

**Dallas Ross
Narrator**

**Deborah Locke
Interviewer**

**Upper Sioux Community, MN
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Minnesota Historical Society**

**DL = Deborah Locke
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DR = Dallas Ross

AL: This is Aimee LaBree on May 5th, 2011 in Granite Falls, Minnesota interviewing Dallas Ross. Interviewer: Deborah Locke.

DL: Could you spell your name for us please?

DR: D-A-L-L-A-S R-O-S-S.

DL: Do you have a nick name?

DR: No.

DL: When and where were you born?

DR: I was born in 1956.

DL: And where?

DR: Here in Granite Falls. Question is where? I don't know, I'd have to ask my mom now but she's dead. [Laughter]

DL: That's leading us to our next question. Who were your parents?

DR: One was Rufus Ross. My mother was Verna Cavender Ross.

DL: And your grandparents, both sides?

DR: My grandparents? Alec Ross and Lily Ross, William Cavender and Eliza Cavender.

DL: How long have you lived here?

DR: All my life.

DL: Did you ever live somewhere else for a short time?

DR: Yeah, as with other people, moved here and there for a while. Home never changes. [Laughter]

DL: Are you an enrolled member of the Dakota reservation or Community?

DR: Yes, this one.

DL: Do you have family members at other reservations?

DR: All over the place, into Canada.

DL: Where did you go to school?

DR: Public school here.

DL: Granite Falls?

DR: College in Ely, Minnesota and a few other places. I never really stayed in one place. I went from ninth grade to college. School didn't treat me so well. [Laughter]

DL: What were your favorite subjects?

DR: I don't know that I really had a favorite subject. For the most part going to public school, it was just something that I had to do. I mean there was no favorite book to read or a favorite subject. It was just something that was necessary I guess so I can't define a favorite subject.

DL: What kind of student were you?

DR: Actually I think for the most part, I was an ambitious student. But as the kids grow older and the impressions of the adults start to come into play, things got a little bit more difficult. The old battle Dakota– Indian versus white. Kids are kids. They don't see colors in people; they just see people in people. But adults teach them, however they do it-by whispers, or whatever. Some adults just tell kids directly, "Don't hang out with them people or those Indians" or whatever it is. It might be a black person. When that started to come to the surface, then it got more difficult. But that wasn't until the sixth or seventh grade. Then things got a little bit tougher. I would still try to perform well but it became more and more difficult.

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

DR: It's really hard to say, probably fishing or my grandma making doughnuts. My one grandma always made doughnuts. I don't know why. [Laughter] You know when you look at it backwards and try to say, "What is your first memory?" A child has so many memories; there is really no one place that is first or second. It's just a memory. That whole group of time can become one memory. That's not single for me, it's everything. I remember when my grandpa was teaching me to swim. It was 'drop you in the water and swim!' Of course he would have never let us drown but it was 'this is how you do it.' It was just 'in the water you go and let instincts take their course.' If you have no instincts then he would pull you out of the water and tell you "Don't go in the river." There's no beginning for a memory and hopefully no end for a memory. So I can't give you one spot. I don't remember any bad things about my childhood, at least at home. People were different. Families were closer. I had more than one grandmother. I had more than two grandmothers.

DL: When you were a young child, what did you do after school? What do you remember filling your days with?

DR: All you have to do is look outside. Look in the valley. That's where I spent all my time. Not in the house. Most of the time I was out in the woods doing something. That was my playground. I never had a reason to be in the house unless it was too cold or it was to sleep. Sometimes it was with other children, sometimes it was just me. It really didn't make any difference, because the land actually speaks so you're never alone.

DL: I forgot to ask you about your siblings.

DR: I have lots. A couple of them are gone now but there were eleven of us. The oldest was Gary Cavender. You may have heard of him. Reverend Gary Cavender.

The youngest is Joseph Samuel. I don't know how old he is, maybe forty. [I have] six brothers, three sisters.

DL: What games did you play?

DR: [Laughter] Games? I don't know, childhood games. I made up my own. One of my toys was an old bicycle wheel. You just hit it up and down the road. I guess that was a game. More contemporary games I guess: I played softball. I wasn't very good at it but I played softball. [I played] tag I suppose. Some of them were just made-up games that survived only for that moment and disappeared in the next. For me there was really no, 'This is the game and this is how you play it.' The game was whatever was necessary at the moment. [Laughter] You make up the rules and start the game and when you're done if it was a good game, you played it again. It was only for the moment.

