

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

North American Indian Project

North American Indians

O. H. 116

LINDSAY BEYER

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

December 1, 1979

LINDSAY BEYER

Lindsay Beyer is a twenty-two year old native of Cleveland. He is of Seminole descent on his paternal side. He stayed with his grandmother when he was a child, while both parents worked. She taught him the basic ideas of being Indian. He holds true to these teachings today.

He feels that education is not exactly the thing for him but for some reason he is forced to attend. Lindsay would rather live the natural way. Ever since he was a child, he has worn his medicine pouch. It contains different herbs and "power devined" items.

Politically, he feels that the white American Government supresses Indianess. He says "even some of his letters have been opened."

Lindsay's parents don't openly support his efforts. They're rather quiet on the issue. He wants to live his life in a traditional native way.

He recently has broken up with his caucasian girlfriend. He vows he will never date anyone who is not of native descent. The only way that a "white person" could marry an Indian, he says, is if they are willing to bend a lot.

One of his biggest gripes is that museums are good to educate the public but need not maintain articles of religious significane.

Lindsay's goal in life is to be traditional.

Jay Toth

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INTERVIEWEE: LINDSAY BEYER

INTERVIEWER: JAY TOTH

SUBJECT: North American Indian

DATE: December 1, 1979

T: This is an interview with Lindsay Beyer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Project North American Indians by Jay Toth at Hudson, Ohio on December 1, 1979 at 2:00 p.m.

T: Okay lets start with as far back as you know of your grandparents or great-grandparents.

B: Well, my grandmother was Seminole and she came from Florida as far as I know. She was not raised by her parents because they didn't have any money so they kind of rented her out to a family, (Laughter) to a white family and she kept house for them in exchange for room and board.

T: You knew your grandmother personally then? She was around?

B: Yes, she was around until I was nine. I had just turned nine when she died.

T: Had you had any conversations with her?

B: When I was little?

T: Yes.

B: Yes, well, I only stayed with her when I was about four and five when my parents both worked and we didn't get into any deep discussions but I mean there were things like the values that she stressed.

T: Such as?

Such as if a person directly asks you a question, such as if they were to come over and say do you want a cup of coffee or to offer you something, you weren't to just kind of like be polite and say, "No," even if you really did. If you wanted it say, "Yes." So she really stressed just being very open and honest and not playing games about well if they ask you again if you want it well then you could say, "Well yes, okay." If you want it say so, or if you feel about something say so, don't cover it up. I don't know. She was a pretty quiet person. There was a lot of stuff that she didn't talk about just because she had such a hard childhood and plus her first marriage went real bad and so she was really used to keeping everything bottled up. And there was a lot of stuff we found out about after she died that she never told us.

T: Do you want to go into that?

B: Oh gosh, a lot of it wasn't necessarily specifically Indian, it was certain stuff that she didn't get along with her second husband and all.

T: They were non-Indian?

B: Who was?

T: Your grandfather.

B: Yes. She didn't get along with either of them. She was real quiet and yet when it boiled down to having to do something she was real spunky about it. Like I remember one time she got into an argument with her neighbor and this was down in the lower west side so it wasn't too nice of a neighborhood and this woman threatened her and she just very calmly and went in the kitchen and got a butcher knife and came back out and said, "Do you want to talk about it some more?" She meant business but she didn't get that excited or worked up or anything. She was always pretty level-headed.

T: So was there any way that she really influenced you to have some of your ideas today?

B: She suffered so much that she was real quiet about it all. She never bitched about it the way a lot of people do or carry on which I think is very Native American because suffering is a part of life. Complaining about it isn't going to make it go away especially if there isn't a lot you can do about it. She stressed honesty a lot which is very Native American and I still carry that with me. We find it very hard to be dishonest or to steal or anything like that. I don't know,

she didn't talk a lot about it. Just mostly the way that she was, the way that she dealt with life which was Native American but do you kind of get what I mean?

T: Right.

B: The way she related to everything.

She also bought me my first beads and showed me how to make rings with them when I was five.

T: How did her family get up to Cleveland? How did that come about?

B: I'm not real sure how she got up there because my father, I'm not even real sure where he was born. I think he was born in Cleveland but I know they moved all over the U.S. because they didn't have any money when she got married and they lived with different friends. I don't know, they just moved around a lot. But she finally married a guy that lives here and settled here.

T: Let's go on and talk about yourself, basically tell me about yourself, your ideas, your feelings, the circumstances that you found yourself in.

B: One circumstance which I found myself in which is real depressing is not knowing more about my specific heritage which is no fault of mine but non-Indians will find fault with you if you don't know everything there is to know about your own people which is kind of hard if you haven't been taught a lot. But I have always identified myself. I've always been an Indian to myself and it's not anything that I just started doing a couple years ago or something because it was the "in" thing. I have always gotten teased in school and that. I've always felt alienated. I guess you would have to say I'm more on the militant side. I believe in old ways. I believe they're the traditional ways. Even though it's not possible for me to live them right at this moment, I think that they are the best way to live, a natural, traditional way and I plan to live that way.

T: Do your parents support your ideals or idealism?

