

September 3, 2009

Ramona Bennett (Interviewee)

Location: Ramona Bennett's property in Tacoma, Washington

Cecelia La Pointe-Gorman (Interviewer-University of Washington-Tacoma)

Cheryl Milas (Puyallup Tribal Researcher)

Clare Johnson (Puyallup Tribal Researcher)

A (5)

**Ramona:** So anyway we went to Joe Mc Cay, who was the caretaker of the cemetery, and Bob's <sup>Sincolt</sup>-----and asked for if there was any property that had any cleaner title. Because we knew we had we owned the property over there...

**Clair:** At the cemetery?

**Ramona:** yeah...no across the river, at Brandon's Landing, that's across the river, and he said that area which is commonly known as the ceremonial grounds had...we had a much stronger claim to it, because it is a part of the original agency tract, within each reservation the Bureau of Indian Affairs quatrains off an area, known as the agency tract, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs assumed control and it not titled because it was still a part of the Indian reservation. But it was cleaner and clearer because it was a part of the agency tract towards the boarding...old industrial school was, and the hospital and the farm grounds and the offices, and even the cemetery was a part of that partial given to the Presbyterians to civilize us, so he thought that was cleaner and clearer, and so we really did set up a security camp to stand as witness to what was really happening to our fisherman. And a immediately involved these other groups, and that's all that's all taped already, the Jewish Anti-Defamation League Majority Group Task Force, and certainly the Anti-War Movement, and both Seattle and Tacoma Church Councils, and I involved them through my contracts through Urban League, they were able to access everybody, and so then we had witnesses to what was happening to our fishermen. But at that same

time I am writing proposals, not grants yet, proposals for a variety of services. And the bureau still wasn't recognizing our Council, this was in seventy...it had been a couple of years. But what we really believed is that we needed to recognize ourselves and act like a government, act like a government should act. So we continued meeting, we continued listening to our members; we went around and met with the members. Now there had not been a certified tribal role since 1929, since the judgment role for hospital funds. And so we had quite a small tribe, I think there were only 174 living members.

**Clair:** In 1970?

Ramona: Yeah, no...we knew we had a lot more members than that...we had a lot more members than that, but they weren't enrolled, because we hadn't had a certified role, to this day we put up obstacles ourselves in maintaining our roles. An so the first contact, successful contact was with Indian Health, which is totally different than the Bureau, but the Bureau issues documents, certified councils and so up to that point we were not certified. So the first thing that we did is, I got us some office space, the Presbyterians let us have a little tiny office with in the cemetery , its that little brick building right up above the church. It's a tiny two-room building, probably the size of this kitchen. It had a little bathroom, and had two little spaces. I had, we set up a daycare in the church basement. Just about that time we were recognized by the Bureau. And the first budget was for enrollment staff. The very first grant that I got, and it sounds like I m we-myself-and-I, but all I can speak to is what I did personally, because those are the things that I know. There was a program called CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) and we were recognized, and I got us funds through Small Tribes of Western Washington because they had accepted funds for Puyallup because Frank Wright had worked with

them, maybe have even worked for them. And so they had the Puyallup funds, and so I approached them for our Puyallup dollars, and allocated two slots, and we hired two slots. And we hired Marilyn Samuel McCloud to be Secretary, and we hired Joe Matheson to keep up the cemetery. And got some phones put in, and bought some kind of a copier and actually set up an office, and that would have been....it was seventy-three. It was in seventy-three, that's the year CETA actually got going. So we were able to bring in this little staff, so we actually had somebody whose job was to be in one place, because up to that time I all over the place, I am I was just absolutely everywhere. Mostly going out doing little speaking gigs, and at that time I was doing bead work for basic life support and I also enrolled into college. And so I had a student grant and my beading money and had been paying for all of the copying and mileage out of pocket. And it was a very shallow pocket, so I really had to bead fast. But, our tribe was gaining recognition. We had already done the security camp; we were fully involved in the movement. I had...fish markets had always been a problem. The white people make really good money off fishing; the Indians were never given the opportunity to really make enough money to make it worth our worthwhile to stay out there fishing. So we...survival, so we bought the fish for seventy-cents a pound; we cleaned the fish, we belly-iced them, egged them, we salt the eggs. Then we'd load the fish up, and I'd drive it down to the bay area (California) and we'd take 1500 pounds at a time, sell them for a buck a pound. And we'd take them to Berkley, China Towne, to the Alcatraz receiving depot. And then Ben Bratt and his brother Peter and Georgia Bratt and Eric would help me sell these fish. They'd be running all over China Towne with all these fish rolled up in newspapers. And anyway, we met Jim Jones, the congregation that went to Guyana and drank Cool-aid.

