

May 2008
Interviewee: Lena Davis Landry
Interviewer: Cecelia La Pointe-Gorman
Location: Fife, WA.
University of Washington-Tacoma
Oral History and Memory Project

CD3 Track 1

L: ...named me after his mother.

C: Magdalene.

L: Magdalene. Mmhmm.

C: That's a pretty name.

L: Nobody ever uses it. Nobody even knows it. (Laughs) They just call me baby.

C: You are the baby in the family though, right?

L: Yeah.

C: Yeah.

L: Baby of the girls. So, I had two brothers younger than me but they both passed away, well they all did, but, uh, my, uh, younger brother who's, uh, you know Roberta and the Young's, Roberta Young?

C: Yeah.

L: She was my niece.

C: Oh, okay.

L: Her mother was married to my brother and, uh, he died when, when the girls were young. He had an aneurysm. And so did his daughter have an aneurysm, Beverly.

C: Mmhmm.

L: But she came out of it. But she's crippled now. Her mind's okay but her, her body is not good.

C: Oh. Okay.

L: She has a hard time walking and using her arm. I don't know what side it is the stroke paralyzed.

C: Hmmm.

L: Uh, I had two strokes but I had, uh, I came out, I think it came out of it okay.

C: You, you look fine to me. Good.

L: Buh, uh, now, uh, I've had a, I had a heart attack and then I, uh, woke up with this, uh, arthritis, I guess. That's what they said it was. Rheumatoid arthritis.

C: When did you have the heart attack?

L: That was the 14th, February 14th. On Valentine's Day.

C: Just uh, this last February, I mean, a year ago, yeah?

L: Mmhmm.

C: Wow.

L: I've been struggling since. But I, I was able to drive and everything until just uh recently that they made me stop driving. But I didn't learn to drive until I was in my seventies. (Laughs)

C: Oh really. Wow. (Laughs)

L: I'm a slow learner or, uh, or what.

C: I didn't learn to drive until I was 36.

L: Yeah?

C: Yeah. Now I, I wonder what took me so long.

L: Yeah. Well, I was in my seventies, uh, yeah, no, 67. Sixties. And I graduated from college in my sixties. And went to school with the kids.

C: Tell me about your education. Your educational history. That would be something we could start on today a little bit.

L: Yeah. Uh, well, to start, I went to St. George's. I told you about that. And my brother was burned and they took us out of there. Then I went to school when I got, uh, I went to school at Fife. And, uh, then my sister and I got, uh, TB. See, the, the older kids were sent off to boarding school. My older brothers and sisters. And we all came back with TB, tuberculosis.

C: Wow.

L: And so we passed it on down and then when my sister and I got it and Cushman opened in 1929 and we were there. When we first went, it was, uh, uh, they had, uh, wards, what they called wards. And one was Ward D where they had the very ill patients, bed patients, and Ward C was the girls, Ward B was the boys, and we had a big dining hall and school. And I was in the Ward D, the very ill, with my sister when I first went. We were supposed to stay in bed. But they couldn't keep me in bed so, they sent me down to the Ward C with the little girls and then there we went to school half day and rested a half day. That was the treatment for TB then. They never knew what it was or how to treat it. And the Indians, the reason we were so susceptible because when we were born, we were born without the germ. They brought it over from, uh, England, or you know, foreign countries. They brought the germ over and gave it to the Indians and the Indians were not, they never had that before in their system. So when they got it, they, they just died from it. Just like smallpox and stuff like that. And then, uh, they sent

the kids off to these boarding schools. The first one was in Tulalip, then down in Chamouwa. We had one big boarding school there at Cushman where our, uh, older brothers and sisters went, but that closed down when I was, in 1929, and we started the new one, which was a sanitarium and school. And I went to school half day and went to bed a half day. Uh, then, then I went home to, uh, in the third grade to, uh, go to school downtown, public school. And I was going to public school up through the fifth grade and, uh, but, uh, TB in the glands so I had to go back to Cushman again and then, uh, I went to school there and I went _____ (*8Min:10Sec*) for a while to, uh, to the public school, I went to, let's see, Hawthorne and then, uh, then I went to Rogers and Galt Junior High. And then I went back to Cushman and then by that time, uh, I was ready for high school but, uh, my father passed away so I went to signed up and sent myself to, uh Chamouwa. And I was there for three years and then they sent me home again saying I had TB. They kept saying I had TB. And then I was back in Cushman. And, uh, then, uh, I've experienced everything there is with TB. I had pneumothorax treatment. I told you about that.

