



Ruby Sam

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 053



Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh

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Duckwater, NV



Great Basin College • Great Basin Indian Archives
1500 College Parkway Elko, Nevada 89801
<http://www.gbcnv.edu/gbia/>
775.738.8493



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S: My name is Ruby Sam. I'm from Duckwater. I was born at a Indian hospital in Schurz, Nevada. And I'm an enrolled member of the Duckwater Tribe. My family on my mother's side are from here. And *nia appe'nante*, he's from Smoky Valley. His name is Nelson Sam. His parents are Judy and Henry Sam. *Soteeke* Smoky Valley *hek*, but Duckwater Reservation [**Shoshone at 1:17**]. I started school, I was a year late because of my birthday. You know, could—anyway, *ne* school start, this sneaky *taipo* [**Shoshone at 1:30**]. And all the older girls [**Shoshone at 1:33**] I think [**Shoshone at 1:44**] when they started. And the teachers [**Shoshone at 1:51**] playground, or powwow ground? [**Shoshone at 2:01**]. Then later, it moved up *akkuh himpaha* Health Department [**Shoshone at 2:08**]. But it's same school, [**Shoshone at 2:10**] Then in 1954, [**Shoshone at 2:16**] county built that school, and that's where I went. Think I was in the fourth grade when we moved down there. And then, from there—[Laughter] then later on, in the [19]70s, *Newenen tuhupuken*, they started their tribal school. But [**Shoshone at 2:34**], so I don't know too much about what was going on. After eighth grade, because my friends were going to Stewart, I decided to go with them. I followed! But [**Shoshone at 2:46**]. Then, my dad stepped in and pulled me out, and made me go to Elko. I didn't like that either! [Laughter] That was so— [**Shoshone at 2:57**], and I went to school in Ely for a little while. But then I ended up in Lund, and that's where I graduated from.

C: What didn't you like about Stewart? Stewart was a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school?

S: Uh-huh. And was racist. [Laughter] They were! We couldn't—[**3:18**]. And if you did, you got punished. So, [**Shoshone at 3:24**] what I'm talking about, [**Shoshone at 3:26**].

And [**Shoshone at 3:29**] for being punished, *akka* floor, it had paste wax on it? *E* razor blade [**Shoshone at 3:37**], you had to scrape that *all* the way. And that was my punishment, *newe taikwan*. Not fun!

C: So, how about Elko? What was Elko like?

S: It was okay. But I wanted to be in Duckwater. [3:58] *Ne kai* Elko [**Shoshone at 3:59**]. It was fine. I was just, I found out I had two brothers and two sisters after I moved there. I stayed with my grandma, Judy Sam, for a while while I was going. Twice, I went back. I went back for the first semester to Christmas, and I came home. Then I went back up again, and went one more [**Shoshone at 4:26**], half a semester. Then I moved in, went to Lund. Or, Ely, and then to Lund.

C: So, how was Ely?

S: Ely was fine because it was close to home. *Kai hakkaitte*. I quit for a while. I was out for two years, and then I went back and finished. And then, went on Relocation to Cleveland, Ohio. I didn't—*ne kai sumpai* what I was getting into. They came and, I can't remember [**Shoshone at 5:04**] about Relocation. Anyway, they had targeted cities, that Relocation, and they had, like, California, I think it was Washington, Texas, New York, Florida, Chicago, and Cleveland. There was couple of others. I picked Cleveland because it was the farthest [**Shoshone at 5:29**]. [Laughter] Because that way, [**Shoshone at 5:31**] I went there. But I wasn't the first one for Relocation. We had three other young ladies that went to Chicago. They were the first Relocation. It was [19]63 when I went on Relocation. That's when, *supai*, I went back there. It was fun. [**Shoshone at 6:01**], different tribes were [**Shoshone at 6:06**] Newene from all over. Different states. Different tribes. But it was funny, that all the Newene, once they met at the BIA office where we had to go sign

