

**LaVonne Swenson
Narrator**

**Deborah Locke
Interviewer**

**Lower Sioux Community
February 17, 2011**

**AL = Aimee LaBree
Minnesota Historical Society**

**DL = Deborah Locke
Minnesota Historical Society**

LS = LaVonne Swenson

LW = LaVonne Swenson's sister, Lillian Wilson, was present at the interview

AL: My name is Aimee LaBree, and I am with interviewer, Deborah Locke, and we are interviewing LaVonne Swenson on February 17, 2011. We are at 39817 Reservation Highway 3.

AL: That is LaVonne's address. We are at her sister's home. We'll proceed with the interview.

DL: Hi again. I'm starting with some basic questions. Just spell your name for me.

LS: L-A-V-O-N-N-E A. S-W-E-N-S-O-N.

DL: You mentioned that you are 62 now. Do you have a nickname? And we know the answer to that.

LS: Yes. Peps.

DL: Who gave you that nickname?

LS: My dad.

DL: When you were about what age?

LS: Oh, probably before I could talk.

DL: And did it mean anything special to him, or why did he call you that?

LS: I really don't know. I kind of asked my mother and she said I quit using the bottle early and I liked Pepsi and that's about all I could think of. She said I went off the bottle early and I don't know if that's the true story, or how I got that, but my dad gave everybody nicknames; the whole family and even some people that weren't in our family.

DL: Tell me just the nicknames of your family members.

LS: One is [sounds like] Crulow, one is Slug, one's Dixie, Dodle, Yaker, Schnoock, Sadie, Gus, Miss Muffet. And Scottie, Gun Boat. I can't think of any more right now.

DL: Did your dad have a nickname of his own?

LS: No, his name was Thomas.

DL: What was your father's name, then?

LS: Thomas.

DL: Last name?

LS: Columbus.

DL: Was he Dakota?

LS: Yes.

DL: Where was he from?

LS: Right here.

DL: Did he live here all his life?

LS: Yes.

DL: Are there still people by the last name of Columbus living here?

LS: Yes.

DL: How did he have the last name of Columbus?

LS: Well, I suppose it was after the war or during the war. It was after the war. They couldn't pronounce the Indian names, so when they built the church here, the people got baptized and they changed their names. So they gave names – you may have been working for somebody – you take that name. And because our family was one of the first families here, I'm guessing that's how we got the name, Columbus. Our Indian name was "His Day."

DL: That would seem rather simple to pronounce.

LS: Well, Umpectotawa was my grandfather's name.

DL: Umpectotawa, does that mean something?

LS: His Day.

DL: So you are the granddaughter of Umpectotowa. Who was your grandfather married to?

LS: She [Lillian Wilson] probably could address that.

DL: I'll ask your sister here in a minute, when we get to her.

LS: My mind just went blank; Lucy Wells, I think. Lillian, who was Grandpa married to?

Lillian: Moses?

LS: Yes.

Lillian: Jennie. Wasn't her name Jennie?

LS: No, that was William's.

Lillian: Lucy.

LS: Yes, Lucy Wells.

Lillian: Yes, Lucy Wells.

LS: Okay then, I had it right.

DL: We can just say here that we asked a question of your sister, Lillian, for the tape, for anybody who's listening. Lillian, what last name do you go by?

Lillian: Wilson.

DL: When and where were you born?

LS: I was born in Pipestone at the Indian Hospital.

DL: On what date?

LS: August 22, 1948.

DL: Who were your parents? You mentioned your father as Thomas Columbus. And your mother was?

LS: Iola Jean Mireau.

DL: Where was Iola Jean Mireau from? Was she enrolled at Sisseton?

LS: She was, but then she transferred her membership to Lower Sioux.

DL: How did your parents meet?

LS: Through my mother's sister, Geraldine Dow. She was a little older and she had asked my mother to babysit. At that time they used a wood stove and my dad had to come over and chop wood to warm the place up, and that's how they met.

DL: Is that what that woman wanted; she wanted your parents to get together?

LS: I don't know, I never really asked, but that's what she told me.

DL: So your dad came over to do some wood-chopping and met your mother, who would become his wife.

LS: Yes.

DL: What about your siblings, please tell us who they are.

LS: Well, my dad was married and had seven children, and she's [Lillian is] part of the first family. Then he met my mom, and I'm the oldest of the ten children that they had.

DL: If I do the math, then your father had 17 children. That's a large family. When did he first marry his first wife?

LS: I don't know.

DL: And do you know what her name was?

LS: Eleanor St. Claire. That's her [Lillian's] mother. We had the same dad, but different mothers.

DL: What happened to Eleanor St. Claire, who became Eleanor Columbus? Did she pass on, is that what happened?

LS: Yes.

DL: So he then found another wife and had more children.

LS: Yes.

DL: He then raised all of them.

LS: They were put in boarding school for a while.

DL: Was there a point at which you were all together at once?

LS: Oh, off and on.

DL: How in the world did he feed all of you?

LS: Like I said, after he married my mother, they went to boarding school. But she'll talk about that.

DL: So the older children went off to boarding school.

LS: Yes.

DL: Who were your grandparents?

LS: My grandparents would be Lydia Rose, her maiden name would have been Taylor Mireau. And then she married [sounds like] Flute and then a Goodthunder. That was her last husband.

DL: Her husband's full name was what?

LS: Steven.

DL: Steven Goodthunder.

LS: Steven Mireau was my mother's dad.

DL: Steven Mireau was your mother's dad; your grandpa.

LS: Yes.

DL: And who was your mother's mom?

LS: That was Lydia Rose Taylor.

DL: I'm trying to get the family tree here; it gets complicated.

LS: I suppose it would look better on paper. We could get probably a copy. At our enrollment we have to do a family tree, so that would be easier to look at. Her mother [Lillian] was Anna Taylor – I think she was Anna Hale, but I read through some papers and she was adopted by her mother's sister because her mother passed away when she was young. So the sister raised my great-grandmother.

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

LS: Yes, Lower Sioux.

DL: And who had you enrolled?

LS: Probably my mother.

DL: Do you suppose you were very young, or maybe a little bit older when that happened?

LS: I think it was in the '70s when they were going to get a payment for the Mississippi Funds.

DL: So it was maybe a Federal....

LS: Claims yes.

DL: And she wanted to make sure you were enrolled so you could get that too.

LS: And maybe we were enrolled before that, but I know they were updating everything at that time.

DL: Tell me your siblings' names.

LS: Glen Columbus would be next to me. Alvin Columbus. Sandra Columbus; No, Sandra Geeshick now, her married name. Marilyn His Day; she's the only one, her and her son, took the family name translated. Vince Columbus. Christopher Columbus. Dan Grey Eagle. Melissa Chee. Is that ten? I was trying to go down in order, but then I skipped. Alvin Columbus; he's deceased. Kevin Columbus; he's deceased.

DL: That's probably close to ten. You mentioned a Grey Eagle in there; did he change his name?

LS: Yes, he changed his name.

DL: So, two of your siblings, a sister and a brother, changed their names. Grey Eagle and His Day.

LS: Yes, she changed it to grandpa's name.

DL: Did you grow up on a reservation?

LS: Yes, I've been here most of my life.

DL: At what point did you not live in the community?

LS: Well, I went to school. My grandmother enrolled me at St. Mary's School in Springfield, South Dakota, a church school for Indian girls, when I was 13 or 14. I was there several years.