DL: What's the first news story you remember from your childhood?

DR: Significant news story? President Kennedy getting killed; that was it.

DL: I would say about eighty percent of the people we talk to say it was the Kennedy assassination.

DR: I think it was because my grandpa had a lot of respect for that particular President. My grandpa Cavender always had a picture of him on his wall. His catch phrase, "Ask not what your country can do for you." That has some similarities to what a Dakota warrior's life would be. You don't ask what your people can do for you. You're always trying to do for them. So it really kind of hit home for my grandfather, that statement.

DL: Did your family have a TV?

DR: Eventually. I don't remember just when, mid-'60s someplace. It didn't work very well – one channel always in a snow storm. So it really wasn't of interest to me anyway. [Laughter]

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

DR: That's a tough one; probably my grandparents. No single one really sticks out. They all had a great influence. Grandparents or grandfathers because of things that we learned from them whether it was fishing, hunting or whatever. Grandmothers were part of my life with learning how to treat others; respect. That's where the children learned early, from the grandmothers. For me personally, I assume it's true for many people

that you've interviewed, there is really no one single significant person in my childhood because they were all significant. If one wasn't there I could go to the other one. That was never a place that I felt alone – always some house I could go to.

DL: Did your grandparents live close to the family home?

DR: Yes, fortunately for me, they were always pretty close. Close is a relative term. Sometimes it was a mile away, sometimes it was just a few hundred feet away but they were always close enough to where you could get if you wanted to.

DL: Who taught you the most about being Dakota?

DR: Grandfathers. Grandfathers were the beginning, and then there was a blank spot for many years after the grandparents left. Grandmothers too, I suppose, but there was no instruction manual on how to teach a child to be a Dakota child. It was just inherent in the daily activities.

Of course grandfathers at a certain age decided that I needed to know certain things that hopefully would be important to me later on. I had one grandfather who always used to teach me a song but his wife, my grandmother; she was kind of the mindset that those really weren't important things to know. So they kind of had a running battle over what he was thinking I should know and/or wanted me to know and over what she thought I shouldn't know. They were old ceremonial songs. My one grandfather really made it apparent that there was more to who we were than what other grandparents were displaying. If they were talking about old times, it was usually lucky if you could listen. If it was something they didn't want you to hear, they would send you outside. But my one grandfather was more open.

DL: Did they speak the Dakota language?

DR: Yes.

DL: Did you learn much of it?

DR: When I was young, I learned all of it, but like I said there was a blank [period of] time. From the time they died for a very long time, nobody spoke Dakota. Even my mother, when I would ask her about things I needed to understand. She had forgotten. In her family, they didn't learn any other language until later. It kind of disappears into the shadows.

DL: You'll have to forgive me if I'm not saying this correctly but – did you learn of Dakota 'spirituality' if that's the right word or 'religion', some will say 'religion', as a child or an adult?

DR: Both, it's ingrained in my childhood. At the same time it's part of my life as an adult. You can't be around old Dakotas without learning about the spirituality of things. So it's not like there's so many tenets you have to know or so many ways that you have to be [in order to be] a spiritual person. It's just ingrained in being a Dakota. Knowing my grandparents, it's impossible not to be exposed to the spirituality of a Dakota. That's pretty much unexplainable. It's not like they had Sunday school for Dakota spirituality. It's just everyday life. When the grandmothers start to teach, that's included. When the grandfathers start to teach, that's included. When the uncles or the fathers start to teach, that's included. There is really no separation so that's a hard question to create understanding for.

DL: Many Dakota we've talked to have blended both the faith of their families which might be some form of Christianity with Dakota. Did your family do that?

DR: Yes. My grandmothers, one in particular, was a devout Christian. It served her well, gave her a lot of strength. My mother was a devout Christian – served her well, gave her a tremendous amount of strength. One grandfather, he kind of went along with both, whatever was necessary. The way I was brought up, is that for Dakota 'dakod wi choka ki eposukta'. The Dakota way of life gives you direction. It's not a religious-type path and it's not a non-religious-type path, it just is. Many questions come up [about] Dakota culture, Dakota spirituality or religion. In truth, there is no separation. You cannot be a Dakota without them both being together.

