



Lester Shaw

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 052



Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh

June 1, 2016

Owyhee, NV



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S: My name's Lester Shaw Jr. I was born in Boise, Idaho, from my mom—Lester Shaw and Lillian Thomas Shaw. We are enrolled Paiute, Shoshone-Paiutes, here on Duck Valley reservation. I have two sisters, Karen Temoke and Adrienne Whiterock. And one brother, Virgil Shaw, and one deceased brother, Irwin D. Ridley. They are all enrolled here on the Shoshone-Paiute reservation. I remember I went to school here in Owyhee all my life, when I was—from first grade, to twelfth grade. I finished my school in 1961. Younger days, when I was growing up here on the reservation, my dad and mom had hay fields down here. Had to put up *all* summer! [Laughter] And we learned, had to learn how to run equipment, like the mower and the rake. And we had a buckrake. Because in them days, we had to use horse-drawn mowers, and horse-drawn rake, and buckrake, and stack hay—loose hay—stack it up there. And all of us had to get out there for help, anyway, even when you're little, all the way up to, until I got into—almost got to high school by then, before we switched over to tractors, and stuff like that. But it's something that we had to do. And I enjoyed doing it, but it was hard work. We all got together: my mom—I worked with my mom, she even went up there to be our cook and stuff, to get on the fields. And we had to move from one field way down to another, and clear down to Pleasant Valley, that's where we put up hay last. But then, in the springtime, everybody has to get out for branding, ride horses, and gather up the cattle, push them out on the range. Branding, and then, yeah, pushing cows, then up on the mountains again. It was just regular ranch work, but it was just pretty tough, hard work. Enjoyed that. During my high school years, I played in the band, high school band. And I was the president of the FFA. I played basketball, football, track, and I was in the rodeo club. We did pretty good

in the basketball, because we were undefeated my senior year, but we got beat out in the zone tournament by the lowest team. It just happened that way, I guess. I'd like to talk about my younger days when I was playing in the Indian basketball leagues. We had a team here in Owyhee that, we'd travel all over to a different reservation to play in a tournaments. Lot of our guys are all, they're getting pretty old now, they don't play anymore, but I like to remember that, when we win that championship, or I used to like to go to Fort Hall because it always has good tournaments up there. Or sometimes, just to go up there and play, you know just the regular games. And participate in tournaments down Schurz, and Reno, and Elko. We'd play all over. And up here. At here, at home, we used to have about five tournaments a year, basketball tournaments. We'd have young men's, and old men's. Now, we have—one of the older, we got a older league, thirty and over, and now it's forty and over. Fort Hall, I used to go up there and play in the thirty and forty and over. Now, it goes clear up to sixty and over! That's guys still playing ball!

[Laughter] It's lot of fun, but now I can't do it. Most of us are injured. All injured. But we had lot of fond memories, it was lot of fun. After I graduate from here, I worked out at **Spanish Arts** to make money to go to school. I went, the fall I went to Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. That was through study of masonry and construction. And I was there for, got out of there in 1963. I worked in Raytown, Missouri as a apprentice bricklayer for six months. And then, I moved back to—I moved to California, I moved to San Jose. And I couldn't find any work for my trade, so I moved back to Reno, then I found a—I got a job as apprentice bricklayer for L.A. Dunson Masonry contractor out of Sparks, Nevada. And I enjoyed working there with older guys that would teach us. I'd learn. Learning, I did all the—you start doing the dirty jobs first. So like, helping to carry

mud, and pack bricks and blocks. Yeah. Then I, they taught me quite a bit, lot of those older bricklayers. Got to work with them, and I enjoyed working with them, because I got to know them and got friendly with them, and then I was kind of scared first time. Like, kind of, because of my race I guess. But they kept—encouraged me, and that’s what I enjoyed: working as a bricklayer.

That was the love of my life, that masonry and construction, because you finish the job, you look at it, and you could see, “Hey, I built that! Helped build *that* building!” And lot of buildings in Boise that we completed, and I look back and when I go up there sometimes, I look and, “Hey, look at that old building we built long time ago.” Like the university, Boise State University, we worked lots on there: the student union, the dormitories.

[Break in recording]

When I was young, I started out with three sixty-five an hour. [Laughter] It’s not even nothing now. It’s probably up about—it’s about twenty-five, twenty-six dollars an hour now, as far as I know. I don’t know, I haven’t been—what, real long time, since 1972, since I done any kind of brick work, or block work, or stuff like that. It’s good, though. I got drafted in 1964. July. And I went into the Army. I went to Fort Ord, California. I finished my Basic Training in Fort Ord, and then I came home on leave, and then went to my AIT training in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. And I was there for another eight weeks, and then I got my orders to go to Germany. And there, I spent eighteen months over there on artillery, as artilleryman. We were on eight-inch howitzers. And when I was about ready to get out, I re-enlisted and got sent back to the States. When I was about done, then I spent five months at Fort Hood, Texas. And then, I got orders to go to Vietnam, Republic