DL: What do you remember about going to that school?

LS: I hadn't been away from home at all, except for maybe a few weeks to go to a Cass Lake Camp. I was very lonely. It seemed so far away. Of course, my folks didn't have a phone; you couldn't call, and it was kind of a sad time. Once I got involved in their schedule and knew what was going on, I liked the school. It was all girls. I think what made it harder still, was they had a program called, "Summer Home Program." So after the school year was done, we would go into the Twin Cities area and babysit for our tuition to go back to school, for families in the Twin Cities area. We'd come home maybe two weeks and then go back to school. That was kind of hard then, being a big family and being around your siblings. But you got used to it.

DL: So you were sort of a nanny for other families.

LS: When they went on vacation, I would just go along with them. So if they went on vacation, like one went to the Ozarks and had family there and they'd just take me along and I'd watch the children.

DL: How old were you then?

LS: 13, 14.

DL: Do you remember any of the names of the families?

LS: One was Youngs; I remember them.

DL: Where did they live?

LS: They lived around Edina.

DL: Did you stay at their home?

LS: Yes.

DL: So how long were you at that school?

LS: Maybe three years, two years, two and a half?

DL: Do you know why your grandma had you enrolled there?

LS: No, she never said.

DL: Was it religious affiliated?

LS: Yes, it was; Episcopal.

DL: We'll get back to that in a little bit, here. Do you have family members at other reservations?

LS: No. I've got a brother that lives in California. He moved away when he was young; 17, 18, after he joined the service. Then he just stayed in California.

DL: The question is, how long have you lived here? We sort of covered that – most of your life except for when you were 13.

LS: I went to school in the Twin Cities two years.

DL: About what year was that?

LS: That was in '97.

DL: What did you go to school for, and where?

LS: I went to the Indian AOIC. [American Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center]

DL: That Work Force, OIC?

LS: Yes.

DL: And what did you study?

LS: Business management and word processing.

DL: Where did you live while you were doing that?

LS: I stayed with my aunt, my mother's sister, in Saint Paul.

DL: And did you get a job from that background?

LS: No. After I finished there I came back and got into insurance and did insurance; life, health, and the works – auto and property casualty. You've gotta carry all those to be in the bond business.

DL: I guess I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit here. We still have to get you through elementary school. Here's the next one: concerning your education, we talked about the boarding school in South Dakota, but prior to that, what's your earliest memory of a school around here?

LS: I went to the Bishop Whipple Mission School here, and it's still standing. It's at the reservation. It's the Social Services building; that's who's in the building now, Social Service.

DL: Tell me about that school. What do you remember from being a child at that school?

LS: I remember we walked to school and it was just right past the church there, so probably a third of a mile. I was there from first to sixth grade. In the middle area was the school area. They had grades one through six. The next room was a lunch room and we'd eat there every day, a hot meal. Then the third room was a library/play area. So we had all six grades in one room.

DL: Do you remember any of your teachers?

LS: I only had one through the whole six grades; her name was Mrs. [sounds like] Keldon. And I visited her up until, probably five years ago; she was still alive. And I've got nothing but good memories of the school.

DL: What was your favorite class, and do you have other memories from then?

LS: Oh wow, how do I start? [The teacher] was very, very understanding, gentle, patient -- I guess that would probably be one of the ways to describe her. She was a Norwegian lady. When I look back at all the teachers that I've had through the years, she's the one I remember. To hold six classes in one room, really took something. So I'd say [there were] maybe 20 children. I had one boy in my class, whom I still visit today. I saw him New Year's Eve, and we're going to visit in March, eat together in the Twin Cities. We always talk about our teacher and memories of the school and the games we played.

Of course, there wasn't much money there. The one game we thought about was when a lot of the kids would stand in a circle and [the teacher would] bring one of her old shoes and tie a rope on it and swing it around and everybody would jump over it. So they made a game out of that shoe. Whoever got the shoe stood in the middle and twirled the shoe around while the kids jumped over it. She really had a lot of ways

where we didn't need money to have fun. And that had to have been hard on rainy days, to have everybody in that small room. I go look at it now, and the building is offices. Where did all the children play with all the books? It amazes me how we got through that. That's probably one of the good memories that I have of being a child, away from my family, was in that little school room. We used to have neighboring schools come visit maybe just to come and see the Indian children. We'd sing songs for them and got to visit with the younger children.

DL: Where was your family home located?

LS: Right next door here.

DL: To this home here? Is it still standing?

LS: No, not the original one. But the home site is still there, and it's still Columbus-owned.

DL: Did all of the children walk to school?

LS: Yes.

DL: Sometimes you had pretty severe weather here, where the land is so flat. How did you even find your way when it was really bad in the winter?

LS: My dad would walk us.

DL: And then he'd probably go get you at the end of the day, to make sure you got back?

LS: Yes.

DL: How did your home stay warm in the winter months?

LS: Wood; a wood stove.

DL: Dad chopped the wood?

LS: Yes. I even helped. That was one of my first jobs. We'd have to go across the ravine there, and he'd pick the tree and then he'd cut it in smaller branches where the kids could drag it. And the boys would drag it and my job was to sit on the wood while they cut it.

DL: To hold it in place?

LS: I'd be sitting on, what do they call it, the sawhorse, like an X, and then put the wood across and I'd sit there and two of them would cut the wood.

DL: How old were you when you remember doing that?

LS: Probably three. I would sit on the wood. Just to be outside, I suppose, just to be a part of things and get out and be involved.

DL: What would Mom do to keep herself busy all day long?

LS: Oh, she had a lot to do. She'd cook and bake and sew. Even my dad helped sew.

DL: Sew the children's clothes?

LS: Mostly [he made] heavy duty things. He'd make us mittens and lining for boots.

DL: Did your parents talk Dakota?

LS: Yes.

DL: What was your very first language?

LS: English.

DL: So they spoke both at home?

LS: Yes.

DL: Did you learn enough of the language so you could talk it?

LS: No. They would never speak it to us.

DL: I wonder why that was.

LS: Well, because she said they were punished in school. When they went to boarding school they were punished for speaking it and they didn't want us to be punished. So that's where our language stopped in our family.

DL: We're getting a picture of the house you lived in. How many bedrooms in that house?

LS: There were two bedrooms downstairs, and one big room upstairs. The babies probably stayed in with my folks, and then the rest stayed upstairs.

DL: In the big room.

LS: Yes.

DL: And who were you closest to as a child, which of your brothers and sisters?

LS: Well, me being the eldest...

DL: You were the oldest?

LS: Yes. I would help with all of them. I couldn't say that I was closer to any one of them. I was kind of a second little mom. [Laughter] I'm thinking maybe that's why my grandmother seen that, and she got me out of the home. And I was becoming a teenager. My grandfather was a missionary and traveled to Montana and North Dakota and South Dakota, so she was in the Episcopal Church. He was a Presbyterian, but she switched to Episcopalian. To this day; the biggest influence in my life was my grandmother.

DL: Your grandmother was your closest relative.

LS: Yes, because she raised me, pretty much.

DL: You stayed at her house part of the time?

LS: A lot. She would take me in the summers. I think at six months old, I started going and staying with her.

DL: In the summers, or year-round?

LS: In the summers, mostly.

DL: That happened a lot with Indian children often staying with their grandparents.

