YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

North American Indian Project

Indian Experiences

O. H. 261

AMYLEE

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

June 2, 1979

AMYLEE

Amylee is a twenty-seven year old Seneca. She heads the American Indian Rights Association at Kent State University. Both of her paternal grandparents were blind, so her father was taken away to an orphanage. Her mother is a mixture of several tribes. Her parents were victimized by the white society. Amylee's parents accepted this, whereas she did not, but won her family's backing.

She would go out and view different cultures. Her parents would take her all over the country and expose her to different ways. She was allowed to choose her own ideas, which is the traditional way. She was not allowed to wear the traditional dress, as it was too long. Also, she was not to wear her hair long.

She went to Kent State Univeristy to get a degree in peaceful change. At the same time, she taught Indian studies. Three days before she was to start her Masters, her undergraduate degree was revoked. This was due to the fact that her native language is Seneca.

Also, a confrontation with Tribal Chief Hoag and the Longest Walk were the highlights of her life.

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INTERVIEWEE: AMYLEE

INTERVIEWER: Jay Toth

SUBJECT: Indian life, culture, school experiences, longest walk.

DATE: June 2, 1979

T: This is an interview with Amylee for the Youngstown State Univeristy, project North American Indians, by Jay Toth at Kent State University, on June 2, 1979, at 11:00 p.m.

What I want to do is start out by asking you to give me some of your past family history, your grandparents, your great-grandparents, whatever you can remember.

A: Instant recollection is not necessarily as much as I know. I do have a lot of family items and histories written down, but off the top of my head half of my family was virtually destroyed by the fact that both of my grandparents, who were Seneca, were blind and my father was taken away from them and adopted out to a white family. Therefore, he didn't have a birth certificate. Native Americans don't traditionally use birth certificates. I lost all contact and record of that. He had several brothers and sisters who were also adopted out or shipped out to orphanages in other states. We've only found one of them, so far. The investigation I've done over the last 10 years back at Allegheny Reservation trying to find out that side of the family, has ended in mostly frustration, but a few good contacts and finding a few relatives has come out of it. On my mother's side, it's Mohawk and minimal Cherokee, probably a little bit of Seneca too because the Mohawks and Senecas intermarried so frequently. My grandparents and parents were victimized by the non-Indian society that said being Indian isn't the best thing to be: Indian's place is on the movie screen being killed by John Wayne and Company. They really bought that whole bit, that it was not good

to be Indian, that the only good one was a dead one, et cetera. They didn't promote any pride in it because they didn't have any pride in it and they stripped themselves and submitted to being stripped of their own Indian cultural identities. It's only my generation that seems to be actively seeking "Indianness," and luckily I have the support of my parents, and before my grandparents died, I had their support too.

T: Can you recall your grandmother, some of the events that you had with your grandmother?

A: Mainly just domestic type things. My grandmother was a farm woman, predominantly, which most Senecas and Iroquois people are agrarian. Just lots of fond memories of old recipes, making soap, lye soap, and the accents and the mixed languages of English and native languages. Combination of contrasts and contradictions, which is what the Indian existence is, a lot of contradictions, because a lot of the non-Indian things do not mesh well.

T: Can you elaborate on that?

A: Yes. A traditional home with a toaster and a blender in it, it's just not quite right. It's a little bit off. Our whole existence is a little bit off, nothing quite blends. You either can be real traditional or real non-Indian contemporary, but I don't know that too many people have succeeded at either one of those pure strains of being totally contemporary or totally traditional. We're stuck in the middle having the values of the Native American, and those values are constantly being challenged by everything we see. The media, government, the United States government, our own government, the nations government who have been infiltrated and manipulated by the United States government. The whole existence has been infiltrated and bombarded and challenged. Everything from, all media, Cherokee Red Pop and Dandy Potato Chips with that little savage hopping around with a tomahawk on it. We're ridiculed all the time and that makes for a very strained existence. It's hard to be an Indian and still have any dignity about it. In our homes you'll see that some have caricatures, the cartoons, and you have to wonder if they really think Indians should be poked fun at or not. A lot of Native Americans poke fun at themselves, not because they think it's funny, but because they would rather do it than be made fun of. I think my grandparents were no exception to that , a bizarre combination of traditional items and hokey Hong Kong Indian crap.