of Vietnam, and that's when I went to the Vietnam War. I was assigned to the First Cavalry Division, Airmobile. And I was—our base camp was An Khe, Vietnam. From there, I was out in the field most of the time on different landing zones. And then, I lasted out there for five months, until I got wounded in January 3rd, 1968. We come under hostile mortar attack and rocket attack, and we were about almost ready to get overrun. I got wounded. I knocked out a rocket position with my squad, and then I received a Bronze Star from that, for heroism. It was pretty tough over there. I don't remember getting loaded up in the medevac chopper, and next thing I know I was in Qui Nohn, that's a hospital there. Then there for short time, and then I was sent to Japan to see what they could do to fix up my wounds. They couldn't do anything for my jaw right there. My jaw was disappeared, and knocked out all my teeth, and my left mandible was gone. [Laughter] So, they sent me back to the States, to Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. There I spent the rest of my tour, at the Letterman's. I finally got out, and I was home on convalescent leave about three times when I was in there. Until I had to go back for more surgery, and then I finally got my honorable discharge. And then, I came back here, home, here in Owyhee. I spent about a year just kicking back. I couldn't do much. I finally, after I got on as a bricklayer, apprentice bricklayer, in Boise Idaho, and I worked there for the Local #2 Bricklayers' Union, until I got my journeyman card for bricklaying. Then I worked there until I decided to go on to school a little bit more, and I went to Idaho State University vo-tech, and I got a certificate for furniture maintenance. Trying to rebuild furniture, and upholstery and stuff. But I used it for about maybe five months or so, but I decided I couldn't do that, because the pay wasn't too much, but it was worth something—something I had to fall back on if I needed to. And then, from

there, I came back here to Owyhee, and worked for the BIA maintenance department. Worked down there for, let's see—I have ten years there, service, as a maintenance worker. As a laborer first, then I moved up to a maintenance worker, and that I worked for a while, then I finally worked for the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe as an instructor for the AIT program. I worked there until I got hired at the Human Development Center as a coordinator of events and building superintendent. Then I worked there for a short while, and then I also worked for the U.S. Forest Service as a forestry technician, in Boise National Forest in Idaho. And then, I transferred to Ruby Mountain Ranger District with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. After that, I finished there, then I decided to look for something else, and I found work at the Owyhee Community Health Facility as a maintenance mechanic helper. And that's all my work I did so far. Plus, I worked on various ranches. But I didn't count that too much. [Laughter] That was lot of interesting fun, though. The last job, that's when I was injured on the job and I had to take a medical retirement. So now, I've been laid up for—can't do much for, oh, sixteen years now. I was injured in year 2000. I've enjoyed going to powwows, watching kids play basketball, and just staying home with my family. My wife is deceased. So I live here, but I have my nephews and whoever come over and visit. I am a member of the American Legion, Post 48—Jack Hanks 48. And I'm Adjutant for them, and I belong to the Military Order of Purple Heart. And Disabled American Veterans. And I enjoy working with the veterans, keep it going here at home. And I like to go to their meetings, and we keep everything up with our old post. We started after World War II, with Art Manning as our commander and stuff. We're down to about very many—oh, we had about seventeen when I first joined. Now we're down to about ten. [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

I was a teacher for, to teach these young guys around here how to lay blocks. So then they started on a building, a shop down here that they built. Went up with my teaching. They built it, they laid the blocks, all these younger guys here that learned that trade. I enjoyed teaching them. Yeah, it's something they can fall back—if they want to continue, they have to go further up, though, to get their journeyman's card and stuff for that. There's not too many, very many brick layers left around here I don't think. Most of them are either passed on or moved away. And they have to go to town, move to the city mostly, to find good work. But you get in that apprenticeship program, you can start off as a apprentice, bricklayer's apprentice, or cement finish. Or then they—you have to get indentured into, with a contractor. And most of them recommend to get into the union so you can go to work, unless you know somebody that does that kind of work. You can work for him, then work your way on up. It's good. Good trade.

[Break in recording]

I like to see these younger people stay with their powwows and their, the Indian, Native American language. They have to try to keep that up, because it's going, we're going to lose it pretty soon if we don't. There's lot of—here at home, they have classes for the Shoshone language, and Paiute, and to keep it up. You got to listen to the elders and try not to—because it's kind of getting lost now because of, they don't listen. Nobody tells you, the younger ones, what's going on with our culture and stuff. It's good to keep that up. And I sure enjoy it, to watch these younger little ones out there, the peewees, clear up to the golden age, that are still dancing. It's good to see. And I believe in that eagle staff, you got to watch our eagle feathers and stuff, we got to keep that sacred, and not to abuse

it in any way. Yeah, the eagle feathers are the main things I like that the—to me, that's what we respect. To our Mother Earth here, and our water, and our wild game, and the fish in the water. And that's what we survived on when we were little, and we ate rabbits, and deer, and antelope, and elk, and—just keep up the language, that's what I say. But I want the younger generation to know that, just continue learning your language and listening to the elders up here.

[Break in recording]

What I recommend to the kids of the younger generation now is to continue your education, because it's getting pretty hard to get any kind of employment. You got to have education to find any kind of work, you know? If you go off the reservations, hard to find work, a job or something—a decent job, anyway. Even here at home, it's hard to get on something like a—get trainings or something anyway, so you can have something to fall back on to support your family. That's what I recommend. I've been through a lot, and I enjoyed every bit of what I did. Went through hard times and good times, and lot of fun times. So, just think about that. Thank you.

[End of recording]