



# Floyd Collins

*Great Basin Indian Archive*

GBIA 050



**Oral History Interview by**

**Norm Cavanaugh**

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**Duckwater, NV**



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FC: My name is Floyd Collins. I was born in Ely, Nevada, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1937. My dad's name was Abe Collins, Sr. My mom was Della Small out of Bridgeport, California. They met somewhere over in Stewart when he used to ride broncs. Broke his leg, that's how she found him. Couldn't get away—couldn't run. [Laughter] Yeah. So, grew up in Ely. We moved around quite a bit. Spent one year in Elko, one year in Carson, half a year in White Pine before I got eight-sixed out of there. [Laughter] Then I joined the Marine Corps. Eight years in the Marine Corps, and come back, married Mary—Collins now. Forget what her name was before. She was from Ely. Her dad used to be a shovel mechanic up at Kennecott, in Ruth. If they worked; they stood around the fire a lot and cooked pinenuts in the falltime. Yeah, then when I was growing up, we used to do lot of deer hunting, lot of fishing. Rabbit hunting. Sagehen. Didn't have any chukar yet. They weren't planted yet. Didn't hunt elk, there wasn't any yet. They didn't plant them until, I think it was the late [19]40s when they finally planted elk over there, up above Cave Lake. Sometimes we lived on the Colony, other times downtown. And we'd go hunting down in Cave Valley, up Spruce Mountain, up in Long Valley. Then, you could hunt anywhere in the state; not like it is now, certain areas you draw for. No deer in one area, you go up to the next area. We'd go up to Spruce mainly late in the season, because you'd get the migrates coming out of Idaho. Bigger bucks. But then, the horns were a lot bigger, too. Not them little willow horns like we got now. They used to be mainly all four-pointers, which is—now all you see is two-pointers, even out here on the reservation! Look at my grandson, he's about ready to go get us one here, pretty quick. Jerky time! I already got jerky shed made; wires are up. [Laughter] And the little one in

there, the grandson, he wants to go fishing. He don't need a license because he already knows how to fish, he told me.

NC: Going back to when you came back out of the Marine Corps, what'd you do?

FC: Oh, I worked for the BLM for about four years as a fire control technician in Ely. And then went to work for Kennecott, took a mechanic's apprenticeship up there. Then moved to Reno—after I got divorced in Ely, of course. And I run my own business over there until I couldn't afford the rent on the building. [Laughter]

NC: What kind of business did you run?

FC: Diesel mechanic. I just worked on the eighteen-wheelers. That, and went to air conditioning/refrigeration school down in California, city of Industry, to work on reefers: Thermo Kings and Carrier Transicold. Then I worked for Thermo King in Reno for a while. And other trucking companies over there. And I went to work for an outfit called Westran out of Missoula, Montana. They come and found me in Wadsworth and put me to work. [Laughter] And I traveled around with them for about five years. We'd haul asphalt, and doubles, belly-dumps, cement. Could pay—use them for cement hauling. It wouldn't leak out. And down in Phoenix; Ontario, California; Lovelock; St. George; Tonopah; and a few other places I can't remember. Yep. So that's about what I've been doing. 'Til I retired when I turned seventy-five; I quit. Turned in my Tribal credit card and said, "I'm gonna retire." [Laughter] But I still do work for the Tribe. I still got to put a motor in here soon's they get one. They don't have big enough tools to put motors in.

NC: So how old are you now, Floyd?

FC: Seventy-eight right now. I'll be seventy-nine in August. Still a pup. [Laughter] I used to go to Sundance up in McDermitt. Everybody had to have a pipe up there. So, you make

your own. Get pipestone out of Minnesota. I got one piece left, and that's about it. This is how they looked when you get a wider one. But that's basically the pattern you use. Then you drill a hole down through the top, down here. Then you drill in this way with a eighth-inch drill bit, to meet. Then you make a bigger one on the end, three-eighths or so. And about a five-eighth hole in the top. And you can whittle these down with a knife. Feels like talcum powder when it's on your hand. But since I'm out of stone, I ain't made one. And for the stems, I'll use chokecherry or cedar. And drill a hole through them all the way through. Partner used to say it's hard to train a termite to drill that one straight hole through there! [Laughter] Then, me and my grandkids, we'll sit around here and make drums. Make them out of any old wood we can find. We got one up there, and one over there. Sell some, give them away. Give some to the Tribe for their festival, so they can raffle them off. Yeah. I make little rattle drums, too. Like this guy here, that's a little rattle drum. If it'll come off from there, if I don't lose everything else. I don't know what that guy's doing up there. Yeah, they make them like that. Use sacred rocks in here: whatever you find on the ground. [Laughter] Yeah, we make a lot of them. Donate them or sell them; only get about fifteen bucks apiece out of them, but we use that new white man's wood in them, called "PVC"? [Laughter] And these here are bigger drum rings, like that. Just smooth 'em up, put a rawhide on 'em, tie 'em up; then they come out like that one up there. Started my youngest—middle-age grandson, I guess he is—he's starting to do the painting for me.

