

February 19, 2008
Interviewee: Lena Davis Landry, Puyallup Tribal Elder
Interviewer: Cecelia La Pointe-Gorman
University of Washington-Tacoma
Oral History and Memory Project
Location: Fife, Washington.

Track 1

C: Okay

L: Umm in my days they never had...nobody was born in the hospital...unless they were wealthy. The aunts and the sisters and... neighbors were the midwives. My aunt was my mother's midwife, and the men were booted out of the house. Somehow we were allowed to be around always the ladies. I remember when my youngest brother was born. umm, I don't know exactly where I was born. I know it was here in Tacoma. But my mother had fourteen kids so... it's... she lived up in Brown's Point.

C: Mmhmm.

L: And then she, she lived right out here...on Meeker. And a, there's property, we bought property up on Roosevelt Heights, she bought a piece of land there and it said, "John Meeker Territory" and "Roosevelt Heights." And you're...you're parents lived up there too.

C: Mmhmm and my mom still does

L: And the La Pointe's and... a lot of Indians lived up there too. Well, my mother's name was Maggie...well, her name was Margaret, but everybody called her "Maggie" or "Mama." Maggie Meeker Davis. Meeker, she was [the] daughter of John Meeker who was the son of James Meeker. Judy has the story of James Meeker...did you get that story?

C: No, I will look it up though.

L: Yeah... It's very interesting how James Meeker went to live with...or how we got the name Meeker....Nationality is, my mother was full blood Puyallup Indian, and my father was...or you're talking about my mother. Well, I'd guess you'd say...I look like my mother, they say my daughter looks like me and I look like my mother. (Laughs). So...She had the same kind of voice...um ah I know that my mother's mother died when she was about ten, eleven and she took care of her younger sister and she had twin brothers. And they...the boy died young, up the younger sister grew up with her, her name was Annie. And they lived around here... in the "John Meeker Territory." After my mother died, my father... grand father married um a lady from Skokomish...can't think of her name right now...and then when she died...he married Laura...Laura....? She came from Cowlitz. But she was living in Meeker after she married my grandfather. She had a son and he had two children, Lillian and Jack Moses. My father was...his father was a Hawaiian. He came off from a boat. The boats used to land here...out in the water, and they came from Hawaii and all of them. And he got off the boat and he stayed here. There were all kinds of Hawaiians on the North-end. That's when my father was...his mother was full blood Puyallup Indian but...his father was Hawaiian. And they were both married several times...but they were not social-able...with they're...with they're...you know after they divorced. We didn't hear too much about them. He had step brothers and sisters and a...and they never associated with...they were whites and they never associated with my father. They knew each other, but they weren't friends...I mean you know they... were just like neighbors. And I already told you that I had nine brothers and four sisters...

C: Mmhmm. Yeah I got there names. You don't need to do the list again.

L: And we're the same nationality. And all of us were born here with the midwife. And little Johnny was the last one...he was the baby of the family and he died as a baby...he had TB. I guess he had TB when he was born. There all buried in the Cushman Cemetery, my grandparents are buried there. My mother used to tell us stories about her parents...well she didn't know anything about her mother, well her mother died. And she never stayed with her step mothers. My father's name was William John Davis. He was on the Council for awhile, a few years. He was on the council before they had...ah you know, paid salary for being on the Council. They just elected them, and they served. They a...worked on their own...but they (not audible) my father was always doing things for other people. It was depression time. He'd go out and find some people, and he'd give them canned food. And he'd go out and get it, and pass it around to all the families.

C: That was nice.

L: And he worked, my father he went to Chemawa when he was boy. They sent him and his brother to Chemawa. They helped build Chemawa School...the buildings...and he learned to be a Carpenter. And when he was in the eighth grade and that was equivalent to graduation then. And he ran away from Chemawa, Oregon all the way up to ...here to Washington. He said he traveled at night. And he always told the story about when he was he...him and his little brother...ah younger brother. They didn't want to get caught...so they would hide in the day time, and try to walk at night. Then they saw ah...in Oregon I think it was- some high... high things that looked like a camp. So they jumped up there and they went to sleep and when they woke up, they discovered that they were in a cemetery... (Laughs).

(12:26)

C: (laughing) what a way to wake up huh, in a cemetery?

L: (laughing) Yeah. Little kids, yeah he had some quiet experiences. He was only a young man when he died. He died I think when he was only sixty. My mother was only seventy-five...no, seventy-nine...that was young I'd say.

C: Yeah that's young...that's young. (I move recorder closer) I don't want to miss anything.

L: I ah...my dad had a lot of interesting stories because he was a storyteller. He would sit and talk for hours. He'd tell us about, he built his own boats, [and] he became a carpenter at school. And he knew how to build the boats, so he built a boat and ah...went to Alaska and then to fish, course they didn't allow him to fish around here. And ah...that's they...had to making money and the boats...the first one he called "The Gracie"...that is after my sister, it was named after my sister. And then the last one he called "The Lena" (laughs).

