AL = Aimee LaBree
Minnesota Historical Society

DL = Deborah Locke
Minnesota Historical Society

DK = Donna Korstad

AL: This is Aimee LaBree on May 5th, 2011 in Granite Falls. Interviewee: Donna Korstad. Interviewer: Deborah Locke.

DL: Donna, could you spell your name for us?


DL: Do you have a nickname?

DK: Yes. Jeanie.

DK: Who gave you your nickname?

DL: My grandma.

DK: Who were your parents?

DK: Douglas and Carol Peterson. But I was raised by my grandparents.
DL: Who were your grandparents, on both sides?

DK: On my mom's side, I didn't know them. And my dad's side is Amelia and Eli Peterson.

DL: How long have you lived here, or in this area?

DK: I was born and raised here. I've been here most of my life. I had moved a little bit to Shakopee, and that was temporary. But otherwise my home is here.

DL: Are you an enrolled member of a Dakota reservation or community?

DK: Yes.

DL: Do you have family members at other reservations?

DK: No.

DL: Where did you go to school?

DK: Granite Falls.

DL: And would that be elementary and high school?

DK: Yes.

DL: What were your favorite subjects?

DK: I liked all my subjects. But if I were to have to pick one, I suppose in grade school it was spelling and reading.

DL: What kind of student were you?

DK: A well-mannered student. We had to have an education and go to school, so I didn't miss much school. My grandparents were real solid about that.

DL: What's your earliest memory as a child?

DK: Oh, I can clearly remember when I started going to kindergarten. Like I was saying, my grandparents wanted me to go to school. And even as young as I was, they always
instilled in me that education was important. When there were school functions they were able to go with me. Also I want to mention that I grew up with my aunt, who was the same age as me. My grandparents were her mom and dad. So we did things together, and were just a few months apart.

DL: So your relationship was more like sisters?

DK: Yes, right. I consider her one, even though she's my aunt. That's my dad's youngest sister. We grew up together all the way from infants to now.

DL: When you were little, did you ever think about the future and what you wanted to be when you grew up?

DK: I always wanted to be a nurse.

DL: Did that work out for you?

DK: No, it didn't. But I can remember when I liked going to the doctor, seeing the nurses and stuff.

DL: What did you do after school? What games did you play?

DK: We would play hopscotch, kickball. And then a few years down the road we got a badminton set. But we were pretty limited on money. So it wasn't like my grandparents spent money foolishly. The things that we did have, we appreciated them. But it was kind of minimal. We liked going to school, because then we could play games and do things that we didn't do at home because we didn't have the money.

DL: Makes sense.

DK: And I can remember croquet. We eventually got that. So we played that too. We were taught to take care of our stuff really well, because if we didn't, we weren't going to get any more.

DL: I forgot to ask you your birth date and where you were born


DL: What is the first news story you remember from your childhood?
DK: I vaguely remember talking about flooding. When we would go into town we would have to detour because of the flood situation.

DL: Did your family have a TV?

DK: Not right away, we didn't. We did eventually get one, but we only got one channel and we had a real old-fashioned antenna, a square one that we attached to the outside of the house. We watched a lot of talking stuff, not a whole lot of movies or anything like that. And on the weekends, we wouldn't sit in the house and watch TV. We were pretty active and outside -- not like nowadays when kids are glued to the TV.

DL: Which relative or relatives had the most influence on you?

DK: My grandma and grandpa and my aunt -- being raised with her and bonding with her.

DL: Tell us about your grandma and your grandpa. What kind of people were they?

DK: They were real traditional people. They spoke the language around us so after a while when you're around it enough you get to understand it. I'm not going to say that I can fluently speak five sentences at a sitting because I can't. But I do know that I picked up on it and could piece it together. And Grandma was real traditional about her cooking. She cooked all the meals. All of her bread was homemade. I remember when it used to be a treat for us to get a piece of store-bought bread because we'd have fry bread or homemade biscuits and all that. I'd give anything to have that every day, now...

And my grandpa worked for the City of Granite, for the Parks Department. He maintained the lawns and in Memorial Park outside of Granite. So he did odd jobs and he fished and he hunted a little bit. Every now and then we'd have deer meat. We'd get it from other friends. My grandparents didn't drink, they didn't smoke cigarettes. We went to church. Yes, we were raised well

DL: Did they live long enough to see you into adulthood?

DK: Oh Yes.

DL: Lucky you.
DK: My grandpa passed away first and then my grandma did. The last couple years of her life, her train of thought wasn't real good.

DL: They could raise you with their daughter easily because you were the same age.

DK: Yes.

DL: Did your family celebrate the holidays and how?