NC: So, what kind of hide do you guys use to make those drums?

FC: This one here is elk hide. It's a little tougher than the deer hide. And it lasts you a little bit longer. Yeah, and we just tie them up in the back. Just—**take** rawhide across there, at

least a quarter inch thick so they don't break on you. It'll only take you about hour to make one. But it's scraping the hide; you have to scrape the hair off, and the membrane off. We got a scraper set outside. We don't want no hair in here! [Laughter] It's hard to pick up! So, yeah. That's what we do. Mainly wintertime, but then, we don't do much in the winter because our water freezes up out here. So, summertime—and now, we don't get no hides 'til about falltime. We go into the butchers' shops in Ely, because they'll process the wild game in there for these hunters. They do the skinning, so you don't have to worry about skinning them. Take them out and soak them in water and little bit of lime, or the ash from your woodstove, the white, that'll make a lime solution that'll make the hair and the membrane come off a lot easier. And then, just scrape them until they're nice and smooth, or make buckskin out of them. Because we make our own drum sticks, too. We use—well, *I* use white buckskin for the outside, and then stuff them with buffalo hair. One guy, he asked me, “Where you get your buffalo hair?” I told him, “Off a *buffalo!* Where you think?” [Laughter] Then one guy asked me, “Where'd you get your pinenuts?” “Took them off a pine tree!” [Laughter] I don't know about some of these guys out here. I think that was old Maurice Churchill ask me where I got my pinenuts. That's what I told him at lunch. “Off a pine tree!” [Laughter] And Jack Malotte asked me where I got my buffalo hair. I usually get that from my nephew Shawn up there in South Fork. He was raising buffalo, so he always had hair there.

NC: So, is he still raising buffalo, your nephew?

FC: The last time I saw him, he was. But I don't know, I haven't been up there for *long* time. Since can't play basketball no more, don't have to travel! [Laughter] Yeah, we'd go play Owyhee, Elko, Wells. Went to LA for their world tournament one time. Come out fourth

in that, from Ely. We didn't have very many Indians, so— And some tournaments we went to, there was only five of us. We tell them our other car broke down with our subs. [Laughter] Yeah, we go play in Fort Duchesne, up in Fort Hall. Reno. We go over there and play Stewart every now and then. Play Elko in afternoon, Owyhee at night. Then drive back home, go back to work. Moved to Reno, used to play softball with the Reno Indian Athletic Association over there. We played that AAA fast-pitch over there. Then go down California and play a lot over there in their tournaments.

[Break in recording]

Oh, I made that one when I was married over in Wadsworth. Then, when I got divorced over there, I took my tools, and my stove, and my old pickup. That's what I got away with. Oh, some clothes, too. I didn't leave *all* my clothes. [Laughter] But there was a lot of them I left there. Couldn't pack them all, I only had a [19]67 Chevy pickup, that was my ride for a *long* time. I used to use that for my service truck, too. Up and down the highway, working on trucks. Yeah. So, me and my grandson built this shop we're in, and it's all out of scrap lumber from housing. [Laughter] Couldn't throw it away, couldn't burn it up. Had to have a place to put the stove, keep warm in the winter. That's drill steel. I just welded the bottom, top, and legs on it, and made the door. Put hinges on the door so we could open and close it. It keeps it warm in here. This sixteen by twenty. So, it works all right in here. I got one sitting outside I made out of a fuel tank. [Laughter] That's when I worked for trucking. We had a shed up there that was cold, so I made a stove and put it in there. Then, when trucking folded up, I went and got my stove back, too. Yeah, I had a Ranger 8 welder, but Shawn, my nephew up there in South Fork was building his buffalo corrals. So I says, "Take mine up and use it." Never went and got it

back; I don't need it right now. If I need one, I go get one out of the shop over there. We got a little buzzbox there, and we got oxygen, acetylene, so. Ain't much we need in here. Got beer in the fridge, so we're in good shape. [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

