sure we had something special for Christmas so we had roasted chinquapin nuts. To do this he placed chinquapin nuts in a bread pan and roasted them on a stove. He didn't leave them in there too long. He'd cook 'em long enough so he couldn't put his hand in it. This was long enough to kill that little egg for the worms. If you tried to keep a fresh bag of chinquapin nuts without roasting them first, you would end up with nothing but a bag filled with worm dust.

I remember coming home on a school bus and there was some big ole chinquapins alongside of the road. The ground would turn black from the chinquapins. The bus driver would stop and let us get out and gather chinquapins. Boys would put them in their pockets while girls would pull up their dresses to make a bit of a pouch to hold theirs.

There were varieties of chinquapins (nuts). Some were small while others were long and larger.

Squirrels went wild over 'em. But there was always enough chinquapins for everything; people and animals alike.

Mother took us to the chinquapin tree behind the chicken house. We would gather chinquapins and played Hully gully. To play you cupped your hands with some chinquapins inside. You rattled them about and let someone else listen to it so they could guess how many was inside. If they guessed right they could have all the chinquapins in your hand. If they were off then they had to supply that same number they were off to the person who held the chinquapins, to make up the difference. Mom never had to pick up any chinquapins. We made up the difference most of the time. If she lost it wasn't very often. She could just tell by the sound of the nuts rattling.

### Chinquapin use:

One year I was real worried. I had two kids and they both had the whooping cough. My one year old baby girl had the whooping cough and coughed so much it made her eyes bloodshot. My four year old

son was sick and in the hospital and we were scared he was going to get the whooping cough too. Whooping cough is caused by a virus so antibiotics won't touch it.

The doctors had tried everything so my dad came over to tell me what to do. He is of Cherokee heritage. I began to tell him how nothing would work. Dad said, "I didn't come over here to listen to you, I came here to help you. Now go get some chinquapin leaves to make a tea."

At that point if he had said to go get manure we have tried it.

Dad told to "collect chinquapin leaves and boil them to make a tea. It'll be bitter so add honey. Each cough stick a spoon in their mouth."

I said it was winter and the trees don't have leaves. Dad told me, "There you go trying to tell me instead of listening! Now go out and find a new shoot because the leaves don't fall off those. And you know he was right.

I brought those leaves back and began to boil them. We had a white granite stirrer (enamel coating) and those leaves left a stain up to the water line that nothing would take out. I tell you that I gave it to my daughter and son both and in two hours her cough turned around and he never did get it.

My dad said this was an old remedy that came from out east with Chestnut leaves and as a chestnut relative it'll work the same.

That was our cough medicine for years after that. If you stored it with sugar or honey it might have fermented.

#### Cherokee knowledge:

My grandmother Maive (Maive is a Cherokee name) used to know a lot about plant use. After she died we were going through her things and we came across sacks of roots and stuff like that. I was not real interested and now I wish I had been. Dad used to try to teach me about certain plants and I was more interested in deer hunting.

#### Blight:

The blight killed out the chestnuts first and later killed out the chinquapins. This occurred in the late 1940s into the early 1950s. It took a while to kill 'em all out.

Chinquapins have been a staple in our lives until I was in high school. Old trees were dying by then

#### Today:

I have eaten chinquapins the last two years. We have a bush about 20 feet tall. That is a cluster of sprouts all around a stump. The blight kills it back every so often but we can get chinquapins from it from time to time.

When will they ever find a disease resistant tree? It would be a blessing if we could get the chinquapins back. I'd love to have a chinquapin tree to my family even if I never got to eat another.

#### Wood use:

It is easy to recognize chinquapin old dead chinquapin trees in the woods. They have a peculiar look to them, and they don't rot. We used them for fence posts. A man once told me that if you used chinquapin for a post you would never have to worry about a post again. I used black locust lasts a long too. He was familiar with a fence post that was forty years old when a farm was purchased and that fence post was still in the ground today.

We sued to make dogwood wedges for splitting logs. We hit them with mauls out of hickory or chinquapin wood. We found a chinquapin 6"-8" in diameter and cut and sawed a circle around it. Went up 18 inches and sawed another circle around. Then we split the rest down to a handle. Have not seen other uses for chinquapin myself but I know the wood is beautiful when finished.

#### Moonshine memories:

My granddad used to make moonshine. This was an age when a good milk cow would cost \$30 or you could buy a gallon of moonshine. My grandfather didn't know much about making moonshine but he bought the supplies and learned how. When more and more people started to make it the price dropped to \$8 my granddad could still get \$12 for his cause his was better.