

Narrator: Bill Sterud
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Interviewed by: Miguel Douglas
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Miguel Douglas: A little background about yourself.

Bill Sterud: Ok, so my name is Bill Sterud, I'm the Chairman of the Puyallup Indian Tribe. I'm 63-years-old. I first got involved with...well, all my life was with the Tribe, since I was 27. So I've been in the middle of a lot of the Tribe's historical growth period. I attended Fife high school, the University of Washington, and Evergreen State. Married, three children. Okay, go ahead.

MD: Okay, so how was the economic and social level of the tribe prior to the Land Settlement?

BS: It was...I'd say pretty poor. Many Tribal members didn't have jobs. The different governments, including the State of Washington, the city governments, they were all fighting our ability to put land into trust where our economic development would take place. I think the key thing that fired up the land claims was our fishing rights battle, where

people were arrested, where there was a train bridge that burned. I led a takeover to the old Cushman hospital. We had won in court the Riverbed case, which left us in a really unique position as far as bargaining with the non-Indian side.

So, with that in mind, there weren't many good relations going on between the governments, between the non-Indians, between the Indians. It was a very rocky time that we were involved in. There was a lot of out and out racism thrown our way. Trying to keep back on this question...so the economic level, because of our land being stolen, because of the racist attacks that were carried on against the Tribe, we weren't in a good position even though our reservation includes international trade, includes some great freeway access and roads, we weren't allowed to be a part of that economic building that was taking place here. You know, they just kept us down. It was actually a pretty...you know, looking back on it...I get emotional.

MD: Yeah, it was a pretty difficult time.

BS: Yes. And then we entered into negotiations. And I'll just show you a quick picture here, let's see [shows picture]. That's my friend Norm Dicks, Congressman Dicks. Here is one of the earlier negotiations that actually took place [shows picture]. Senator Inouye became a friend of the Tribe and he was the Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, so he helped put the thing through on the Senate side and Norm was on the

House side. And to this day I am a friend with Norm Dicks and I have dinner with him tonight.

MD: He does attend a lot of our functions.

BS: Oh yeah, he is a hardcore Dawg man, he was linebacker...he went both ways actually, defense and offense back in the old days, he told me this story, it was pretty cool.

MD: He's a cool guy

BS: Very cool guy, very cool guy. I'm lucky to have him as a friend and he hung right with the Tribe during some tough times because there was some pretty hardcore, right-wing republicans that don't like Indians, don't like funding Indian tribes. In the meantime, all this is going on, we had this little tiny clinic up there, it was basically a portable. Norm made sure that during our negotiations that our clinic was expanded, was built, was done. I believe that was done to keep the negotiations open and stuff, it was all done well. You know back then Chief Leschi School also came into being, you know we didn't have any of that stuff. You know, it was pretty poor. We had to fight for a building to have an office, you know. We were not far off from just having cemeteries, it was all we had, just some cemeteries.

So, that's kind of how feeble it was. There was, well you know, a lot of welfare, lot of food banks. That world was the world of the Puyallup people back then, we were left with that. I was trying to figure out how to pay for a funeral home.

MD: It was, just from reading about it, it was a really difficult time because of what was going on with the city and a lot of the land that was originally ours was not anymore.

BS: There was one big case...the court cases is what kind of strengthen our ability to go into negotiations in a strong way. There was the Riverbed, that was big. There was the Cushman hospital, getting that big. And, a major one was the *Andrus v. City of Tacoma*, where they're starting to put land into trust on the Puyallup reservation. The City of Tacoma sued the Department of Interior saying it was illegal that the reservation didn't exist.

So one of the parcels of land that was put into trust was mine. It has always been in family ownership going back to the treaty days. So our legal department in Washington D.C. thought that would be a perfect one to use as a test case, so my mom testified, I testified, on July 5th. So did Roleen Hargrove, she was there, and the council was there watching this thing take place, and when we won it, everything changed. It was historic, very cool, look that up.

MD: Okay.

BS: Judge Gesell called us a historic Tribe. So we had this, all of a sudden, power. You know, we can put land into trust. The reservation boundary exists. We can go fishing. And we can act in a reasonable way, whether it is taking over a building or whether it is going to court for our people. And so we had to do that but we did it in a good way, you know, nobody got hurt, but it was definitely some crazy times.

MD: I am going to move on to the next question.