C: Yeah, you did. Where they had that big needle?

L: Yeah.

C: Yeah.

L: And the doctor said I'd go to happy hunting grounds if I don't, uh, take it. Uh, I wasn't afraid of it, uh, nothing scared me. It was just another thing. But, uh, but my schooling was so broken that I never did complete anything. So, then I went, uh, I never stopped going to school I guess. I went to night school, summer school, and, uh, trying to get an education. Then I went to work for Metropolitan Development Council

downtown. And they, they had an offer for us that we could work a couple hours a day, we can go to school. I mean we could go to school a couple of hours a day from the work.

C: Nice. Yeah.

L: So I signed up. I was in my sixties. I went to TCC, Tacoma Community College, with the young people. I, it was really great. I mean, I enjoyed it. The kids didn't, it didn't make any difference to me whether I was going to school with kids. There was a lot of soldiers and, uh, at that time there was a lot of people that were laid off and they were going to school, but, uh, my age didn't bother me. And I graduated from, from there. (Laughs) From TCC. Uh, uh, I didn't have a high, uh, grade but I graduated and, uh, when I went on to, uh, what's the name of that school in Seattle now?

C: There's the University of Washington Seattle? No?

L: No, uh...

C: There's Seattle University. Was it a university?

L: No, it was just a little college they had where you can get credits for your work. I can't think of it. Antioch.

C: Antioch, okay.

L: Yeah. That's where I went to finish my to get my bachelor's but I didn't quite complete that. That was about all the schooling I had I think. That, that was it.

C: And your work career? I know you've done...

L: Oh, uh, I've been working ever since I could remember. When we were little we picked berries, we picked hops, I told you about picking hops, and picked all kinds of...I've always worked. In my, I went to work during the World War for Boeing as a,

um, let's see, at Boeing I was a, what did they call us, we were helpers. We didn't do, we weren't Rosie the Riveters but we worked with them, uh, during the war. I can't remember, uh, but I used to grind the, uh, the wings.

C: Grind the wings?

L: Yeah. Parts of the wings.

C: Oh, okay.

L: We did parts here in Tacoma or down on Portland Avenue there was a shop there. And we worked there 24 hour, we worked, uh, every day, no days off. Uh, at that time I worked, uh, graveyard I think. My youngest brother worked day, uh, swing and, uh, my oldest brother worked days. We, we never saw each other because we, we worked those shifts and we, nobody had a day off, like Sundays or Mondays unless it was an emergency. But, that was war days and we got, uh, I think we got seven dollars, seven dollars an hour or seven dollars a day, I forget. It was quite a bit of money at that time. And then after the, that was World War II, and then after that, um, I, uh, went to work at, uh, Bremerton Navy yards. I worked there for ten years as a shipfitter's helper. They had, that was, uh, another war and they, the young men were all gone so they, uh, had to hire the ladies whether they wanted to or not. They didn't think we could do it, but we did. I, they said after I left that they, they had to hire ten guys to replace me.

C: Wow. Now what did you do again when you worked the shipyard? What was it called?

L: Shipfitter's helper. And it's, uh, my particular job was to, uh, it was just like making a dress only it was the ship, uh, you know the sides of the ship, the big metal, then the, then they, uh, they have a, a template or pattern and, uh, we would, uh, fasten it on with

clamps all around the sides and then we'd take a punch and it was holes in it that pattern and we'd punch each hold a certain way so that, uh, the burner would know what to burn and sawer, or the guy that saws, would know what to saw. And that, that's what our job was. They called us shipfitter's helpers.

C: (Laughs) You made the dress for the ships, huh?

L: Yeah.

C: That's interesting.

L: Yeah. It was. And the, the old guys, they just enjoyed watching us work, uh, that's why I, I worked for three men and, uh, there was, uh, one lady to each three men or each man and some of the ladies did the, ran the, uh, what do you call that thing...

C: You mean around the, the frame?

L: No, that big, uh, thing that's moving around?

C: Oh, a crane.