LS: Yes, and you learned from her. Like my brother and I are ten months and so many days apart, so she was busy raising him. My grandmother would take me and I'd be with her. Some of my earliest memories are being bathed in a metal little tub where she'd heat the water on the stove and she'd put it in there and she'd give me a bath.

DL: What was your grandma's name; which grandma was that?

LS: Lydia; Lottie, we called her. My mother's mother. I never did know my dad's mother.

DL: So grandma sort of took over you and raised you as her daughter?

LS: Yes.

DL: What did she teach you? You said she knew a lot. Did she know a lot of the traditions?

LS: She, by this time she was Christian. She had taught me the Christian way. She was living in Flandreau, South Dakota. She moved closer, and I would go spend quite a bit of the summer with her. So we'd get up, sometimes the sun would come up before 5 and we'd be up. She'd have our breakfast made, we would say our morning prayers, walk a mile and a half, probably, to go to church. So she instilled Christianity in me. I'm still active today, in the church. It was an Episcopal girl's school.

DL: She wanted you in a church school.

LS: Yes.

DL: You were here then, until you were in sixth grade, that would be about the age of 11 or so.

LS: 12, probably.

DL: You mentioned that was a very comfortable place to be and that you had a really good teacher. Do you remember any of the specific subjects that you learned?

LS: Well, we had the same, subjects that other schools had at that time. We had reading and math and social studies. I don't know if it was called history at that time, but [we had] the social studies part. I went to the spelling bee in the county when I was probably in fifth grade.

DL: Were you a good reader?

LS: I was a pretty good student.

DL: How'd you do at the spelling bee?

LS: I made it quite a ways, but I didn't become one of the finalists.

DL: Tell me about the first time you remember leaving this community and going into the non-Indian world.

LS: It was probably after I left the school here and went into the Morton School area. That seemed like a huge school, which is still standing today. It was kind of frightening, I guess. You didn't know what to expect. I don't remember how we even got to school. Anyway, I didn't stay too long down there in Morton, before my grandmother put me in school in South Dakota.

DL: What you're saying then, is you spent most of your childhood here. You had no reason to go into the communities around here. You were able to just live here, go to school here with your family...

LS: Go to church.

DL: Go to church here, and be fine right here. There was no reason to go anywhere else at that time.

LS: My grandmother had me over in South Dakota, though. Flandreau, South Dakota.

DL: And then later, Grandma had you in school.

LS: Yes.

DL: And that school was in Flandreau?

LS: South Dakota, Springfield. So it was a ways from her home, too.

DL: Where did Grandma live, again?

LS: She lived in Flandreau.

DL: She was in Flandreau. Now I'm understanding. And that's where you would go in the summertime.

LS: Yes.

DL: Was it hard to go to Grandma's and leave home?

LS: Not to Grandma's, it wasn't. But to school, to school it was.

DL: How did you get to Grandma's, far away?

LS: Dad had an old car. We would all jump in it a few times. My mother would fix a lunch. She'd have, we'd call it cabooboo bread; it's a round, flat, made in a flat pan. And she'd fry chicken, or we'd have a little lunch. And most of the time the car broke down. We'd all get out and get up on the ditch and sit along the field area while he'd fix the car, whether it was the water pump or a flat tire. That happened a lot. So he'd be scraping and we'd sit there and that's where we'd eat our lunch. We'd be sitting on the ditch, up on top, with a blanket laid out, and we'd all be eating while he fixed the car. He'd get in and take off.

DL: How did your dad make a living for all of you?

LS: He was a mason. There's a lot of stone fireplaces and stuff that he made around the area. And he worked at a mortuary for a time. Mostly a laborer. They had a brick plant about 25 miles from here and he worked there, too. But he used to make stone chimneys and brick chimneys. He'd point it out to us in Redwood, where we still see them.

DL: I'm sorry I don't have the opportunity to talk to him to see what it was like to raise 14 children with 14 mouths to feed.

LS: Well, I think he was way too busy. But the memory I have of my dad that I tell, I told my son-in-law, I said, when they first got married and had my first grandchild, I said, "You know," I said, "What I learned from my dad was self esteem." And he probably never knew that. So I was telling my son-in-law, I said, "You know, my dad, he worked hard," I said. "But he still had time when I brought my little pictures home and would show it, and he'd be all surprised." "Oh, ain't this beautiful," and "Oh, you did a good job," and it made me want to keep doing that and doing my best." So that's where I got so I'd bring home an "A," and he'd really be surprised.

DL: Your father was encouraging, then.

LS: Yes. That's the one I think I got my self-esteem from, was my dad.

DL: He was very wise to do that with his children. Would you say, was it a home where you were raised – how could you keep that many children behaving? I mean, how would your parents raise you?

LS: I think, like you said, they were wise. My grandmother gave me all the attention where I learned how to behave. It was kind of like a role model process, how you react to certain things. And Grandma, she was calm and understanding, and she gave me the time to know how to deal with crisis and stuff like that. It's probably made me who I am and [influenced] how I raise my children. My mother was busy cleaning and cooking and baking and sewing. I was kind of like a little mini mom with the children. I would play teacher with the kids, and then we played games outside.

DL: Little mini mom. What would you say was the best part of your childhood? Was it Grandma, was it the little ones? Your dad, your mom?

LS: I can't pinpoint just one because I think it was the whole family, the loyalty in the family, where we had an extended family. Like, if my mother was too busy to ask questions of, there was Grandma. Or we had dad time, too. I would help him do chores to be with him, where he probably didn't have time to sit down with each individual child, to give that time that kids need – the nurturing. But they did spend their time and my dad did a lot of – I wouldn't say he was a workaholic, but he did Pipestone, he did crafts. And when he'd come back from work he'd have to cut wood. It was hard; when you look back at it now, it was a hard life, but it was done with love for your family and their comfort. And then the boys would hunt and he taught them what trees to cut down so you wouldn't have chimney fires. And so they all got their time and knowledge.

DL: What food do you remember eating as a child?

LS: A lot of potatoes and meat. Sunday dinners we'd have Jello in the wintertime. So our foods kind of went by the season. We'd have rabbit and deer and stuff in the cold – it would be different. And then she'd cook outside over the open fire in the summers. We had a well where they would put meat and stuff – we called it the cistern, where it would keep cool. And I remember when we first got margarine, we used to all fight to squeeze that little bag – there was a little bag like this, and there was a little red dot, and you had to squeeze it to get the yellow into the thing, so we all had fun doing that. That was not a chore for us.

DL: You mentioned some of the happier times about growing up. What were the harder times about growing up?

LS: Probably winters. Winters would be a little harder. At that time you didn't think of it as a job; it was just something that had to get done, and we'd get it done, like the wood chopping and sawing. The boys would haul the wood in and Mom would have a nice big kettle of soup and fry bread, and then some kind of pudding or something to dunk it in. So those together times when the work was done, you'd come in to a nice warm place.

DL: Winters, were they pretty severe and were they long? Did they seem long, too?

LS: They did seem long.

DL: What about your immediate neighbors? Did you know the people around you, or were they too far away?

LS: No, they were close. This has been the same since I've been here, the distance between the homes.

DL: You knew your neighbors, then.

LS: You knew your neighbors.

DL: Was there ever a crisis you remember, where you helped out, or they helped out?

