AL: This is Aimee LaBree on April 27, 2011 in Granite Falls, Minnesota. Interviewee: Dean Blue. Interviewer: Deborah Locke.

DL: Hello Mr. Blue, thank you for meeting with us today. Could you spell your name for me?

DB: Both front and back?

DL: Both front and back.

DB: D-E-A-N B-L-U-E.

DL: Do you have a nickname?

DB: Yes, I do.

DL: And that would be?

DB: Well, it’s anglicized from the family tree. You know the family tree in Nakota; you probably heard this from other Nakota people, the firstborn child, if it’s a male, it’s always a Chaska, and then the next one is always Hapi or Hapa. Well, I happened to be the Hapi. Back in the old days, as soon as someone is introduced to a [Dakota] kid, they’d know immediately by name where the kid stood in terms of the family hierarchy.
Anyway, they anglicized kids, back when we were kids, by starting calling me Pete. Pete, yes, of all the names. But I was supposed to be Hapi.

DL: Who gave you that name?

DB: It’s not a question of giving it to me; that’s the way it is, traditionally.

DL: The Pete?

DB: Oh, the Pete – just the kids that I used to play with. Rather than calling me Hapi, which they occasionally did, the majority of the time it was easier to say Pete.

DL: Are you still known as Pete Blue?

DB: By some of the kids, yes. I mean, by some of the folks my age still; yes.

DL: When and where were you born?

DB: I was born in our own home, along the Minnesota River, back in ’27; 2-18-27.

DL: Who were your parents?

DB: My mother’s name is Harriet. And family tradition, again, as I stated earlier, she’s the Hapste, meaning she is the third born in that family tree. And my father is Fred.

DL: What is your mother’s family’s name?

DB: Pearsall.

DL: Where were they from?

DB: My grandfather, Fred Pearsall, is not from this region. He came from out East someplace. But he took up his home in Sisseton, and his parents, would you believe, were – I suppose you might say – did quite well. They were bankers, of all things. But he refused to participate in that family tradition and left the family and went to Sisseton, South Dakota and made his home there, married there, and had a family of five girls. I think my mother said she was five when her mother died. So my Grandfather Fred raised all the kids by himself. He must have been very strong at heart. Five girls. So they lived in Sisseton for many years. And then they moved to this region and took up residence here. And I was born, like I said, along the Minnesota River.

DL: Were both of your parents Native?

DB: Yes.

DL: Were they both Dakota?
DB: Yes.

DL: How about your grandparents on both sides; what were their names?

DB: My grandmother from my mother’s side, I’m missing some information here because my mother rarely spoke about her mother. And so whatever her traditional name was, I have no idea. Because again, going back to this tradition, however she stood in the family tree, I have no idea, except that after my mother was born, then there was another one that was born thereafter, and they died from – what was the complication with the gallbladder. Back in those days, of course, gallbladder conditions were far different and very serious. My mother, her name is Harriet, and her traditional family tree name is Hapste – now I lost my train here.

DL: Your grandparents on both sides.

DB: Then my grandfather, as I said, he’s not from – he’s not local here in Sisseton, but he married there. And my grandmother’s name from the Wasichu point of view, that’s the white man’s point of view in terms of having given names – her name was Eunice. But her family tree name I don’t know, because I have no idea if she had previous sisters before her, or brothers, which makes it difficult.

DL: How about your children?

DB: I have four, plus I adopted two. My first child, Linda, she’s here someplace, she works at the casino. She works in finance. And then I have a son, he’s a chief of police, of all things, so I gotta behave myself or he won’t be very nice to me. I have two other girls besides. I adopted two girls and they’re doing quite well; one is a nurse out in Arizona, in Flagstaff, and the other sister is a department head at Lake Superior State College. She’s the head of the department there, social services.

DL: So in total you have...

DB: Six. Six that I raised; four of my own and two that I adopted.

DL: What about your brothers and sisters?

DB: I have a younger brother. He married into the Shakopee Clan; you might meet up with him when you’re over there, perhaps. I had an older brother, but he’s gone; he died about six years ago. And then I had a sister that was born and died before I was ever born; whooping cough is what she died from.

DL: How long have you lived in the community.

DB: Well, I was born here, of course, as I said, at home. I wasn’t born in a hospital. That was back in ’27, so I’ve been here, basically, since. I’ve always considered the
Granite Falls area as my home. However, from the time I was 16 years old, I left home and I did a whole lot of things. Actually the reason I left home goes back to 1943 when we were supposedly at war with Japan. Of course I never heard about Japan back in those days, whoever had a telephone back then, no one among the Indians, anyway.

And it was no different for poor white folks; they didn’t have phones either. But anyway, the point is, no newspaper, no TV – who the hell had ever heard of TV back then? Some friends of mine and I decided since we had nothing to do, well, let’s go into the service. I was 16 and both of the other two lads were 17. They agreed and so we went to service together and I was discharged in ’46. I joined the Navy at sixteen and obviously I didn’t finish high school, so I went back to high school and finished that.