L: Crane. Yeah. Some of the ladies ran the crane and some of them, uh, they did everything but working the burning. The ladies didn't do the burning. They did the grinding, they, they had ladies grinding. I was working in the grinding to begin with but the, uh, the blocks were so heavy they were bigger than me, and I dropped it and cut my hand, they were sharp. I _____ (19Min:39Sec) dispensary and so they took me off of that and put me on the big _____ where I climbed up on top and made the dress. And, uh, I don't know why I was selected to, but I was a, sheepherder, they called me, a sheepherder, uh, where I took all the newcomers out to the boat and showed them where to go, showed them where to get tools and what tools they needed. And, uh, that was in my spare moments. And then, uh, on Fridays every Friday, I had to dress in my suit

because I had to go upstairs and, uh, work in the payroll, sort checks, and, uh (laughs), talk about jack of all trades. It makes life interesting. Oh, I could just go on and on about my job at the shipyards.

C: It sounds like it was pretty interesting. It was probably pretty kind of fun, huh?

L: Yeah.

C: Yeah.

L: Yeah they didn't hire too many women. There was just a group of us. I'd say in the lunchroom there would be about nine at the most in the whole shipfitting outfit. The men were all very nice, very polite, very kind. At first they, they thought they, they were going to not like us, but then they, they got to liking us. And what's not to like?

(Laughs) Uh, let's see. After that job, uh, well, Eisenhower got in and, uh, he was a Republican and that job dwindled and, uh, I was without a job for a couple years and then, uh, I got, and Johnson got in and I told you about the Johnson, where we started the tribes program. And, uh, I worked downtown for Metropolitan Development Council for 16 years before I, uh, came over to, uh, to be on the council, tribe's council. And that's another story in itself. The Metropolitan Development Council. It was, uh, Johnson's War on Poverty, which, uh, was, a blessing to me because, uh, at that time when the Eisenhower was in, we had no jobs, there was, nobody had jobs, and we went out and picked berries and, uh, my lady friend and I worked out there in the fields like the men, hoed, hoed the berries and we would get selected too before they'd select the men because, uh, they knew we would work. Uh, I don't know, it's uh, how they knew that we would work, work out there in the rain and cold and...

C: Hard workers huh?

L: Yeah.

C: Let me check this.

L: Oh, you were asking about my education.

C: No, this is perfect. This is how it works. It just goes into, you know, this is great. What you are talking about, the employment and your experience.

L: Mmhhh. Um, did I tell you about, uh, the part where we worked out in Puyallup because we started that program for the tribe?

C: Hmmm. No, you didn't tell me about that.

L: I didn't?

C: Uh-uh.

L: Uh, well, after Johnson had this, uh, War on Poverty. Uh, he had funds for whoever wanted to, to get, uh, get the money and there was Frank Wright Senior, not this one, but his father, and, uh, Faye and, uh, there was a couple, uh, she just passed away, uh, Gloria Jacobs and her husband, uh, George Jacobs. He was blind but he, he was, uh, very intelligent. He was an Alaskan Indian and, uh, we got together and formed this MORE, MORE, Inc. M-O-R-E. Make Opportunity Rehabilitate Economics and George was the one who thought of that, that slogan. That was our name. And we, uh, started the clinic out, out in the cemetery for, uh, for the Puyallup tribe. We got a dental clinic and whatever health we could do and then they worked into the church building and then grew into, to the clinic now. That's the way it got started. And then when I was working for MDC, I got some funds from MDC to start their little daycare and, they had a daycare, and we had an elders program there. Uh, I belonged to the elders program. I

don't know why it was always the eldest. (Laughs) It seems that no matter where I go I'm the eldest.

C: Oh wow. The MDC, what does that stand for?

L: The Metropolitan Development Council. Uh, that's down, I, I think they still have parts of it left. It started out from the government funding. They uh, gave us money to, uh, that was to help all the low income, uh, get them educated and, uh, jobs, training to jobs. And that was, that was our goal was to take people and get them, we, we had a lot of people that would have been street people, they were just low income people, and, uh, had nothing and gave them jobs, training, and it, it was a good thing. Then we, we had, developed so much that we had broken up into different factions. There was the drug, drug program where, uh, they, uh, they worked with all the people that had drug, drug habits, worked with them to get them off from the drugs, or do what they could with them. They had doctors, and, and they, they branched off into, uh, they were up in Browns Point and then they bought a piece of land up there that the tribe had, it was a beautiful building, and the drug department bought that. Then there was the housing, housing fix up, they fixed up the houses for people, housed my people, and, uh, uh, there was the education force that, uh, helped people get in school and, uh, training for work. That was a large program. I was, worked in all different departments. Uh, by the time I was through working there, I, I was in payroll. I was doing the payroll. And, uh, one time it snowed and, uh, everybody had to stay home. The snow was, well, over a foot deep and nobody could get to work. But, I called a cab and I went to work and, uh, I was there by myself to get the payroll out. And the, the bank was very good. They came and picked up my payroll and everything so that people could get their checks. And, uh, and