T: Was there any time that your mother related incidents to you?

A: About what? I mean she talked to me all my life. (Laughter)

T: As far as life and any relationships. You know, like you were saying, they have to accept and they did accept it.

A: Yes.

T: A lot of Indians say this but they don't explain themselves.

A: Okay. My parents raised me very traditionally by exposing me to all different facets of life. They weren't afraid for me to go out and view other cultures and other political governments and other people of different ethnic backgrounds. For instance, I went to a black baptist church in a rural ghetto, the largest rural ghetto in the United States. I went there for a while. I was the only non-black person and I got to appreciate and know intimately their particular culture. Through just a myriad of occupations my father and my mother took me many places to see many things. Everything from living in a log cabin in Minnesota in the forest where there were no neighbors who were human beings, just animals, to living in an orphanage in Pittsburgh while they were house parents. That was the traditional way, not traveling so much, but the way of exposing me to all sorts of things and letting me make up my own mind about what was good. That's the traditional way to do it. That's how they relayed not only the culture that I have actively decided to live, the native culture, but they let me make sure that that was the best culture for me. They let me have the option to become an Indian or just fake it and pretend to be like a white person all my life, or to be a traditionalist. I like to think that they are proud that I chose the traditional way, something that they didn't have an option to do when they were growing up.

T: What were your experiences at school?

A: (Laughter) They were interesting. A lot of racism, a lot of times you just sit through it because I was a minority of one and minorities of one just can't do too much when they're outnumbered by forty other kids in the classroom. To this day, I think probably

three-fourths of my classmates don't even think of me as Native American, not because I said otherwise, but because I just didn't go around saying I was one. It was easier just to not say but just to be. I don't fit the stereotypes that we are all force-fed on what an Indian should look like. I got by a lot easier than somebody who perhaps had the jet black hair, the hook nose, high cheekbones, dark skin, and brown eyes. It might have been even rougher for that individual. The things I recall most are not being allowed to wear my long ribbon dresses, traditional garments, and while they were measuring other girls skirts because they were too short they were always telling me mine were too long. (Laughter) I had to conform to style, conform to the length right above the kneecap, I believe, in those days. Also, they wanted me to cut my hair because I'm a woman, remember ususally they pick on men for this; they wanted me to cut my hair because it was a hindrance, et cetera. Well, this is something that has been happening all over the country for years, that once somebody finds out that hair is like the old Samson myth in the Bible that strength and power, and in our case a very important part of our culture, it seems that's what they go after. I know many native individuals who have had to hack their hair off, men and women, to conform to whatever situation they were in.

T: What are some of the situations that you know of?

A: Well, right now I've got a friend in jail in Oklahoma who has had his hair tied to the bars of the jail. He got picked up for having an eagle feather, even though it's legal for Indians to have eagle feathers. It's nice to harass Indians over that because they have to go through the whole rigamarole of proving their Indianness, et cetera, while they're in jail, which is virtually impossible to do. His hair was tied to the bars and then they said, "Oh, gee, we've made a real mess of your hair here and we're just going to have to cut it off." His hair was longer than mine, below his waist. It was really beautiful. There's his picture there. That's one incident. There are so many. I think we integrate these incidents just totally into our life and to pick them out, it's possible to do. Instead, we just file it away because there are so many of them.

T: Why did you decide to come to school at Kent State?

A: Half of my family had relocated here and I never thought of really going anyplace but Kent State, because from being a little child I had always visited the area. I had some really fond and romantic memories of Kent, May Day campus queen and all that kind of stuff that every average little girl dreams of. By the time I got here, I relalized that that wasn't why I came here. I came here to be a political activist, and that's what I am. It's a good place to be that. There is a lot of suppression, but there is everywhere. It's very fertile ground because I can have a platform here and it's one that's desperately needed. There are people here who are interested in Indians, but all they know about us is what they see on T.V. They want to know more about us and this is a passive way of changing the Indian existence, making it for the better by teaching, education. My major here is Peaceful Change and that is what I believe in. Education is the most peaceful way to do it.

T: Can you relate some incidents in your class as far as the students' attitudes that you come across?

