



Helen Walker

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 051



Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh

March 18, 2016

Duckwater, NV



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W: *Nia natepinniah* Helen Walker. *Ne Duckwater naitthe*.

C: Has your family always been here in Duckwater?

W: No, [**Shoshone from 0:49 to 2:47**]. [Laughter] Well, like I said, my family, they're not around here. It's just two of us left from us. It was just—I'm the oldest one out of the last group. And then my sister, she's the youngest. The rest, the oldest one, they're all passed on. So their kids is, some are in Reno, some in California. They're just scattered all over. Like, my kids, they work. They work in their tribe buildings, in their tribe—working for their tribes. My son, he works down here at the oil rig—refinery. And two of my girls works here at the Tribal building, at the clinic. One at the Tribal building. And then I got, my sister, the youngest one, she's in, up in—oh, my God—Missouri. Missouri? Montana? I think it's in Montana. She's up there. And then, my other daughter's in Vegas. She works for the lawyer down there. Then, I got a lot of aunties and you know, uncles, but they're not around here. They're just scattered all over.

[Break in recording]

I went school here. All my eighth graders, up to eighth graders. I *think* it was Indian school, because we had all kinds of teachers. You know, they hire a teacher, then they stay with us for a while, then they take off, and then we have another one. You know, it wasn't a steady teacher like the county had. The county had a teacher that lives down here. So that's, that Kathy was talking about. But this is, these guys are from all over. From—then they come teach us. But seemed like they're okay with us. We never had no problem. Then, we had a cook that used to cook for us. We eat at lunchtime. She's—

you'd probably know Virginia Sanchez and Lilly Sanchez? Yeah, she was our cook, Lilly Sanchez. She was our cook for long time.

[Break in recording]

Yeah, we speak Shoshone. We speak Shoshone. We never had no problem with—well, *then*, that years, I think all the kids, they talks Shoshone. Not really, not much speaks English. But now, the kids, they all speak English. Not much Shoshones. See, my kids all—they all understand it, but they just don't talk. That's—I know that's my fault. I should've teach them when they were small. Because we would live down the ranch, down Moapa for ten years when they were smaller. Then they went school with the *tsippans* and *taipos*. Like I say, it's my fault; I know I blame myself on that part. But they'll understand if you're talking to them. I talk Indian to them all the time. Then they'll understand me. But my grandkids are the different story; when I try to talk to them in my language, they'll just mock you. “[Makes gibberish noises.]” They don't know what I'm talking about. Then I try to explain it to them; but still they don't.

Stewart Boarding School, I didn't really care for it. Because you know, there were different tribes, and some they don't treat you right, and they're kind of mean to us. But that's where I learned how to do things with the teacher, one of the teachers. One of the dorm lady. She used to let me clean her apartment. She had apartment, so I used to clean that all the time, maybe twice a week, three times a week, or something like that. That's where I start learning how to clean house and stuff like that, in, just to iron her clothes, like her top, and stuff like that. I iron for her all the time. I think that's where I learned how to iron, and clean house, and stuff like that. I still iron. I know lot of people don't iron nowadays, but I still do. I think that's where I learn lot of those stuff, from Stewart.

Then, on the one summer, we were shipped to up Lake Tahoe. They got a big wash house or something up there, laundrymat. Like laundrymat. There's bunch of us girls got shipped up there for the summer. So, that's where we worked all summer, at the laundrymat. Then school start, then we come back. Then I went school up there for a few months, and then I took off. So, that was the end of my Stewart! [Laughter] Twenty-five cents an hour.

C: Twenty-five cents an hour?

W: Yep. Twenty-five cents an hour I used to get. That was lot of money! Yep. That's how much I was getting, twenty-five cents an hour. That's not much, huh? [Laughter] Then I remember, I worked for—when I came back, and about maybe what, three or four years later on, I found, somebody got me a job at Tonopah at a laundrymat. And that was seventy-five cents an hour. So, it was going up little bit. Then I worked there for a little while, and then I came home. Just trying it out, see how I would like staying by myself. But I didn't care for it. So I came home. So I been working here and there around here. I worked in the—drove bus for a while. Six years I was a bus driver. Then I worked at Currant over there. They had a café and stuff like that. I worked there on weekends. Then, later on, I start working for the Seniors [Center] over here. I worked long time for the Seniors, 'til I retired. I was there cook job—Theresa. Didn't she tell you that, Theresa Sam? Me and her, we cooked for the Seniors. We both retired about the same year. We said, "You know what, we should *never* retired. We should have just stood there." Because there now, ever since we got retired, we kind of both went down. Getting sick and everything. See, I end up with knee surgery, and her leg I think is hurting, or I don't know, something else is hurting now. That's what we say now: "We should never quit!"