Then I went to work for a power company as a lineman. I worked there for I don’t know how many years – 13, 14 years. And then I had a little accident on my job, so I decided this was no way to make a living. By then I was married and had three kids, and decided that maybe I should try something else. So I went back to school again. For seven years I struggled with college and finally got a degree after seven years. That goes back to, what would that be, the ’70s? Yah, ’71 I think it was, when I finally earned my degree. And then I went to work for the government, government service, the Department of the Interior. And that’s where I retired from, some years back. So that’s a short synopsis of what my history is all about.

DL: Your Department of Interior job, would that have been the BIA?

DB: Yes.

DL: And you were located here?

DB: Oh no. I was a housing officer, so I went from reservation to reservation. I worked with all the reservations in Minnesota, and then I transferred over to Michigan and tried to help them over there, with their housing problems. Then I was transferred over to Wisconsin and did the same things there, I worked with all the reservations in Wisconsin. Michigan was a little bit different because some of the reservations weren’t recognized at the time, and I worked with the ones that were recognized. And then as I said, I was transferred again to Wisconsin. And after Wisconsin I decided, well, enough of this, and I retired from there.

DL: Your government job required quite a few moves for the family.

DB: Yes.

DL: Did you enjoy that work; was that a good position?

DB: Well, it’s like everything else; there were good points and bad points. Moving, of course, wasn’t one of the best things with a family. However, I enjoyed working for the
Department. The only thing I disliked about it was—talk about rules and regulations; oh, my God. No wonder they move slowly. I found that out.

DL: Do you have family members at other reservations or communities?

DB: No.

DL: Where did you go to school, starting with your earliest years?

DB: In Granite Falls.

DL: Elementary school?

DB: Elementary, yes.

DL: Then high school, and then you returned to finish that degree.

DB: Yes, I went to Flandreau, South Dakota. There’s a government school there; that’s where I went to finish my high school.

DL: Did you have brothers and sisters who went to the boarding schools as well?

DB: My younger brother did. He was in the service also, but this was after. I can’t recall exactly when he went in; probably back in either the very late ’40s or ’50s perhaps. After that, he went back to school and finished high school also.

DL: You mentioned your service with the Navy. Where were you stationed?

DB: I was in the Pacific.

DL: And you were in the Navy for how many years?

DB: Not quite four; it was three years and some odd months. Back in those days, they discharged personnel according to a points system. If you were, for example, in enemy territory, as they called it, you got so many points for that. Or if you served state-side, then of course, your points were minimal.

DL: World War Two was still underway when you were in the service.

DB: Oh, indeed.

DL: Did you see a lot of, what’s the word, action?

DB: Oh yes, I was on an aircraft carrier. And back in those days, aircraft carriers weren’t very popular with the Japanese because our planes raised complete hell with
them. So they loved nothing better than to sink aircraft carriers. They were prime targets. So, we scathed through it all and survived.

DL: You were a Dakota man, among a lot of men who were not Dakota.

DB: On an aircraft carrier, there were some Chicanos and there were some Blacks. Blacks, of course, in those days, were used primarily as servants. Back in those days, the way society looked at people was completely different. And the Blacks, unfortunately, were treated as servants. Then, as I said, there were Chicanos. I was the only Indian on that ship until probably the year before I was discharged. A fellow by the name of Holy Bear from South Dakota came on board, and he and I, we kind of talked about traditions – his traditions and the way we had ours over here. But of course, I lost track of him, as well as everybody else.

For a long time I used to go to what they used to call Ship’s Reunions. The very first one we ever had was 50 years after the war in Seattle, Washington. From that point on, whoever made these arrangements I don’t know, but anyway, we’d go from the West Coast to the East Coast, back to the west, then east, and way down in Florida, down into Texas and to the Gulf area. So we’d just move it around for oh, 12 to 14 reunions. As time went on, some of the fellas were, of course, older than I was because of the fact that I was 16 when I went into the service. From one reunion to another, we’d lose personnel and good friends. But that’s life, and nobody lives forever. Even the Good Lord couldn’t live forever; we hung him up too. So anyway, I enjoyed being in the service.

DL: What is your most vivid memory of your years in the service?

