

# Congaree Swamp Stories

## Featured Speaker Transcript

### Jimmie Dinkins - Fishing with Dough Balls and Bamboo Poles While Growing Up Near the Playground That Was the Congaree

**Jimmie Dinkins:** I was born around here. I was raised up down here - this was our- Well, let me go back and tell you, I was born in '42, so that makes me what?

**Camper:** Old?

**Off Camera:** Who said that?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** (laughing) How old? How old would that make me?

**Campers:** If it's 2009, I don't know. 59? 19-what? 60? 19-what?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** 42

**Campers:** 60-something. 67? In your 50's? I feel like about 58.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** 59? Ooh, that's great!

**Campers:** 67! What year was you born?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Huh? '42. 1942

**Campers:** 69. It's 67.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** 1942

**Camper:** I know you something with an 8.

**Off camera:** Ask him what month.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** August. August. My birthday's the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

**Campers:** I bet its 66.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** How many?

**Camper:** 66

**Jimmie Dinkins:** That's good. That's good, isn't it?

**Campers:** 30 or 64. 58.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** But anyway, anyway, you know, about '57, I guess I was about, what 12? And we - down here was where we used to play. You know, this was our playground, and we played near the water. It was always near the water. In the summertime, we would go swimming. We would come down here and make little swimming holes and stuff like that. So, in my neighborhood, there was boys my age. There was about maybe 20 of us in that age from 12 to 15. So we all would come down here and play together, and swim together. We would make our own little swimming hole and stuff like that. And we was camped down here - we would camp down here sometimes two nights, just stay until our parents would come and get us. If it wasn't for that, we would just stay down here, you know, because this was a place to play. You know, there was water, there was - we could go fishing, and you know, we would bake our little fish - and eat. And you know we would have our little selves - My mother, when we would leave home in the morning, she would give us like, you know, a little flour to make dough balls, so we would have you know, like um... Ya'll don't know what dough balls are, do you? (retrieves bag of dough balls) These are like dough balls, they would be like flour...She would put flour in a little Vaseline jar, and we would get down here and we would mix it up and make dough out of it, and that's what we'd fish with. You know, we had our little fishin' pole. We had our little - I still have my fishin' pole. So we would have our little - (picks up bamboo fishing pole). This is the kind of pole that we would fish with. We would have like, we'd have our little hook, and a little pole, and that's what we would fish with - put our little dough ball on there. And see we, you know, by - The swamp then, it wasn't as wide as it is now. It was like, maybe, you know, as wide as this room. And there was trees, there was always trees. You could walk out on the log, and we would walk out on the log and fish. You know, so we didn't use no cork or anything like that. This was all we used. We would catch brims and stuff, and we would cook, and play for a while, and go back and catch more fish, and eat, and stuff like that. And so, it was, so you know, it was like our playground. And you know, we would do things, just like - boys would do. Boys would do - bad things (laughing). It wasn't bad things, but you know, boys do, you know, just strange things. And it was always, back then, it was always - There was always fruit trees on our way, because grown people would, you know like apples and pears and stuff, they would eat these things and throw the seeds out, and there would be trees. There would be apple trees and pear trees, and you know, blackberries and plums and stuff all along the way. So we always had, like, fruits and stuff like that. You know, we didn't have to worry about, you know, going to the store to get stuff, because you know, there wasn't a lot of stores. And plus, you didn't have any money anyway. So we would do things like, you know, bring watermelons down to the creek in our little swimming hole, and get up in the trees, and dive in there and try to bust the watermelons (laughing). Boys do bad things like that. But this was our playground. I mean, we - I guess we didn't know anything else. You know, I guess that was, like in '57. We didn't know anything else. And we really didn't know much about cars, because we still had a mule and wagon then. My father did. So we didn't know much about cars and stuff like that. So, we played and I even was baptized down in the Congaree Swamp. We would - they would dress us in our little white uniforms, and they would clear out a little place, and that's where we got baptized and stuff like that. So that was for us, that was - Well, like I said, we didn't know anything else. You know, we didn't know anything else until, you know, we got older. And then we got older, and then we still came down here when we got older. We would come down here and, you know, we would - I got my first BB gun, you know, we would come down here and - Then we could kill birds. That's bad, but that's what we did (laughter). And you know, rabbits and squirrels and stuff. All that stuff, you know to us, that was food. You know, we would bake our little rabbit on a little stick and stuff like

that, so you know...It was a lot of fun for us. So, ya'll have no idea what that would be like, right? I guess ya'll never even swam in the creek before...Huh? Nobody?