But, we enjoyed that. We used to take our seniors to powwows. Elko, Battle Mountain. We even went pinenuts picking in [inaudible 10:18] one year. Then, where else did we go with our seniors? Oh, to Goshute. But mostly, it's Ely. Ely powwow and stuff like that. We enjoyed that. You know, we used to go with them. But now, all the seniors that we cooked with, they're all gone.

[Break in recording]

Yeah, we had a ranch. Dad had a ranch. He was one of them, had ranch. We started from way up there, way at end of our Rez up there. That was our first ranch we had. He had some cows, and he raised some hay. And then mom and us, we had to help her with the garden. She had a big garden. We'd plant our own potatoes and stuff like that. Like, potato, carrots, all that stuff you could store in a cellar. So what you do, she'll make a hole in there, make a little hole in there, and she'll put all her carrots one side, and beets one side, and potato on the open side, and then she'll cover the rest of them up. Have it for all winter long. But now, you don't see that. Nobody do that. Nobody raise garden here.

C: So, how many people live here on the Duckwater reserve?

W: Maybe pretty close to two hundred with the kids. Because we got lot of little kids here.

It's not a big reservation.

[Break in recording]

Well, you could see it, just down the valley. Mostly down here. This where mostly us lives.

[Break in recording]

Well, the guys are the ranchers. Yeah, the guys are ranchers, and then I think there's three of them that—let's see, there's Eddie, Tony; those guys got the ranch. They work here at the tribal buildings. You know, at the shop. And most of them, they work—some works in Ely at the mine, and then there's few of them works at the oil rig. My son works there, and my grandson works down there. Well, they started over here at the tribal building, but then they had problem and they quit.

[Break in recording]

Mostly, the ladies, they work at the school, and they work at the tribal building. The guys there, the janitors over there. They got a job as a janitor. Then, the ladies, they work in the office and stuff like that.

[Break in recording]

Now, once in a while, me and my son and my other daughter, we go up to Elko, do our big shopping at that Walmark. Like, some big stuff up there. In Ely, it's just—boy, it's really high! So what we need, really need, you have to buy. But everything is so high! But we've kind of noticing in Elko, the meat are getting really high up there. Because we used to buy lot of meat up there. But this last time we went up there, God, that's so high! So I guess they're going up, too. Once in a great while, we'll go to Vegas, and we'll buy the big stuff, like at the Costco. Big stuff, like meat and stuff, we'll just pack 'em up. Bring 'em home, and then we cut them up in small pieces and freeze them. That's what we do, sometimes. What we need really bad, in Ely, then we buy it in Ely, but we go to doctors in Ely, and the hospitals in Ely.

[Break in recording]

They got health clinic over here, but they still don't have no doctor yet. But right now, they're adding on to the building. Did you see that part on the north side? The Health Department? They're adding on. So, it's going to be a big clinic. So they going to, what they going to do in there I guess is them exercise for the guys, you know? So after that's finished, we'll probably get a doctor. Right now, we don't have a doctor.

[Break in recording]

When I was growing up, Schurz. Schurz, that was our hospital. That's where we used to get all our help. If we need a, like our tonsils removed, or anything like that, they'll take us over to Schurz. Then we get all that taken care of. Dental; dental over there. All that stuff. So we, I remember that, we used to go there. Then, Elko got part of us. We go up to the Newe clinic up there, too. Is it Newe Clinic, the name of it? That's where we go, some of them goes there. Then, we used to go, I even remember we used to go up to Owyhee, too. They'll take a load of us, and take us up there. Then we spend a night up there at, where is it, that one little motel they used to have up the canyon? We stay there overnight, and then go up to the hospital the next day. Then we'll have our dental work up there, too.

[Break in recording]

If we need help, you know, like an Indian doctor? Well, Willie Blackeye was the only one that was, he was the best one we used to have. But he's gone. And then, before that, then we had another guy; his name was some kind of Bullcreek, that used to do those things. And now he's gone. So now, only one that kind of comes around and help us out little bit all the time is Gonnie. Gonnie Gomez, or what is it? Gomez? Is it a Gomez? Gonnie?

C: Mendes.

W: Mendes. He's the one that kind of we go help for, from him, if we need help. He help me couple times. He sings to you. He sings all that time. Then he'll have a break. Then he'll sing again. Then at the third time, I think it's the third time, he stops. Then he'll tell you what's bothering you, or you know, what's happening to you, who's bothering you, and where'd you get that sickness. And he'll tell you that. And then he'll sing again, and then that's it. That was interesting though, to listen to. Because I was little older when I used to remember him doing those things. But he'll tell you who's bothering you. Where'd you get that sickness. Mostly, it's from handgame and stuff like that. That's where you mostly get it.