LS: They used to play a lot of cards. My aunts would come over and they'd play cards and they'd eat and sing. They all knew how to play instruments back then. That was taught in school. My mother played piano. My dad could play just about any instrument that there was. So that was taught in school. One guy played the violin. One played guitar, and all my brothers could play some instrument. We always had a piano in the house. We'd go pound on it, and finally we'd learn little tunes, but that's all the further it went. My mother played piano, so a lot of times we'd be able to sing and that was a fun way to pass the winters.

DL: What card games did they play?

LS: I remember one was canasta, whist, and I forget the other one. Anyway, whoever lost, they'd take the inside of the stove, the soot, and they'd mark like this, and by the end you'd know who was the loser, because they'd be sitting there all full of soot. They got to mark them when they lost a hand or something like that. I don't remember the name of that one, but that was a fun even for us to see our elders sitting around, playing cards. So they would amuse themselves with cards during the wintertime.

DL: When you mentioned the music, I should have asked then, what songs do you remember from then? What were they playing?

LS: Probably the songs of the time then. Even today my grandkids could sing, "You Are My Sunshine," and stuff like that. "Down By the Old Mill Stream," is one. "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." My husband taught that one to my granddaughter. She might remember some of them, because she sings. She would know the names of them.

DL: For entertainment then, you would remember the adults with their music and singing and playing cards. It sounds like fun.

LS: It was, because all different families would come at certain times. I wish I had recordings because they'd sing hymns and then sing songs of the day and harmonize.

DL: Was there a church choir?

LS: I don't remember a church choir, no.

DL: Can you sing?

LS: I sing in church. But she'll [Lillian] get up in front of a crowd, like at funerals and wakes and any church doings and stuff.

DL: You mentioned that your grandma was Christian, she'd been baptized and so forth, and she wanted her grandchildren, obviously, raised in the Christian faith as well. But did she ever know any Dakota ways?

LS: Oh yeah, she did. Traditional, she did. And she told me, she said the traditional way is very good, but she said you gotta watch out for like false prophets. She said some of the traditional people are going astray. She said it was a beautiful, beautiful way of life. And I was thinking about that and it kind of made me think. She was given away in marriage. That was the last one in our family to be given away in marriage.

DL: What do you mean, given away?

LS: Her mother and them, picked who she was going to marry.

DL: Is that a tradition in your culture?

LS: Yes. So that you didn't marry somebody too close.

DL: And did she have a good marriage; was she happy?

LS: Well, if I put myself in her position, she stayed with that man, my grandfather, until he passed away. In later years she told me she never loved that man. She fell in love in her elder age, and she's buried with him at Fort Snelling.

DL: Her second husband?

LS: Her third husband. She said, "I fell in love when I was an older person." And of course by then they didn't have any children, but she told me that when I was older, that she never loved my grandpa.

DL: Her mother determined that she would marry this man – when she was very young?

LS: I don't know how old.

DL: When you say she was given away, was there an exchange of some sort?

LS: There may have been, but I don't know. I think I heard the story one time, but it escapes me now, what was given.

DL: An exchange.

LS: Yes.

DL: Did she know the ways of like, medicines or herbs, or anything like that that she passed on to you? Sometimes Indian grandmas were in charge of the crops and they knew...

LS: No. She was pretty much into the Christian way. I guess she did go with my grandfather to the different reservations to spread Christianity. My mother's mother, the one in the picture there, Mikushi, we call her, great-grandmother, she's the one that was into medicines. She then in turn taught my mother all about medicine. So the few things I know, I used to go pick medicine with my mother, and she still had some roots and stuff when she passed, that I just burned with her clothing because I didn't know what they were for. She used to give medicine away to different people.

DL: She was able to help them, improve their health and they felt better.

LS: Yes.

DL: The very first medicines in human history came from the forests.

LS: Yes. And they're going back to that, because there's no side effects.

DL: You have some interesting women who taught you.

LS: Yes, I know.

DL: Look how long it's taking us – we're still in elementary school. We asked about your favorite subjects and what kind of student you were. You were a good student; you studied, you got good marks. As a child, did you ever think of a future and what you wanted to be?

LS: No. We were just living in the....

DL: Living in the day.

LS: Yes.

DL: What did you do after school when you would get home in the afternoon?

LS: Well, we got the wooded area here, depending on the season. We would mostly be hanging around out in the woods. We would go eat. We had blueberries, we had strawberries, we had raspberries, we had gooseberries, we had choke cherries. A lot of times we'd go pick berries with the folks, Grandma, Great-grandma and my mother. And then we'd come back and of course, they'd make bread and then we'd have a little snack.

So when they weren't along, we'd just go explore in the woods. Turn over rocks, find bugs and snakes and baby birds and we'd find nests. We'd end up maybe going down by the river. In wintertime we'd go sliding in the woods; we'd take cardboard.

DL: Down a hill.

LS: Yes. And then sometimes the hood of cars. That was pretty dangerous though, because sometimes you'd have to end up jumping off before you hit a tree. But it would still go.

DL: You would hang onto the back of a car?

LS: The hood, it would turn upside down and we'd all jump on and you'd start going. And you couldn't steer it or nothing, and if you started going into a tree, everybody would dive off. And in the summer times we'd have a lot of grapevines around here, and of course we got the valleys. We'd get on those grapevines and swing way out there. And the younger children that came with us, maybe we'd get up to five people swinging on one. A lot of times the young kids would fall off. So there went my dad, he started chopping them all down and so you'd have to go way over there to play on the

vines. We'd find another one, though, growing. So that was part of our after school activities: Find new grapevines.

DL: Those vines – they were strong enough to hold five kids?

LS: Yes. Some of them got this big.

DL: I'd say you showed me something about three to four inches wide?

LS: Yes, easy. And then of course, the smaller ones, you'd get two people on there, but you'd have to hang on, because you'd go a long ways off. If you go look at this valley here, this ravine we'd call this one, you'd be able to go and jump off to the other side.

DL: Fun!

LS: It was.

DL: I wish I could go back and get that picture.

LS: Yes. And then we'd pile leaves and jump into it. In the summertime, this one was a dangerous one: the top, where you turned here, and about down to around that bend, they have a culvert there. And in the rainy season we'd all crawl through there; it was a long ways to go, and sometimes there'd be animals in there. So the boys would go ahead and go first. And then there was a bend in it. So that was one of our things that we weren't supposed to do, but we liked to do it because there was water running and it was cool to go in there. And we'd take clothes along and change in the woods before we'd come home.

DL: Because you'd get wet.

LS: You'd get wet and muddy and full of sticks and whatever else went down – cans and whatever people threw out.

DL: When you were a little girl, was there a radio playing at home?

LS: Yes, we had a radio.

LS: Probably the parents, mostly. But we were curious; we'd peek in that little thing [the radio] to see where the people were. Tried to peek in and look through where the light came on. It was a big thing like this where they would turn it on and listen to different programs. We weren't interested in that; we didn't sit still that long. We'd be drawing or something. We had a kerosene lamp, and that's what we did homework by.

DL: After sixth grade, you started school in Morton?

LS: I started school in Morton.

DL: Which school was it?

LS: Morton High School, I think.

DL: You would have started in the seventh grade there, then.

LS: Yes.

DL: What was that like?