DB: The most vivid memory that I can recall certainly had nothing to do with enemy action. It was how well I got along with everybody. I never had any arguments, or never had any – people use the excuse of discrimination; well, maybe there was, but at the same time, I see more discrimination in Granite Falls here than I did onboard that ship. That’s what I remember mostly, and I keep telling my wife that now, I say, “Gee, I got along so well.” And I hear people complaining about discrimination, and I know it exists, but the point I’m trying to make is I didn’t experience it. In fact, one time one of the quarter masters came through and I happened to be on duty at the time, and he said, “Your Commander wants to talk to you.” Oh, my God, I thought, what did I do now? Because commanders don’t just arbitrarily talk to anybody, I mean, they’re way up there. So therefore, they don’t talk to the ordinary people, they just talk to their lieutenants and captains and so forth. Anyway, needless to say, I was pretty shocked that he wanted to talk to me. I went to his State Room and had no idea what I was there for. After I left his cabin, I still don’t know what I went there for, because he just talked to me. He just plain talked to me. He said he went to school at USC and said he was the quarterback for their championship game and the whole bit. And he showed me pictures and all this time I kept saying to myself, “Okay now, when is he going to drop the bomb.” It never happened. After I had discussion with him for at least an hour, he said, “Well, good to talk to you and nice to get acquainted with you, and keep up the
good work.” That was it. And I never could understand why, and to this day I wonder about that – why he did that. But anyway, it was quite an experience.

DL: What was the name of your ship?

DB: The name was Hoggatt Bay. It’s one of these smaller aircraft carriers, that if you were to drop a small bomb on it, for sure everyone would be goners. They used to call them floating coffins. They were very flimsy and they sank very easily. The point is, we got by. We had several explosions and some people were killed, and we had airplanes coming over us, strafing us, but that’s war, and it happened to every ship that was out there, so it was nothing uncommon.

DL: When you were in school, what were your favorite subjects?

DB: Girls. Actually, when I got out of the service and prior to that, going to school here in Granite, I really had no favorite subjects. Frankly, here’s the scenario: I knew very little English when I went to school and I wasn’t the only one. For most of the kids my age at that time who went to school, the teachers all thought we were dumb. It’s not that we were – probably some of us were, maybe, but the point is, when you don’t have command of the English language and understand it, you’re going to have a very difficult time trying to understand math and history. Of course, history was never correct anyway, insofar as the white man and Indian. That type of history is never correct. But anyway, that’s beside the point. The point I’m trying to make is that when we went to school, my brothers and I had a very difficult time, simply because of the fact that we had very little knowledge of the English language. And so we struggled. I’m surprised that I got as far as I did; I got up there in ninth grade, and that’s when I dropped out and went into the service. So my favorite subjects – I can’t honestly say I had any.

DL: What you’re saying then, is that Dakota was your first language.

DB: Yes it was.

DL: And by the time you got to Flandreau, which meant you might have been how old by then?

DB: I was probably 18 or somewhere thereabouts, I guess. I don’t keep track of that stuff. It happened in history and I leave it.

DL: But even then Dakota was still your first language.

DB: Yes.

DL: And the teachers were teaching in English, which of course would create a lot of problems for the students.

DB: And then of course, I began to have a little knowledge about the language itself.
Otherwise I’d have never gone in the service, but the point is, from the time I first attended school, up until I went in the service – by then, at least we were able to speak the language to some degree; certainly not in depth, but we could handle it somewhat.

DL: Do you still speak Dakota?

DB: In fact, I teach the language. The English language – I’m not trying to belittle it, but it is very easy compared to the Dakota language. So we’re trying to revive that here, and some of the people here who teach the Dakota language, they do a very good job. And I’m one of the people who fortunately was able to retain the language and I do some teaching.

DL: Could you tell me your earliest memory as a child?

DB: Let me try. When we lived along the Minnesota River in a village called Gahameen; I’m not even going to try to spell it for you – anyway, my auntie, who lived in Pipestone at the time, and her husband and kids did Pipestone quarrying, and that’s how come they lived over there. One time she came to visit with my cousins, and we all managed to play together every now and then. They came to visit, and I asked my mother, I said, “Can I go back to Pipestone with them?” And of course that was all in Dakota, because back in those days, that was still the dominating language. Of course she said, “No.”

So what happened is I told my auntie, “My mother said I could go with you guys.” So she believed me, of course. When it came time for them to leave, I got in the car and I hid. I went to Pipestone, and of course my mother didn’t know anything about it and my dad didn’t know anything about it. And they went down the river and they looked for tracks, and they went crazy. And of course, there I was, having a good time over in Pipestone with my cousins. So my mother (of course back in those days, as I said, telephones were unheard of so the only mode of communication was letters) -- she wrote a letter right away to my auntie and she said, we can’t find Pete. (Well, there we go, “Pete,” see?) She said, “We’re very distraught.”

My auntie wrote back and said, “Oh, he’s with us.” [Laughing] So anyway they came after me, and lo and behold, I never even caught any hell; she was so happy to see me alive, I guess. But anyway, to me, that’s the fondest memory I have, is just this one occasion, but I remember it very vividly.

DL: About how old were you?

DB: I have no idea; I don’t think I was even in school at the time, so I had to be somewhere in the neighborhood of four or five years old, I suppose.