[Break in recording]

No, I don't play handgame. I was just—I usually just watch. I just stand there and watch them. Or I'll sit with somebody's—like some ladies I know from Battle Mountain. They play handgame. Or Goshute, they play handgame. So, I just sit there and, you know, visiting them. So I don't do that no more. After he told me not to. Don't be too close to them handgame players no more. He says, "Somebody in there don't like you."

C: So, back when Willie Blackeye doctored people, did he charge people, or was it just—?

W: Fifteen dollars. He used to be fifteen dollars. Now, it's just donation. Like Gonnie, I think he's just a donation. If you want to give him something, like Gonnie always ask for a bag of smoke, whatever the—like, used to be Bull Durham. I don't know what it is now. You'll just donate that to him. Because he'll use it in his sweat. In his sweat. You know, they have that sweat building? They use that smoke in there, to get their rock really hot, and they sprinkle that smoke on it. Because that's where I go. I go in that sweat.

[Break in recording]

They usually have one, I think—well, if they wanted to have one, if somebody wanted one, and then they'll have one. But they usually have one before their Sundance. You know, when they have Sundance up in the mountains? Then they'll have one here on the reservation. Then, they—somebody from Elko comes down. Helps Jeff and them. Then they usually let me know, so me and Theresa go down there and get in there. We make it through. Just that one time I didn't make it through there. It got too hot in there.

They have sweat, and you know, he'll just tell you what it's about, and what he believe in, and then he'll sing a song, and then he do a little prayer. A prayer in there, and then they got some singers in there. Like Janey, and Shasta, and I don't know, some of these guys, they'll sing a song, their—what is it called? Sweat song? The sweat? Or something. They sing that. And then they'll have a maybe half hour opening in there. If you want to bless your family, then you say your—you know, while they're singing, you bless your family. Like, I always bless my family. Somebody probably sick or some I usually tell them I was thinking about them, and we bless them and stuff like that. We'll do that, and then—it's neat. And he'll sing again, and then all the one that's working in the sweat building, like they're going to be—like Jeff, he's trying to be helping along Gonnie. And then, we used to have another guy that was trying to be doing that too, but he got in a car accident, so we don't have him there now. So there's just few of them that sings their song and stuff like that. And then, couple of them from Elko comes down. Some kind of Collins, I can't remember him. They come down. That's all they do in that. They just bless each other, or you want to bless somebody, you bless somebody in there.

They have classes at the school. Actually, my little granddaughter always tell me that. “See Arvilla there today, she teach us this and that,” and she’ll tell us what they learned. And they sing song, too. When a Christmas program comes, they’ll have a—Kathy and Arvilla, they’ll have the little kids’ class. You know, the little kids are like kindergartens. They’d be singing their Indian song. About the animals, or whatever they teach. And I think those are little neat ones, the little ones. They sing songs, and they say their little whatever. One little girl, she’s got a little bag, and she’s got all kinds of stuffed animal in there. And she’ll take them out and she’ll name them, what that is. She’ll say “This is a horse,” then she’ll say the Shoshone word. And it’s all, she’ll have maybe six of them in there. Then she’ll say them all. That’s the way they teach them.

[Break in recording]

Lot of our youth, I don’t think they’re interesting any those things. Not like the little ones. The little ones are, they’re more into that than the older kids. Older kids are busy with—I never see them over there. Just see them little ones there. You ask them, “You want to go to the class?” Say, “Oh, I dunno. Maybe.” That’s their answer. I think the little ones just really starting this year. They started from the daycare. Then, now they’re in that preschool over there, so they’re over there in the afternoons. So I think the little one is, they’ll speak more Indian language than the older groups. I don’t think the older groups will. The teenagers. Oh, they’re busy; they’re going to go to movie, or they’re working. I don’t know where they’re working, but. When they get their jobs and stuff like that, then the people there, the who is their supervisor will tell them to do things and that, and then holler at them. I don’t know about this teenagers.

[Break in recording]

The only thing I do a lot is I make quilts. Embroidering. Dish towels, and my pillowslips. Those things I do a lot. I tried beadwork, but my eyes are not good. I can't see good. So I can't do that. And the willow, the willowing, and—I don't know. My hand's not, I can't do it. It's same way with crocheting? My hand gets really stiff; I can't crochet. Like I said, that's only thing I do is embroidering. I do lot of embroidering. I quilt, yeah. I do lot of quilts. I used to make lot of baby quilts. All those kids from way back had my quilt. I make little homemade quilt for their. But the young ones nowadays, I think my baby quilt thing is going down little bit, I think! [Laughter] Yeah, lot of these kids don't have my quilt now!

[End of recording]