A: Oh, boy. I wish I had time to prepare a study for this one because it's really fascinating over the three years I taught American Indian Studies. I deal mainly in the stereotypes and the racism because it's a subtle type of racism around here. There just aren't that many Indians; therefore, the racism is one of ignorance, sheer ignorance, and not other forms of prejudice. The stereotypes are, they run the whole gamut of the physical impression. People insist that we look a certain way, that if we don't look a certain way then we can't be Indian. Then they have this peculiar notion, almost every student I've ever had to begin with has this notion that Indians come in fractions. You can be a quarter-blood or a half-breed or a full-blooded, et cetera, totally ignoring the fact that blood does not come in races, but B positive, B negative, et cetera. This concept of blood is in itself racist. The concept of race is racist. It wasn't designed by us as native people, but by the invader. Designed not to acknowledge and respect our differences, but to wage control over people who are different from the people who designed the concept of race. On that premise alone it's really difficult to get through to people when they want to know, well people come into the office and go, "You can't be Indian." They are that bold whereas they would not dare go down the hall to Black United Students and walk in the door and say, "You can't be black." (Laughter) They would come in and ask us, "How much Indian are you? Are you a real Indian? Are you a full-blood

Indian? Never have any of my black friends been asked if they were a full-blooded black or a half-breed black, or a quarter-breed black. Nor would I do that to any non-Indian white person, would I ask them if they were a full-blooded white, et cetera. That's the most prominent problem of racism that we have, just being recognized for who we are.

T: As far as the future, do you feel that education is the way?

A: One of the ways. It's the way I've chosen. I think it also is going to take some violence and revolution. I don't want any particular part in that. I don't think I'd be a good revolutionary. Just like the black people have made progress, they had to have the Black Panthers to get it started. A lot of moderate black people would disagree with that and say, "No, we would have been just fine without all that violence." I think history has proven itself over and over again. You have to have the extremes to get that change. You had to have the Black Panthers to get blacks recognized. Then the moderates and the liberals can move in and reap all the benefits that the Black Panthers put their lives on the line for. Well, I'm afraid I'm not as bold as some of the American Indian movement people. I don't want to die for a cause right now. I may end up doing that, but right now I see the Wounded Knee's and the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] takeovers, the more militant acts as necessary, and I'm following behind educating while they're doing that. That's just the role I'm more suited for, than holding a gun.

T: So give me your opinion of Wounded Knee?

A: Wounded Knee 1890 was a massacre. Wounded Knee 1973 again was almost a massacre, the only time I've ever seen on television sets tanks rolling into this little isolated area totally surrounding it with more weapons than, I think, were ever used on native people before. It was one incident of many in which the United States government repeatedly violated it's word and that's about the only thing I can say about it. It was necessary. It was necessary for the Native Americans to try to get the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1863 reenacted and lived up to by both parties, and I still didn't get it. I think because of that people started to realize, "Wow, you mean there are Indians left and they're still not happy? Gee." That was good. It is good to have a vocal point. The news media picks up on that but they usually only pick up on things when we're violent, defending what's ours or when we want land

back, like the Passamaquoddy and Penobscots in Maine. It makes us look violent and greedy all the time. The news media for some reason doesn't want to pick up on all the other peaceful things that we are doing, to preserve our mother earth.

T: Last year was the Longest Walk. You were on it.

A: Yes. I was one of the organizers from Ohio East. That is the kind of thing I can get in to. No violence, on our part at least. Several people were injured and killed along the way, but there were no weapons inside of the encampment and no drugs, no alcohol, no pot; it was a traditional walk uniting native people from across the continent. It was beautiful, spiritual, political, probably the climax of my social-political-cultural career.

T: Explain to me what a day or two was like on the Walk?

A: The Walk?

T: Yes. From the time you got out there.

A: From February to May I was an organizer and that was all bureaucratic business stuff. Phone calls, posters, printing things, that's what I'm used to. I was grateful to cast that aside and become just a walker. The walkers, I think, were probably the most important people. After I joined in May we would get up at five or six in the morning, whenever it got light. You just don't feel like sleeping in. (Laughter) When there is so much beauty around you, you want to absorb it all. Get up and make fried bread with some wild berries that we would pick and have breakfast. Each encampment, each nation, had their own encampment.