DL: When you were a young child, what did you do after school?
DB: Most of the time, if it was summertime, spring or fall, my mother used to do a lot of gardening and we used to help, my brothers and I, we used to help quite a bit with that. But other than that, play, play, play; that was it.

DL: What games?

DB: I don’t know. That I couldn’t say, but we swam a lot during the summer and in winter we always were outdoors, even in severe winter weather... It seems like the cold never bothers kids and it didn’t bother us. So that was most of our activity, enjoying ourselves.

DL: What’s the first news story you remember from your childhood? Something from the larger world.

DB: We didn’t have a radio, and the mode of transportation was always on two feet, that was it. So some breaking news – good Lord! The only thing I can recall was that somebody probably passed away. I don’t know, I can’t pinpoint one area that I remember vividly in regards to importance in the news. I just don’t recall.

DL: Which relatives had the most influence on you?

DB: Well, other than my parents, of course, probably my grandfather. He died probably right around 1950 or somewhere thereabouts. I’m very poor with dates. In fact, I’m very poor with names. And like with everything else, when I left the government service, I just left it. When I lived someplace, when I leave there, I leave everything there – I don’t take it with me. When it comes to something like you just asked in regards to something that’s important, that’s history – I just leave it and I don’t even think about it anymore. Which is probably not very easy for most people, but it’s easy for me. But anyway, what was the question?

DL: The relative with the most influence on you.

DB: Okay, my grandfather. When we were youngsters, we began to understand the English language a little bit because we were in school and so forth, and we were able to speak somewhat. As I said, the English language is not very difficult. It is if you want to get in depth, in terms of deep conversations, yes, it is very difficult. But what we used, of course, was the simplest form of the language. Anyway, our grandfather would never permit us to speak in the English language in his presence. And if we tried to address him in, as we call wasichu which means “white man,” the wasichu language, he wouldn’t answer us. He wouldn’t give us any type of a response. But he would say in Dakota, “If you want to speak to me, speak to me in my language, or your language.” So I suppose to some large degree, my brothers and I happened to retain the language as we did, because we had to grow up that way. As a result, we do have two languages, English and Dakota.

DL: Who taught you the most about being Dakota; was that your grandfather?
DB: Him and my parents.

DL: What do you recall learning from them about your history and culture?

DB: They probably taught us the most, as I recall, about how to get along with people. Like don’t carry grudges and don’t argue unless you absolutely have to stand your ground. I think they probably taught us more about the social aspects of life rather than anything, other than the language.

DL: How about something like food. What do you recall your family preparing for the meals?

DB: There were times that we were just scraping by; I remember that. As I said, my mother always had a garden. We had a cellar where we stored food, so that during the winter we could at least have the necessary food to survive. And we did a lot of hunting. And this is hard to believe: back in those days there weren’t any deer around here. They were mostly in northern counties. If you saw a deer, that was a rarity, and I don’t recall ever seeing a deer when I was a youngster until I began to get older and pretty much on my own. But food, well, we ate a lot of rabbits, a lot of pheasants, chickens – things of that nature. We always had chickens. Later on, we went into farming and we raised our own beef, our own pork, and as I said, chickens. We always managed to get by.

DL: Did you learn of Dakota spirituality or religion as a child, or was your family raised Christian, or something else?

DB: Christian.

DL: Which church?

DB: Presbyterian.

DL: Was it here on the reservation?

DB: Yes, pretty much.

DL: Do you remember holidays as a child?

DB: Basically Easter and Christmas; that’s about it. Fourth of July was another day to us; what was there to celebrate? The point is, we just took it as another day.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name?

DB: Wanbli
DL: What does it mean?

DB: Eagle.

DL: Who gave you the name?

DB: My unkana, my grandfather.

DL: Was that his name?

DB: Yes.

DL: Did you learn anything about Dakota history while you were growing up?

DB: Not a whole lot. Sure, I mean, I hear the older folks at that time, talking about some of the things that happened, but insofar as sitting down with us and talking about it; not really.

DL: Did you ever hear of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War during your grown up years?

DB: Yes, we heard about it, but at the same time, again, at that age, it was something that was foreign to us. We just never were indoctrinated into it; we just weren’t – at least in our family, because as I say, my family taught us basically, to try to get along. Oh sure, sometimes I’d overhear them talking about some of these issues, but as far as them addressing it directly to us as children— no, they just didn’t.

DL: We’re back from our break, here with Mr. Blue, and we were talking about whether you had heard any stories of the 1862 war period while you were growing up. I was wondering next if you ever heard of family members who lived through that time.

DB: No, I’m not familiar with anybody that was involved with that – whatever you want to call it – war or uprising. There are different terms that are used, and really none of them fit because the reason – well, you didn’t ask me this, so I’m not going to say it.

DL: Please do – what’s the reason for what happened?