So when my grandparents or my grandmother and my mother became Christian, they didn't adopt a religion, they just made it part of their life. Christianity teaches that a few days out of a whole year are very special. To my parents, being Dakota and Christian at the same time, every day is important. The blending was not difficult for them because coming up as a Dakota, every day is important. There is no one special day to pray. Every day is a good day to pray. You get up in the morning, say a prayer. You go to bed at night, say a prayer. Saying a prayer in a different religion really wasn't that difficult. Maybe learning of it was something, but for me to look down the path and try to see what a Dakota would see; there is no special way to pray. That's one thing one of my grandfathers taught me. I told this to my mother and my aunt. They thought it would be funny that he would say things like that to a young boy but grandfathers don't always tell their children what they're teaching. I asked him because my grandmother was a devout Christian. She made sure she was at all the church functions. But

Grandpa wasn't quite as active. I asked him, "How come?" He said, "Well, I don't need to go to the church to pray, I can go outside and pray." Like I said, I don't know if he was actually Christian or otherwise. He was just my grandpa. He said, "One day you're going to have to choose" – he was speaking Dakota at the time. That I would have to choose Jesus to pray as a Christian prays or try to pray as a Dakota prays. He said, "You always have to remember no matter what people say to you, if someone is praying in a manner that you don't understand, you don't have to understand it. You don't even have to believe in it. But you have to respect the fact that they believe." He said, "Then into the future, if you respect that people believe in a different way and pray in a different way then there is hope that they will give you the same respect for the way you decide to pray." So what he was telling me [is that] there is no difference. The difference is in the people themselves, not in the prayer and where it goes.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name?

DR: Yes, actually I have two.

DL: What is it or what are they?

DR: One is my grandfather's, my dad's dad, and it's a long name: Tatepeta Wakanmani. He began with just Tatepeta. Later he added the Wakanmani'. Tatepeta is Fire Wind. As a child maybe he thought I was full of hot air, I always tell people. Wakanmani is Walking Sacred or Sacred Walk, Mysterious Walk. Put the two together- that's my name. The other one is a spiritual name that the grandfathers actually gave me in the way that I pray.

DL: Did you inherit one of their names?

DR: Tatepeta was my grandfather's father.

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

DR: [Laughter] That there are very, very many viewpoints on Dakota history. My first experience, and this goes back to school, was in seventh or eighth grade when I opened a history book. They did have something of Minnesota history. It portrayed the Sioux as being savage people. So written history, that was my first experience. "The Sioux are savage." So I kind of adopted that title. If I'm a savage, I'll try to live up to my name. Part of it was that's about the same time that racism and prejudice started to surface in the other children. So becoming a savage actually had advantages at the

time. It kept people at a distance. They could shout at me from a distance but they wouldn't come close.

Otherwise, Dakota history, I remember my grandparents and older people that I can just picture, I can't put names to them anymore, when they'd gather they'd talk of things leading up to where they were [Inkpaduta]. Like, who actually were the ones that killed the people up at Acton? Decisions that different people made in reaction to that, those were all stories among the old men of my family. One side of my family for the most part was a warrior side. They would meet the challenges. The other side was actually peaceful at that time, trying to find a peaceful resolution. So even in my family there were differences. The warrior side, they spoke of many things about who caused what and what caused things and why they decided to go to war in the first place. The way I heard it was from my grandfather speaking. I wasn't part of the conversation. I was fortunate enough to be able to sit and listen. That was it. Through all the deliberations they had leading up to going up to battle, they weighed many things. In the end they decided the end result was going to be the same. So they decided to fight. On the other side, the ones that decided to try to find peaceful means were hoping for something better but the result was the same. We're in the situation we're in now because of what happened in history. The decisions of the peaceful versus the unfriendly had no impact on the result.

DL: If you flashed back to that time, which side of your family would you be on?

DR: The warrior side. That's one gift the Creator gives you. Every Dakota is born with the spirit needed to go into their life. I always wondered if somebody could have made a difference. The other people that were coming had one mindset. The only thing it would have done is slow it down. It may have made a little difference today but not much.

DL: I think you've already answered this but I'll ask it anyway. Did you hear of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota war during your growing up years?