up and everything, different Newene [**Shoshone at 6:25**], so—can you guys just—everybody were friends. We were like, *nenneema'ai*. Newene, didn't matter what tribe you were. So, that's how we got along. We probably had about four or five hundred Indians up there. And some of those people that went up in the [19]50s on Relocation for jobs, they were still there when I went up. And they're still there *maaikwa*. They made it their home, *kai ko'ihテナ*. But lot of them [Shoshone at 6:58] because they get homesick. They have an Indian Center there in Cleveland, too. I worked there for about seven years, like that, with the different tribes. That was fun. You got to find jobs for them, and find housing, get them—we had an attorney that worked with us, and that's who helped them out, because I got to know them pretty well. So. We help our own. Anyway, then way later, in [19]70s, I went to the BIA office just looking around, and there was a guy, one of the counselors started talking to me. And *ne supai semmewa'i niikwiken*, I went for keypunch, but came up finishing. He said, “Well, [**Shoshone at 7:53**].” I said, “Sure, why not?” At that time, I had gotten married, and my old man was in Vietnam, so I had nothing to do. So I told him okay. He said, “What would you like to be?” I said, “How about cosmetology?” So this BIA sent me to school for cosmetology. And I graduated in [19]73, went for my state board, and got it. So, I was a licensed cosmetologist for a while. [Laughter] But [**Shoshone at 8:25**]. So, yeah. It was fun, once you get to know people.

C: So how many years did you—was that in the Cleveland area? You lived there from—

S: 1963, and I finally came home in 1993.

C: Wow.

S: I mean, [**Shoshone at 8:51**], because we, *nemme*, we moved around a lot because of Bill being in the Service. So we were stationed here, stationed there. So, I would come home.

And then wherever we were at, that was my home! [Laughter] In all of our travels from [19]64 on, where *nemme*, we were moving around, [**Shoshone at 9:16**] anyway when he went up there. [**Shoshone at 9:22**] But then, my old man learned to speak Shoshone, too. Like Wendy. [Laughter] [**Shoshone at 9:30**]. But he did. But that's what—that was it. Or if I talked to my mom and them on the phone, then *matewe newe taikwan*. So, we never forgot. Or I could've been like the others, come back and say, "Oh, [**Shoshone at 9:46**]." But I didn't. You don't. Sometime it's hard to get back into it, [**Shoshone at 9:54**], because I was gone four and five years at a time, but I didn't forget! I kept up with it. And that's like, Keith speaks Shoshone, too. And lot of the people here, when he used to come here, they weren't thinking that he *newe taikwan*, and he used to surprise them because he would answer them in Shoshone. So, he didn't forget either. You know, it's changed. When we were up there, [**Shoshone at 10:24**] you could walk on the street by yourself. You had nothing to worry about. Now, if you do that, [**Shoshone at 10:30**]. It's not good! You'd have to find a good place to live. But then, I don't think there's too many. Yeah. *Natian*. Back then, [**Shoshone at 10:43**]. We used to go down to Lake Erie on the *himpa* because we right on Lake Erie. And *sateen tsaa* Beach *napuite*, we used to go there *tookkahnih*. We'd walk around in there. And now, you don't dare. And that's the way the Indians gathered after bars closed. [Laughter] They had a pipe there, and then they would do their 49er *himpa*, with using your car hood as a drum. That was kind of fun. I mean, you had what, about twenty different tribes? All from different schools, too.

C: Now that you've experienced that, and looking back on Relocation, what do you think was the intent of the Relocation program?

S: To water down our blood degree, because they knew once we left here, [**Shoshone at 11:38**]. You know, [inaudible 11:43] us, and if you have kids, you can't count their blood because they're of a different tribe. And you're from a different tribe. So, depending on where you're enrolled, you could only use part of it. And that's not right. But that was their intent, was to make sure that they were going to water down and get rid of the Indians. That's the way I feel. I don't know if other people feel that way or not, but that's the way I felt.

C: What prompted you to return back to the reservation?

S: My mom was by herself. My dad passed away. So, figured it was time to come home.