T: How many people would you say were there?

A: Four thousand, I believe, were in Washington.

T: At the time you were walking, say your group?

A: Okay. A thousand, give or take five hundred. You can't tell when you're right there. (Laughter) The news people are the ones who usually give estimates like that. The Iroquois confederacy was well represented. We were probably the largest by the time we got to Washington. The Sioux Dakota people had the largest encampment before that. Being with the Iroquois confederacy camp, it was nice because the only languages usually spoken were Iroquois dialects. The foods we ate were all Iroquois. Even though the government kept bringing in all these surplus food

things for us to eat, like bottles of corn syrup with recipes on the side that says, "This is what you should feed your babies." Corn syrup? (Laughter) I would rather feed a baby milk from myself if I had a baby. It's typical of governmental programs. They gave us turkey drumsticks as big as my calves. (Laughter) They were from like 1962, frozen. (Laughter) They wanted us to eat this stuff? We politely said thank you, then went out to the berry patches and picked berries for our fried bread, and had venison or rabbit or sometimes people would donate a cow along the way. Everybody would have a good meal that day. Well, there was a lot to be done but there was so much that you just had to pick and choose your priorities, besides the cooking for everybody and making sure the elders were taken care of. The elders were our first consideration and then the young people and everyone else. There was a lot to do. There were seminars going on all the time on weekends when we weren't walking, on midwifery, Indian law, legal system, Indian women's rights, because so many Indian women have been forcibly sterilized under the Indian Health Service Policy that we're trying to get together to prevent this type of treatment or mistreatment. There were seminars to enhance our awareness and then the nights were filled with all night long powwows, which were great. The days were filled with walking and talking and working together.

T: Once you reached Washington . . .

A: Once we reached Washington--I see, it's a fill-in-the-blank question. (Laughter) Once we reached Washington it got hectic because that's when all the non-Indian supporters wanted to join us. I got stuck in the white camp for a while because all of the friends from Kent who had come up were not Indian. I thought I would be with them, and get them all situated and lined up and at home and ready to go as we were going to walk. I think it was fourteen miles into Washington from Greenbelt Park. I hated the white camp. It was really depressing and disorganized. I'm not sure if it's because they all got there at one point or if it had been infiltrated and made to be so sloppily cared for or what the problem was. I think it was that most of the people who came were typical non-Indian militants who have so many causes, just so many, that instead of talking about the Native things, the reason they were there, they were all talking about other places they were going to go after this, like anti-nuke rallies, which is good, but I would rather be concentrating on why I am in a certain place than talking

about plans I had for the next day. They were very disorganized, arguing all the time. Several of them were caught smoking pot and were asked to leave. I was not happy there at all and eventually moved back over to the Iroquois encampment and was allowed to bring some of my friends with me. We walked, a delegation, all of us actually, about four thousand or five thousand of us walked from Greenbelt Park where we were encamped to Washington. We were lead by the elders who carried the sacred pipe and then all Native people, and then followed by about four hundred Buddhist monks who were neat. They were supporting us. They had walked almost the entire way too. Then we were followed by black supporters, and then white supporters, then anybody else. It was spiritual. It was intense, different from any other march I've ever participated in. We walked four abreast the entire way, very solemn, no laughing or talking, no chanting. Just the sound of the drum-beat and the sound of all of our heartbeats. It was beautiful.

T: And then when you reached the destination?

A: Yes, well, you see, Carter knew we were coming. After all they were walking since February 14. He decided that he would go across the salt water, the ocean, and talk about human rights instead of meeting with us, the people who have been denied human rights by the United States longer than anyone else. He got back in time while we were there. We were there almost two weeks. When he got back, he decided he couldn't see us. He decided to see a troop of Boy Scouts who had come from Pennsylvania, I think, instead.

T: Who did he send to see?