BS: Go ahead.

MD: So what were some of the opinions from within the tribe surrounding the Land Settlement issue?

BS: You talking about Tribal members?

MD: Yeah, you don't have to name any names.

BS: Oh, ok, well it was very controversial. This was our reservation, they stole all this land from us, what are we going to do about it? We can't negotiate with them, we just kick

them off. We just a...some of our Tribal members thought that the land...some, I'm going to say some, thought that the negotiations shouldn't take place, that we just go get what we own, and start removing people from our properties that we had won along the riverbed. So the word 'sellout' was thrown at the council for negotiating, and on the other hand, the tribe voted overwhelmingly to approve it.

But it was not, you know, an example...you can delete this if you want, but you know I got a death threat from an obvious right-wing non-Indian on the phone, and I got a death threat, from what I thought, could have come from a Tribal member, for selling out. It was definitely a contentious period to be the chairman of the Tribe back then. So it was, you know, in the meantime...and rightfully so from some of these Tribal members, we had nothing, everything was stolen. And how dare these other people come in and say 'this what you are going to get' and 'this is what you are going to do' because everything had been taken just because it is one of the deepest ports in the world out here.

In the meantime, the fishing rights struggle was also still going on, where even though we were building hatcheries, the sports fishermen would organize into groups to battle with us and stuff. There was some contentious times down on the river around fishing and had stuff thrown at me and vice versa.

MD: A lot of that, I mean, especially with the water issue you know, you had the sports

fishermen, who felt that...

BS: They owned the fish.

MD: Yeah, they could take as much as they want.

BS: And they also had the State of Washington backing them. You know, in fact, in the one decision, when they were appealing the Boldt decision, it might have been the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals that said 'not since the Brown decision...', which was the Board of Education versus Brown when they wouldn't allow black people to go, I forgot the name of which school, 'that a state fought a U.S. district order more than what the State of Washington has done to the Puyallup Tribe.' It was that big.

MD: A lot of it, from the political aspect, during that time, even before that, certainly they really looked down on Native Americans and they didn't think they should own really anything, they lost out on it.

BS: And it wasn't just the general public, these are the governments that I'm talking about. I'm talking about the State of Washington. I'm talking about the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which just lost a bunch of records. Talking about the City of Fife, the City of Tacoma, Pierce County. All those governments were battling us. Fortunately, we've had

some great legal help. John Bell has been just this incredible person. We've had some great ones, some great people working here. Old school days, a lot of them are gone now. They are all over my head, cool guys, cool gals.

MD: Well it's good to have that solid team, especially when you are going into the legal realm, where you have to defend yourself more so than...

BS: You're talking about a people, an entire people.

MD: And you know, the livelihood of the water, especially to our people, some non-natives may not necessarily view that spiritual connection. They are looking at it from an economic....

BS: Just go sporting, and that wasn't understood. And so, since there has been an incredible education process in all the cities, all the governments around here, it's still continuing, but there are still some feelings out there, even from the Tribe. There are still some days where some people still think why did we give up so cheaply even though it was the largest land settlement in the 48 [contiguous] states, ever.

MD: Oh wow, I didn't know that. We you think about the boundaries, that kind of defined the boundaries of what the reservation was.

BS: That's one of those areas that we'll talk about off air, there is a whole thing there [laughs].

MD: Okay, yeah, going on to the third question, and I think we kind of discussed this already, but the general public consensus before and after it had passed.

BS: Well after it passed, you know, it got voted down first time. Is that what happened, it got voted down the first time? Yeah it did. You know, its so crazy, it fell apart, no, we added some stuff...yeah it went down, we added some stuff, came back and it went through. And of course, the non-natives that didn't understand were all really, really angry, the wasting of taxpayer money and all that stuff, so the public wasn't exactly too enamored over the whole thing, they just saw it as a waste of just a bunch of public funds.

You know, this entire area here, billions of dollars had been made off of our reservation and we weren't included on any of it. 'As long as the sun shall shine,' you know? And after it passed, there was still animosity because things just don't go away. You know it is an educational process, it's a public process, at that point you had some great people, Norm Dicks out there, sticking up for us, Dan Inouye, sticking up for us. That whole process began to take place, and the non-Indian side had like a three hundred member blue ribbon committee group of people that studied the issues, because the issues

were water, air, land, fish, international trade, economic development, and how we fit into what their minds was their world, and we just kind of created our own world within it.