**Camper:** Uh-huh...

**Jimmie Dinkins:** (Laughing) You did? Yeah, and I still keep all my toys. I have my first BB gun. See this was my first BB gun I had. My first BB gun (holds it up). Still got BB's in it. You know? I kept all my toys from when I was small. And then I grew up and I got a real gun. I got a .22 when I got older, but I've got all my guns. I have all my little - I even have my little cap gun. You know? I had a little holster. And I would go around and shoot my little cap gun. And I got my little rubber band gun. It shoots rubber bands. Ya'll never seen anything like this before, huh? It shoots like rubber bands. You can put like five rubber bands on it. And you just pull the trigger. I don't know if it still works. See? (Laughing) So we, actually, we used to have a lot of fun and stuff like that, you know? So, you know, once we got older, and then actually, we would come down here and shoot squirrels and sell them for like 25 cents, because you know, that's how people in the neighborhood got meat and stuff like that. You know, squirrels and rabbits and stuff like that. You know, you could get 25 cents for them, but you had to skin it, and all that kind of stuff. But ya'll don't know anything about that...Wait, do ya'll got any questions and stuff like that?

**Camper:** Was that fishing pole made out of bamboo?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah, its bamboo. So, you know, we would do a lot of stuff down here. We would do a lot of stuff down here, you know. This is where you wanted to be. This is where you wanted to be when, you know, you was our age and nothing else to do...

**Off camera:** I have a question. Two questions. Two requests. Can you tell the story about the time your mom came here and she passed out into the water? And can you tell the story about the little water moccasins in the puddle of water, please?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah (laughing), those are bad things...But you know, what we used to do a lot of times, you know like, when it rained a lot...We would call it the creek, the creek would rise, and then when the creek settled down, it would leave little puddles, little small puddles of water, like, the size of this room, off from the main stream. And what we used to do, what we used to do was, you know, take our shoes off, and get in there, and muddy it all up. So when you muddied it all up, the fish can't breathe, so they'd come to the top, and you could see the eyes - you'd see the eyes when they'd come to the top. So we would have a little stick. We would have a little stick. When you'd see the eyes, we would just hit it just like that (swings fishing pole) and it would just turn over and you could just pick it up. So, and everything would be in there - snakes would be in there, everything would be in there, turtles, everything would be in there, you know? But you know, the fish you could see, because you could see little eyes. Their little eyes would come to the top of the water. And you could almost, a lot of times, you could catch it with your hand, because they couldn't breathe in that mud and stuff like that, so...And one summer, we came down here - this was a real hot summer, and there was just little pools of water. The creek was like real small. There was just little pools of water, so you know, by just walking - Being boys, you just walk through the water - you know how kids will walk through the water, right? So we walked through the water, and we got to the other side and the water was still moving, right? So we said "hmm, that's strange." So we walked back through the water, got on the other side, and it was still moving. So we got our little stick and we did like this, and it was filled with water moccasins, little

baby water moccasins about this long. It was like thousands in there, you know? And we had walked through it twice! You know?

Off camera: In bare feet!

Jimmie Dinkins: Bare feet, yeah! Never got bitten or anything like that, you know?

Camper: What is water moccasins?

Jimmie Dinkins: It's a snake. It's a snake. Poisonous, yeah.

Off camera: Almost like a cottonmouth.

Jimmie Dinkins: But one summer, my mother - she would rarely come down there, but, you know she would want to know what we was doing and stuff like that - some of the mothers, not all the mothers. So my mother had like a, you know, a long fishing pole, and on the bank, you know... On the bank actually was like - almost like a beach, because there was sand, because the water would bring sand and stuff, and she was like, she was like fishing, and we heard this scream, you know, "Help, help!" So, she had caught this fish, and the fish was like, dragging her into the water, and so we all got down there dragging, and we finally - all of us finally got to a place where we stopped, and we was all in the water, and we were holding onto the pole. So, finally this thing turned up and it was a turtle - it was a turtle about this big (motioning), and what had happened - he had flipped up on his back, so we pulled him out. It was about this big around (motioning), you know? So she'd make us take it home, boil it, she took the meat out of it, and made soup and stuff, so we had like turtle soup and meat like that - just like steak, you know? So, we would have some great times down here, you know?