LS: It was a whole lot different than the little country school here we went to, because we didn't know any of the children there. Like I said, there was only one boy in my class, and they were all in different classes, so you really didn't get to see anybody that you knew during the day. So that was kind of a, I wouldn't say a shock, but an adjustment that you had to make. And then the food; the food was different. Here we had, like I said, my godmother, she was a cook, she was a very good cook. We had everything we needed there. We got to have seconds.

DL: This was at the little school.

LS: Yes. So even the food was different for us. And here you could take your time and eat, because after that we had recess. There, you had to be on schedule on everything.

DL: And the food was unfamiliar.

LS: Yes.

DL: How did the teachers treat you? Did they treat you as nicely as your favorite teacher here?

LS: No. Because we had too many in the classroom, one classroom.

DL: So you kind of lost that sense of being special.

LS: Yes.

DL: The class was bigger, and there were many Non-Indians. Was that the first time that you encountered a lot of non-Indian children?

LS: Yes.

DL: How did they react to you, and how did you react to them?

LS: Well, I just did my best and that was my focus, was to do the best I could and learn. So that kind of pushed away any being different. They can't call me, dummy, or something like that; I was going to do my best. And I don't know if I said, "I'll show 'em," I wasn't that kind of a mind set, but I was going to do my best. I didn't stay there that long, because I went to the South Dakota school then.

DL: Why did your grandma encourage you to go to the other school?

LS: She never did say, but I'm just guessing it was because it was a church school and it was just for Indian girls. And maybe she knew somebody, or maybe a friend talked her into it, I don't know. But anyway, I ended up being there. It seemed like my mother didn't have a say in it.

DL: Did your grandma tell you you were going to the school, or did your parents?

LS: My mother did.

DL: What was your first reaction?

LS: At that time you don't question.

DL : You just said okay.

LS: Yes. And so then we got busy getting clothing ready. They had a list; I had to go get a physical and all of that, and so that kept my mind off being gone until I was actually going. You forget about it for then, doing all this stuff, and pretty soon you're on the ride.

DL: For how many years were you there?

LS: Probably, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth—at least three years.

DL: So you were there through the tenth grade?

LS: Tenth grade, yes.

DL: Did you get homesick for your family?

LS: Yes. I got homesick even in Springfield because I never was away from Grandma, I had all of her attention and love, and anything I wanted. You were kind of almost spoiled. So I had all her attention and that was easy to be away from home.

DL: So you're at the boarding school for a couple of years. Were you a good student there too?

LS: Yes.

DL: Did you do homework?

LS: We had to get up extra early and religion was a part of our school. You'd learn the gospels, you'd study, and that was one of your grades. We had to wear dresses, uniforms. And then we'd go to church, and then we'd come back and we'd eat, and then go to school. So that part was different than going to the Morton School.

DL: Were your teachers good?

LS: Yes.

DL: And what did you do for fun there?

LS: I was part of the basketball team. And because they didn't have much for girls competition, we played the colleges. We beat them all, our little high school girl's team. We were the best, I guess.

DL: What position did you play?

LS: For the girl's team you could play either; you could play guard, or you switched back and forth, wherever you're needed. We had some good girls on the team.

DL: Sounds like it.

LS: Boy, they were good.

DL: Did you graduate from that school?

LS: No. Every time we won, we'd get a steak dinner at the school. So that was something different, where the other girls, they couldn't come in there. They'd set up a table for us and they'd make us steaks. We were kind of privileged in that part, where you wouldn't get such good meals at the boarding school, normally.

DL: Did you quit school?

LS: Yes, eventually I did.

DL: You didn't go through graduation, because it just wasn't important, or what were your thoughts?

LS: After I left the boarding school I came back and went to Redwood Falls School. And I don't remember, why did I go there and not Morton? I think I was taking Latin, and to get my credits I had to go to Redwood Falls School. So, there was no bus service – or was there? Let me back up here: Morton had grades seven through 12, and I could have went there, but to get my credits I went to Redwood Falls School to finish,

and to get my credits for Latin. And there I took Spanish, so I had to take that for two years to get my credits. And I was going back and forth to school in a car and my parents would pay for the gas and stuff. Finally in the end, the principal of the school, his name was Mr. [sounds like] Anseth, had two boys in college, and he wanted me to move in with him, because he was going to see that I was going to go to college. And my parents couldn't afford the gas going every day back and forth to school, so I ended up staying with, he was a Dodge garage car dealer in town, so I just lived out there and rode the bus into town. I was a mile from town. So now that I think about it, I wasn't home too much, it seemed like. So I went to school in Redwood Falls, and then because I was getting good grades, in my mind I thought, well, I don't have to finish. I'll just get my GED. And they let me.

DL: And your parents were okay with it?

LS: No, they weren't. They had their plans and the principal had his plans; it seems like everybody was going to send me somewhere, and I guess I just had other plans. At that time I had met a young lady that was an immigrant Spanish girl, and she was on her own, she didn't have any parents. And we became good friends. Anyway, she said, "You can go to work right now and make good money." And so I took off with her and we ended up in Texas. And so I got to experience how their lifestyle was. That was hard. Get up early, early. Get out in those wet fields, muddy and dirty and hot and bugs. But we made it. But it was hard.

DL: What work was it?

LS: Working in the field.

DL: Crops?

LS: Crops. Bean fields and beets. We didn't have anybody to take over for us, it was just her and I. And of course we got a check, but it sure didn't seem worth it at the time or for the money that we received for it. You'd get a little room with nothing in it. It sure wasn't like home. I learned. Nobody there to care for you or cook, or help. After I got done there, I called my mother and she sent me a bus ticket, and I came home. So that was an experience that I'll never forget, I guess.

DL: You must have been, what, 18?

LS: Yes, I was almost 18. But I was 18 by the time I got back.

DL: What's your first memory of world events, the first news story you remember hearing as a young person?

LS: The Kennedy assassination. We were sitting in class in 1963. That was the biggest one I remember.

DL: What was your feeling when you heard that news?

LS: Just the sadness. Sadness and a great loss. Because you'd hear the families talking about how good a man he was and how much he was doing for the common people. And then you learned in school, the current events and stuff. So it was a loss, and everybody felt it at that time. That was November 22nd and we were sitting in class.

DL: How was the announcement made?

LS: Over the intercom.

DL: We talked about your relatives that had influence on you. I was going to ask if your family celebrated the holidays. How did they do that?

LS: Christmases, we would go to the church and they would pass out gifts. The school, they would have a program where we would get little gifts from the school. But we would all be involved in a play, a certain kind of play, and we'd dress up in costumes and use the church hall, the stage. And that was a fun time. But it seemed like everybody was shy at that time, because I think you didn't go any place outside of your home to know anybody other than your family, your close extended family, and those who would come to visit. Other than that, you didn't go any place else. You'd go, probably once a year. Probably once a year, just before school, you'd go get your new pair of shoes and your coat and hat and mittens and that. But other than that, I didn't go anywhere to the stores, or outside of the church and school here.

DL: Your clothes, did your mother make your clothes when you were a little girl?

LS: My aunt used to make my clothes. She was a seamstress.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name?

LS: No.

DL: What did you learn about Dakota history when you were growing up? Did your grandma ever talk to you about the history of the people as a whole? Or your grandpa, or anyone?

LS: No, I think they tried to, like even from the boarding schools, I don't think those were happy times and they didn't talk much about them. If they did, they'd talk in the Dakota language.