DB: Well, prior to that the government made a treaty with the leaders, to supposedly purchase at least one-third of Minnesota which was occupied by the Dakota at the time. And so anyway, they made treaties, and ten miles on both sides of the Minnesota River were reserved that the Dakota didn’t sell because they wanted to retain that as their homeland. And that goes on as far as New Ulm to the South Dakota border, where the Minnesota River pretty much begins.

Anyway, that was reserved for the Dakota, their home base, or homeland. What happened – now there’s always two sides to everything. You flip a coin and you don’t get heads all the time – there’s two sides. The land, in particular along the Minnesota
River Valley, is very fertile in particular for farming. But there was also a lot of lumber in the valley. Of course with moisture from the river, there was all kinds of lumber that people, particularly from Europe, were accustomed to living in; houses were built out of lumber. Dakotas were not that attuned to that -- they lived wherever they could, in their teepees, though sometimes they built little shacks too; that’s true enough. But they’re not going to destroy a whole forest to do it.

So what happened there was, and again, there’s two sides to every issue – when the skirmish began, it was based on the farmers and the lumber people and people who were after mineral rights. They saw ten miles on both sides of the Minnesota River that had all this potential, and who owned it? The Dakota. So they started screaming to the State at that time, whatever form of government there was, and the State in turn screamed to the Feds about all the fertile land and all it’s doing is just lying there idle. The treaty stated that 20 miles of the land was retained by the Dakota from the South Dakota border, down to New Ulm. So they made a pact between the State and the Feds that okay, when they sold the land, when they treated with the government, what they did is, they had agreed every year to make a payment to purchase the land. They thought they could develop it. Which is very true; the white folks are prone to development – there’s no question about that.

So they wanted it, and they started crowding into the reservation. And of course the Dakota at that time thought, well, okay, it’s no big deal, but you have to understand, that’s our land. Well, the more they let them in, the more they wanted.

But that’s not the whole issue. Between the State and the Feds then they finally made a pact, okay, annuities are paid once a year. If those annuities were held, it would create problems. That’s how it all began. It’s true that some young bucks [Dakota warriors] did kill some settlers. But the point is, they were hungry, they were starving because they were not allowed to go off the reservation to hunt. So when the game left for the plains, they had nothing left. The [settler] family was killed, and the U.S. got into the action immediately. You know damn well that they were already prepared to act by virtue of the fact that they withheld annuities; not just one year, not just two years, but three years – no annuities.

Meanwhile then the Dakota say, where the heck’s my money? We made a pact, and you’re not paying it. And meanwhile your white farmers and your white lumber people, they’re crowding into our land and taking what’s basically ours. That’s what started the whole damn war. It was because the Indians finally decided: enough of this! When the U.S. Government, who made a pact with us, would not live up to its agreement, we had to defend ourselves. That’s how it all began. But of course they blamed the Indians for starting the war. Well, they probably did, but there’s a good reason. That reason was that they were losing their land; the government was not living up to its agreement. That’s what started the whole thing.

Here’s another issue: when the government made this agreement (I suppose I should say treaty; treaty a nasty word with us because of the 800 treaties made with the
Indians throughout the United States, some were very minimal, and some of them were huge, like the one I’m talking about. Over 800 of them, and the U.S. never lived up to one; not a single one). So anyway, they broke the treaty, and so therefore, that’s when the Indians decided: they’re not going to do a damn thing, so we might as well try to defend ourselves. So that’s how this began. Here’s a real trick: when they took that land and they told the Indians back then that they would pay them annuities on a yearly basis, they put the money for payments in the U.S. Treasury. And the few payments that they did make (I think it was two – probably three annuities were paid) – but here’s the catch: the annuity payments that were in the U.S. Treasury, the interest that accumulated from that money that was sitting there, they paid as the annuity. So they never actually paid for the land; never paid a cent for all this vast territory. It was the interest money that accrued. That’s history, but you don’t hear that, and it’s not in history books, certainly.

And another thing, as you probably well know. The U.S. Government all of a sudden maintains that when whites came to this country, there were somewhere in the neighborhood of three million Indians across the country. That’s a bunch of BS. There were over forty million. But they annihilated them. You talk about the catastrophes over in Europe, when the Jews were burned alive – well, I shouldn’t say alive – I mean, I don’t know if they were or not. But they were killed and atrocities were committed. It happened in this country, too, but you never hear that, never. There were over forty million Indians from the various tribes, from the East Coast to the west; from the north to the south, that got annihilated. So we were down to probably somewhere in the neighborhood of a million Indians from that forty million. But you never hear that history. The white man lies a lot. Excuse the impression, but they do. When it comes to greed, they go beyond the limits to lie.

DL: You’re well-schooled in a lot of Dakota history and Indian history. At what point did you start to learn that?