That's one of the places we would sell fish. I got arrested at Bobby Seals birthday party at Golden Gate Park for selling fish at the park. I had to go on trial with all the prostitutes come Monday morning. Those were real hippy-dippy times, I had, it was a real wonderful time, and you know it was the true hippy days. I was a real exciting time. We talked about Puyallup tribe, and we talked about the lack of federal protection and services. It was...how come we didn't turn that television off? What's wrong with us, are we just lame brains? (Laughs).

12:42

Anyway it was a real exciting times, and entering that time I was constantly bugging the bureau, constantly bugging Indian health, constantly harassing all of these agencies that should have been meeting our needs. You know, any place there was supposed this share, and Puyallup wasn't getting their fair share you know to be meeting our needs. You know any place there was supposed to be a share-and you know Puyallup wasn't getting their share-I was right after them. And so I used to haul down two loads of fish every week. And various people would hop on with me and make that trip because we were creating markets for our fishermen, so it would be worth their while to get out there and fish. And it was all about economic survival and there were no job opportunities for our fishing people. -fishing was the only-possible way to support their families, because no one would hire Indians because of the stereotype of the dirty drunken lazy irresponsible Indians and so there weren't jobs for us. And so we had to create our own way of surviving and that what the treaty-you know- (Ramona asks Cecelia for a glass of water). The treaty rights are all so interrelated-the right to basic life support. You know if you're on your bloody knees in a welfare line, you can't live with any kind of dignity and pride.

And you really can't take care of your family. And because of the deprivation of the fishing right for ninety years, our families have truly come a part, our children were removed in masses, so many adopted, taken away, you know dragged off to boarding school, in white foster homes, parental rights terminated and adopted. And a lot of our Puyallup of our Puyallup families fled, and that is what happened. Alex and Elian, they grabbed their kids and went to eastern Washington where they would be safer.

16:03

The Daniels family, the kids were all snatched and adopted out; just family after family. I could really sit here all day and name the families whose children-our children are beautiful-our families were seen as a resource of available children, they knew we were poor. They knew we could not fight back, they know we lived in substandard housing, anytime there was a fire, an electrical fire, it was an Indian family, and time there was an electrical fire. Because our families lived in the most run down, dilapidated, unsafe housing. And of course -housing was a big issue- that was one of our top things at Fort Lawton, one of our top things here at Puyallup. And so we have this little office. Now Chief Leschi was murdered by the government, he was buried first at Nisqually, and then they were afraid he'd be a Martyr and there would be an uprising. And so they moved his bones over here at the Puyallup cemetery where he couldn't cause any problems. And his grave was right outside our office-right there and if you looked at the back of this headstone "judicially murdered", he put down his life, and he was well off, he was loved by the white people and the Indians. He was smart; he was well off-he put down his life, because he knew he loved us without ever seeing our faces. He put down his life, so we would have a future. He loved us that much. He thought generationally. And that's we

needed to think. We needed to think what was going to be happening tomorrow and what was going to be happening with the ones coming behind us? What were we going to leave for them? And so, we knew we needed that hospital property back. We knew that landless Indian doesn't stand a chance. So even before the Bureau recognized us I was on a campaign to educate the people in Indian country and all of the religious organizations, and all of these people that were in motion at that time. You know, the peace strike people, any people...that were in motion and thinking. We talked about that hospital, we talked about how there was a solid promise from the government that we were going to have the very, very best medical care, and the Puyallup's were going to have jobs, we were going to have jobs. And when they closed that facility, it left us with no potential employment, and it left us with no medical services...we didn't need to be recognized, and we didn't need a budget to talk. And I had my student grant, and I had my beading money. And we travelled, and we travelled all over and I told these guys- I was back at Salish Kootenai. I started going to the Indian meetings too, that the other thing, the local and national Indian meetings. And I was back in Salish Kootenai, and my Kia (Grandmother) told me, "you can go two mountains over, and there are really nice Indians, and they understand us and we can understand them if you go three mountains over, those are different Indian and we don't understand them, and their different than us." You see the Salish Kootenai people are two mountains over, and they speak Salish. But you go one more mountain over, and you got like the Sioux, stuff like that ...we don't know them, you know their different; probably Back Feet even, you know. You go three mountains over than their different, go two mountains over...their friendly nice Indians. And so I stopped at Salish Kootenai while I'm on my little campaign. I go into

