

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

North American Indians Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 640

JOHN LOPEZ

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

June 2, 1979

JOHN LOPEZ

John Lopez is a twenty-two year old Shawnee, who was born and raised in Yale, Ohio. His mother was born along the Big Sandy River in Kentucky. Her grandmother was not raised by her own parents.

He had always tried to help change the Indian situation, although he did not have his parents backing. After Wounded Knee in 1973, he became interested in AIM. He and two other guys formed an Indian rock band. After that, he tried to form an inter-tribal warrior society, which did not last.

Afterwards, he became discouraged, cut his hair and got a job. The Longest Walk was the ideal dream he waited for. He became involved in security patrol on the Walk for a month and a half. He goes into depth of the Longest Walk.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN LOPEZ

INTERVIEWER: Jay Toth

SUBJECT: Longest Walk, security control

DATE: June 2, 1979

T: This is an interview with John Lopez Jr. for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Jay Toth at Yale, Ohio on June 2, 1979 at 1:30 p.m. The subject for discussion is North American Indians.

Start out by giving me some of your family background like your grandparents possibly, and your parents.

L: What do you mean, like a genealogy thing?

T: Yes.

L: As far as my Indian background is concerned, that's on my mother's side. On my mother's side, it was my mother's mother. She was Shawnee-Cherokee mixed blood and she was born down in the Big Sandy Country of Kentucky, along the Big Sandy River someplace. My mother's grandfather was from North Carolina, a Cherokee from North Carolina. My mother's grandmother was a Shawnee-Cherokee mixed, or a Shawnee--I'm not sure which--from down in that area, the Big Sandy. As far as going back any further than that, I haven't been able to because . . . Kind of a rumor has been going around the family for years that she was raised by somebody else; she wasn't raised by her own parents. I've been just kind of figuring that maybe somebody had come through and raped her mother and then her mother didn't raise her or something like that. I don't know; I haven't been able to find out anything. That went on a lot down there about the time she was born. My great-grandmother may have been born somewhere in about 1837, which kind of coincides with when people, when the Shawnee people, came back from Canada after the war at the Battle of the Thames with Tecumseh. That's one

of the areas that they settled in.

T: You were born in this area?

L: Yes. I was born and raised on this farm.

T: Have you been participating in any Indian programs or anything as such?

L: Well, I don't know how you want me to . . .

T: Like the Longest Walk type of thing?

L: Officially, that was the first thing, but I was doing stuff before that.

T: For example ?

L: Can this be used as incriminating evidence in courts?

T: No.

L: I always was trying to do something about it all my life, but I didn't really get much help from my parents. I guess the thing that really got me going was the occupation at Wounded Knee in 1973. After that I got real interested in AIM, but being an isolated breed kind of made it hard. I didn't know anybody and I guess I really didn't figure I would be accepted. So me and two Comanche guys formed an Indian rock band back, I guess, in my junior and senior years of high school. After that went down, then my idea was to form like an inter-tribal warrior society. I tried to get all the breeds together that I could find, which only amounted to about ten or twelve. It really deteriorated quick; it didn't hold together more than about six weeks. About that time, I was thinking real, real, militant. Although I never did anything about it, it just petered out on me.

In 1976 I believe, a friend of mine who is Sioux was in the Army. He just had kind of a sneaking suspicion that something was going down in South Dakota, so he wanted to go up to Wounded Knee. He went A.W.O.L. from the Army and went up there. I was supposed to meet him up there and before I could even get started, he had already been busted. I didn't really feel much like going up at the time. After that--I had been letting my hair grow for a long time, about three years--I got pretty discouraged and I just cut it all off and got a job. Before I got my job, I had spent a lot of time kind of going out and partying and getting drunk and stuff, but then they told me to get a haircut. I was trying to get a job so I could try to get some money and they told me to get my hair cut. It didn't

matter to me anymore, so I cut my hair off. I worked for a while which was in 1977, 1978.

On May 4, I went over to the rally at Kent State in 1978 and I heard Vernon Belcort speak. He told about the Longest Walk and that was the thing that I had been waiting on all these years. I didn't figure it was ever going to come around. I figured, well, between my parents . . . They didn't want me to get involved in anything I was going to get hurt with. I guess they just didn't figure I was old enough or anything like that. I really didn't want to up and run off because it would tear them up because we were pretty close. Anyway, I heard about this Longest Walk getting ready to come to Ohio and I went home and I told them. I said, "I'm going." My Pa didn't particularly care for the idea too much for quite a while, but it settled into him. I left and I was involved with the Longest Walk Security for about a month and a half. I pulled security on the Walk and in camp. I pulled back gate security over at White Camp one night when they were having some trouble.

T: What happened at White Camp?

L: This was in D. C. They would set up a separate White Camp. There was a lot of people who had come in from the nuclear rallies; they were nothing but bad news. Everybody was high and everybody had their own ideas and everything. They were really strange. Anyway, they set up a separate camp. There were about thirty white people who had really, really been on the Walk. They really worked their butts off and took a lot of shit from a lot of people and were really trying to do it right. I hated to see them over there because nobody deserved to be with those people. They were having a lot of trouble over there. Some guy had come in from Woodstock, New York. He was a white guy and he had a buffalo skull and set up his own altar. He was supposedly carrying on some sort of ritual or something, supposed to be Indian. He was burning some sacred herbs or something like that and the smoke came off black. A friend of mine had told me about that. That sure wasn't good medicine for either camp. There was supposed to be some witch in there. The way the camp was set up, there was like an amphitheater and then you would go off one road and there was an Indian Camp and then you would go off another road and there was a White Camp. Well, on the road between the amphitheater and White Camp, they were going to set up the sweat lodges. When they were over there digging the fire pit--they did this between the sweat lodges--some white girl was over there and I don't know if she was stoned or what, but she was screaming and stuff and said that she had seen demons from hell coming up out of that pit. So that really screwed

the works up too because they wouldn't set up sweat lodges after that for a long time, until the White Camp dissipated. Anyway, they were having that trouble over there and I went over one night. Not too much really physical happened, but . . .

T: When you're speaking trouble, like what? Verbal abuse or . . .

L: It wasn't so much like anybody just cutting people up or anything like that, but there was something. You could sense it in that camp. As soon as you walked in the front gate, you could sense it. When you got down into camp, there was something very strange.

A couple of my friends had come over to the Indian camp and asked me if I would come over and pull security after I got off of my shift. They needed help because they were shorthanded. There was one white guy who had been on the Walk ever since it started and he was really great. He had been up for three days straight just walking around with a club because he was so worked up about it. The people over there were . . . I just can't explain it. They were strange. Anyway, this one bro who was staying over there with his woman who was white-- she was staying over there with him--was from Six Nations. He came out and was really shook up. He said that he smelled a funeral that night. This was some kind of sense that he had or ability for premonition, that he could tell when something like that was going to happen. They had been having all this trouble with this weirdo and his supposed Indian altar. Anyway, when I went in there I could feel the tension. Everybody was really worked up.

END OF INTERVIEW