And it has gone a lot further now, there is a lot better communication, there is a lot better working together with the governments, because in the settlement, it created this method of forcing the non-Indian governments, and the Tribe, to go to the table to discuss issues like jurisdiction, to discuss issues like taxation, to discuss issues like putting land into trust. There is a...I'll call it a 'notification' process that takes place between all the governments when putting land into trust. Notification from the government when they are going to do some development and stuff. So that forced the City of Tacoma, City of Fife, Puyallup, Pierce County, State of Washington, Puyallup Tribe, to sit down and discuss these issues so there is some sort of workable agreements concerning land use, concerning how we are going to use that trust property. Their concern is that we'll open up a big dump or something else, which is absolutely crazier than hell, but I can see in their minds how they are going to take advantage of this. So I thought it was a protection for us too because they can't just step on us without us being aware when they are about to step on us so we can fight it. And that's what it was, it was kind of a fight, getting all the stuff together, and then it just kind of went through and passed and the Tribe just kind of watched this thing grow.

MD: It's those hard steps because you are dealing with so many different people and different entities that want to take what they can or renegotiate the way they want to.

BS: That's interesting because in some of those meetings they'd have the county, the cities and stuff, and they'd have skeletons in their closets, where Pierce County didn't like the City of Tacoma over certain issues, and that came out in the fights, and the same thing with the City of Fife. The City of Fife was absolutely crazy the way they handled the whole thing until this day.

So you know it was kind of a healing for this entire area, which is an interesting way of looking at it.

MD: Well, it's bringing people together that wouldn't necessarily want to be in the same room with one another, or be at a meeting. You try to get those issues resolved too along the way.

BS: And there has been, and that's because of the settlement. It created that opportunity, and the scary thing is 'what's the Tribe going to do? They've taken over buildings, they've burnt bridges, they go fishing.' Maybe we aren't crazy, maybe that is what we had to do to show them that we are going to have to do whatever.

MD: Especially since you guys were put into that situation, you guys were in that situation where that had to be pretty much done.

BS: Oh yeah.

MD: They are not going to listen to you guys.

BS: And there were plans to take another step, and some day I'll tell you about them, because that's all the power we had. There were 800 members at the time, now there are like 5,000.

MD: It's trying to find that voice.

BS: That's a good way to put it. And they took us for real.

MD: From a marginalized community, finding that voice can be somewhat difficult, difficult to do that.

BS: We had some people go to World War II, and they came back from the war and realized they can't even go finishing in their river. So it was that generation, that I believe, started putting some stuff together, and it came out from World War II.

MD: Kind of pushing forward in their structure as a Tribe. Standing up and doing what you can, under the circumstances.

BS: There was never no money for attorneys, no one had any money. When the fishermen tried to go fishing, they'd steal your boat, the state would. They'd steal our canoes, they'd steal our nets, they'd arrest us, they'd beat us. That happened down on the river, all illegal. The State of Washington passed a resolution, I think the governor even signed it, where they said that they apologize to the tribe. Not enough, not enough.

MD: It's much more than that.

BS: It destroyed families. Put people in jail. There should be reparations for what they did to us, from the State of Washington.

MD: From most tribes too, from across the United States.

BS: No tribe went through what we went through, where we had it all taken, except for the cemetery.

MD: I noticed that we are slowly getting some of the land back, having to buy it back, which is kind of ironic.

BS: But that's the way it is. And we have some economic development that allows that to

happen. And that is where we are getting some key strategic pieces for our economic development plan together.

MD: Which is where I was going to transfer to the final part of it, so as Tribal member, what were some of the benefits that you had seen arise from the land settlement?

BS: Economic development, pride, employment, developing services, health services, school services. Our entire social structure went up, from 800 members to 5,000 to where it is today. There's jobs, there wasn't any jobs, so we had a little small staffing at the Tribe, those were important jobs because they were jobs. A 'job,' because they weren't any, and Indians weren't hired. So now the shoe is on the other foot, the Indians are hiring the non-Indians.