DL: So you couldn't understand them.

LS: Yes. I know my grandpa would be singing Indian songs in the back, and there was one song that we sing in church, that they sang at the hanging when they were going to get hung in 1862. We still sing that song.

DL: How does that song go?

LS: It goes – it's got about seven verses, and it's got a kind of a – it's not an upbeat tune: It goes: "Many and great, oh God, are your works, maker of heaven and earth." And it talks about all things good: "Thanks for giving us this day," and it's beautiful.

DL: How does the melody go, can you hum just a little of it?

LS: "Many and great, oh God, are your works, maker of heaven and earth." Then it goes real high. [Humming] You gotta sing it loud to bring out the... I'm going to have to get you those words. It's all written in Dakota, but somebody translated it. So we'll be singing one verse in English, one verse of Dakota, and then another verse of English.

DL: And the prayer is for what?

LS: It's giving thanks for their lives and all the blessings that were given to them. It's about now that they're going to be going to see their maker – I guess they were holding hands when they were singing this – and that was their last song. But they were happy to be going and to take care of those left behind. I'll have to get you that. I think we got copies at the church. Write that down.

DL: Get lyrics.

LS: Get lyrics for "The Many And Great." And I'll understand.

DL: I'm glad you brought that up, because I wanted to ask you next about anything you recall hearing about the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War, during your growing up years. Do you have any family members who lived through that time, or later ones who talked about it?

LS: We have a relative in Canada, and her, was it her grandmother – she said it took them seven years to get from here to where they are now, at Sioux Valley [Canada]. She told me that because it was all prairie, they had to travel in the day, they would dig down into the ground and lay that buffalo robe over the top – buffalo skin.

DL: To hide?

LS: To hide, because they'd look over the prairie and they'll see nothing but flat. And they'd be laying, dug in, and it would be cool with that skin over the top. So when the troops were coming looking for them, they'd look and see nobody and keep going. And of course they'd travel by night; not dark, dark, but towards dusk and real early.

DL: They walked then. They couldn't have horses because you could see.

LS: No.

DL: So they started from where?

LS: They started from Lower Sioux here; that's where they were all from.

DL: And walked up to Canada.

LS: Yes.

DL: And it took seven years.

LS: Seven years.

DL: How did they survive along the way?

LS: Berries, I suppose, and probably fish. They dried their foods.

DL: Do you know if they had help from any people along the way?

LS: She never did say. She just said that that's what sticks out in my memory when she was talking.

DL: The way they had to hide at night.

LS: Yes. And even during the day, that's how they would hide.

DL: And this is what kind of relative to you?

LS: She would be my grandma's cousin, Lottie. Lottie's cousin. She said that's how they....

DL: They survived.

LS: Yes.

DL: So, do you stay in touch with the Canadian Dakota at all?

LS: Yes. I remember when I first learned to drive, I would drive my grandmother up to Canada to visit her relatives.

DL: Did they ever regret having to go up there? Did they ever want to come back?

LS: Well, when you go up there, they've held onto their traditions. They've got their original names, they use their Indian name. They've held onto more of the language and the culture. Right now there's probably a little over 10,000 Dakotas, Mdewakantons

from this community in Canada. They live on probably, oh, maybe five Sioux reservations from this area.

DL: So you have quite a large family north of here, too.

LS: Yes.

DL: I suppose they were able to handle their language and their ways in a way that was more... they could preserve it better.

LS: Well, even there, they call them, not boarding schools, they call them something else. What's sad is there, the Canadian government just paid a lot of the residential school students – they were called residential schools. The kids that went to them got a big payment, hundreds of thousands of dollars.

DL: In reparations.

LS: Yes.

DL: I heard about that.

LS: Because 50,000 Indian children never came home. Ain't that sad. So here [in the U.S.] at least, they came home. But I went to – now this ain't part of the story, but in Canada, it's called Maple Creek, they have Healing and Medicine International Day up there, and it's usually in September. And we decided to go. And they've kind of got rolling hills like that, and there were teepee's as far as you could see. You go down this valley and they had one big tent and then you look over here and they had seven teepees of healing. And they had invited medicine men, medical doctors, people from every tribe, and even non-Indians to this Healing and Medicine Day. I think it was the second year that we attended. And they were going to decide at that time whether they were going to let the Indian medicine be known to the public. Anyway, they had decided at that time that they weren't, because they said it would lose its healing value, or the strength of it because they were going to be selling it. So they decided at that time they weren't going to. But you go there, and it's just kind of like one big family. You sit down on the hills and they'd feed you and everything. But you'd hear stories from last year – people were healed from cancer, from AIDS. They had medicine men from South America that healed. And they had one man that would stand there from the tee pee, all the seven teepees, nobody could go back there unless you wanted healing. So you'd go to this guy and you'd tell him what you want or what you needed, and he'd tell you which tee pee to go to. So you'd hear stories about that. And then you'd hear sad stories about the rapes and stuff. The men, that was part of their healing, to tell their story of what happened in the boarding schools. And the women and the girls. It was sad. And that was a way to bring about some of the healing by telling their stories.

DL: You mentioned that some of your family had to flee into Canada as fast as they could go. Why did they feel compelled to run to Canada?

LS: Well, at that time there was a bounty on all the Indians.

DL: So they were just running in general.

LS: They were just running after the war. I suppose a lot of them got away maybe after the riverboat ride; maybe even before. I didn't get to hear that much of a detail, but I just heard that's how they got there. And then one thing she said: if somebody passed away along the way, they'd put them in a tree, say their good-byes and then go, because they couldn't carry them. Normally they wouldn't do that, leave relatives behind. That had to have been something different for them.

DL: Very difficult.

LS: Yes. But they picked a place that has the same valley. You go to Sioux Valley; it looks exactly like Lower Sioux, so they found a home with a river, with a valley and the prairie.

DL: So that's what they were looking for; something similar.

LS: And they found it.

DL: And they found it. And they're safe. There was no bounty in Canada.

LS: No.

DL: We talked a little bit about the stories you may have heard. Do you remember how old you were when you heard these stories? Did your parents talk about them, or your grandma, or did anybody else talk about that chapter of history?

LS: No.

DL: Just didn't talk about it.

LS: Yes.

DL: Now, what is your opinion about – this is just your opinion – what is your opinion about the aftermath of that war, about what happened afterward to the Dakota people?

LS: Well, I guess it scattered everyone, even your family. Families were torn apart. Like my grandpa and them ended up in South Dakota in Flandreau for a time until they built the church and they were able to come back when things settled down. And they had to survive off the land, which they knew how to do, but like the cold and winters

killed how many? They had to suffer. And I just wonder how my relatives made it through all of that, how difficult a time that had to have been, to be able to survive.

DL: We're very close to the battlefields right here, now.

LS: Yes.

DL: This may seem like an odd question, but do you ever feel a sense of history here, like something happened, or you know, like – I don't like to use the word ghosts or spirits, but can you ever feel another presence?

LS: I never thought of it like that.

DL: So when you see the Birch Coulee Field....

LS: Oh yes, then it takes you back to: just think, in history you're part of what went on here. I'm a survivor of those same people and we have picnics down there, and pow-wows and just think that at that time, they had pow wows back then and it had to have been a happy time. And then for it to turn to tragedy, and how many lost their lives, including children? You get a sense of belonging to that part of history and surviving, and still being here too. Your family tree keeps going on, where some families ended. And it makes you think how things could have been or would have been now.