A: What's his Vice-President's name? Mondale? Okay, I think that's who met with us. It was hard to tell. He just sat in the corner and listened to these beautiful old Navaho women tell him off in Navaho. (Laughter) Then he listened to the Dakota people try to present their proposals for human rights for Indians. There was no response, just him sitting there absorbing this, taking notes and then he left. That's all the contact we had with the government other than them bringing out security people and turkey legs and corn syrup. (Laughter) But it was worth it. A lot of people say, "You mean you walked all that way for nothing?" That's not the case because we accomplished something that the United States as a government will find even more threatening than if

we had gotten all of our treaties reenacted or whatever. We accomplished a solidarity that Native people have never known before. They've always been so divided with our own cultural differences, and our own political differences, and the fact that our languages are different and the fact that we are historical enemies, many of us. We realized on that walk that we don't have to be enemies any longer, that we have to work together to overpower programs and laws that are designed to eliminate us, to legalize us out of existence. There are thirteen bills in Congress right now which are designed to do just that, which was the basis for our walk to Washington.

T: What do you feel are the basis or causes of these being?

A: Money. Corporations, multi-national corporations who thrive on abusing land and people. Almost all of the bills were sponsored by Meads and another person in Washington. They can all be traced back to the fishing industry, coal, oil. Money, it's all money.

T: A recent write-up in one of the newspapers was saying that these bills are, in fact it was on the news, these bills are ten years in the future.

A: They would take place ten years in the future if they were ratified?

T: Ten years as far as to be ratified.

A: I've never heard that at all. That surprises me. Usually Native people think far in advance. The United States usually doesn't plan that far in advance. (Laughter) It seems to me that they live for the day. Ten years from now I think some of those fuels that they're trying to rip off of Indian land will be extinct. They won't be the type of fuels that most people will be needing. I didn't hear that at all. I would be interested in following up on that. To me it sounds like if they were approved, they would go into action right away. If they did, I don't think there would be anymore fish or water in ten years. The way those bills are phrased for the fishing corporations to get in there to Indian lands and deprive the Indians of fish, there certianly wouldn't be too many Indians in ten years.

T: Right now we've all got problems as far as the reservation and high powerful tribal leaders, from the Navaho reservation to Pineridge, one you're very familiar with.

A: Yep! (Laughter)

T: Can you? Let's discuss that particular person.

A: Okay. I don't want to be slanderous at all. I don't want to have my legs broken at all (Laughter) is what I'm saying! (Laughter) It's cowboys and Indians without the cowboys up at Allegheny reservation and I guess I was naive about that for sometime. I guess it has been that way for a long time. There are two governments, the traditional government and the government that was set up by the state of New York and the United States of America. Unfortunately, well, obviously the government that the United States put there, that's the government they're going to listen to. They're going to manipulate. They don't listen to a traditional government at all. The sell-out government or whatever phrase we can use, modern government, contemporary government, is a council system where the elections are rigged or bought. The votes are bought. Commonplace practice. In fact, the President of the Nation admitted to paying for votes. He admitted that on the Federal Jury Investigation. He was on trial for embezzlement and bribery, where it came out to his benefit, where he said, "Yes, I buy my votes," or "Yes, I can manipulate elections," and there is not a thing you can do about it because we're a separate nation from the United States. Now, this is something we've wanted recognized for years, that we are a separate nation. Then if we are a separate nation, what is he doing in power. The United States set up that government and totally has a disregard for the traditional government. It's a catch-22 over and over again.

T: You had a particular incident?

A: My class and I were banned from the reservation. We're allowed on it now, I guess. We went up there last weekend and lived to talk about it. I'm not exactly sure what happened, except while he was under a lot of pressure, being on trial for embezzlement, et cetera, he received through his security agents, who went through my maps in the building, where we were staying while I was out. He went through the maps, found a handout sheet that I used to circulate, one that I don't even circulate any longer, that listed in my flippant and dry humor, the different places we could go, things we could do, people we could see. He found great offense at this. It wasn't meant for him, it wasn't meant for anyone but those students, and not even for this particular class because it