DB: I don’t know. I suppose I was always interested in it. I suppose, sometime after my college career, maybe I got smarter then, in terms of what actually transpired back in those days. Somewhere along the line I got wise.

DL: Are you related to any of the chiefs or other well known people from the middle 1800’s?

DB: Not that I’m familiar with.

DL: Can you tell us anything about the aftermath of the war and the scattering of the Dakota people?

DB: The President of the United States back then, Abe, he made a declaration that all Dakota people would be chased out of Minnesota. I don’t know if you know that or not. But what they did, they wanted all the Dakota people driven off or killed; and of course there was a bounty on them too – I don’t know if you know that or not. That’s how
scalping began. The white man started the scalping. They’re the ones – in order for them to be paid, to say “I killed an Indian,” they had to bring the scalp in, that’s how they were paid. Well, Indians took up that banner and they said, well, if they can do it, so can we. So they started [scalping]. But the point is, it was started by the white folks, not by the Indians. But the Indians were driven off into the Dakotas – I have no idea where they all went. They were chased and they were completely excommunicated – that’s the term to use – from the State of Minnesota, never to come back to this part of the country again. But of course we did, we’re just like mice; we can never be completely controlled.

DL: Mr. Blue, how is it that your family is here today? Were they chased off?

DB: They were. They lived in South Dakota. And then they migrated back, probably in the 1930’s or somewhere thereabouts. It’s not like they lived here their entire lives, no. My mother died when she was 99 years old, and that was how many years ago – five years ago.

DL: Can you explain to me, what the draw was in coming back to Minnesota for the Dakota people. Why did so many Dakota risk their lives to return?

DB: I suppose, to use an expression, I suppose it’s because it’s their homeland. Like for example, when I was in the service and then later in different states working [for the BIA], I liked most of the places, however, this was always my home and it remained my home. There’s something I’ve noticed about the white folks – pardon the expression – but some of the folks that I worked with, when they decided to retire, they stayed where they were. They didn’t go back to someplace else, where they were born or raised and went to school and all that. They didn’t. I’m not saying that they all were that way, because I know quite a few folks who were that way, that they stayed right where they retired. They considered that to be their new home. We Dakotas for some reason were always drawn back to where we were born and raised; we’re drawn back.

DL: And that’s why you’re here today.

DB: Indeed.

DL: Did the war have a direct impact on you and your family?

DB: I think the impact it had, at least with me is, there’s a world out there. Before I went into the service, I only knew the small village I lived in. And as a result, when I went to school I had a difficult time trying to understand because of the language barrier. But to me, what I probably appreciate most was the fact that I became somewhat knowledgeable about what the world was all about. I’m sure my dad felt the same way too, being over in Germany and over in the European theater [of World War Two]. Meanwhile, of course, my mother, poor woman, she sat back here and I’m sure she was twiddling her thumbs every day – what’s her husband doing and what’s her son doing. You know, here’s a war going on and she’s just sitting at home. So I’m sure that
was very difficult for her. But when I got out of the service, and I’m sure the same held true with my dad, the issues never came up, she never questioned us. She never questioned me and she never questioned my dad about the war, and it was, again, it was just left behind – it was over with, done, forget it, life goes on.

DL: Have you ever been to Mankato to the execution site?

DB: Oh indeed. Oh indeed. An atrocity is what it is. All they [Indians] were doing back then was defending what was rightfully theirs. That’s all they were doing. What the heck – here we are now over in Afghanistan and we were in Iraq, and now we’re butting heads with Iran and who knows what other country we’re going to be involved with. I understand Syria’s getting into the act now, too. What the hell are we doing over there, when we have our own problems in this country here? But that’s again, the U.S. Government: intrusive. We talk about kids nowadays being cheated out of the budget that’s needed to adequately educate them. Where do we spend billions and billions every day? We spend them over there – so what good is that for the kids? Zero.

DL: What did you feel when you went to that place for the first time; that site?

DB: I thought, talk about the ignorance of the white folks. All the guys were doing, all the people that were hanged, defended what was rightfully theirs. That’s all they were doing. And they were condemned.

DL: Have you ever been to any of these places? Fort Ridgely?

DB: Yes.

DL: What was your thought about that?

DB: Well, I’m sorry to say this, but everything that happened back then, I really have a sour disposition for it. I try to see both sides of the issue, but I can only come up with one answer and that is: the white folks were so wrong. And I apologize for that, but that’s the way I felt.

DL: Birch Coulee.

DB: I’ve been there.

DL: What do you think about that area?

DB: About the same.

DL: As you walk around?

DB: About the same.
DL: The Lower Sioux Agency, where the food storage building was.

DB: Yes.

DL: Upper Sioux – obviously you’re familiar with that.