C: Named after you.

L: What an honor. (laughs)

C: Laughs...yeah.

L: Those are quiet interesting stories about when he went to Alaska to fish. Umm, that was before I was born. And then times were so hard that he took any kind of job. He even worked for a bootlegger. But the bootlegger got caught and he got shut down. [He] was a Canadian man and they sent him back to Canada. And he was married to an Indian lady...not from here. She was from...where's that word...reservation on the corner of Washington? Neah Bay. And that's where that lady was from...her and her family had to

move back home. They were right about here on the water (Port area). It was things like that we did to survive. Because there was no jobs whatsoever; not even the well-educated had a job. And then the Indians every year went hop picking. That's every interesting. Kids nowadays don't even know what hops are. What the beer is made out of...you know what hops are?

C: Yeah.

L: Have you ever seen them?

C: I've never seen them.

L: It's too bad we couldn't get some to grow...just to show the kids what they were...just ah...just a flowers, and they were sticky and dirty. And the sticky got on your hands and your arms and scratched you. But we went out there every season in the Fall. Ah we started out with picking strawberries, and raspberries, and blackberries [and] then the hops. Then we'd all go to Yakima. Just like ah...what you call it, like pulling a train...not a train...ah. We'd each had our own car...and we'd go up the hill. To took us two days to get up to Yakima.

C: Wow...

L: Can you imagine that?

C: A two day trip, huh to Yakima?

L: We'd have to stop to...at the...green meadow to camp because it was such a long trip...traveling 5 miles an hour I guess...going up the hill.

C: Wow

L: Yet... there was a number of Indians that went from Muckleshoot and some that went from Puyallup...every year, until it started to number down to the younger people...

[and] they stopped going. Um let's see...oh we went out to Puyallup and Orting and up in there. And we worked in Orting- up in there...we worked up in Orting and all around in there, and harvesting foods and hops, and berries... blackberries, raspberries.

19:00

C: So we these like farms that you worked on...and then the people, like the hops, where did you put the hops when you got the hops harvested?

L: Oh yeah it was a great big field filled with hops and they hired people to pick them, mostly the ladies picked the hops, and then the men...and then the (hops) were twelve feet tall I'd say. And then they were on wires, so the men had to take poles and get them down and the ladies would stand there and pick them and put them in barrels and then they dumped them into a sack. And then they weight them...and then get paid by the weight. And then a truck come along and pick them up. We'd start early in the morning ...late at night all day out there picking those hops.

C: Was it hot...was it hot out there, was it sunny weather?

L: Yeah, hot...raining...mostly hot. Course I was a little girl. I remember going out with my parents, and ah...they made us dress warmly. We went to the secondhand store and they got me some ah...shoes...button shoes. And my sister made fun of me...because they were old fashion button shoes. (Laughs) I didn't want to wear...so they got accidentally lost in the dirt.

C: (Laughing) Accidentally, huh?

L: (Laughing) I never did find them...

C: (Laughing) Really.

L: They had apple trees growing around the sides. And we would manage to nab an apple while we're going home. Course we weren't supposed to, but we did. My brother that was younger than me told the boss, "We're stealing apples." (Laughs).

C: Good memories.

L: Nutty family.

C: Fun Memories.

L: And ah we were full blood Puyallup except for part Hawaiian...my father was not too tall...but most the Indians around here are not tall. He was a burly man.

C: Burly man?

L: Burly man, husky. He never had a gruff voice, but when he said do something...we did it. He didn't have to say it twice.

C: He had a stern voice?

L: Yeah. He never talked about his parents. Course he probably wasn't raised by them, because he was sent off to school when he was young.

C: So many children, huh?

L: Yeah, yeah that's when the white people first came. They ah...didn't...didn't... ah much attention. But at least they got an education.

C: mmhmm

L: you got the names of my brothers?

C: Yes.

L: And the two that passed away. I was very close with my sisters and brothers. We always had fun. My mother was...she'd go a long with a joke too.

C: Fun family.

L: Yeah, we could be very serious but we always managed to get along with a joke. My oldest brother, he was married but he never left my mother's side. He left her when he first got married and went to Port Angles. But he didn't stay very long... he came back to live with my mother...that's the way he was...he loved her so much.

C: Thank you...telling stories are healing...and it also helps me to appreciate...everything.

L: I could just tell you a book about Sonny my oldest brother. He was comical and he was...I will have to tell you some other time...it just gets to me.

C: Okay.

L: You see...my mother and brother. Umm, he stayed with her until she died. And when she died he died...same time.

C: It's like he didn't want to be without her...because they were very close.

L: um humm, he was sixty when he died. She was very young when she had him and he was just mama's boy. He'd go away but he always took care of mama.

C: Oh Nice...that's so sweet...good boy.