DR: Many, many times.

DL: And you've already explained that you have family members who survived that time.

DR: Yeah, it's kind of obvious if they hadn't. [Laughter]

DL: You wouldn't be here.

DR: Right. My one grandfather... In this context, when I say grandfather, it can go back many years or close. He was in Fort McClellan and he was pardoned. Out of the three hundred that were supposed to be hung, he was one of the ones that wasn't. The other grandfather fled and returned later. He didn't go to Fort Snelling or anything. He just fled the area and came back. Some ended up in Crow Creek and came back. Some came out of the Davenport prison and came back. So there's a lot of circumstance leading to one's existence.

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

DR: Yes.

DL: Who?

DR: Mazomani. [He's] buried in the State Park out here. Wahpeton Chief. Inyangmani is buried in Canada- another Wahpeton Chief. He actually just lived north of here across the road, this last home. Below the bluff, he didn't want to be a farmer Indian so he didn't get a house. Mazomani was killed at the Battle of Wood Lake. Pe Pe was kind of friendly maybe not so friendly. Techandahupa was a warrior headman who signed many of the treaties, and [was a] nephew of Little Crow. Skyman [Mahpiyawicasta], another Wahpeton, that's on my maternal side – Inyangmani, [his] wife was the daughter of Sky Man. Wabasha's or Wapahasha's are on my maternal side. It gets a little thin there. Pretty much everyone in my grandparent's lives were significant in history, I suppose. At least you can read their names in history. Whether or not that makes them significant or not, I have no idea.

We just come from a long line of leaders. You probably had a very special opportunity in visiting with my Aunt Carrie in that generationally, we don't jump very far from 1862 to now. Auntie Carrie heard stories directly from people that experienced it. I heard it from my grandparents whose parents experienced it. So in very few generations you can hear things from history. People are so far removed – several generations as opposed to one or maybe two.

DL: You are only two storytellers removed from all of that?

DR: Yeah, and Aunt Carrie was only one. She heard it from the people that experienced it.

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

DR: I don't understand the question.

DL: Well in some cases, people have told us about relatives who were forced to Canada or who were actually on the March, or most of them ended up at Santee. Things like that.

DR: Certainly my family is scattered everywhere all the way to Wahpeton in Canada near Calgary. Sioux Valley, Pipestone Creek, Crow Creek, Santee, Flandreau; I may have direct bloodlines at all these places. On both sides of the family, everything was just scattered. It was hard for the family. The older people, my grandparents, were better at keeping track of where their relatives were. Through them I've learned who my relatives were. It's starting to disappear now. People don't even know who they are anymore or even their family lineage, so to speak. So the impact is that people weren't able to keep in contact with their families. Because of that they weren't able to keep in contact with their Dakota life. Everybody wanted to live a life so they would be treated better. For the most part it had the same result... It didn't change the way they were treated; the same reason why the decision to fight or not to fight didn't change anything. The only thing that happened to people that decided to try to live differently so they'd be treated better is that [for] many Dakota things got left behind. That includes relatives, wherever they are. Fortunately for me and my children, hopefully they are listening when I talk to them about where relatives are and who they are and they'll remember.

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

DR: Twice.

DL: What was your reaction to that place?

DR: My reaction to the place was not necessarily to the place but to the people that were there and the reasons they were there. I helped one of the Owens- Ray Owen. He was down there for something. He asked me to come over. I didn't actually do anything except that we talked before he did. Then I just listened. The second time was kind of for the same reason. To help someone do something-not necessarily do it myself.

My reaction to the place? I guess if I were there all by myself, I probably would react to the place but the people are what caused me to think. They are looking there and they

don't really truly understand what happened. They know what happened but they don't truly understand it. So I just sense something missing in the people standing there. Something that I wouldn't be able to fill for them and that includes Indian, white or any other race that was there. So it's a place that at some point in time will become significant again but not for the reasons that people think. The land never forgets. That's another thing about Dakota spirituality. The land has a memory. Someday someone will be reminded of what happened there. It probably won't be good.

DL: Have you ever been to any of these places and what are your thoughts about them? I'll list a few places.

DR: Okay.

DL: Starting with Fort Ridgely?