DL: What do you think about the treaties that were struck, like in 1858 and 1851? Do you have any impression of them, or did you ever see them, or read them?

LS: I read all of them. I used to be kind of like on the Treaty Council, and being a part of what's called the Seven Council Fire, it would be all the Sioux Nations. I used to attend meetings on those. And they're still going on to this day, trying to unite the whole Sioux Nation and bring those Seven Council Fires back into one Nation. I don't like to think on our relationship with the government at that time, because all the treaties I know of were broken. Where they were sacred to the Native peoples, they didn't mean anything to the government. And even at that time we read that it was some of the clergy people, the churches, that were interpreters for some of the treaties. And I can see where some people are angry still, with what happened in history over our treaties, where they blamed that even for our boarding schools – how could those Christians do that to little children, or to our people. So we still have, at funerals, we have traditional and Christian together at one funeral.

But with treaties, you kind of get little hope. [President] Obama, the new president, he said that he wanted to have government-to-government relations with the tribes. So that makes you think, well, maybe we're going to be treated on an equal base. But I haven't seen that yet.

DL: What is your understanding of the start of that war?

LS: Food. They were supposed to be paid for the land that they were giving up, ten miles either side of the river. They were told at that time, "Yeah, the gold's coming, the gold's coming." They kept putting them off, putting them off. And the stone building over here, that's where they stored it. And they were starving. They had given all the land away. They didn't have any food to eat, and that was the rations that they were supposed to be given, entitled to for payment. So a couple of the people of the tribe broke into that [storage building] and killed to get food. And that's when one of the, I don't know what he was – some kind of officer– he said, "Let them eat grass." So that's something we hear every time we go over to the Interpretive Center. And the treaties, even now, it seems like even Bush, he even broke treaties. Before they used to have a handshake, my word is my honor. But now it don't mean anything.

DL: Do you think that the Dakota should have gone to war? Was that a good move?

LS: To survive, I imagine they had to fight. And even though Little Crow knew in his mind and heart that it wasn't wise, he still was their leader and he went.

DL: He said he would fight with them, he didn't agree with them, but he would fight with them.

LS: Yes. He'd be their leader and die with them if need be.

DL: And he did.

LS: Yes.

DL: We're two-thirds of the way there. Would we like to take a little break here? Then we'll get it on tape, the fact that William Columbus was the great-grandfather and first cousin of Little Crow.

DL: We're back from a break, and you were going to tell us who William Columbus was the great-grandfather of.

LS: William Columbus was on my dad's side, paternal great-grandfather. I can't remember his Indian name, but he was first cousin of Little Crow, and he was the tribe's war chief.

DL: Did you ever hear stories about him, growing up?

LS: No, but what I did find was in an old newspaper, that he was the tribe's war chief. I never would have known that because my dad never spoke about that.

DL: What does that mean to be the war chief?

LS: I suppose he would do all the planning, whatever you want to call it.

DL: Strategizing.

LS: Yes, that.

DL: I wondered about this: Do you think it's a good idea to acknowledge these events today, 150 years later, or are they better left alone?

LS: No, I think it's best to – the more education that people get, the more understanding they will have of the Sioux people; well, indigenous people in general. The more education they have, the better understanding that we're just people too, we're no different. It's just that we probably had to suffer a whole lot more. But history's got to know both sides; the good and the bad. And the more truthful you can be about things, the better understanding we will leave in the minds of our children and history.

DL: So in your opinion then, the commemoration is a good idea 150 years later.

LS: I think it's a good idea.

DL: And what do you think is the best way to commemorate those events?

LS: Stories, just like what you're doing.

DL: Telling the stories.

LS: Yes.

DL: Now we get back, unless you want to add something about that chapter on the war, we can get back to a little bit more on your life.

LS: Well, I think that it should be brought up in the schools, what I was raised on, and we were savages, and with all just the negative part of our life, lifestyle that they learn. So if they could learn both sides, then I think they will have an education and know the truth.

DL: So perhaps non-Indians only know the piece of the war chapter of Indians being, like you said, savage fighters.

LS: Yes; like you see on TV.

DL: And what you see on TV. And instead, maybe there was a reason for why those things happened. Would you say that was true?

LS: Yes.

DL: And they don't understand the reason.

LS: They don't understand the reason. And if they put themselves in our place at the time, they probably would have done the same thing.

DL: Now, we talked a bit about high school and the fact that after high school you were down in Texas for a short time and you came back home. What did you do after that?

LS: I had a new little sister when I came back, which was a surprise. She's about 18 years younger than me. And before that, the last child we had was probably about seven, eight years old by that time, so it was a surprise. I got married when I was 22, in 1972. There was a guy who came from Kansas and I met him and then he brought me home. He was a truck driver, so he pulled into the yard in a big truck. Here my dad came out there and said, "What's your intentions for my daughter." "Oh, we're going to get married, we're going to get married this weekend." We went and got married.

DL: And you got married that weekend?

LS: Oh maybe not that weekend, but not too long after that.

DL: How long had you know him?

LS: Oh, not very long; it wasn't even a year – six months, maybe.

DL: How did you meet him?

LS: Through some friends.

DL: What was his name?

LS: His name was Charles Peterson.

DL: Was he a Dakota?

LS: No. Our reservation is very small, so if we were going to hold to tradition, I would have had to have looked to a different reservation to find spouses for my kids, because we're all related, pretty much, here. So it was a good way at that time, because my mother came from Sisseton. I don't remember where my grandpa [through the arranged marriage] came from.

DL: Did you start a family right away?

LS: No. We never had any children.

DL: Where did you live then?

LS: We lived in Morgan, about nine miles from here. Then I drove truck.

DL: You had to learn how to do that.

LS: Yes. I don't know how legal that was with the insurance company, but I would go along. He'd go coast to coast, so he'd be gone. Most of the time I did stay home. By that time we had the local pottery shop open and I worked there. I didn't throw the pots, but when we first started out, that's probably when I came back, about 19 years old. We would go down and dig the rock and then crush it. We had to get the different chemicals to mix, and it was a hard job. But finally we started getting everything from the Minnesota Clay Company in Bloomington, I think, and we had a regular business here, called Lower Sioux Pottery. And we started selling our pottery all over, at the airport and shipping it to people overseas, and all over, so it was a good business. I don't know what happened; why it closed. Me and my sister would like to open a business, because she does the throwing of the pots and I design.

DL: How long did you do that?

LS: Oh, probably – we'd even fire our own pottery right here too, so it was good. Probably five years, total. Five to six years, off and on.

DL: How long were you married to him?

LS: Probably about six years, and then I don't remember if he got a divorce, or I got a divorce, but it just didn't work out. I want to tell you about this: my dad was 20 years older than my mother, and I picked a spouse that was about the same.

DL: He was quite a bit older.

LS: Yes. So anyway, that didn't work out. He already had about five children, and they were too hard for me at that time, to raise. They were kind of like problem children and it was too hard to try to keep a job and raise somebody else's children. So they moved back with their mother and then I think he kind of went back that way.

DL: And by this time you're probably about in your mid-twenties or so.

LS: Yes, twenty-six or twenty-seven.

DL: And then what happened?