Off camera: Hey, Jeffery had another question. I think he was saying, he said that about - don't know much about hunting, but you're a hunter right? Yeah...

Jimmie Dinkins: Really?

Off camera: Yeah, Jeffery's out there, he can tell the hunts...I think that's pretty cool Jeffery.

Off camera: What do you hunt for Jeffery?

Jeffery (camper): squirrels

Off camera: Squirrels? What else?

Jeffery (camper): deer

Off camera: Deer? You guys have similarities...That's neat.

Jimmie Dinkins: Yeah, yeah, we- You know, one day, one day - You know, they still had wild pigs down here. And I was out one day and I was just walking along, and I heard, I heard, like you know how you heard scurrying along in the leaves, like that? So, I heard the little scurrying along, its "Oink, oink" scurrying along in the leaves, right? And so I looked down, I looked back, and there was like a mother and about eight little pigs. The little pigs was in front of her by maybe 10 feet.

They was just scurrying in it like that, so I stood behind the tree. I said "I'm going to catch me one of these little pigs!" So I stood behind the tree like this, and they were just scurrying on, and they got ready for my, and I grabbed one, and he go "OINK, OINK, OINK," and the mother came through - she came through those bushes like a bulldozer, you know? And so I tossed it and she went (motioning away), when she was coming in with that squealing worry (laughing)...

Off camera: What was about - you know, you said you got baptized in Cedar- Did you get baptized in Cedar Creek?

Jimmie Dinkins: Mmm-hmm

Off camera: Is there something sacred about Cedar Creek, was it just because it was close by, or...?

Jimmie Dinkins: It was - back then it was just a custom, you know? That's what Baptists do, they baptize you. I guess they baptize you in the nearest water.

Off camera: Right, okay.

Jimmie Dinkins: Yeah, so that was the whole idea.

Off camera: Okay.

Jimmie Dinkins: So, Cedar Creek was the only water that was near our church, so we just came down and got baptized down there.

Off camera: cool.

Jimmie Dinkins: Yeah, I guess it was sacred in a sense, when you're small like that, it's a sacred thing, you know.

Off camera: You guys understand all about that baptizing right?

Camper: I got baptized.

Jimmie Dinkins: You got baptized? Yeah. You got some more questions for me?

Camper: When was the first time you caught your biggest fish?

Jimmie Dinkins: Oh, I was about...I probably was about, maybe 10, because see, see during the season, carps...You know what a carp is? A carp is a big fish. It's got big scales, and they kind of migrate to have their young. They migrate I guess from south to north to have their young. And see, when they get ready to have their young, they have like eggs. They have like eggs, so they're real, real big, they're stomachs are real big, and they're real long, and so, when the carps come this way, you could just almost just reach down in the water and pick 'em up, pick 'em up, because they're just scurrying along. And we would catch 'em and they would weigh like, they would - some of them would weigh like maybe 20, 25 pounds. They would be big. And we would catch 'em, and we would drag 'em home, drag 'em home to our mother (audio cuts out)...for like, white potatoes. She would boil like, white potatoes in that same pot. And then she would, she would, you know, peel the potatoes - you know, once you boil white potatoes, you can just take

the skin off, and she would mash - she would make, like fish patties out of it, out of the carp and the potatoes, and then she would fry that, and then we'd have fish patties. But that was the first big fish I ever caught. We would catch a lot of little brims with our poles, we would catch a lot of little brims, and we would, you know we would cook those ourselves.

**Camper:** Did that (the pole) ever break?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Oh yeah, it would break, you know? A lot of times, you would get angry and break it yourselves (laughing) Look at you, Can't catch a fish! But it was easy to get because, you know, you could get it from anywhere.