DR: Yes, I've been there. That's another place that the land remembers a lot but [it remembers] nothing good. It's a place that should be treated differently. It's something that might be just the impression. Sometimes I feel like people are trying to kind of blot out the bad things and just leave the good things. That's why history gets so convoluted. They'd rather talk about their golf course than the actual history of the area. At the same time the land is remembering, the people are trying to forget. There's a conflict there. Whether or not everybody feels it, I have no idea, but there's a conflict going on there.

DL: It's interesting you say the monuments and everything also would remember. We were at the Milford Monument not too long ago, overlooking these farm fields. Those fields must remember, as well, what happened. There was certainly bloodshed.

DR: Yes. That's the difference between the way I look at creation as opposed to someone else looking at creation. I know there's a spirit that exists everywhere and maybe even say the land has a spirit or a tree has a spirit. And yeah, they do, but all at the same time they become one spirit and the land never forgets. It's always there. The memories good, bad or ugly will always be there. Someday people will be reminded. Maybe they'll be reminded of something good. Maybe they'll be reminded of something bad. That's part of the Dakota Armageddon I suppose but that's more difficult to explain and I won't even try. I mean that's a lifetime of learning for a minute of understanding.

DL: Here's another place: Birch Coulee?

DR: There's a lot of spirits there in the form of ghosts if you believe in them. It was kind of an embellished place on both sides I guess. As far as I was told, there were only two Dakotas killed there. They are buried there someplace. That's another place that has a lot of confusion. I'm not sure that even the spirits that dwell there are comfortable there for some reason. These are just personal things that I feel around me. It's probably one of the saddest places in this local area. I mean there are many of them but that's probably one of the saddest. That's when the Dakota started to realize, this is my own belief that their future was not going to be good. So those memories end up staying there, too. They were fighting knowing that in the end it's a futile fight, but they were going to do what they could anyway. At that point it was starting to settle in that their lives were going to be changed forever and there wasn't a thing they could do about it.

DL: The Lower Sioux Agency?

DR: Not a particularly important place to me.

DL: Why?

DR: Simply because it's in such turmoil. It's like a fight over who owns history, the same reason we talked about before. That actually changes the meaning for me. It's something that has to be remembered just to be remembered and not fought over. So it's not a particularly important site although it does house some nice pictures and some things out of the past that people don't remember. But unless I could go back thirty years again, I might recapture some of the meaning it had. Today it's just a structure.

DL: Traverse des Sioux?

DR: I got invited down there for many different functions. I just chose not to go because what was going on during those times was more political -- personal-gain type things. It really had no purpose for me to be there. It's an important place in history because that's one of the places Dakota started to give up things. People always ask me about those treaties and reservations. Somebody will say, "Well you know the United States gave you this." I say, "No, the United States didn't give us anything. What little we had we kept." We didn't give it away. Places like that, they have to be told truthfully, because the impression that the United States gave the Dakota whatever they have is still prevalent. Whether people want to turn a blind eye to the truth of the matter, I have no idea. But it doesn't help that places like that are not spoken of in a manner that they should be.

DL: How about the Sibley House?

DR: I was at the Sibley House a couple of times but it's kind of a hodgepodge of history. Sibley was not a very significant figure on either side of history from my point of view. He was not a particularly good leader for the white people although people followed him. He made poor decisions for the people he represented and definitely had a negative impact on the Dakotas. Most of this was done because he wanted to become important. So that's another part of history and that's my own viewpoint. But I think if people looked at his history more closely they would probably at least come to some similar conclusion that Sibley was a bad person for everyone. But since he's part of non-Indian history, [you] can't really paint him too bad because it makes everyone else look bad. They should really look closer at the history of Sibley to understand that his purpose in life was not good for anyone.

DL: Fort Snelling?

DR: That is a place that should be left alone. Maybe the park is okay but there is immense, immense sadness there. It's a place that should be remembered. If you stay there long enough, it really wouldn't matter which side of the history you're remembering, it would still be sad. So many bad things happened there that even minor changes there to me are desecration.

DL: So leave it standing as a reminder.

DR: Yes. Not just the fort but the whole area around the fort.

DL: Including the camp area.

DR: Yes, every place.

DL: The camp area is overrun with trees right now.

DR: Yes.

DL: You don't see a clearing at all.

DR: Well, the earth tries to heal.