But it is a whole different game now, we are just all trying to get through this life that we all have, that we are all sharing. Until we...and my whole goal is international trade, until we open up our port, we won't realize exactly where we are at, where we are going to be. And we got the port down there, and we had some different entities lease it, do this with it, do that, but at the end of September, all that is going to be clear, and then the Tribe is going into the international trade portion. It's going to be great, there's a lot of opportunity to import stuff and send stuff out from Indian reservations from across the country. Most of the resources that are left are on Indian land because all the other businesses wiped out the timber, wiped out the fish, and wiped out this and wiped out that.

So what's left is on Indian land, and in my mind 'we'll work with this Tribe and ship it out this way, and we'll send it over there, and be working these deals,' and that's the idea, that's the idea behind the thing.

MD: Building those trading communities where you trade different items, and have them shipped between us and other tribal entities.

BS: And other countries love the idea of working with Native American people. They like it, they think it is tremendous. We're the only place that has an opportunity for international trade, it's right here. So it's been slow, it's been agonizingly slow, but it's going to happen. It's going to happen before I'm done.

MD: We are lucky enough to have that opportunity, because pretty much all that down at the port was our land, but to get a part of that...

BS: Couldn't get it all but it all came down to attorneys figuring out just what our the odds that the U.S. Supreme Court going to give us the Port of Tacoma, and that wasn't going to happen.

MD: Yeah.

BS: So there had to be a deal.

MD: Certain compromises had to be made.

BS: Well, you had to because we get one shot, and if we lose at the U.S. Supreme Court level, we don't get any of that. So this way we were able to keep the pressure on and work that deal. I'm saying this, you know, it took me four years of my life [laughs].

MD: It's a big step for the tribe.

BS: Oh yeah. And we got some economic development out of the settlement. Individuals Tribal members got money, not much, enough to pay some bills is the way I look at it, about \$20,000 each person got.

MD: Also, just having the opportunity to hire people that are non-native and helping the city. Obviously Tribal members too, of course.

BS: We have a Tribal member preference. I say stay in school, for the young bucks. Stay in school and then walk away and help us out. In fact, I've always been so strong about that. We can send a Tribal member anywhere to go to college. Anywhere. And we do. But I think you have to come back and work a couple of years for the Tribe if you do that. So

that's how I kind of look at how it should happen. People end up coming back anyway.

Everyone is allowed their trip in life, find out what life is, then come back here and help us out.

MD: Help the Tribe out because that is where the future is.

BS: It's all right here.

MD: And given the complexity, like once the port opens and everything, it's going to get to the point where you're going to have to have people who understand the negotiations...

BS: The port stuff and our casinos do pretty well. We have gas stations, and all that happened because we had the settlement. And as that sits, it's still smoldering. It isn't over until it's over. And it will be interesting to see how we'll grow. It will be interesting to see how the non-Indian community accepts our growth and becomes a part of this whole area. And everyone makes money then, when everyone has a good life, is kind of how I look at it.

MD: Cooperation, you know?

BS: Which exists now.

MD: I notice how a lot of the people who are non-native who say ‘yeah, the Puyallup tribe definitely should have a casino, have economic prosperity, this is their land.’

BS: We help them. I think we gave out like 1.6 million dollars for food, for charity, for clothes, the University of Washington here, University of Washington over there in Seattle. Other schools, and Puyallup means ‘a generous people,’ and I think it is an important way to make everybody feel good about us and our economic development because some people are still like ‘oh god, the Indians, they got this, they got that,’ it’s all crap. Indians pay taxes, Indians pay a lot of money. Indians create a lot of jobs. You know, I’m the boss of...I say 5,000 members, but I think we are around 4,200 staff. 4,200 people work for us, and they are happy to work for us, in all ways, in all manners. Health, education, economic development, whatever it fits.

I’m actually feeling pretty good about the direction, my fingers are crossed, I don’t take anything for granted because I’ve seen it go. They’ve stolen everything from us before. That’s a whole other story on that, at the turn of the century on what happened to our Tribal leaders that no one even knows and it hasn’t come out yet. It’s pretty gruesome. That was when they were out there stealing the port land, and a lot of the Tribal leaders where ran over by trains. For real, as crazy as that may sound, it’s true. So to this day, it’s been a long journey. We are kind of like catching our breath and moving forward [laughs].

MD: So do you have any final words?

BS: Ah no, I'm glad that you spent the time. It's a good direction, and welcome aboard to our future.

MD: Thank you.

BS: Sincerely, I mean that from my heart. I'm glad our paths crossed.