**Camper:** Would most of the fish respond to those - the balls that you said (the dough balls)?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah, yeah. I guess its maybe because, because of the color of it, they would bite it, you know? Yes sir?

**Camper:** May I see your pocket knife and the other one?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** (laughing) He wants to see my pocket knife. Ok, I'll let you see my pocket knife. See, it's just a little knife, you know. I got that when I was old enough to have a knife. They wouldn't let us have knives at a certain age, you know? So, when I got old enough, my daddy bought me a knife. Actually, we really didn't need a knife or anything like that, you know, because we would just, you know - Actually, you know, now, the fish we caught - we didn't, we didn't, like, we didn't like take the intestines out. You know, you just, you stick a stick through it, and put it over a fire, and bake it and you just ate the inside. Just the outside meat off of it, and you know, throw the rest away, because, you know, it was plentiful. Because it was plentiful, you didn't have to really try to eat the whole thing, you just ate what you wanted to eat off of it, which now you would never do.

**Camper:** What kind of gun is that other one?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** This one? This one's just a .22.

**Camper:** No, the smaller one that you had.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** The little one right here? That's just a little cap gun. You know what a cap gun is? Yeah, that's what that is. Let me let you see it (unwraps gun). See? My little nephew chewed on the end of it. He played with it and chewed on the end of it. That's why the end is chewed up (laughing).

**Camper:** Does it have bullets in it?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** It, yeah, let me. Okay, let me show you (fires cap gun). See? It doesn't have bullets in it, it has like little cap things.

**Camper:** (question about dough balls)

**Jimmie Dinkins:** It's just flour and water. Just flour and water mixed together, that's all, you know. Sometimes Mama would give us a little sugar and we'd put a little sugar on it, I guess the

fish would like a little sugar, so we'd put a little sugar on it and make it sweet. Like most of us like a little sweet things.

**Camper:** What's the bamboo sticks for?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** I'm going to give you one. Want one? That's what they're for. Now everybody wants one, right? I knew it! I knew it! You can get one, you can get one.

**Off camera:** I have another question while they're getting their bamboo sticks. You talked a lot about before you started out when you were born, you know your age, and the fact that I believe you've been here your whole life.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Right.

**Off camera:** And so, you've talked about a lot of things that you did, - interacted with the swamp, you know, earlier in your life, and so what about now? Is it still prevalent in your life? Do you still interact with the swamp that much?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. I, you know, I have like a boat and stuff like that. I still come down - come down and fish, and I also - I also make handmade baskets out of natural vines, so I'm in the swamp a lot, you know? It's still like home to me, so I'm here like all the time. Even when I grew up and got a job, I came down here to do like little documentaries and stuff like that. You know, I used to do what he used to do - he's doing now (pointing to camera man).

**Off camera:** You worked at the TV station?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah, I worked for the TV station for 40 years. Yeah. Yes 'mam?

**Camper:** How do you make the baskets?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** The baskets are - I make out of - You heard of kudzu vines? You know what kudzu vines are? You know that green stuff that grows beside the highway with all that leaves on it and stuff like that? That's what I make baskets out of.

**Camper:** How do you do it?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** I weave it - It's a weave. I weave it together, you know? Like knitting? Kind of sort of. But I - you know, I grew up and really I never - I never moved away from here. As a matter of fact, the house that I live in now is right next to the house that I was born in, so I still live on the same property and stuff like that, you know. So I, you know, I grew up and I went to Vorhees College, and I started working at ETV, and that was home for me. So I was there for like 40 years.

**Off camera:** The swamp has always been a big part of your life, I take it.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Oh yeah. Yes 'mam?

**Camper:** Are these BB gun holes?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** No, those are water holes. You see bamboo has a lot of water - and bamboo, when it gets a lot of water and it gets too much water, it lets it out. That's why it has these little funny things on it. Any more questions? Yes sir?

**Camper:** I found a way that you could use this as a gun too. You put some bullets on top and then you blow it onto the....