DL: Why are those stories papered over? Because I've read the history of Fort Snelling from many different writers and there isn't any understanding of what the Dakota experienced at that camp. Where did those stories go or did they never come out?

DR: Well, it's something people don't want to remember. Unfortunately the ones that suffered through it had no way to forget. That carried down through the generations. It's a generational memory that the Dakotas can't forget. I heard one non-Indian, a state employee, was feeling bad about it but made an odd statement: "Well they put the Indians all there to protect them." Protect them from what? They said, "Well would you rather have had them scattered out all over the prairie?" My reaction was, "Well that's where they came from before you brought them over here." But this person could not accept the fact that people were so cruel. She could not bring herself to think that the purpose was something other than to protect the Indians. So it's something that one side does not want to remember or look at and the other side can't forget.

Here's a short version of a long story. This is a personal occurrence and it has something to do with the question you're asking. I met this old man way up in northern Minnesota. One day he said, "Grandson wait, today I want to talk." The way he said that was he was going to talk and I was going to listen. So this was a half a day experience if not more.

He said, "One day I thought I was someone special, way, way above everybody. I could look at a person and say look at that person. Look at the way he lives his life. He shouldn't do that. Or look at these women, or look at this woman, the way they treat themselves, the way they treat their bodies. That's wrong, they shouldn't be doing that. Or look at this man, the way he treats women. He shouldn't be doing that. I was very special. I could see that. I could point at people and say what they were doing and know that it was wrong. Look at these people the way they bring their children up. That's wrong, they shouldn't be doing that." He said, "I was very, very special, very important. Then one day, I was looking and I could see all the people pointing back at me, 'Look at this old man, who does he think he is to tell us how we should be living our life?'

Since that time I've been trying to live my life according to what the Creator wanted me to be. I think I'm finally that man or at least as close as I'm going to get and I'm going to die." That was the end of his story. It seems like an abrupt stop. Probably 30 years later, I'd almost forgotten about him, [when] that voice just came like it was alive again around me, the same story.

After all that time I thought I'd forgotten but I'd learned some things. Truly he was only speaking of the hazards of life; warning me, saying: be careful. Unless you have something to offer, in this case truth, unless you have something better to offer, then you cannot judge people. If you give them something better and they refuse it then

maybe you have the right to criticize them. This is where we're at with some people not wanting to see the truth. Do I have the right to criticize them? Probably not because right now I have nothing better to offer them. Those memories are strong on both sides after hundreds of years. Some people want to forget or look at a picture and hope it changes. I have nothing to offer them because that's within them. That's their generational memory. That's something that the Creator caused to bring forward in time so that they would not forget. In the same manner the memories of the Dakota come generation [after] generation [after] generation so that we don't forget. The reality is that it happened. What we do with that is our own choice.

DL: What happened at Fort Snelling at that camp?

DR: An atrocity.

DL: Tell us more.

DR: It was something that maybe was intended to happen by the creator but probably not. The white people wanted something. That's why we didn't become humans for so long [in the eyes of non-Indians]. That's what I believe. As long as we stayed savages, then it would be okay to do the things that were happening. And so the things like Fort Snelling were less about humanity [and more about] managing something savage. From that point of view, that's how we were looked at: To sooth the moral dilemma that something like that brings for another group of people. They didn't really want to do anything bad to a human being so they kept us somewhat less than that. So that hurt them as well as us Dakota. I told a group of people this at Augustana [College]. They asked me one time, "What is the most significant impact the treaties had on the Dakota?" That's one of them – Fort Snelling but not for the reason that you think. This goes back into Dakota life. Every time a treaty was signed, the Dakota would do it through their pipe, their sacred pipe. Someplace in that treaty making process that pipe was there for the Dakota. The Dakota believed that when you used the sacred pipe, everything was going to be as it was said because that's what is required by the Creator through those sacred things. The Dakotas endeavored to keep their words because they did it through that pipe. Unfortunately, the other people didn't believe in the pipe so they could easily break their word and do something different. All the way from the battles to Fort Snelling, part of the Dakota were still trying to keep their word because of that pipe. So the atrocity is not so much singly the suffering. It so much shook the basis of Dakota prayer that they would say, "But we did this in a manner that was good. Why is this happening to us? We prayed before we did it. We smoked the pipe when we were done. Why are these things happening?" So it not only hurt the other people because they're shaping a group of people into something that would suit them and kind

of relieve their moral dilemma but also shook the faith of a whole group of people because their prayers came to such a bad end.