[Break in recording]

On my mom's side, I have two sisters, one brother. On dad's side, two sisters, and I think four brothers; the two I never met. And then, we lost one brother in 'Nam. That's on my dad's side.

[Break in recording]

I only came back because I did an interview. Phone-*fa*. For a position at the admin. But instead, I got one at the school. I was their school education office manager, which is just plain secretary. But I had a fancy title! But, that's where I started. And then, later down the road, I went down to admin for a while. But there was some issues, and the officer, police officer, wanted me to work at their office, so I got transferred to law enforcement as a court clerk. Court clerk, probation officer, all around. [Laughter] Janitor, whatever else. But I worked there for, gee, a long time. So, I finally retired.

[Break in recording]

We do quilting. That one I got to finish. And then, I do a lot of crocheting those little things. And then, I do a lot of embroidering because I make quilts out of this. I got one that's finished for a king-size, and this one is going to be a queen-size. So, we keep busy. And we go to a lot of—you know, like, we have Christmas bazaars, and our spring fest, that's where we sell these stuff at. It does pretty good. Plus, it keeps me busy, and keeps me out of trouble—sometimes. My sister Adeline and I do a lot of it, and then we go to the Fandangos and stuff like that, and sell. And Wanda Thompson's the other one.

[Break in recording]

I don't know if it's just me, but I think our language is lost, no matter how much we try [Shoshone at 14:35], because the language, *kahni ken*, it's taught at the home. And, *e oyo*, if you're around it all the time, [Shoshone at 14:45]. But, the way it is now, I don't think it's going to happen. [Shoshone at 14:51] But that's only me. So—[Shoshone at 14:57], they're not going to learn.

[Break in recording]

I think that's where Duckwater's pretty good, because there's quite a few. [Shoshone at 15:08]. And that's good. But, I noticed lot of other tribes *kai*—I mean, other reservations—[Shoshone at 15:18], they look at you like, “What're you talkin' about?” [Laughter] So, I don't know. But I think it's lost. But I hope not. But, I think. And I think that if they're going to spend money, I think it should be done within each tribe. That *mate* speaker *Newe* is from there.

[Break in recording]

Yeah, not too long ago, just, I found out that [Shoshone at 15:49], and *okai* new hospital [Shoshone at 15:55] back East, [Shoshone at 16:02] Cleveland and different [Shoshone

at 16:03] multiplying or something, I guess! [Laughter] [**Shoshone at 16:21**], and that's not right. But, *tamme kai proofekan(te)*. So. But they—

C: So there was a sterilization program going on without the knowledge of the Native American women?

S: Right. *Soonten*—and not just here. Just, it's all over, [**Shoshone at 16:42**] *Newe* hospital [**Shoshone at 16:43**]. That was happening. And that's what those girls were telling me. [**Shoshone at 16:48**]—we were just talking one day, and that came up. And I believe it happened here, too. Because I could've been one of them. Because I only have one child, and that was it.

[Break in recording]

Well, right now, *en tamme* Ely *kattu mia*, because we don't have a doctor, but you know, we get referred out to—we've got a good healthcare. It helps all their members. So. And if it has to be specialized, you know, doctors, then it's either Salt Lake, Reno, Vegas, wherever they need to go. So, it's pretty good. And our kids do have braces that they pay for, too. And they pay for all of their enrolled members' glasses and dental, whether they live on the reservation or not. It don't matter; as long as they're enrolled, they help 'em out. Which is pretty good. It's been like that for quite a while. Plus, we help other non-enrolled members that's here with the glasses, same thing. They get the same thing as the enrolled members, which is pretty good, too—I think. But that's only me—no!

[Laughter] [**Shoshone at 18:15**].

[Break in recording]

The only thing I can say is, we need to push our young people on education, so they can make it out there. Government isn't going to go on forever. One day, all of that money's

going to dry up. Right now, they need to take advantage of whatever scholarships are out there. Apply for it, go to school. Make something of yourselves. That's all I can say.

[End of recording]