the carpenter department, they were so pleased that they wrote a poem. I don't know where it's at, but it's about me and they took all these little metal things and put it on there, nuts and bolts, and (laughs) made a metal for me.

C: (Laughs) That's so cute.

L: Yeah. It was nice there.

C: Now when you worked for the payroll, where was that at? What's the place that you worked? Where was it located?

L: Well, we were moved around a lot. Uh, we started out on 15th and, uh, just off Yakima Ave. Up on hilltop. I used to take the hilltop bus and get up, or 11th St. bus and get on top of the hill. That's where the first office was, had a big office there. And then, uh, then, uh, then the rent went up there.

(Private Conversation with Third Party)

CD3 Track 2 (I could not transcribe this track as it kept cutting out. Did you possibly have voice activation on the recorder when you recorded this?)

L: For quite a while and it's so hard to ____ (*6Sec*) and so many ____, you know.

C: Yeah. And _____. I know, Lorraine talked about that too. She said that the elders dinner is kind of precarious because of all the _____ and you gotta watch out.

Funny. She said. Isn't this supposed to be an elder's dinner? (Laughs)

L: Yeah. It's most, and young people, hardly any elders.

C: Wow. Really? Well, I don't know. You got a few minutes? Maybe a couple? Maybe ten?

L: Couple minutes? (Laughs)

C: I want to ask you more about, you talked about your political history. Maybe just a brief on that. And then I can start researching on work history. Political, like you were very, I know that you had talked about starting something that was back in the '80s. Uh, an improvement plan? Something...

L: Uh, that paper, did you get a copy of that paper?

C: Yeah, I have one at home. That's what I'm talking about. Yeah, that paper.

L: Yeah.

C: I wanted to hear just a little bit more about the MORE, what you...

L: Uh, well, that was when times were, it was after Bill got laid off at, I was working at, and Eisenhower was a Republican. I drew...

C: Wow.

L: And, uh, of course I was looking for a job all the time. _____ Johnson "War on Poverty" it was called _____ Frank Senior who passed away recently.

C: Oh, okay.

L: Him and his wife. _____ was blind. I guess you call it legally blind. _____ worked _____ factory _____ sorting tools. Gloria _____ Frank's sister, Frank Wright Senior, sister, she was the head of one of the those elder's programs that _____.

C: What proposal?

L: _____ how we got started. _____

C: The MORE, what does M-O-R-E stand for?

L: (Inaudible)

C: Good acronym.

L: We found a building out in Sumner just outside of Puyallup _____, small one, that, uh, and up there, I, I don't know _____

CD3 Track 3 (I had some difficulty transcribing this track also.)

C: I'm just going to keep it on because... (Laughs)

A: Well when she lived on Mt. Rainier, did she tell you that?

C: No, tell me about when you lived at Rainier in a tent. About what your _____

A: When you were little.

L: Oh yeah. When we were, uh, we used to go up the mountains every year to pick huckleberries and, uh, the, there was a place on the bottom of the hill where you camped right by the river. Uh, we'd get up early in the morning and the parents would have the fire, had the biscuits and potatoes and all that ready and you'd get up and run to the creek, or river, the river come down the hill, and wash your face. Can you imagine that? I can't stand to go outside now.

A: Wakes you up!

L: Yeah. And then we'd wash our face and then get ready and climb up that hill. I don't know how long it took us, but it seemed like forever climbing up the mountains until we got to the huckleberries. And there was one time, uh, my mother went off by herself and, and she came back running and, uh, I said what's the matter, and, uh, she said she was talking, she heard this rustling behind her and she was talking and then my mother only spoke Indian, she'd speak English to us because she knew we couldn't understand all her talking, but she was talking and, and said that she thought that that was my dad behind her that she was talking to. She turned around and it was a bear. And it was, it was a

good thing it was not a grizzly bear. It was a small bear. And she ran, that's when she came running to us. (Laughs)

A: Now did you pick 'em or did you eat the berries? (Laughs)

L: Oh we had to fill up our baskets before we could go back down.