L: I took care of mama and I took care of him...yeah, we traveled around during the depression. My dad would take any job he could get...we went up to Barnet...have you ever been to Barnet?

C: It's up by Muckleshoot...Enumclaw; just on this side of Enumclaw...it was all woods then. And then we...ah, he was cutting wood to make a living. How they cut wood and sold the wood, but ah he worked for a company...and we had to live in a tent, and it didn't bother us. You know, just to set up a tent and just go and live there and ah...we as kids go out, and they'd chop the trees down and there were big stumps out there. And my

sister and I we'd use the stumps as our play houses. (Laughs) She'd have one big tree as hers and one was mine, and that was her house. And there was a log...I don't know I managed to ah...I was scared to death of those little...there not lizards...their little...

C: Are they like bugs?

L: Water Lizards....

C: Oh Salamanders?

L: Salamanders...yeah, yeah I was scared to death of them when I was a little girl, but I'd stand there on...they'd be on the sidewalk after the rain...sidewalk? (Laughs) on trail (laughs). We have to walk down to the spring to get water, and we all went together and sometimes they'd send me, and I get down there- if I went by myself and there'd be a salamander on the trail. And I would stand there and scream and they'd say, "Come on, come on!" and nobody would come and get me, and I would have to shut my eye and get there. And ah...all the crazy things that we remember, I remember my dad, if he said something he meant it; he would say it twice. My sister and I...we listened all time, but one time we thought..."well he didn't say it twice so." He said, "You kids sit in the back of the wagon" he drove the wagon, it was a flat wagon, and he said, "You kids sit back there and hold on." And we went up the hill, and we thought oh, we going to be smart and we sit up on the tail and we got down there, and thank goodness it was soil...soil road and it wasn't cement. And ah...he just went right up the hill with his horses, and we fell off, and we're lying on the road screaming and he kept on going and we had to run all the way up the hill. He said, "I told you to hold on!" (Laughing). You learn the hard way. My father's occupation, he was a Carpenter by trade. He built all the houses down...a

around where the Port is. There's no house there now but there were houses down there... farms and houses... he built those. But we had a house down there...

C: By where the court house is?

L: You know where the Port, where the Port?

C: The Port? Okay... yeah.

L: Yeah, where all these cranes are now? Right there was... that was farms, they had dairy farms, and a... and that was another thing my chore was to... my mother would give me a nickel and send me to the dairy farm every other morning and go get a quart of milk. ...but you could do that those days... there's no worry then.

C: It was pretty safe, huh?

33:25

L: Yeah, yeah you could, a girl could walk any place, it was quiet a ways down... down the road down to the dairy farm, [and] it was a nickel or a dime. You go down there and get a quart of milk. And they're milking the cows down there. They handed the milk and you'd give them the dime and nothing happened you know. You wouldn't dare send a girl outside today...

C: Sure has changed.

L: He was a fisherman, he was a carpenter, and a... he was working at Cushman as a helper I think. Um he helped out in the Carpenter shop and they'd send him up. I was a patient there then. Talk about patient in Cushman. Since 1929 I was entered there, I'd go home, go to school, and get TB and get sent back. So I was a patient there quiet often. And we owed some property out there in Fife at a... I think that was lost to taxes during the depression. And I don't remember him being in the Allotment land owner. I don't

remember him singing songs but we had on our property, we used to make a fire at night and all the neighbors would come over and we'd have our little Pow wows there -right in our yard. And the young people would sing. My dad would go along with the ceremony or whatever they were doing. I have a picture of him with a head scarf on...a lady's scarf; you'd never think my dad would be wearing a lady's scarf. But a...and then his arm around one of the young fellows...just joking around at the Powwow. They always had the Pow wow in our yard.

C: That's nice.

L: Bone games...bone games, we played bone games. And the kids played because they didn't have enough people to play. That's another thing my oldest brother, he made all of us learn how to play...black...a poker. That's why I am working here; because, I know how to play poker. When we were little um we lived out in the country and there's nobody for my brother [to play]...and they called him "Poker Jack" and he liked to play poker, and he never had anybody to play with so he taught us how to play. So we could play with him. And that way I learned how, and that is how I got my job. And they were looking for somebody who knew how to play poker to be a head of the Gaming Commission. And my son said, "Mom knows how to play poker." He (brother) was a Catholic, my parents were Catholics. Though it's traditional he didn't go to church everyday but a, he was a Catholic, born and baptized and raised a Catholic, and married a Catholic. He a...he spoke, he learned that Chinook language, that was the language that was taught to...to the white people, it was an Indian...it was between Indians and whites. I don't know it...I used to know some of the words...but I don't know. He knew that. And he could cook, because when he went to Alaska he cooked on his boat. And when

we went up picking huckleberries he would get up early and cook pancakes. And he fished and he hunted. He liked to hunt, he'd go out and catch a deer, and a kill a deer, bring him in and never preserved it, he past it around to everybody.

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