I'm not much for their powwows; I go to one here in Duckwater. Now and then, to the one in Ely. But, they don't have much in Ely. They got no singers, no dancers, no drum. Least Duckwater's got their own drum; kids are singing out here. And they do have some dancers. My grandkids quit dancing already, so. Don't have to make any bustles now. [Laughter] Yeah, we made all their stuff. My wife, she made all their outfits for them. Sewed all them together, made the bustles, their moccasins. Just about quit making moccasins, too. Don't nobody need them now. None of the kids. I don't make them to sell. I don't sell them. They're just for the family. Grandson in Pyramid Lake, he's got one with all eagle feathers. Oldest one here, he's got eagle feathers. The middle one, he got hawk feathers in his. Not supposed to sell feathers from birds of prey. You can *give* them away, but you can't sell them.

No, out here, Boyd Graham from Duckwater does it in Ely. There's hardly anybody in Ely talks Shoshone, except the ones that moved in from Duckwater. The last ones in there pretty well died off, that talked. And mainly, the ones in there that *do* talk the language are mainly from Duckwater, some of their kids that've moved in. But the older folks, when they started passing away, it pretty well died out with them. Because them days, you couldn't talk it in school anyway; you'd get whacked. So you, you know, even if you had friends you could talk to, the teacher catch you talking, that's the end of you. Oh, they'd *whip* you! They'd actually whip you then, they had their own paddles in every

room! [Laughter] Well, that's just like Stewart, they couldn't talk their language over there, either.

I only made it halfway through my junior year in White Pine High School before I got kicked out of there. Don't know why I got kicked out, but I did, but then, there's always the Marine Corps, so I joined them. That was in 1955.

Oh, I spent a year in Japan, six months in Okinawa, Phillipines, Formosa, and a lot on the ocean. Float around on carriers, mainly.

NC: If you were to recommend anything for the youth of today, what would you recommend, or what do you think is important?

FC: I think, school: go to college. Get a degree in something, because every job you apply for, you've got to have a college degree in something. And out here, what they hire, they stipulate a lot of, you know, what you're supposed to have before they hire you, but it don't work; they just hire whoever comes in. And none of them been to college that I know of. Ely, same way: they don't go to college. They go to work for the mine, then the mines'll close up on you overnight. You're out of a job again! [Laughter] Oh, if you're living on a Rez, you need a trade school. Learn mechanics, welding, electricians. Because out here, it's a long ways from town, so you usually have to do all your own work. You can't afford to have a service man come out and work on your tractor for you. That's why I don't work on them; they're all broke. They pay you payday, but they never have a payday! Yeah, so I don't work on cars or anything like that; barely work on my own. But you know, on a reservation, you've got to be able to take care of all your own equipment.

NC: So out here in Duckwater, is it more of a ranching community, then?



FC: Yeah, most of them do have ranches, but they're small. You're not going to make a living on them. So, you do have to have a job, too. And if you don't work for the Tribe out here, or down to the oil field, you don't work.

NC: So, is your family all here in the Duckwater area, or Nevada, or are they—they live elsewhere?

FC: Oh, they're all buried at White River. We have our own family cemetery over there. Just off the highway over there. My grandfather and grandmother used to own a ranch right there. It's up on the hillside above it. But, don't dig the grave by hand unless you got dynamite. So we use a backhoe now to get in there. But I got—my mom and dad are there, and my grandfather, grandma, two brothers, one uncle, one aunt. And a whole bunch of kids that my grandma and grandpa had that didn't live past a year or two. Nope. But some of these kids got to learn how to keep their crafts alive. Make drums, pipes, moccasins. Tan hides—hardly anybody tans hides anymore. And you get a good tanned hide, you can get about three hundred bucks out of them. But, you ain't going to sell them to an Indian, because they ain't got three hundred bucks! [Laughter] Mainly, that's—you know, I see lot of people take them to, like, their powwows, because you get a lot of white people around there that does have money, and that's about the only ones can afford to buy them. Indians got three hundred dollars, they're going be drunk! [Laughter] There, that'll conclude it!

[End of recording]