



Theresa Sam

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 054



Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh

March 18, 2016

Duckwater, NV



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Interviewee: Theresa Sam

Interviewer: Norm Cavanaugh

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S: [Shoshone at 0:45] Blackeye Ranch and place [Shoshone at 0:57] *O soten Tuupui nateppiniahan*. Will Blackeye *nateppiniahan*. [Shoshone at 2:13] Allison, Minnie Allison, Noonie Blackeye. Agnes Penoli.

C: So, how did you guys get that family name, “Blackeye?”

S: My grandpa. Grandpa was born with one black eye. His eye was black on one side. So, it never went away. So that’s why they called him “Chief Blackeye” when he got older.

C: So you began school here in Duckwater?

S: Mhm. Yeah. Went to school here.

C: Was it elementary school?

S: Mhm. Yeah.

C: How many grades did you—

S: I think it was seven. Because we went to—the bus came in from Stewart. That bus came and picked us up, all of the kids. To a high school—high school ones, and the grade—our bunch. That’s how we went to Stewart.

C: So, about how many students were in a classroom?

S: That was when they first—the reservation first came. There was lot of us, from kindergarten on up, I think. First grade on up.

C: So, when you went to Stewart, how old were you?

S: I can’t remember. Fifteen. Fifteen, sixteen; something around there.

C: So, it was for high school?

S: Mhm. We was down in the—I guess it was not high school, but... We was all in a big building. That’s where we started. Then, they moved us up. The next year, we went up to

the other building where the high school kids were. That's where we stayed and went to school. And then, we—they put us to work later on. We helped in the kitchen area washing dishes. And then we'd, they transferred us—the next year, they transferred us to the laundry. We did all of the laundry; folding and—. And from there, I guess they try to teach us from that to the bakery. So, I worked in the bread factory, making bread, and doughnuts, whatever they have there. And we used to deliver to the hospital. I didn't graduate from Stewart. My mom got sick, and they needed help here, so I didn't get to go. Yeah, we'd go to school in the mornings, and about eleven or something like that, they took us out, and put us to work. Then when we got done, we went back to the school again. Yeah, that school bus used to stop in—after it leaves from here, used to stop in Austin. Pick up kids from there. And then, on the way to Stewart, I think we picked up I don't know how many kids. But from Fallon, I think—Stillwater, or something. And on the way to Stewart. That was a long ride, but we made it. I don't know where they came from, but they were Indian ladies that was teaching us. And at the same thing, at the hospital, there was a Navajo lady? I think she was the head of it. Can't remember. Anyway, she was from Arizona someplace. She was a nice, nice lady. We didn't speak our language. We had to use English. But when we get together, in the evenings, the Mike girls, and the one that came from here—the older girls—we all get together and we talk. Speak our own language. But the same way with the Paiute and the Washoes. We roomed with some of them. Some of the Paiute and Washoe. They try to teach us, and we try to teach them our language. But we never did—couldn't learn. [Laughter]

C: So, how many people you think lived in Duckwater back then? Was there quite a few families that lived here?

S: Yeah, there was lot of people that came from Smoky Valley. Reese River, I guess. That was in [19]42, they all got here. The Charles and my uncle, they came from Cherry Creek down below. That's south, south of here. They were down there, and they brought their family. And there was quite a bit that landed here. That was in [19]42. That's when the people came. This was a Florio ranch. My grandpa was working for him. When I remembered my grandpa and some other people that used to live up here, across, they used to work for this guy. He's the one that sold it. I think Raymond Graham and Brownie Sam, they were the ones that started it. Worked on buying this place I guess, or something. Anyway, that's how it started, the reservation. That was way back, I remember. We used to live down there, down below, at the ranch where Janie is now. Janie's got that after my dad passed away. And stayed around, worked at the ranch down below; white people. Clean house and whatever. And then, a guy came from Phoenix. He was talking to us while there was—some boys and some girls talked to us about sending us back east to find jobs. You know, put us in working, so we could work to make a living. So, I signed up on that. There was three of us, three girls. There was six of us, but only three, three of us, we went back east. And the boys backed down. There was five boys that signed up, but they didn't want to go back. So they stayed. Just the three of us went back east.

[Break in recording]

It was scary when we first got there. And then, they showed us—this lady, our supervisor I guess it was, always with us. Going to our jobs, showing us where to go, what bus to take. We went up to Chicago. We went from Arizona, they put us on a train. We went all the way up. I don't know which way we went, but we got up there. There was

Madeline—her married name is Kammassee, from Ely. And from here, it was Louise Mike. And myself. The three of us. They put us folding clothes for Montgomery Ward. We worked there, then this lady says, “We’ll change you guys for another one,” so after so many month—I think it was three month we was there working at Mongomery Ward, folding clothes, bagging it—and then, they put two of us in a, where money order, where they ordered pencils, papers, school supplies and whatever. Then we end up there, gathering all of our orders. And then put it in a great, big cart we was pushing all day long. And then in the evening, I got so tired being on my feet all day. And I asked that lady if I could switch, see if I could get off of my feet. And then, she says, “Yeah. I could do that.” So I end up at the hospital, working at Illinois Masonic Hospital. I stayed there. Went to school in the evening for Nurses. After work, used to go there. Go to school ‘til eleven at night, then come home. That was scary. Because you have to be so—look out for whatever. There’s always a lady that used to get on the bus with me. Then we’ll get off where I had to go, and then get off of there and go home. And the next morning, I do the same thing: go to work. You don’t go anyplace. You just have to go with somebody. Our friend got robbed. Before Christmas, I think it was. And she was going to go home for Christmas, and she got robbed. Took all of her money. So, all of the girls got together and collected some money, and sent her on her way to South Dakota. This Indian girl.