A: Did you have traditional berry baskets? Made it?

L: Yeah, my mother made the baskets, uh, it was the baskets that are made with, uh, cedar roots and uh mountain grass. They're water tight. You could cook in them or, uh, pack water in them.

C: Wow. How big were they? About like....

L: Oh no. They, they were...

C: Big, big.

L: Yeah. I have one at home. It's 12 inches wide and about 30 inches deep.

A: Wow, that's big.

L: Yeah. But mine was about 9 x 9 or something. She made each of us a basket that we carried on our backs or sides. She made these straps out of wool to go over our backs. We used to carry those little baskets. And we had to fill them up before we went down. Pick huckleberries and pick only the big ones, not the little ones. It, it was, uh, it was fun but it was hard, hard work. We all enjoyed it. We camped up there for two to three days. Get back down and my mother would can berries, so we, so we had them. They didn't have refrigerators then.

A: Was that during the Depression when you were up that, when you guys would go up there and stay for a while?

L: Uh, most of the time was Depression when I was little. We, uh, Depression time there was no jobs for, uh, anybody. Rich couldn't, couldn't stand it so they, they were just jumping out of the windows because their stocks went down to nothing. My mother had some of those bonds but she never knew that they would ever come back. But they, they said they would pay 'em now but, uh, I don't know where the bonds are. Somebody destroyed them I guess. But, uh, there was, my father was a carpenter and he couldn't get a job. So, he had to, we all went out in the field and worked and, uh, we, he'd get a job like picking cleaning a pea patch and we'd all go along and take the peas that were left on the vines, we'd pick those and either eat 'em or can 'em. There was no such thing as drying them in those days. And then we'd be out in the fields. We were fortunate that we, we could do that to get out in the fields and work. Some, some people weren't able to do that and they just, ____ what they did, nobody had any jobs or money. Just very few people.

A: Survival skills see.

L: Yeah. Mmhm. And we were able to get out there and live in a tent and a lot of people wouldn't be able to do that. It, it was, uh, just like camping out but we camped all winter.

A: You're tough, that's why. (Laughs)

L: Yeah. (Laughs) I had nine brothers and four sisters, so it was a big family. But, uh, they, my brothers and sisters went to government schools and they got the TB germ and they passed away every year. Every year we went up to Yakima to, uh, dad could dig potatoes. We worked out there too picking up potatoes after he dug 'em. They didn't dig them with a machine. You had to dig them by shovel.

C: You had to dig them by hand.

L: They, uh, we went behind and picked them up and put them in a sack. (Laughs)

A: You were tough. Potatoes that'd be fun. See, that's where I think you'd dig it, you know, potatoes, you know. My mother in law used to grow vegetables _____ and when my kids were little babies, they would dig those potatoes ____ but they ____ digging for gold. They loved to dig _____.

L: Oh, I was in the TB sanitarium since 1929 when it first opened. I, I was, uh, in the very sick ward with my sister. She was very, very sick but I, I wasn't. I was an ornery little brat.

A: Could you imagine? (Laughs)

L: That went along with my sister and, and I had a little friend that was, uh, up there and she, she was showing me around the hospital and, uh, when the nurses were gone she'd show me how to slide on the bed to slide under the bed and it was fun until I tore my dress and everybody told me "Well, you gotta wear it, you tore it". (Laughs) I loved that dress. It was a velvet dress that a sister made for me. And then when we got there the ladies around there were sitting around with earphones on and we thought they were, they were receiving medication or something.

C: *That's* the story. (Laughs)

A: She didn't know they had music coming through them or words. That's medicine.

L: Yeah. We were, we were trying to be polite and not stare at them and when, when they're taking their medicine.

A: Is that cute? I love her stories! (Laughs)

L: And then later on we found out they were, they were earphones for the radio.

C: That's funny. (Laughs)

A: I know, isn't that cute? (Laughs) You would have been a fun little kid. Well, she's fun now!

C: Yeah.

A: I gotta go to work, darn it. You have great stories.

CD3 Track 4 (I could not transcribe this track as it kept cutting out. Did you have voice activation on the recorder when you recorded this?)