They felt abandoned by something. There was a story about a medicine man at Fort Snelling who somehow had a drum. He sang a song and broke the chains on the gate and the gate opened just to show the people that the land was still there. Nothing had changed. To give them hope. Of course the soldiers quickly closed the gate again. But he did that one single act to show that all of creation was still there and what was happening was only a moment. So what happened at Fort Snelling? You'd have to be raised in a spiritual life that you're not familiar with because the land talks to you. The memories of all the old people are still present in the land so you get a lot of information. There's no way one person, a group of people, a diverse group of people could say exactly what happened at Fort Snelling. It's something that should have never happened.

DL: Perhaps you can help me with this question which has been put to me: The Dakota feel, believe, that the land was their way of life and it was removed which removed their way of life. However, now ask the Dakota who they displaced because historically they were not the only people who lived in this area. How do you answer that question?

DR: Well, I can almost picture the person that posed the question because there are many of them. If you think of the way warfare was fought before the white folks came, displaced is probably correct but battles were not fought to kill people. Counting coup was honorable. Death sometimes happened. Unfortunate reality in a battle, sometimes death occurs. But counting coup was more important- not killing a person. Moving a person from one spot on this earth to another without restricting them to stay in that one spot. Sometimes they could move one way or the other but the Dakota displaced people and the Dakota were displaced by people. It was pretty much dependant on the needs of the individual bands but it was never intended that someone would be wiped out totally. It was more of a struggle over where someone should be hunting. If things were plentiful, those things didn't occur. Displaced? Yeah, you can view it that way but the reality is they never killed a whole people. They never said, "This is ours and we're going to keep it. If you want some of it you're going to have to pay us for it." Sometimes they negotiated some sort of a peace as it were so that both could occupy one spot. It changed year to year, changed decade to decade. It's an unfair comparison to what happened to the Dakota. The Dakota were more than displaced. One story, I have no way of telling you whether it's true or not, one of my grandfathers, I asked him, "How many Dakotas were there at one time?" He thought a long time. He tried to put it into numbers. He said from what he knew from his grandparents, he thought maybe there was a million of us. How many were there at the turn of the

century? Or how many were there even in 1950 or 1960? Everywhere, there's less than a hundred thousand. So if my grandfather had any truth, a million people down to 80,000 -- that's more than being displaced. You'll have to answer the question yourself.

DL: Camp Release?

DR: That's an interesting place. Mazasa- and you probably know this, was Mazomani's brother. Mazasa [Red Iron] wanted to find a peaceful solution to what was happening to prevent something bad from happening. He disagreed with the battles. Of course the warriors were going that way. He was a significant person. The warriors decided not to challenge him but turned the captives over. The captives were probably more of a security blanket than anything else. 'How do we extricate ourselves from this battle without getting killed completely? Well, we'll take some hostages and do what we can.' Mazasa wanted to hopefully make things better. However it came to be, Mazasa was able to take the captives and keep them relatively safe until someone came to get them. [That created] a big contrast in what he had hoped and what occurred to him- the result was the same. Whether it would have been better if he would have taken his warriors and joined the battle -- it's hard to say but the end result was the same. He wanted something peaceful to come out of it. Some of the trials started there. Some of his own people were tried. That ended in Mankato or Fort McClellan. So it's a place that should be remembered for what it is -- a man seeking a peaceful resolution to a battle he didn't want to fight.

DL: Wood Lake?

DR: Wood Lake -- unusual set of circumstances, an important battle for healing the friendlies. One thing that is not looked at either, maybe a few Dakota do, is if the warriors had not fought, how many people would have been able to escape to Canada or the far places that they ended up? The warriors were defending a great deal at Wood Lake because their families were close. That's where Mazomani was wounded. You know he's buried not too far from here. His family was there. He was looking for a peaceful solution as was his brother but he was killed for his efforts. The 14 to 20-some warriors that are buried out there, they were fighting for the lives of all their people -- friendly or unfriendly. They fought a battle, thought they could win, probably could have except for unfortunate circumstance. But they would have fought whether or not they had a chance of winning. They were fighting for the existence of a people even if some of the people disagreed with them. A warrior's life is to fight for the people, protect them, hunt for them, provide whatever, police. So their life ended the same way as it began. They began a life that led to them to be akicita. Their life ended being akicita. Whether or not anybody has respect for the Dakota warriors, and what they fought, has

really no bearing from my standpoint because their spirits were probably more pure than anyone else's in what they were trying to do.