[Break in recording]

My friend, the two girls, one stayed folding clothes at Montgomery Ward, and the other one went to the packing where we were. Where they put us. She stayed there. She says, “I could handle that.” So, that’s where she stayed. But the rest of the girls, they went to different jobs, whatever. They try to tell us about this computer they were just then

starting. And that was little bit too much for me, so I didn't take that. That year we was there, whatshisname—that soldier. That guy, I can't remember now. The one that helped put the flag up?

C: Oh, Ira Hayes?

S: Yeah. He died when we was there. We heard about that. That's when we was there. Still there. And two years later, I came home. My dad died. Had to come home and help my mom. And then, end up at the cleaning again, for people down here, down below, Currant. That's when I started working there. Well, we—funny thing happened. Mrs. Thompson—Perline Thompson and them—they were talking, because the white school was giving our kids trouble. They didn't like them, and was getting after them, and wasn't even helping them. So, they went talking I guess, and they got committee together. I didn't know they did that, until she came to the house and told me. "You want to join us?" she says. "I'm the only woman that's going to be on there; can you join me? We could talk for the kids. See what's going on." So—and then, I said, "Oh, okay. I could do that, I guess, if you're the only one." There was the one that has the car, he had girls. He was down in Railroad Valley. He came up. Always coming up. His kids were in school, and he didn't like what was going on. And then, I guess they got together, there was him, and Paul—they got Paul, Doug, Allen Lenbeck. Paul Walker. There was Perline. And myself. And there was our Vista, little girl that used to go with us all over. She was a Vista worker for the school. Anyway, we traveled. I had lot of traveling on that, to open the school back up for ourselves. And they told us they were going to put us all in jail, the kids and the families. We all got together when that was going on. We didn't send our kids to school, so, kept them home. And they tried to get the Tonopah

cops to come up and pick us all up. We end up at Allen Lenbeck's, in their house, with all our kids, all of the families that had kids. We was all there. The cops drove up, looked at us—there was lot of us then. [Laughter] Lot of kids and grown-ups. They didn't pick us up! They got scared of us, I guess, or something. They couldn't do it. We was all there. We laughed when they took off. And then, that's when that little Vista girl was here. There was Vista workers here, to help us get the kids in school. And then, we started traveling. We went to Tonopah, to the school meeting, and then got bawling out. And one of the school members were—she know everybody that was from here. And she give us the bull: "Oh, there she goes again! We're going to get her boots this time," they says. So, she abused that kind of word, when she was cussing us out. But we stayed with it. And then, we end up getting two lawyers: Mike Deezy and the other one. And they traveled with us. And then we went to Lake Tahoe, on the lower part of Lake Tahoe. Went to the meeting. The same thing: why were we doing that, taking our kids and things. Then they explained why we were doing that: because the teachers were treating our kids bad. Always pulling on their ears, they don't listen. So we—from there, then we went to—we came home. And then, we went to Reno, I think it was. I can't remember. It was quite a long time. Anyway, Reno, to the meeting. I think we travel all the time. And then, we end up in Colorado. Denver. We went to a meeting there. And then, Phoenix, where there was whole bunch of people, all different kinds, all different tribes. Had a meeting when we was down there. They were all there for some kind of meeting they had going on, and we was with the school. We did all of that to open our school up. Until finally, we had to get our school going. And it's still going. They were giving us a bad

time, but we got—we made it through. We didn't—we all got together and didn't back down. With our kids.

[Break in recording]

U1: I come here for the day. And visit her.

C: And how old are you?

U1: Nine.

C: And do you go to school?

U1: Yes.

C: And what grade are you?

U1: Fourth.

C: And what do you learn at school?

U1: I learn math.

C: And who's your teacher?

U1: Um...

S: [Whispers] Ms. Nettle.

U1: Ms. Nettle.

C: And how many students are there with you at school?

U1: Five.

C: And so, you go to the Duckwater school?

U1: Yeah.

C: And so, when do you guys learn about the Shoshone language?

U1: Only on the Tuesday and Thursdays.

C: And so, can you talk to us in Shoshone, or tell us a story in Shoshone, or just talk in Shoshone for a little bit?

U1: I'll talk in Shoshone for a little bit.

C: Okay. Tell us about your grandma, in Shoshone. *Ne kaku...*

U1: *Ne kaku...*

C: *...tsaa...*

U1: *...tsaa...*

C: *...taipuhanni.*

U1: *...taipuhanni.*

S: I always tell him to listen to me, but he talks English to me all the time. But most of the time, he tries. Tries to learning. Like he says—he'll count his numbers.

C: So, can you count for us in Shoshone?

U1: *Semme, watte, paitthe, watsa, watsewaith, manikeh, naphain—*

S: *Taatsowain.*

U1: *Taatsowain.*

S: *Woosewi.*

U1: *Woosewif.*

S: What's the last one?

U1: *Simma—*

S: *Suomihankan.*

U1: *Suwaihamanaihaka...*

S: What's eleven? *Semmen toihinkan.*

U1: *Semme hawetoi.*

S: *-toihinkan.*

C: So, you just counted for us one through eleven? Oh, good job!

[Break in recording]

S: My grandkids, they understand little bit. Not much. They always say we sound funny when we try to teach them. But every time I see them, I try to talk to them in Shoshone. And then—but the one in Utah and Arizona, my grandkids, they don't—they speak a little bit of it. Not much.

C: Well, I'd like to thank you and your grandson for sharing your stories with me today. And that concludes our recording for the Great Basin Indian Archives.

[End of recording]