the office and I say, hi my name is Ramona Bennett, I'm the chairwoman over there at the Puyallup Tribe over on the coast. And I'd like to meet with, maybe your council. And the receptionist said, "Well, the elders lunch is starting right now and the council goes over and eats with them. So why don't you just go out and have lunch and met them?"

21:58

So I go to their lunch and I introduce myself and I say where I am from and a couple of them elders say, Ahhh- your one of the devilfish people! Our grandmas and grandpas told us about you. That you people the harvest the octopus and you used to bring us smoked octopus, and you used to tell us everything that was happening. This was all recorded before, but I told them Bertha Turnipseed doing a bingo. They said, "You know you people are like a newspaper, you know everything that's going on, and your real friendly and an out going people, so tell us what's going on." So, I told them about Bertha and her bingo hall and the Alaska oil claims settlement up in Alaska, and all of that. But that was the whole reason I was there, and I didn't know we were known as the devilfish people-I think that is so cool that we were known for harvesting the octopus. [Be]cause when Jacques Cousteau went all over the world looking for the biggest octopus, they were right out here in the Narrows (Commencement Bay). And so...its really true that's who we are-that was the campaign to build community support for our eventual effort to get back the property. It was all about property and it doesn't cost-I mean it cost money to travel, but it's not a grant thing or a contract thing, it's a human thing. And its like the women who walked into billy-clubs and if all you have is your body, you just get there and you do what you have do and we needed everybody's support. We needed absolutely everybody's support where it's a campaign, and it was Chief Leschi Indian Medical

Building C.L.I.M.B. the only way to go is up-C-L-I-M-B...we made buttons and so, its all about economic survival, getting the land back, getting the fishing rights back, we needed a land base to establish services. You can't do services without a place to put them. This campaign to regain the property was pivotal to getting everything else going- as you know, you can see that was the most important thing. My priority was services, Silas and Alice it was land. They go together, economic survival, fishing, they all go together; there all right there in the treaty...our ancestors knew that. We're on this campaign going out to...I'm at all the reservations; I am everywhere I could possibly be. I'm at the national Congress of American Indians, talking to everybody that would listen. I'm at national tribal chair-MANS association, which is a whole another story-talking to anybody that would listen. Then getting around speaking at local churches in the evening on Sunday...it was day and night. I personally was going seven days a week, sixteen hours a day on the road, and just getting everyplace I had to be. Now the Bureau...once they recognized us, they offered up some tribal government dollars. And my first decision was to get on that role. I said earlier we brought Connie McCloud, and Milley she's a McCloud, but at that time she was married to Allen Frazer, Milley McCloud and Connie we brought in. I began pushing for Indian health for services and they said, "we could get a community health rep." They wanted to know what kind of community health rep I wanted and I said, we demand mental health-have you met our tribe? (Laughs) we need mental services, I think the first person we brought in was Judy Anderson as a full time staff person to work with some our homebound people, making sure that they were getting things that they needed. But also I was coordinating mental health services. Indian health really really didn't want to give us medical services. And they could see I was