LS: I don't know, I just pretty much stayed around here and worked. I worked at pottery. I had a sewing company in Redwood Falls and I did some sewing there of uniforms. Just odd jobs wherever you could get jobs. When I was twenty-nine, I had my first child. Twenty-seven, I think. 1978. I lost my first child. I was coming down some steps – Lillian lived in the Twin City area and I was coming down the steps and here my boots come out, it was in the wintertime, and I fell down real hard. The baby came out right in the bathroom, and then I had to call the paramedics. What was sad

about that time was that they put you in the regular delivery room where everybody's happy, having their own children. And I was laying there and they had to cut the baby away because it was still attached. And then you hear all these babies crying and all happiness and stuff, and you never know what happened to that baby. And then you see that it was almost six months along at that time, so you see these little jars and you just wonder sometimes – I wonder what happened to that baby, did they stick him in that embalming fluid? They never gave you the option of, "here you go, you can bury." That's one of the things that sticks out in my mind.

And then I had my first daughter – only daughter. She just lost her dad last year in February. I had two children by him. And then '78 to '87 was when I had my last two children with the man I'm still married to. That was '86 I met him. But I knew him all my life.

DL: That was Swenson?

LS: Yes, Dan.

DL: Is he from the community?

LS: No, he's enrolled in the Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin area. He's seven years older than me.

DL: You have then, how many children? Four?

LS: Four.

DL: What are their names?

LS: Regina is my daughter, and then Dean, Willis and Aaron.

DL: What are their ages?

LS: Gina's probably 33, 31, 23 and 22. I was older when I had my children.

DL: Do you have any grandchildren?

LS: Yes. Five.

DL: Five grandchildren. Where does everyone live?

LS: They live close. They live close by. Right next door is my daughter, so I get to see my granddaughters every day, for however long I want. I'll tell you the ages: nine, eight, seven, five, and three. Six.

DL: You've got six of them.

LS: Yes, because I got four from my son and two from my daughter. And she doesn't want any more.

DL: What do you do in your free time? How do you have fun?

LS: Oh, grandkids. I go to their little recitals. I like to do crafts. I like to do my flower work. I like to paint. Right now they're into: "Can Grandma come over, we want to paint." My little granddaughter, she's five, she said, "One of these days I'm going to have a painting in a museum," she said. So they're involved in ballet and she's just now going into a pre-kindergarten. She goes to skate class. She's involved with Just For Kicks, where they go into the nursing homes and perform for them, sing and stuff. So I get to go watch them do their things. But what I do in my spare time, I'm the president of our senior citizens here; I facilitate that. I'm a lay reader for the church when our priest ain't here. I'm a senior warden at the church; I attend meetings there. I was involved in Wisdom Steps, but I tell my group, I said, "Don't get involved in too many things, because you're going to neglect one of them. Do your best wherever you can." And I think goodness for our casino, where that I don't have to work, where we get enough money from that so I can do a lot of volunteer work. I visit the nursing homes and stuff – whatever the church calls for me to do, I'm able to do it. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to do that, attend meetings.

DL: Otherwise it would be a struggle or you'd have to still be working.

LS: Yes, I'd have to still be working and not spending much time with family here. They can call me. We've got cell phones. My daughter got me that. I would rather be without a cell phone. And then when we have a family crisis I'm called into the community and anywhere.

DL: What TV shows do you watch?

LS: I like to be up on current events. I watch MSNBC, I like science programs, I like Home and Garden TV, and that's probably about it. I don't like to watch like murder stories and stuff like that. It's depressing.

DL: Do you ever go to the movies, or do you ever watch movies?

LS: Sometimes I'll come here and watch a movie with her. I don't watch too much.

DL: How about the casino?

LS: I like to go to the casino, yes. I enjoy the slots. I don't play bingo. She [Lilian] plays bingo, but they said I got comps over there, so she encouraged me to use them, so maybe I'll go with her sometime. My mother used to play bingo, and when she didn't have anybody to go with, I would go and be with her.

DL: What is your typical day like?

LS: Well, it depends on which day it is. Wednesdays I'm busy. Sundays usually I'm busy. The rest of the week is pretty much open. I live alone; my husband, he lives over in a senior building about nine miles from here. I really don't have a schedule. If somebody calls, then I will go. So if somebody's having a hard day, or there are certain people I see every day. One is my sister-in-law and brother. She's got diabetes, she's in a wheelchair and I go check on them. He's having problems with his arm. They can't lift their water jugs like this, so I go for about three houses and check on them and see if they need anything, and have coffee and just listen sometimes, and then go on my way. If my daughter calls, then I'm there. "Mom, can you babysit?" And I say, "At least let me know one day ahead and I can do it." So when I'm home, like when we have funerals, then I'm busy going to get my baskets, my flower-makings and I'll sit down and make them for the funerals. And Easters I do it. Sometimes the tribe has me do centerpieces for the community when they set up when they're going to feed, I will do that. And I enjoy it.

DL: Where did you pick that talent up from?

LS: I don't know. I just wonder myself, where did I learn how to paint? My mother didn't paint, my dad didn't paint; it just comes kind of natural. I do cake decorating. The only thing I don't do is like beadwork and stuff like that. I do special orders – when I was working at the pottery, somebody would bring in a picture and I'd put it on the pot. I just learned at that time that I had that talent. I never went to any formal training or anything like that, so it just comes naturally.

DL: What would you say are the contributions that Dakota people made, not only to Minnesota, but maybe to the whole world?

LS: Well, I think the food was one. Food. And how to farm; how to grow that food, and how to store it and the nutrition value of the foods. A lot of the diabetes; look at how much diabetes we have today. I think if we had the proper foods, or the foods we were brought up with, we'd be healthy. And lifestyle. I think the biggest contribution was our lifestyle, because our religion was our lifestyle, and our lifestyle was our religion. They were one. And to be a whole person, your mind, body and spirit have to be one. And that's health-wise mentally and physically, both. I think that's our biggest contribution.

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

LS: Probably to erase all the historical trauma that they had to go through, and just to have the sense of belonging to where they came from, and a pride in what's been lost. The community; I think that's probably our biggest loss, is that we don't have that any more. Politics enter it, money, where people are fighting amongst families over material things. Where at one time we had to struggle to survive and we all shared. One had something to contribute, it was there. I don't remember ever going hungry, or if I did, it

was because I didn't know how to cook. My husband did all the cooking and the baking and everything. We had a good lifestyle.

DL: Is there anything you want to add from any of the areas of your life?

LS: Which one did I skip?

DL: You skipped about who is your hero.

LS: Probably Grandma. Because she told me, we used to set between my mother and my grandmother and myself, and it was kind of a learning thing. It seems like no matter what would come out, if you listened, you'd get what she was talking about. So I was a little older here and Grandma was telling my mother – my brothers got involved with the law and they were in jail at different ages, you know. So it went for maybe years, whether it was their fault or not. It was usually alcohol-related. But she was telling my mother, "Daughter," she said, and she was looking at her. By that time she had heart trouble and was sickly. She said, "You made yourself sick over worrying about your boys being in jail. I want you to know that children know the difference between right and wrong by the age of nine. Don't be so hard on yourself; look what you've done to yourself and you're sick now." So I learned from that, not to get upset over something that you couldn't change. You've got to do is do your best, and hope for the best, and just be there when it's not the good times. And don't worry yourself sick.

DL: This concludes our interview. Thanks for your time, Peps.

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