DB: But here’s another issue. When the U.S. treaty – the Upper Sioux was never involved with what went on with Lower Sioux, in terms of the so-called war or skirmish, or whatever you want to call it. The Upper Sioux was never involved there. What the Upper Sioux did was they harbored a lot of the white folks who were running away and they took care of them. But when the U.S., after this was all “settled” (if you want to use that term – nothing was never settled as far as I’m concerned). The U.S. Government came up with a law, they call it the Forfeiture Act, in which they said that the Indians went to war against the United States, therefore, we’re going to make them forfeit their land. That’s what the Forfeiture Act was. The Upper Sioux were never even involved in the war; still, we lost everything. We lost a percentage of the acreage that we were supposed to be occupying; we lost every acre, and we weren’t even involved in the war.

DL: You mentioned the agreement, what is also known as the treaties. Have you ever been to the Traverse des Sioux area where that treaty was signed?

DB: No.

DL: What about the Sibley House in Mendota?

DB: Yes.

DL: What was that like, to go to that man’s…

DB: I wanted to vomit. Terrorist.

DL: How about Fort Snelling.

DB: For a while there, after I retired, I became a veteran service officer. I went there a lot because some of my communication work was involved at the state level for servicemen. So I was there quite a bit, and sure, I saw a lot of the buildings and wandered through some of them. And the point is, I never appreciated it. I liked the idea of being a service officer, a veteran service officer, but I didn’t really care to even be seen there.

DL: We’ve heard from some Dakota people who say the fort should be burned down.

DB: Oh, indeed.

DL: We’ve heard from others who say that it should remain standing as a reminder of what happened there. We’ve heard from other Dakota who are veterans, who see it
first and foremost as more of a memorial place or something important to them as veterans; so they say leave it standing. Would you say: "burn it down"; "keep it as a place of remembrance" or "keep it as a place to honor veterans?"

DB: As long as it’s there, as far as I’m concerned, let it remain. Just let it remain, not as a remembrance, or not because of hatred, or because I condone it. None of those – it’s there, so let stand.

DL: Let it stand. What about Camp Release?

DB: It’s a little ways from here.

DL: Perhaps we can get over to see that; any thoughts about that area?

DB: I just want to stay away from it.

DL: Wood Lake, the site of the battle....

DB: Same thing there. Again, you see, as I keep saying, every time you flip a coin you see a different side. The greater population, all they know is their side of the history. It’s written by white folks. None if it is ever written by Dakota. And so therefore, they have free gratis in regards to how they want to write it. And so therefore, 90% of it is inaccurate. Oh, I shouldn’t say it that way, but there’s two sides. All these things that are considered to be historical were never participated in by the Dakota.

DL: Camp Cold Water?

DB: Nope; never been there.

DL: Pike Island?

DB: No.

DL: Redwood Ferry?

DB: Redwood Ferry – nope. I know where it’s at, but I’ve never been there.

DL: The Milford Monument?

DB: No.

DL: New Ulm?

DB: Oh yes.

DL: Any thoughts about New Ulm?
DB: Well, again, the people were not attuned to why this atrocity was committed by the Indians against the white folks. All they could see was Indians fighting whites, and yet at the same time, they didn’t know why. When I used to work for Northern States Power Company, we were stationed there for some time. I just put up with it. I had feelings for it, yet, at the same time, what was I supposed to do. That was history and nothing could be done to change it. The written history as we now know it, again, all of it written by the wasichu, there’s nothing we can do about it to change it. It will never be changed. It will never be put in its proper perspective – never. Because one thing about wasichu is, they’re not going to admit that they made a mistake or mistakes. It will remain as is, which is again in my opinion, and I’m sure this is true with 99% of the Dakota, it’s all inaccurate.

DL: Is it possible that today they don’t know any of this occurred?

DB: No. No, they all know it.

DL: Especially in New Ulm.

DB: Yes.

DL: Do you think it’s a good idea to commemorate the events of the 1860’s?

DB: What good would that do?

DL: Now that we’re up to the 150th anniversary.

DB: I don’t see what good that’s going to do.

DL: Now, we’ll get back to your life a little bit.

DB: Uh oh! [Laughter]

DL: I learned that you were a lineman and you worked for the BIA for a while, and that’s where you retired from. And I forgot to ask about your spouse. What’s your wife’s name?

DB: Pat.

DL: How many grandchildren do you have?

DB: I even have a great-grandchild, too. A husband is never good at this, and I’m no better. I must have at least 14, 15 grandchildren.

DL: What do you do in your free time, now that you’re retired?
DB: Well, for one thing, my wife keeps insisting, “You better sit down and rest. You better sit down and rest.” I’ve been active, and I get nervous just sitting around. But the one thing that I like doing is, I paint. I paint pictures, mostly portraits. But I do a little bit of landscaping, but portraits, that’s what I like to do best.

DL: Do you use oils, watercolors?

DB: I use both, watercolors and oils and acrylics.

DL: Is any of your work in this building?

DB: No.