pushing hard, so they sent a couple of their reps, and they came to our little office up on the hill, and they said, and mind you I was living on nothing, I mean I got a school grant and my beading money. And they said, "We want to know if you would like a contract to do a -like a survey? Would you like to do a survey [for] forty-thousand dollars a year to-for you personally- just you to be hired by us to do a survey on whether the Puyallup tribe needs a clinic? Three year contract-forty-thousand dollars a year-you know how much money that was? That's like the equivalent of what the council gets now, three-hundred thousand dollars a year-or whatever it is. And I took them one on each side by the arm and I walked them out into the cemetery and I took them to baby graves, and I showed them all the baby graves. And I said, "Look, I've done a survey, we need a clinic! Our babies are dying." And they went, well that didn't work.....for a clinic they'd have to spend way more than forty-thousand dollars a year. And if I got comfortable on the forty-thousand dollars a year then they could have just continued extending it. And without me pushing, nobody else would be pushing. And so in the long run, they could have saved a Bi-skillion-dollars, because they wouldn't have to do a clinic. I just said-look, look at my survey-all these babies. So anyway, they-well it didn't work, and we could see that they were going to fight us. And we could see that the Bureau was going to fight us. In [19]74 there were something called title-four, it was Indian Ed, and it was the Indian Education Program. Up to then it had been federal impact money, and the federal impact money was allocated to the tribes based on how many families lived on trust property. It's also called Johnson O'Malley money, but something new had come out, and it was title-four, and it was Indian Ed. Money and so I sat down and wrote a proposal. About then we'd had gotten the Hawthorn Center.

**Clair:** Wasn't the Hawthorn school, wasn't that kind of used as an alternative tech. school?

**Ramona:** Well, if you'd let me continue talking I will say on what we did there. That's alright...you knew something, your excited, we're finally getting to something your aware of. The Hawthorn school was surpluses to the needs of the Tacoma Public school system. Tacoma Public School system bulked and fought, they absolutely did not want the tribe getting involved in the arena of education. They bulked, they had this surplus building and I applied for the use of the building. The council backed me, this information came to me. And so the council gave me their backing and we applied for the use of the building. And they agreed to let us use the building for a dollar a year to do social services and educational programming for Indian people. And so we got the use of the building. And it was so dilapidated. Okay there were some conditions, we had to have low-pressure enginemen and so using CETA funds we hire two low-pressure enginemen, who were also high-pressure enginemen who come in to work the furnace. And then we used CETA funds, and we called them trainers. And then we brought in a bunch of Indian trainees to learn how to operate these engines. Because this furnace, you had to have a license to be able to operate it. And so we set that up, and we got Ft. Steilacoom Community College to agree to do an early-childhood education program, under CETA we were able to hire a trainer and her name was Grace Coatman- I believe. And we brought in all of these trainees, and the trainees were, Peggy Jackson, Linda Keating, and Delores Bill. We brought in a bunch of Indian women to work towards the two-year certificate to be early childhood education teachers, to teach children.

35:13

And so we moved the ARENDA program out of the basement of the church to our new facility at Hawthorn. And then, we had earlier done something called IRSG. It was Indian research and services program and that operated right next door. There was a farm next door to here. I actually lived there, and Judy Wright and her husband at that time Rocky Duanes and [I] and we lived there at that farm. And Ft. Steilacoom Community College did all the certification and instruction. And we brought in all these young Indian people to learn how to be social workers, and how to find their way through the legal system, you know all different kinds of things. And that is how I met Andy De Los Angeles. Andy was Snoqualmie Indian, and his tribe was completely not recognized. So he came to learn how to get a tribe recognized. So he just worked with me, side by side with me for a few years. And he eventually went back to his own tribe and got it recognized. And then a young Indian guy, Sonny Bargola had been adopted, he was Muckleshoot. He did not know his way around Indian country at all, he saw something about us, and he can't be enrolled, and he found his way back into his tribe, and served as Councilman for many years. Clyde (Bill) came, he had graduated from high school. He came to go to college. He eventually earned his double degrees out of Evergreen, the first one being Native American Studies and he actually worked in the tribes group home. Which was a long sad story-not him working there-I mean the group home was wonderful, but it was promptly closed by a subsequent council. And then he went back and got his science degree and worked for Washington State health department shellfish division for twenty years, protecting our clams. If you buy a clam in a restaurant or a store that it's a health product. I mean we had a lot of people come and enroll, there must have been thirty students and a lot of them did go on to be social workers, and did go on to be teachers, and go on to be

part of their tribal governments. But you see, this is part of what we were doing, killing time, waiting to be recognized. You see, you just have to keep busy. And so we had a college program right next store. Outreach into the community I was probably still driving fish to San Francisco at that time. And I was probably still going from tribe to tribe, from area to area babbling about that hospital and property. And now we have a facility, and we had Ft. Steilacoom Community College do the Indian School.