was outdated. A third of the places on the map were closed. He took great offense at the way I phrased things, then pursued to write a letter, not to me, but to the president of this university banning my class and me from my own reservation, mind you, because we were there to provoke. We were banned from the reservation because allegedly we were there to insight violence, and we were supposedly practicing racism, which I haven't figured out yet, since my major is peaceful change. If my words sound violent it's not that I'm provoking at all, they're just my opinions and my students know that. Anyway, the students responded with tears and anger and all of them wrote letters saying why they went up to the reservation, not to change the reservation but to meet some of the people I had talked to them about, my friends and family up there, and to have a good time. It is a tourist area. It's not a closed reservation. Then I had professors who had gone up on the trips before write letters, and before I knew it a whole support committee had started, and when I flew up to meet with the president of the Nation I had a few copies of letters that I knew about. I went into his office and on his desk was a stack probably eight inches deep, of letters he had received in support of my class. The repercussions after meeting with his associates, we were allowed to come back. He refused, he hasn't refused, he just hasn't come through by putting it in writing yet, which I have asked for. I guess everything is all right though. A few people don't seem to know that everything's okay. (Laughter)

T: As I found out.

A: Right, as you found out at three in the morning. The other weekend when somebody walked in the house and said, "Bob Ho said you guys were not allowed to be here anymore," or something like that. That's the trouble. The news communication isn't working too well up there. They ran an Associated Press article that hit here, of course, that we were banned from the reservation. Now I think they need to do us justice, and release one that says we're allowed back on, because the repercussions are numerous. Once we got back here I was told I wasn't allowed to teach any longer, until I worked that one out, too, with more letters and more support committees.

T: Can you elaborate on the conversation at Kent State?

A: Yes, I can. Let me back up and say it resulted in never being finished, the conversation wasn't. I think it would have ended in a lawsuit where I'm sure I would have won, but the gentleman who made the allegations fell over dead of a heart attack a few hours after saying he never wanted to see me again. We never got to finish that with a lawsuit at all. I'm totally frustrated at not being able to finish up something he had started. That's something I have to work out.

T: He had said something, what was it?

A: Yes. He is the dean of the Owners Experimental College, and he called me in allegedly just to pick out a room number for teaching next fall. Before the hour and a half was up he had called me everything from a fraud to a liar, an imposter, and silly, and that I was silly too. (Laughter) I think that hurt more than anything. He asked for immediate proof of my credentials and my Indianness. That totally frustrated me. I gave him every I.D. card I had on me at the time, which was considerable, but I didn't have my birth certificate, which he asked for. He asked if I carried my birth certificate around with me, and was very rude and pompous and was violating federal law. You're not allowed to ask a person his race or her race, which would probably have been the basis for a lawsuit, that and the fact that he called me a fraud as well. After producing all the identification I possibly had, many things that did say I was a Native American, which to me doesn't mean I am a Native American, paper doesn't make a person who they are, that's what he wanted, proof in the form of paper. He literally threw the I.D. cards back at me and said they were all worthless. My only response was, "Quick, prove you're Jewish!" (Laughter) You know, there's just no way to prove one's race unless you fit the stereotypes, and even then there are so many exceptions. A lot of my friends who are Caucasian, who are Mediterranean people, are darker than some of my black friends.

T: You were saying that when you met with Bob Ho that . . .

A: Yes.

T: His council told him that he had no leg to stand on.

A: I don't recall saying that, that his council told him that, but it is a fact. He did have no leg to stand on because of the laws there, state laws and federal law. He can't kick me off of my own reservation. There was no violation, we didn't do anything wrong. He couldn't really prevent my group from coming up again, especially since it's an open reservation that is

allegedly encouraging tourism.

T: Your friend that's on the newspaper down there . . .

A: He interviewed at a press conference after Bob Ho was acquitted of embezzlement. He's the one who wrote the Associated Press article and released it. In the article Bob Ho also could have gotten himself in trouble again. He said, to quote of regarding us ever coming up again, "Somebody is going to get hurt, and it's not going to be us." That was his quote. Now, that wasn't very diplomatic, because if I'm even in a car accident or anything when we'd gone up there it would have looked very suspicious for him. That type of violence does occur up there, which is not something we like to admit to but it is a reality.

T: Your impressions of the reservation at the present time?