**Jimmie Dinkins:** (laughing) Not with bamboo, because you have these little things in there blocking it, you know? It's not solid all the way through, you know? And you know what we used to do also - We used to sit down, and we would take these, and make little flutes out of them. Like you can cut this right here and right here, and you can put like, three holes in there and have a little flute. You know, it's real easy to do. And see we, back then, we didn't have - we didn't have anything like drills. What we'd do, we'd sit around the little fire, and you know how you put a stick in the fire and it would get hot on the end? It would get hot on the end, and we would just burn it. So, you had to do it more than once, but you could burn it, and it would just burn a round hole right in there. And we'd have a little flute. I wish I had - I still have some of those at home too, but I didn't bring one with me today.

**Off camera:** Jeffery has a question for you.

**Jeffery (camper):** Have you ever camped in a tent?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** A tent? We didn't have any tents. We would just rake up straw and leaves, and that would be our camping. We didn't have nay kind of cover, you know just like - an area like this, we would just do our little leaves thing. Because, you know, actually, we would stay up all night long. There would be somebody awake all the time, so, you know, you'd sit around. And we would play at night just like we would during the daytime, because there was - We would go out and catch lightning bugs. Ya'll ever seen lightning bugs? We would catch - We would get lightning bugs in like a quart jar and at night it would be like a - they would light up like a lamp, you know? I mean, it was - We would have great times down here.

**Camper:** Don't they run out of light?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Well, yeah, they would run out of light, but you know? And there was a lot of bats around here too. And the bats would like, you know - I guess they would be catching like mosquitos, but it would seem like they would be diving at you, but they would be diving at the mosquitos. And they would be just flying around and we would be ducking.

**Off camera:** I heard someone say this week with the mosquitos used to not be so bad as they are now? Is that your experience?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** You know, we never even thought about mosquitos. Mosquitos, we - You know, I don't think we ever even got bitten, with mosquitos, there was - You know, unless we didn't pay it any attention...

**Off camera:** That's what somebody else said. That's exactly what someone else said. They were so used to it...



**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah, you just didn't pay it any attention, because I think back then there was no such thing as mosquito spray and stuff like that. The only time my mother was concerned - She was more concerned about red bugs. You know what red bugs are? She was more concerned with red bugs, so she would make us, you know, put kerosene around our pants legs. And I guess that got rid of the red bugs, so we didn't bother with that either.

**Camper:** It didn't burn?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** No, it didn't burn. It was just, you know, on your clothes, and I guess red bugs come when you're walking through the grass and stuff like that.

**Camper:** (unintelligible)

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Really? Yeah, that happens, yeah. They're out there in the grass, you know.

**Off Camera:** Ricardo has a question.

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Okay

**Ricardo (Camper):** What's your favorite season in the swamp?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** I like the wintertime. I like the wintertime. Wintertime is great down here. It's a little bit colder down here, but it's real strange down here - It's like, it's colder - It's colder on the edge and once you get further in, it's warmer, you know? It's - I don't know why is it like that. Maybe because the wind can't get down in here, but something like that, wintertime is my favorite time.

**Off camera:** You build a big fire?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Oh yeah, there's nothing like a campfire.

**Camper:** What's your favorite tree?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Tree? Well, you know, I kind of - I kind of like all the trees, but the cypress tree is a favorite tree. Actually, we used to use the cypress stump most of all, because when we had little cans of pork and beans, the cypress stump - you could peel the bark, and it would be like a spoon, so you could just soup it out. So we used the cypress tree most of all, so I guess, that has to be my favorite.

**Camper:** What's your favorite animal?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** I like - you know, I like all animals, you know. Animals and I get along real well. I even raise chickens and ducks and stuff at home now. I have turkeys and guineas, and stuff like that at home right now. I don't have any large animals, just small animals.

**Camper:** (unintelligible) flute holes. You had said you left them at home...

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Yeah I left them at home, yeah.

**Camper:** You ever got caught by quicksand?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Never had a quicksand experience, you know? I always wanted to do that, but I never had a quicksand experience. I don't think we have quicksand in this area, I don't think. I never seen any, you know?

**Off camera:** Any other questions for Mr. Dinkins?

**Camper:** What's your favorite kind of bamboo?

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Well, in this area, there's only one kind, so I guess this would be my favorite (laughing).

**Off camera:** Thank you!

**Campers:** Thank you (clapping)

**Jimmie Dinkins:** Okay. You're welcome. Any time. [end]