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We set up classroom there. And Denny Hurtado (Director of Indian Ed. For Washington State) who is now head of the Sate, the Indian desk of the State Office of Public Instruction was one of our classroom teachers. And he was a goofy kid back then, a god he went to a conference and he-ah never-mind (laughs) he didn't do what he was suppose to be doing. But we, see what happened, I'll tell you what happened. We have this building, and I got money from the Episcopalians to pay for paint. And then this committee of Jewish kids from New York City, high school was supposed to be doing good work among the impoverished, and so they contacted us, and asked if they could come out and work for us for the summer. And I said, yeah! Because I had five-thousand dollars with of paint and no one to do anything, so I used CETA youth summer money to be-able to hire a bunch of kids, and I think Silvia and Venetta got in on that. The Miller girls, and didn't some of the kids in your family (asking Cecelia)?

**Cecelia:** some of us, I remember the CETA program, but not the Hawthorn school. I did some art work for some of the inside (school).

**Ramona:** Yeah, then like Patty Boyd, and there was just so many, there grandparents now, but they were kids back then. I got CETA program, we were able to bring in all

these Indian teenagers who worked with all of these New York Jewish teenagers and they painted that building turquoise and red (laughs). Big and bright, turquoise and red, we got ...so anyway, I rented scaffolds, and we got kids hanging off the side of the building, painting it. And then I brought in a sander, I rented a sander to redo the floors, and we're painting the walls, and the kids are going, "Why are we doing this?" And we said, because we're Indians and we deserve everything to be bright and shiny and clean and pretty. And they said, "Really?" Because most of them had never seen anybody paint anything, because if your place gets too f-'d up, you move, or you just put up with it. You don't even think about improving it or changing it. And here I am, and we're moving into this building and it's going to be beautiful and so. And they were painting the inside-oh you did paint one of the inside doors too! (Talking to Cecelia). And Sue did another door. I remember you girls just painting away, doing little murals in the building, but it was high ceilings, it was old school. So when they said old-school, that's what they mean. Like the ceiling were like twenty feet up. We used scaffolds doing this painting, clean up and fix up and we did it. And it was shiny and bright, and we repaired all of the windows and everything ...shiny and bright, clean and new.

Okay the programs that I included in the title-four program. Mind you I wrote this in the dead of night in the cemetery, that's where my office was, and there was branches scratching the window, but that is where our office was, and so that's where I was, and its writing our little title-four application, and it included a pre-school, early childhood Ed. And it included counseling and tutoring. This is our first title-four app. It included counseling and tutoring and we hired tutors and counselors, and that was Gene and Julian

Argil and Clyde (Bill) and they go to Hawthorn to begin tutoring and counseling. And all these kids come in, like thirty, forty kids come in and they sit down and they're just looking at our guys. And our guys-these kids are young, there like eleven, twelve years old, you know there little kids. And our guys say, well, "Where's your school work?" "We don't go to school", "What, how old are you?" "Eleven" "You don't go to school?" "No, I don't go to school, I am here for school." We're like-what'd going on? And it's just a flood. All these kids come in every single day and their just sitting there. And their not in school and we're looking for their parents and their parents-if you'd only completed the sixth grade, you don't expect your kids to go much past the sixth grade. And these kids just dropped out, and their little! Their young little kids, and like this is really messed up, so I asked Tacoma Public Schools to tell me, what their drop out rate was. And they say that information is not available. So I get their stats on percentages, what percentages of kids are Indians in the first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade. And then I noticed when we get to the seventh grade the percentages go down, eighth grade it goes down, and by the time were to high school, there's not Indians left. So I took their reverse statistics and the next year I went after classroom dollars. And then I really started looking at the Bureau as a resource and so we did a little visit to the Bureau and said, we need our own school. And they said, "Well we're not going to support that. We have a Bureau school in Oregon, and we have one in eastern Washington, and that was over Colville. And they said, "We're not going to support that."