A: They are depressing. That's what my impressions are. The drug abuse and the alcoholism and the unemployment, combined with the fact that the culture has slipped through their fingers just makes for a totally depressing atmosphere for me. The ceremonies that you and I went to, the midwinter ceremony that should have had a hundred or two hundred people in the long house, there were probably, what, twelve of us, fifteen. Even when they do go there to the long house, such as the strawberry ceremony which is coming up this month, the people will dress up in their native attire, which is beautiful, but they put it in a suitcase right after the ceremony. Right after the dancing is over they run back over to the ladies room or the mens room, change their clothes and put on their other clothes. This isn't the way it used to be. They're put-on Indians, they're dress-up Indians. I find that really sad. So many of them have lost the language, even though they're trying to teach it again, they teach how to say white things in Indian, not the traditional concepts with the language.

T: You said that you had, as far as your degree went in language, . . .

A: Right. The university catalog here states that a person whose native tongue is other than English, they take proficiency tests in both languages to waive the foreign language requirement. My native language is an Iroquoian dialect. My second language is English. For years they said, "Well, we just can't accept that because you can't write your language. It's not a written language, which of course is racist, blatantly racist to say, "If your language is legitimate then it's going to be just like ours." After convincing them that the Iroquois languages

were legitimate, that in fact, they are one of the few, some of the few real American languages, Native American languages that are sophisticated, beautiful, and intricate and very, very legitimate, they approved my taking a course up on the reservation last summer. It was from the state university of New York in linguistics on how to teach the Iroquois languages. They said this would do in lieu of taking foreign languages down here, which I totally accepted, moved up there, paid for everything, was to graduate, graduated in August, and was to begin my Masters scholarship, my Master study here. Three days or five days before that I received a note, a letter saying that my degree had been revoked because they realized that that course I took up in New York taught me how to teach the Seneca language. Just because I can teach it doesn't mean I can speak it, they still need proof. Any time I want to fly down a person with a Ph.D. in the Seneca language to chit-chat in front of them, I could do so. Of course, that in itself is a catch-22. Nowhere in this world is there such a thing as a Ph.D. in the Seneca language. At this time I have no degree, but I have no need for one either.

T: Do you have anything that you would like to . . .

A: Yes. So far I've sounded probably very cynical and bitter. It could be because you've dragged me up here on a Saturday morning (Laughter) or it could be that I'm a very cynical and bitter person. (Laughter) I think I laugh more than most people, I think I love living more than most people I know, and I'm happier than most people I know. I wouldn't want to be anybody but me, and I get a lot of joy out of living. I don't want to come across like, "Wow, life is a drag and white guys made it that way for me," because that's not the way it is. The most important thing I can get across to any of my students is that, those who go on ego trips because they're Indian or go on guilt trips because they're not, we can't take credit or blame for who our grandfathers and grandmothers were. We've got to start taking responsibility for who we are, and what we do with who we are. That's what I'm all about.

T: Could you bring one more incident in the light?

A: So I can sound more bitter and cynical and negate everything I said? (Laughter)

T: They're moving you from this room into one without a window for someone else so they can have a window.

A: Yes, I know. We've been here so many years. I had over one hundred and fifty posters and objects on the walls. File cabinets, you can see, are going to take me some time to move from here a couple of yards across the hall. The issue is primarily one over the window, and student life, which is a bureaucratic body of the university, wants the office with the window. (Laughter) That's all there is to it. They supersede any protest that we might have over it. I've gone through the legal appeal process over and over and at least we've come out ahead. They were going to make us pay one hundred and fifty dollars to have our phone number changed, instead they are going to pay for it. They were going to make me get out of here in one day, which is virtually impossible, it was yesterday. (Laughter) I tried, I couldn't do it. They've given us an extension. They are giving me some leeway that they haven't extended to any other organization that has been asked to move at any time. They're not going to reprint our stationery or anything like that though. (Laughter) After all, we're Indians; we're used to getting rubbed around.

T: Just for the record, it has been a pleasure to know you.

A: (Laughter) Well, it's mutual. You're a hunk. (Laughter)

T: I've met a lot of people through you.

A: That's right. (Laughter) I survived one tedious weekend in Youngstown because of you, doing that International Festival where you assisted our table and our booth. I would probably still be there laying under the table. (Laughter)

T: I don't think I will forget that.

A: I don't think I will either. I don't think I'll forget any of the encounters we've had. Most of them you've made pleasurable, out of circumstances that could have been otherwise.

T: Thank you.

A: Thank you, Jay.

END OF INTERVIEW