B: They accept them. I don't know if they necessarily support them. I guess you could kind of say they support them because if they see something that they know would interest me, whether it's in the paper or a piece of art work or something they'll get it for me. But my old man has pretty much been white washed. He doesn't really

BEYER

talk about it a lot sometimes he'll open up but not a lot usually. I think back in his era you were looked down upon for it. There was a stigma attached to it.

T: He's from Cleveland?

B: Yes

T: Okay, just continue on yourself.

B: Okay, lets see. I believe in old religion.

T: Old religion such as what?

B: Natural ways. I believe in the use of herbs, the old medicines, the old animals, spirit guides, the use of song and chants. I have an altar, different rituals I guess you would say. I have my medicine with me all the time. I don't take it off unless I'm taking a bath and I have had medicine with me ever since seventh grade.

T: Medicine?

B: I guess the technical term would be like medicine pouch but its' like specific--I don't really want to go into the contents but they're specific contents that have religious significance and power. This is what I carry in it now. I used to wear it in leather but because I wear it all the time, it would rot all the time and I'd have to take the contents out and I'd have to put them in another pouch and that's all. This, I can just keep it in all the time.

From a political point of view, I don't consider myself a United States citizen. I consider myself a citizen of the Seminole Nation. You kind of have to get along with the Government but I don't feel a part of it. I don't feel that it's right.

T: Have you ever visited Florida and made contact with any of the people?

B: I had contact with some Seminoles out in Oklahoma but it's real hard to trace my roots because there are a lot of divorces and a lot of adoptions. I have been trying to work on it but it's hard because they moved around so much, it's not like if they were born and died all in the same place, I could just go to the records and look everything up. Also it's kind of a sensitive subject in the family. We kind of don't talk about it which may seem kind of strange but it's something that--this is going to sound awful bad--but it's something that the rest of the family--is not so proud about or anything.

T: Your father's paternal side of the family is non-Indian?

B: No, it's my father's side that it's on.

T: Okay, what about your mother?

B: My mother is German.

It would probably also be pretty rotten to say that I don't particularly like being white but I don't, but there is nothing I can do about it. Some people may say, "How can you deny that part of you?," but for me, being Native American is best for me and it's right for me so that's the side that I choose. Traditionals believe in where your heart is.

Well, I got into politics, I got into religion.

T: As far as politics, what are some of the issues that you are into?

B: Do you mean like the issue at Akwesashe?

T: Yes.

B: I fully support them. I'm going to go up there with John in January for awhile. The thing that depresses me most is--for reasons I'm not going to disclose--I have to be in school and it's going to break my heart to have to go up there and have to come back down here because I know that's where I should be. I feel very alienated at school.

T: I have my own response to those people up there. I held a food raising thing for them in conjunction with them. We raised two hundred dollars, had a whole garage full of canned foods. They came down and took the two hundred dollars and left the food and they were stuck with that much food. They guaranteed us that they would come and get it. They took the money and said that they'd send someone down in a few days to get the food and it has been three years.

B: Is it still sitting there? Where was that at, at Youngstown do you mean?

T: Yes, this is Youngstown University so if you go on from January from the time I still remember them. . . .

B: (Laughter) With little affection huh? I don't know, it sounds pretty rotten but it's kind of your University and I think you must kind of be looked upon as part of bureaucracy, as part of the system which, I mean I'm not making excuses for them. But can you see how you guys

might have a little bit of a stigma attached to you because you're a University or no?

T: Well they came to us in a sense.

B: Really, how's that?

T: We had an anthropology colloquium and they spoke at it.

B: Well that's it, anthropology that kind of spells a lot of stuff out right there.

T: And they came and spoke at the meeting and said that we appreciate anyone that offer or help at the time. That was when it was first started.

B: I don't know. Anthropologists aren't too popular, I know that.

T: Well, we can discuss that later.

B: I know, I'm not making excuses for them.

T: They're supportive of the culture and I think without them we'd be in a lot more hassle with the Government and outside people.

B: Sure, if it wasn't for them and AIM, Governments would step all over you as much as they could get away with it.

T: I think they helped as far as preventing destruction of a lot of old sites and pushing legislation through.

B: Oh, one thing I would like to bring up, I will not marry a white woman.

T: I heard you had a tough time.

B: Yes, it's very. . . inter-racial marriages-- it's going to sound like I'm racist or something--but I know of one that has worked but I know of more that haven't. Unless the Indian is willing to give up his culture or unless the white person is willing to bend a lot. Like the one woman I know, he will not let her go to the reservation. He doesn't say anything but he doesn't like her doing bead work. He doesn't want to let her be herself, he's trying to make her into a caucasian. And I had that with a girl that I went with and I'm not going to stop being me. She didn't like it either and I really don't think that a white person can know how an Indian feels. And if you're going to live with somebody the rest of your life, I want somebody to know where I'm coming from and somebody

that I can relate to. I also intend to raise my kids Indian, and that was another thing that we used to fight about all the time. She said, "Well, why?" You know, well, they're my kids and I want my kids to be raised the way I believe is right, with my values and that. It may sound kind of ethnocentric but I think you'll find this all over the world: is that native people whether they're natives from Africa or Australia or the Americas believe that the natural way is right and I don't think I'd be happy living any other way.

END OF INTERVIEW