DL: What does akicita mean?

DR: Today it is translated as a warrior but it means a lot more. If they weren't being warriors, they were the policemen of the village- the societies. There were many societies under an akicita. Sometimes they were hunters. Sometimes they were policemen. Sometimes they were scouts. They were the ones that went ahead of the people to make sure the path was clear. Then sometimes they were the ones that went to battle. But being a warrior was only a small part of being an akicita. I don't know if I could explain an akicita. It kind of translates as "looks after them or looks out over them." That's what an akicita did.

DL: Are you an akicita?

DR: In today's sense of the word? No. In the old sense of the word, I have been for a long, long time.

DL: New Ulm?

DR: New Ulm – ill advised battle. That was probably the worst mistake the Dakotas had made is entering New Ulm prematurely. They could have done significant damage to the non-Indians there but that was in the heat of the battle when the akicita were restricted from doing what they were supposed to be doing for a very long time. They were too hot-headed.

DL: Camp Coldwater?

DR: Camp Coldwater – a place where a spirit used to be but the spirit is gone.

DL: Tell us about the spirit that was there.

DR: A very strong spirit, one of the first. Could be terrible; could be helpful depending on the people. It just stayed there for a long time but it's not [there] anymore. But that's a story that you'd have to live rather than hear.

DL: What's your opinion of the war?

DR: It didn't have to happen but would have happened under any circumstance. It would have been caused one way or another. You can't push people into a corner and expect them to stay there for very long when they start to starve.

DL: You touched on this earlier. What do you think about the treaty?

DR: I think the treaties' purpose was not as they were sold to be. The intent of the treaties was the result that occurred for the other people that came to overcome their moral dilemmas of taking something that didn't belong to them. So they had to fashion a way to overcome these dilemmas to make it seem better for themselves. "Well we didn't really take it; we sat in treaty for that." That's what I think.

DL: Is it a good idea to remember the events of the mid 1800's?

DR: It's always a good idea to remember the history.

DL: Why?

DR: Because if you do something today and forget it tomorrow, what's the purpose of the next day?

DL: What's the best way to remember those events or commemorate them or whatever word you want to use?

DR: It varies from person to person. As a group of people, they should remember both sides and leave the bitterness behind.

DL: This is a very broad question. What contributions have the Dakota people made to Minnesota and the country?

DR: [Laughter] Very significant contribution, the simplest one is: What's the name of the state that you represent at the moment? There were Dakota code talkers in World War II, Dakota code talkers in World War I but they aren't remembered. So they contributed in battles. This is a goofy thing. They contributed in those battles before they were allowed to consume alcohol anywhere in the United States. Their rights were limited, not that that was a bad thing. Dakotas did things without regard to how they were treated. What's lost in that part of history was that the Dakota still did things that were important even though the people they were trying to help gave them little respect outside of what they did. They still went home to the racism, to the poverty, to the racial

bias. [They] couldn't work because nobody would hire them. But they did those things anyway. That was a lesson that many people didn't learn and still have not learned.

DL: What would you wish for Dakota people today?

DR: I wish they would be Dakota.

DL: They're not? Who are they?

DR: Nobody.

DL: How do they become Dakota again?

DR: I've told you. Dakota is not a nation of people. Dakota is a way of life, a manner in which you walk through this world. Dakotas call the white people wasichu. It doesn't mean white man. It means something different. Dakota's call the black people wasichu sapa. It doesn't mean white man or black man. Now today, we have wasichu sa [black man]. It doesn't mean white man, it doesn't mean red man, it doesn't mean anything. But it doesn't mean Dakota, either. What is missing is all those things we talked about. To walk the life of a Dakota, you don't have to be born this color to be Dakota although that is the popular desire and belief today. There were white people that became Dakota at points in history and they lived their life as Dakota and therefore they were Dakota.

DL: That concludes our interview.