DK: We didn't really. We acknowledged Thanksgiving and Christmas. Real minimally as the money situation was really tight. We would have Christmas at our church and we would get a little bit of candy and stuff. It was a big deal for us to get coloring books and crayons, you know? So our gifts were real minimal. It wasn't a real big thing like nowadays [laughter]. At Easter and Thanksgiving, my grandma was really focused around a meal...Providing food and having a good time that way. So as far as gifts, like I said, that was real limited. That wasn't a priority for us kids. I guess we didn't know any different. We did good with it.

DL: Who taught you the most about being Dakota?

DK: Well, if I had to pick between my grandpa and grandma I'd say my grandma.

DL: Did you learn of spirituality as a child or as an adult?

DK: Yes.

DL: Did you learn traditional ways?

DK: Yes.

DL: Of those you learned, what's the most meaningful to you?

DK: Knowing parts of the language.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name?

DK: Yes.

DL: Can you tell us what it is?
DK: Nina Washte.

DL: What does that mean?

DK: Nice girl.

DL: And is that something you inherited from a relative?

DK: This was from my grandma, yes.

DL: What did you learn about Dakota history while you were growing up?

DK: My grandparents would just explain to us our beliefs, what they meant, and how they are used. They kept it real minimal. But, like I said, we just got by. And when we did get something kind of big, we were majorly happy with that, we appreciated it.

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

DK: No.

DL: Did you ever hear about family members from that time?

DK: No.

DL: Are you related to any of the Chiefs or other well-known people from that time?

DK: Not that I'm aware of, no.

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

DK: No, because that wasn't talked about by my grandparents. Not to us kids, anyway. Maybe they talked about it to other elders or the grown-up kids, but I didn't hear about stuff like that.

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

DK: No.

DL: Okay, I'll mention some places and tell me your thoughts about them.
DK: Okay.

DL: Fort Ridgely, have you ever been there?

DK: No I haven't.

DL: Birch Coulee?

DK: We were there a few times and went to a mini pow wow. That was when I was younger and it's real vague to me. I don't have a whole lot of memory of that.

DL: Lower Sioux Agency?

DK: We would go there to visit my grandparents' friends, elderly people. Every now and then we would go out and have a gathering, and have food -- picnic-type things. Just visit. But it was to people's homes, it wasn't like a community event anywhere.

DL: Let's see, how about Traverse de Sioux?

DK: No.

DL: Sibley House in Saint Paul.

DK: No.

DL: Fort Snelling.

DK: No.

DL: Camp Release?

DK: No.

DL: Wood Lake?

DK: No.

DL: New Ulm?
DK: No.

DL: Black Dog Village?

DK: No.

DL: Camp Coldwater?

DK: No.

DL: What's your opinion of the war?

DK: I guess I really haven't thought about that. I suppose it would kind of stick with me and be a part of my life had I grown up with it. But things were minimally said to us.

We focused on the present life that was going on. Not too much outside. We weren't exposed to a whole lot of functions, a whole lot of outings and stuff. We were a real close family. We had a few little events here and there, celebrated birthdays, but as far as going out of state, we never went on vacations or trips, probably because more than likely we couldn't afford it and didn't have a dependable enough vehicle. We were pretty isolated at home.

DL: How about the treaties, did you ever hear anything or learn anything about those?

DK: No I didn't.

DL: Do you think it's a good idea to remember the events of the mid-1800s?

DK: Yes, I think it's important. I'm not real in-tune with that. But if people talk to me about it, and shared with me, I would be open to that. And be willing to learn.

DL: Did you go on to college?

DK: No, I did not.

DL: And what's your occupation?

DK: Right now I've been working at the casino.
DL: What contributions have the Dakota people made to Minnesota and the country?

DK: Can you give me an example of what you mean by that?

DL: The language is a big one in Minnesota because so many towns are named after...

DK: Yes, the language here. I know on our reservation, the language is taught in our school system. And as far as for me, when I was growing up and then got into high school, we didn't have that offered to us. But, that was the language that was mostly spoken to us kids by my grandparents. So that's how I learned it, just by being around it. A lot of my grandchildren have participated in that and have done well. Like I said, it's offered and it's real beneficial to the Native American kids to learn that and to know about themselves. And I know that it's not only for Native kids but other kids in the school system who can take that as a subject if they want to. I'm not sure if there's a lot of non-Natives in that program. I guess I've never asked my grandchildren that participate if there's other races in there. So that's a big one.

And then our casino funds things to benefit people. For example, in the city of Granite, we donate to the school, and provide things that are real beneficial that the adults and kids.

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

DK: I wish that our reservation was a lot bigger with homes and stuff. I don't live on the reservation. I live in Granite Falls. And the reason I say that is because it's probably like a learned thing for me, having been born and raised on the reservation. As I got older, got married, had kids and chose to move off the reservation -- it was by my choice. I miss that now. I wish that I could have a home on the reservation as well as my kids and grandchildren. Also, I really do wish that our reservation had a clinic, hospital, and a school. I think that would be real beneficial.

DL: That concludes our interview. Thank you.