DL: Do you sell it or keep it?

DB: Generally I give them away, but I used to sell them. But of late, the few that I accomplish, I just give them away, because I can reproduce them anyway.

DL: What is a typical day like for you now?

DB: Breakfast.

DL: It starts with breakfast?

DB: Oh, indeed. Breakfast is always cold cereal and milk and toast. My wife always insists, “I have to cook you a big breakfast,” I say, “No, I don’t want any big breakfast.” Usually on Saturday mornings we have a big breakfast. Usually during the week that’s all I want, that’s all I need to get through until lunchtime. And usually from that point on, I’ve got a dog to feed and she has a cat she feeds and both are outdoors, so we take care of them. And usually, like the last few days, until it started raining yesterday, I try to clean up the yard. I have a big yard that needs a lot of attention. That’s really it, I work outdoors and I work in the garage, doing things that don’t need to be done, but I’ve gotta do something to occupy my spare time. So that’s it; nothing of any significance, but to me it’s something that occupies my mind.

DL: Earlier you mentioned your college experience. Where did you get your degree from, and what was your degree?

DB: First of I’ll give you this little scenario here: I went to a J.C. [Junior College] first in Willmar, and would you believe I flunked my first quarter because I had kids by then, and when you haven’t been in any classroom-type of setting, you just lose track of how to study. And boy, I tell you, I tried and tried and I just could never get my mind studying. Well, my first quarter I flunked. But anyway, I went back again and battled it again, and I did get through my first year of J.C. But then from that point I went to school at the U of Minnesota, I went to Bemidji State College, which is the University now, and I also went to Madison, Wisconsin, to the university there. So I kind of just
jumped around. I think I got a diploma finally, just so they could get rid of me, I think. [Laughter] So anyway, back in ’71 I finally got my degree.

DL: From the University of Minnesota, or Madison?

DB: I finally wound up at Bemidji; that’s my last college. I was a senior then. I had my transcript worked out finally, after some very shaky moments, but I finally got all my transcripts. But I went to Madison, Wisconsin when all the turmoil was going on; I don’t know if you’re familiar with that or not, there were a couple of college professors that were killed due to some bombing or some darn thing. Some students destroyed a couple buildings. That was the time that I was there and I couldn’t understand what the hell they were doing that for. I just could never get to the bottom of it.

DL: What was your degree in?

DB: Sociology.

DL: What contributions have the Dakota people made to Minnesota and to the country?

DB: You’d be surprised how many types of medicines the Dakota have developed, pills, prescriptions and that type of thing. I wish I had a list of all the things that the Dakota initiated, and that the whites finally realized that there was some merit to this stuff that they were calling, the Dakotas, medicine. And there’s a huge amount where credit is due, but it is not given. A lot of that was developed by the Dakota, but in a different form. Not a pill or a capsule; it was a different form of medicine that the Dakota developed that the wasichu finally saw, and then they developed, too. They put it into the pill and the capsules. But a lot of it was developed by the Dakotas.

DL: If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for the Dakota people today?

DB: That they had their original reservation back. It was a fact that this treaty was for outside the 20-mile radius plus, from the South Dakota border down to New Ulm. I would like to see their homeland given back. Not given back – what the hell, it’s theirs, and by the virtue of the so-called Forfeiture Act, which I mentioned earlier, which doesn’t make any sense whatsoever. Because the Dakota battled for their rights, their land was taken away. What did we do with Japan? We gave them back their land. What did we do with Germany? We gave them back their land. What did we do with Iraq? We gave them back their land. And not only that, we rebuilt those countries [after the war]. And that’s what we’ll do with Afghanistan, and I’m sure if we get into some kind of a war with Iran we’ll do the same damn thing there again too. But when it comes to the Dakota: zero.

DL: Did I miss anything that you want to talk about?

DB: This is kind of an aside topic, I think, but when we started developing these casinos, there were a lot of folks – wasichus, the white folks – that are under the
impression that when we build our casinos they were subsidized by the U.S. Government. We never got one red cent from the state or the U.S. Government to start the casinos. I was the one that built the first casino here; it was down below the hill. We called it Firefly Creek Casino at the time; it’s now changed to Prairie’s Edge. I was chairman at the time. I begged, borrowed and stole in order to get the funds raised to build the first casino. We never had one red cent from anybody, other than the fact that we borrowed money – and we paid back 30 percent interest on the money we borrowed. And of course, some reservations, when they built theirs, they paid as much as 50 percent on a dollar that they borrowed. Highway robbery, but that’s the only way we could start them. A lot of folks are under the misconception that these were subsidized somehow by the U.S. Government. No way!

DL: You’ve lived a long time, before the casinos and now. What difference have they made in the lives of the Dakota people here?

DB: A lot of folks are driving nice, new cars instead of walking – and some of them should be walking. [Laughter]

DL: Thank you.