48:08

And so we did our own line-item request and then my next year, title-four application I did, included some actual classroom instruction and we had already implored Ft.

Steilacoom alternative high school. But we could see that these kids were out long before high school, and so we asked them to do a basic adult Ed. component, basic adult Ed. Is just to an eighth-grade level; but that means the kids are coming in under the eighth grade level, and this is a program that is usually reserved for people, older people, not children. But the only way we could get the materials to the young kids, was by calling it basic adult Ed. and having Ft. Steilacoom do that. And they actually had state funds available to do basic adult Ed. And we invited the adults in the community that were not anywhere near a GED level to come into that class, or the eleven-year-old. Whoever had not achieved that eighth grade level, because those kids were not going back to public school?

**Clair:** Where was that basic adult class held at?

**Ramona:** It was right there in Hawthorn, it was all in the same.

**A (6)**

There was like these three big class rooms, reserved just for classroom instructions. So we had ARENDA the day-care, the Ft. Steilacoom early-childhood Ed. program in the basement. And we put a rubberized floor in so that if kids fell that wouldn't hurt themselves bad. And we cleaned the windows, so that downstairs was nice, we painted the walls white and all kinds of murals and drawings up. We needed...early childhood Ed. equipment. And so I had Linda and Peggy put in an application to United Good Neighbors through United Way. And they were declined because we hadn't existed for more than five years. And we're a tribe and we existed long before the United Good

Neighbors or the Tacoma, or anything like that. And so I told them, take the kids and when that board is meeting and their reviewing their programs that their going to fund. Take the kids and pitch it, and tell them, it's not our fault we have not existed as a daycare for five years. We've been denied all services; we have to do this [by] the seat of [our] pants. You know, we're running a volunteer program. And so they did, and they went to United Good Neighbors and they took the kids. And they weren't given any time; they weren't given a time slot. So they Rambo'd the meeting, they just opened the door and walked in and told the broad, "you are going to meet with us." And of course that left the kids with nothing to do but get into trouble. Image a whole bunch of babies like Lucky, you know, they were like climbing on the tables, getting in peoples laps, and digging in their pockets, and picking up their purses, and Linda and Peggy and all of them said, "These kids have nothing to play with, so we're going to just stay here and play with you. They got no toys, they got no books, they got no climbing equipment" and the board said just a minute, and said, "We just found five-thousand dollars for the Indians, get out of here." And they came back and the babies were so proud because they got five-thousand dollars and they were able to buy cots. And we had...it said USGA...in the garbage, the stuff that the government throws away, the surplus. Anyway we had like surplus tables, where we cut off the legs to make them lower, cut off the legs of chairs to make them lower and stuff. But they were able to buy their own stuff, their own playground equipment and stuff. And the babies were proud because they knew they did it, because their teachers told them, you know, "if you kids can just takeover this room, these people are going to give us money so we can get stuff," and the babies went, "alright" because they understand about money and stuff. And the babies were proud,

because they did their little movement thing. And that's like Baptista, Paso, Aaron, Lucobatsoot, Muckoleen, it's all...god...Keating, mostly Puyallup, and then of course Nora Keating was part of that training project along with her sister Linda. And so our babies actually learned about takeovers and stuff and achieved something and understood it. And now ARENDA's got some equipment and we got some real classroom instruction going and we got our first Alcohol program going and we were able to bring in a counseling staff and we were already really actively working on a job training, you know getting money to train people to do things and work. And our school, our bases, and we still had our counseling and tutoring component, the tribe did. And Ft. Steilacoom was doing the classroom instruction. And about that time we got our first tribal government money. And we were doing a well child clinic, and now ARENDA's out of the basement. And so we're able to start doing a well child clinic with weigh-ins, and hearing tests and health screening down in the basement of the church because the school is now over here. And so (Talks to Muck)...so now this turquoise and red building is rocking and rolling, and we still have the church with enrollment going on, we still have maintenance. I think by then I think we brought Marilyn over to Hawthorn. But we still have that little office, and we're still using it for some of the movement stuff, because remember we're still hooked into the peace strike, and campaigns for justice. And we're working very closely with people, the Hispanic community up in Seattle. Just about this time, I got to try to get this right, in seventy-two (1972) there was a "Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan"