AL = Aimee LaBree
Minnesota Historical Society

DL = Deborah Locke
Minnesota Historical Society

LW = Lillian Wilson

AL: This is Aimee LaBree at the home of Lillian Wilson, 39777 Res. Highway 3, Morton, Minnesota, February 17, 2011. Interviewer Deborah Locke: interviewee Lillian Wilson.

DL: I start by asking you if you could spell your name. Are there two “L's” or one? Lil?


DL: Do you have a nickname, Lillian? Did your dad give you one too?

LW: Yes, Little Miss Muffet was my name. I used to be real little and skinny when I was first born; I didn’t grow for a long time. Probably the way we ate. Then I just shot up one year.

DL: Your dad called you Little Miss Muffet. Did anyone else call you that?

LW: Yes, the whole family; they still do once in a while.

DL: Do they ever shorten it?

LW: No. They call me Lil or Tilly once in a while, too. I don’t know who started that. And Diamond Lil, they call me that too, at the casino, all the old people that aren’t even part of our family, they call me that. So I have many names.

DL: When and where were you born?
LW: I was born in Pipestone, Minnesota, July 18, 1939.

DL: Who were your parents, what are their names?

LW: Tom Columbus and Eleanor St. Claire.

DL: What’s the name of your brothers and sisters?

LW: That’s what I wanted Pepsi to stay for, but of my own family, my mother’s, I got five brothers and a sister. Timothy Columbus, Rowland Columbus, Delano Columbus, Clyde Columbus, and Leon Columbus. My sister, Ramona, died early. All the rest of the four guys, three died, and there are two boys left, and me; three of us. It’s funny, the oldest ones, my two oldest brothers are still here, Rowland and Tim, and then myself.

DL: Where do Tim and Rowland live?

LW: Rowland lives in Redwood, and my oldest brother lives in San Diego, California.

DL: And who were your grandparents, what were their names?

LW: Moses and Lucy Columbus on my dad’s side. And my mother’s side was Henry and geez, I can’t think of her name. I don’t know if her name was [sounds like] Sabina. Well anyway, that was their names. Henry was a minister.

DL: Episcopal?

LW: Yes.

DL: And what was their last name?

LW: St. Claire.

DL: Are you an enrolled member here?

LW: Yes.

DL: You grew up here?

*Her sister LaVonne Swenson
LW: Yes, I grew up here, and then I moved away. To get back on PC [casino profit payments] I had to live here a couple years, and we fought to get back on. We fought to get back on here, and then a whole bunch of people got on with us. We had to fight. They tried to leave us out of the casino money and the enrollment, things that are rightfully ours. So we took over the center and everything, nine people.

DL: What year was that?

LW: ’91, was it ’91? I don’t know.

DL: So you moved away for a while and that was held against you?

LW: Yes. But people moved away because there were no jobs here; there wasn’t anything. They had to move away. People went away to school, for a job.

DL: Where did you go away?

LW: I went away to school a lot of those years, and then I moved to Minneapolis; St. Paul first, then Minneapolis. I went to the U of M for a while until I got sick, then I just stayed in Minneapolis.

DL: You mentioned boarding school. Where did you go to boarding school?

LW: I went to boarding school in Pipestone first, and then I went to Flandreau, and then I went to – No, first I went to Mobridge Wakpala Indian mission school. And then I went to Flandreau, and then I came here to Morton for my last two years of high school.

DL: So you were in boarding school pretty much all the way through?

LW: Yes.

DL: Was it hard to leave? Were you forced to go, or did your parents say it was okay?

LW: We were forced to go when my mother died. We all had to leave because my dad couldn’t take care of all of us, it was hard for him. So then a couple of my brothers went in the service, then the rest of us got shipped away to school. I don’t think it was hard; it was kind of like an adventure. And I suppose if our mother was here, we probably would have hated to leave, but she wasn’t here and he always worked, so it was kinda nice. I liked it. We got to meet a lot of kids and it was fun. It’s kind of fun when you’re with a whole bunch of kids like that. It’s like a big family. I liked it.

DL: And you were treated well, then. You must have had a good experience that way.
LW: Oh, we were treated good with the kids, but the matrons were mean at Pipestone. The matrons were mean, and some of the teachers were really mean. But it was nice to be with all those little kids; it’s just like playing every day with your friends. I thought it was pretty nice. We got to do duties and stuff; they taught us things like that. As soon as you do your duty you can go play, so we used to try and do ours right away and then go play. It was a good life; it taught me a lot of things, things I never would have learned, probably, at home, that I remember now.

DL: And the basics. You learned reading and writing, and how to do math.

LW: Yes. I think one of my biggest things was learning how to get along with people. I never could speak well. I don’t like to speak in crowds; I don’t like to stand up. I have to once in a while, but I don’t like it. I don’t know why – I think because when we went to school when we were little, they made fun of us, as Indians. So we kind of got bashful and embarrassed; I think that’s where all that started from. But to go to the school where we lived and played with all the other kids, it was fun. It was like two different worlds, going to school, then coming back and being with all our little friends. It was nice. It was nice and like day and night. Have a good time at night with the kids, and during the day go to school. It was rough. But you get used to it. You start trying to learn and then you try to do what you’re supposed to and then you don’t get in trouble and you’re all right. But it was fun, I liked it. As I got older I thought back and decided that I learned a lot out of that, rough as I thought it was then. I learned to toughen up and to be what you have to be. When you’re with your mother and father they treat you so good that you’re protected and you don’t get to do things in the outside world. But we weren’t protected, so we had to learn, we had to be tough and we had to grow up, and we did it.

DL: Were any of your brothers or sisters with you?

LW: Yes, my little sister, I had to take care of her all the time. That was a big hazard because she was a big chicken. I had to always protect her and help her [at boarding school]. Even at night she used to run all the way from her room over to my room and try to come to bed with me. Then they’d come looking for her and then we’d both have to stand in the hallway. We both had to stand in the hallway half of the night. My punishment— I didn’t even do anything. But she was so small. She was scared. They should have known that. They could have just let her stay there. That was mean. But that was the only drawback. My brothers were way across campus; they had boys way over there, then the campus, then the girls. So they couldn’t help us, they were way far away. We hardly got to see them.

DL: Did you talk Dakota? Did you know how to speak the language?

LW: Yes, we did when we were little, but we started getting over it right away when we started school because there was nobody to talk to.
DL: Some Indian children were punished for speaking their native language. Did that happen there?

LW: Yes. So I think you just forgot it right away while you’re trying hard to learn the other language. You forgot it, especially when there was nobody to talk to. Our parents weren’t there. So I forgot it. I always wonder how come I can’t remember it. Sometimes when they talk, you know what they’re talking about but you can’t understand the whole thing.

DL: So, about what year was it that you went into the boarding schools? How young were you?

LW: I think I was seven or six, because Ramona wasn’t even supposed to be in school yet. She had to come and sit with me when we first got to Pipestone because she wasn’t in school yet. I must have been pretty young, six or seven. But I remember starting school over here, I remember that. We had a good school, we had a good teacher and we had a good cook. Those are good memories. That was before we left. So I must have went to school here one year – or was it two years, I don’t even know. Maybe it was one year.

DL: Peps went all six years.

LW: Yes, she was in a different family. I raised Peps. I was just telling her a little while ago, she used to walk down the road and she wouldn’t want to walk. She was just fat and heavy. She’d sit on the ground and wouldn’t get up ‘til I carried her. Yes, I was just small myself; I had to carry her on my hip. I was just small myself, because I was small and skinny, and then I had to carry her around. Yes, I remember her; all the kids.

DL: Did you graduate from one of those boarding schools?

LW: Yes.

DL: Which one?

LW: I came out of Mobridge – not Mobridge, but Wakpala, they called it, a small town. I came out of the seventh grade and then I went to Flandreau- was it Flandreau for a while? No, it was there, seventh and eighth, or ninth and tenth. Then I came back here for my last two years, eleven and twelve. But gee, we went to school all over. We went to Pipestone, then we went downtown to Flandreau, then we went to Mobridge, then we finally came to Morton. That was about four different schools.

DL: Yes. Pretty resilient.

LW: Yes. And that’s why later on when I think about it, that was good for me. You always think, geez, how come I had to go through all that? But it’s good for you. You come out a different person, a better person, a harder person, so you face life. That’s
what I like. Those guys that have it real easy, they don’t know that one of these days they’re gonna have a rough time and they can’t do it. That’s why people commit suicide and everything.

DL: What were your favorite subjects in school, and what kind of student were you?

LW: I was a good student until I got back here. I was a good student because I learned quick and I learned to pay attention right away and catch everything. And then when I got back here I just didn’t like the school at all. I didn’t like the teachers, I didn’t like the way we were treated in Morton, and so I just didn’t care about school anymore.

And a lot of things went against me too, like I had to raise Peps, so then by the time I got to school I’m all worn out. And then when you get home, you work again, you can’t do your homework, and then you try to tell the teacher that and they just laugh or smirk and say: Yah, I know. They don’t know. We worked hard. We could have been better than that at school if we didn’t have all that work. We had to haul water, we had to haul wood, we had to carry out the slop pail at night for the little kids when it was full. Every time they went, we had to take it out so it didn’t stink up the house. We had to haul water from the well – there was a reservoir in our stove for their baths. And look at all the kids – she had ten kids. We helped raise every one of them, me and my sister. And it was hard. It wasn’t an easy life. The teachers still made fun of you like you were dumb or something. I wasn’t dumb, I was a good student and I had good grades when I was at my other schools, but they don’t count that. So that made me mad. I barely graduated. I think I missed some papers that I had to do later, that I did; then I got to graduate. But I think teachers are really important in this world because they can help kids, even if they’re behind. There’s reasons why they get behind. Some people aren’t dumb. Some people, or even like my one friend said, her child was dyslexic or something, and then there’s something wrong with her other kids, but gee, they’re all smart. They’re really smart. People don’t realize it.

So I think I had teachers in my life that wrecked part of it and influenced part of it. Some of it was good. We had teachers that were good for us and helped us, pushed us and helped us along. Boy, when I talk to teachers I really have a hard time, because they have a job to do and some of them aren’t doing it. I really get mad, because some of them are in it for the pay, and they’re wrecking somebody’s whole life. We have a lot of artists in our community. We have people with talent that can do things, but they never get into nothing. It’s still like that here in Redwood. We tried to put our kids in skating once; they were going to play hockey. We sat there in that room, and sat there, and they were going around to everybody, filling out their papers, and me and my daughter sat there, because we were trying to put my grandchildren in. They were good at skating. And she wouldn’t come and wouldn’t come. She went all over the room, helping everybody, so finally we got up and walked out. And we shouldn’t have. I didn’t want to, but my daughter said, “Geez, I’m tired of this. Let’s just go.” I was going to try to get a paper from that woman and fill it out later, but she just said, “Okay, I’ll talk to you in a minute.” So we just walked out again. We have kids that are talented. We have kids that are athletic that can do things, but they’re not letting them. I don’t know
how it is now, but that wasn’t too long ago. What year was that? That might have been in the ‘90’s. Yes, that might have been in the ‘90’s. But see, I get upset with teachers when they can’t do their job, and I get upset with teachers that are really mean to certain kids. It could be a personality conflict or something, but they could let somebody else handle it. Give it to somebody else. Okay, what’s next, or we’ll be sitting here all day.

DL: When you were a little child, did you ever think about the future and what you wanted to be?

LW: Yes, we used to laugh all the time. We used to like to dance and sing. Our whole family was talented. We have people that were musicians, and everybody could sing. We used to always sing together, but my friend, Ruby, when we were little, we used to all get up on that old platform and take turns singing. But that’s when they thought we could dance and sing.

They used to make us dance Indian, so we used to dance Indian all the time. We used to ride in parades. That was fun. They always got paid for it too, but we didn’t see the money; the parents got it. But that was fun. I think just dancing and singing.

DL: Were the parades for holidays?

LW: Yes. Whenever they had a parade for something, they’d call on the Indian float, so then we’d all go with our outfits on. And some of the people really liked us. Most of them didn’t. But some of them did and would really look at our outfits and ask us if we made them and stuff like that, yes. Some people were really interested, and some weren’t. But it was still fun, just to ride in there. We had fun. But I don’t think I ever thought of being anything, or anything famous.

DL: What games did you play as a little child?

LW: We played with knocking tin cans around with a stick. We played ball all the time. Sometimes we made our own balls. We made our own toys. We made our own sleds. We did everything. We had fun too. We had a lot of fun without a whole bunch of money. And we were rough. We grew up rough, so we were all tough. We’re not like them guys that just sit there and play with the computer now. So geez, I think that’s what helped us get so old and stay in shape. I’m not too in shape, but a lot of Indians are, from just the way we lived, because we had it rough. We had it rough and we were rough and it’s amazing to me how none of us died from pneumonia. We never had good coats or mittens. Every Christmas we’d get mittens and a scarf or a cap. That was our highlight, that we’d get that and one toy and a bag. We had to hang onto our mittens. My little grandchildren, they’re always losing their caps and mittens. How could they lose them? When we had ours it was just like something real great; we had to hold on to them and take care of them because that was our only hat and mittens for the whole year. Now those guys throw their stuff all over and lose them. It’s surprising to me that we never got sick, because we used to come home and get off the bus and
dive right in the snow every day. We were told: “Don’t get wet.” “Okay.” And then we’d come home all wet again. That was the fun of our life, the rough stuff.

DL: The rough and tumble.

LW: Yes, rough and no little easy games.

DL: Which relative had the most influence on you?

LW: I think there were several. I have an aunt that I was real close to, and my dad. Probably because my dad had to be the father and the mother both. So he taught us a lot of things, just by example, not by hollering at us all the time. But then my aunt was fun and she was just a fun person; one of them people that stand right out. She was beautiful and nice and outgoing. Yes, I think she had a lot of influence on me; her and my dad.

DL: What was your auntie’s name?

LW: Valerie.

DL: What’s her last name?

LW: Columbus.

DL: That’s a pretty name, Valerie.

LW: Yes, she got a good break. She was a fun person, she enjoyed life. People are drawn to those kind of people because they make you happy. But my dad was more wise and staunch and down to earth. He taught us values and morals and stuff like that. He married one woman, my mother, and then the next one, and stayed with them. And that’s why he said, gee, I don’t know why our kids are all messed up {with} marriage and divorce. When we were young they taught us, you get married, you stay with that person your whole life, or until somebody dies.

DL: And that’s what you did.

LW: No. I tried my best. I got so busy and now I sit here and think, where’d the time fly? Geez, I should have gotten married, I should have had a life. I got busy throwing myself into helping people, working for people, driving people around. Where did the time go? My husband has been gone eleven years; he’s been gone since 2000.

DL: He passed away?

LW: Yes. He had heart trouble. And just when I stuck with him, I had to take care of him all the time too, he was real sick. He went to the hospital over and over and over.
DL: Was he American Indian?

LW: Yes, all of them. Two of them were Chippewa and one was a Sioux.

DL: In what ways did your family celebrate holidays?

LW: Feasts. All feasts. And artwork. People had good holidays because we made our own stuff. Pepsi is really good at it. She'll decorate a tree – she should be in that Home and Garden magazine or something. You should see her trees; every year she does a different color. Oh, they're beautiful. All she uses is ribbons and lights and bulbs. If you could just see some of her work – I asked her that one time, are you going to take a picture of it? “Yah.” But I don't know if she did. But the whole family is like that, they're all artists, like I said. Everything they do is kinda like perfection: this color and that color. Like me, I would put different colors together, but they use certain colors. But every holiday it's fun because everyone can sing. And there's a lot of humor; laugh, laugh; that's what we're good at.

DL: Did you learn anything of the Dakota traditional religion or spirituality when you were growing up?

LW: Not too much. We learned the values and stuff, we learned that we were supposed to be good to people, we learned how to honor and respect the elders, to treat them good. We learned to give, we learned to help, but we didn't learn prayers, or putting out a dish, things like that. They didn't teach us that. I didn't learn that until way later. I didn't know you could put out a dish in the water for people. When they drank {alcohol}, they'd pour some on the ground. I thought it was awful. I still don't think it's nice, but maybe it is, who knows? We used to drink at the parks or at the river, or at the lakes, and didn't people put some on the ground? And I used to think, gee that's awful. Why would a spirit want to drink beer or wine or whiskey. But here the Mexicans do that too. They give the spirits booze and they give them food. And I used to think it wasn't right, and here I had a dream about it, so it's right. We're supposed to. But I used to think, I wonder who made that up. They must have just made that up; they're wasting food. But here I see my dad used to do that with their food, but they never told us. But you could see them put a little stuff aside. One of the main things we learned was to eat what you put on your plate. If you're not going to eat much, take a little bit. That's what they learned from the war. People went hungry. So after that they made gardens. They taught us to just eat what we're supposed to, and eat healthy. You don't need an overabundance of things. It wasn't until we started getting way older that people started eating funny like a whole bunch of cake and pie. I still don't like cake or pie, or candy because we never had it when we were young.

DL: What's the first news story you remember from your childhood? The first news event? From the outside world.

LW: I'm pretty sure that was during the war when I was just little, and everybody was scared. I remember things when I was little. I could hear when people got all excited
and were all talking about things. I was small and still had that belly button here – I remember laying in somebody’s lap and looking up towards the hallway and seeing somebody there. Then I see a hand come out like this. And I tried to tell my mother and I probably didn’t know how to talk yet. Because I was trying to tell her, but I didn’t know how to tell her and I was scared. Here I was a baby because I still had that thing here. I used to just hear their excitement. I knew it was something, but I never could understand the real purpose behind all this until I was two. Then my grandma died, right on my birthday. So I remembered them all, all that hush-hush stuff, “oh, be quiet.” I was trying to say, “What about my birthday?” But they were all busy with her. But I remember that real clearly. Everybody forgot about me and started taking care of my grandma and a whole bunch of people came. That’s about the earliest I remember.

DL: When you were little and saw something in the hallway – what did you see?

LW: It was somebody. It wasn’t a real person like us. It was like a spirit. They went down the hallway and then they came back and they had their hand out like this, like they were reaching for somebody. I got scared and tried to tell my mother, but I probably didn’t know how to talk yet.

DL: I wonder who they were reaching for?

LW: I don’t know. I think they were just trying to tell us something. I think a lot of times they bring us messages. They probably told me I was going to get well. I was real sick. I had double pneumonia and everything. So maybe they just came to help me, because I was really sick. That’s why I remember that so well, I bet. I had double pneumonia, I don’t know how many times. I almost died, I don’t know how many times in my life, but somebody takes care of me.

DL: So your earliest memories concerning outside events might have been the war, with all the excitement and the chattering around you from adults about that war.

LW: Yes, because you can tell when they’re not paying attention to you. When there’s something exciting they all talk amongst themselves. I could hear them talking and stuff, but I didn’t understand what they were talking about. But I remember all the excitement.

DL: And your earliest memory as a child was to see someone coming down the hallway.

LW: Yes. Because I was so sick. Then at age two, I jumped in the river. I dove in the river and almost drowned. They all told me that later, but I remember that too. That’s why sometimes when I breathe funny, I always think of that. [Deep breath] Like that; take a deep breath. I couldn’t breathe. So what’s next?

DL: The next question is, who taught you the most about being Dakota, and did you learn any traditional ways?
LW: Yes, when we went to school at the mission, there was an old minister named Bear Hawk. He’s the one that taught us the most, besides my grandpa. Yes, he taught us the Indian stuff and religion, and the Christian religion. I used to bother him all the time. I’d be right up there talking to him when we were done with our class. And I think he was kinda glad, because he knew somebody was paying attention. He was really good. He was kind. He was a nice old man, and he was smart. You can just tell them guys that have wisdom. He was a real old guy. His sons got to be ministers too; one came here later on. I think it was him, Reverend Bear Hawk. I was trying to tell Peps, I couldn’t remember his first name, but I know he had a son named Bill, and another son. They were both ministers after that.

DL: So your family was Christian, and that was your first faith. And maybe some Dakotas still practiced the old ways, but at least with your family it was Christianity.

LW: Yes.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name?

LW: Yes. Little Wind.

DL: That’s pretty. Now we get into some of the stuff concerning our project and 1862. The question is: What did you learn about Dakota history while you were growing up, and who told you about it?

LW: Yes, I think our grandpa and my aunt and my dad, we used to hear it. Later on when we heard it, when we went to school, it was different. They didn’t teach the same thing. One of the things we learned was that people were hungry and they didn’t want to release that food, and that’s why the war started. They just said it was from that. So that’s why I think the people learned to value food, making their own gardens, making sure they had food for their kids and stuff. Everybody had gardens. I don’t remember going any place where there wasn’t a garden. And there was a lot of space then; the houses weren’t like they are now, right close to each other. The houses were way far apart.

But the people got along. I remember we’d walk a long ways, just for my parents to go play cards or something. Walk a long ways and have to sit there and be quiet, or play quietly while they played cards. But gee, it was fun to see everybody, and now they’re not happy to see each other all the time. Homes are too close together, I think. Before it was all spaced out; we could walk a long ways to see somebody. And I think that’s why people were healthier too. Walk, be outside.

DL: Did you hear any accounts of say, some of your relatives from past generations? Were any stories handed down about what so-and-so did, or where they settled, or where they were raised?
LW: Yes, you know, we heard all that, but I never paid attention to it. I don’t know why that’s not important to me. I think because the way I grew up, my job was to pray for the people now and the future, the future happenings. Even when I was younger they told me not to read the paper. Don’t read the newspapers, stay away from TV. So I don’t really care about the past. I think we have to build a better future and we have a lot of things we have to care about instead of dwelling on the past. I think it’s a gloom thing and I think that it was bad, but that we should let it go and forget it. Go on with our lives and do better, so things like that don’t take place again. So I heard all those stories, I listened to them and stuff, but they just didn’t stick with me. Maybe that’s supposed to be for people like you that study the history. In my life it’s not important. I heard them, I remember hearing them all.

DL: Stories about the war?

LW: Yes, I remember hearing them, but I just let them go in one ear, and out the other ear.

DL: Did you hear the story of the hangings?

LW: Yes.

DL: And you pretty much ignored it, though.

LW: Just about our relatives, how brave they were, and that they stuck together and that they sang and that they went to a better place. Yes, all that kind of stuff. We heard the hard parts too, where they weren’t allowed to smoke, or do the things they used to do. We heard little stories like that. I just didn’t really pay much attention; I don’t know why. Even now I won’t. My husband was into it. He was reading, reading, reading, but I just didn’t pay attention. But I remember when we had those ceremonies down at Birch Coulee. You could just feel the presence of all of them.

DL: You read my mind; I was about to ask about Birch Coulee.

LW: When they have those ceremonies, you can just feel somebody standing by you, around you, and it feels real awesome, like way above, and that they’re still all right and that they’re here. When we saw a psychic, I heard her say, “Sitting Bull’s crying and he’s saying that…” Well then he came by me and he said, “I don’t want you to make the same mistakes that we made.” And that’s where all my thinking is. I mean, I think that too. The past was really bad and we have to do better. Like that.

DL: So Sitting Bull had a message for you.

LW: Yes. Sitting Bull had two messages for me. Once I stood by a picture and was looking just like I’d walk up there [into the picture], insisting on standing there, and he said, “You don’t be afraid. Stand up and take your place amongst the leaders.” And I still don’t know where that comes from; I’m not a leader. I mean, I’m a leader in little
stuff; I’m the boss all the time when we do things, but I still don’t know what he means. Maybe just in the spiritual realm, because I do a lot of stuff. I pray all the time. Sometimes I would be trying to sleep and I’d hear, “Somebody’s here to see you.” Then a spirit would walk in and talk to me. And then I talked to one of the thirty-eight, and he asked me, “You pray for our Indian people, well what do you really want for them?”

I said, “Well, I think our biggest thing is to get along. It seems like we’re not even friends no more. Whatever happened to the brother and the sister and the family? They used to have brothers take care of the brother’s wife if something happened to him. It used to be like that; the whole family would pitch in and help this woman with her kids, but it’s not like that no more.” So then he said, “Well, yes,” he said, “The Indians forgot how to love.” I said, “Oh, well, I’ll start praying for that.” I was sad. But then I asked him if I could see him, and guess what he said? “Not at this time.” And I always wondered why people who are afraid to see them see them all the time, and I’m not afraid and I wanted to see him, and he said, “No, not at this time.” But that was one of the thirty-eight.

DL: Did this come to you in a dream, or were you….

LW: No, I was awake. I was praying. But my husband had similar things happen to him. He had somebody come to his bed in that room, with a big robe on, and we thought it was Cut Nose. He said he was real tall. That’s when we started putting that Birch Coulee together; that was ours. That was his vision, he started that. So then between us, all our dreams and visions and stuff, we decided to do that. But he was scared. That’s why I was thinking how come he got to see his, and I didn’t get to see mine. But he got scared; he said he tried to pull his covers up, but the man was already standing there, that guy. I don’t even remember what he told him. I think that’s when he told him to have a ceremony at Birch Coulee.

DL: You said you started putting Birch Coulee together. What does that mean?

LW: We’re the ones that started the memorial down here, Gathering of Kinship. That was our doings; that was our baby. So we got that together. Then we met with my stepmother and we asked her, because she was real wise too. So he said, “I think we’ll go ask her.” So we all sat down and had a prayer meeting and stuff. I think a Medicine Man came and then he wanted to know if anybody had anything, and then she did. She said, “Let’s call it Gathering of Kinship.” So we took that name. That was ours; we put that together and did that for years. Then finally it fizzled out.

DL: Right within this vicinity, some battles took place. At the storehouse there was a very, very sad history. So I’m wondering, when you go to these places now, do you feel a heaviness from history, or do you think, is it light?

LW: It’s light. The only hard part for us was when we planned this Gathering of Kinship and the spirits wanted to come home. They were all over, some in a hospital. The bones and stuff were all over, and they wanted to come home. So that was the start of
this thing. We had to walk from Mankato where the hanging was, we had to walk all the way back to Birch Coulee. When we walked, I wish there had been more people around. When we walked, when we came down by that road from New Ulm, you could just about see the spirits all standing along the road, a whole bunch of Indians. There wasn’t just the thirty-eight, there was a whole bunch of spirits. And then we heard singing. Nobody paid attention because we thought somebody had a tape on in their car. So we just kept walking—we took turns walking. We’d get back in the car and somebody else would walk. Later on, everybody said, “Who had a tape on?” And nobody had one on. All the way down that road, we heard that singing. But people heard different things. Then when we got up that hill, we all got out of our cars and walked down to Birch Coulee. But it was amazing because people saw and heard different things; everybody’s was different. One of the spirits said: “Well, we’re glad to be home”. So the walker did his duty, whatever he was supposed to do, bringing them back from the hanging site.

I always wonder how come it takes something like that? How come they just can’t come back? But it’s hard for them to find their way. I had spirits come here and ask me to get them to a certain place. Like the one that committed suicide, he came over and said, “I can’t find my way home.” And he didn’t know what happened, so I had to tell him what happened to him. And then I said, “I’ll show you the way home, but don’t bother your parents. You don’t get to make racket and you have to be real quiet, because they’re going through a lot.” Everybody feels guilty when somebody commits suicide. So then I just talked to him about all that stuff and then I showed him the way home. And then my step-mother, when she died too, she said, “What’s going on at my house, they’re taking everything out.” So then I told her what happened. She didn’t know she had died either, so I told her. But then she asked for her way home from the courthouse. She said, “I’m way in Redwood by the courthouse.” I don’t know what she was doing up there. But she said, “I can’t find my way home.” I said, “Okay, I’ll show you the way home.”

That’s my job. I help the people in the spirit world. I don’t get to see them most of the time. Once in a while I’ll see somebody, but usually it’s just to help them. Sometimes I can walk somebody, when they die, over to the light where they’re supposed to go. I walk them that far, but then I have to turn around and come back; that’s my job too. So sometimes I wake up really tired, like I really was awake all night, or doing something, like I did a whole bunch of stuff. I wake up really tired. There’s a lot of that stuff at Birch Coulee, like when we went up there and saw Little Crow’s son at Redwood. He said something like that; he said something like he was walking back and forth along the river and he wanted his bones back here. They are way out in South Dakota. He wanted his self to come back here where he belongs. Who was that? Geez, I get all mixed up. He wanted to come back. I don’t know if that was Red Cloud, or one of the other Indians.

Anyways, there’s so much that’s going on, I really can’t hardly keep up. I hear things. I could sit here and then I could hear something. One of the hardest things I remember, is somebody said, “Help me! Can’t you help me?” Then they swore, and I was thinking,
gee, what’s wrong with them? How could I help them, I don’t even know what’s going on. I can’t see, I can’t see what they’re doing. All I could do was pray for them; that’s it.

DL: Do you think that helped them?

LW: Yes. They got quiet. And they always run to the right place. I know people. Sometimes I’ll sit here and hear a big thump outside and I know somebody needs help. And sometimes that’s all they can do. They can’t talk; I don’t know why, but sometimes they can talk. Then there’s a lot of spirits that will tease you or bug you, and I just tell them to go. I know one said to me once, “You won’t be here in the morning.” I said, “I’ll be here.” But you could tell when there’s a lot of spirits who were drunk when they died. They like to play games, they like to bug you. They usually can’t come in here, but they could hit the house or something; that’s it, but they can’t come in. They can’t scare you, they can’t hurt you. Human beings are the ones that can hurt you.

DL: Thank you, that was good.

LW: I can’t remember what we were talking about.

DL: We were talking about whether you had heard stories of the 1862 U.S. Dakota War, and the answer is yes, but you don’t remember them because you don’t need to remember them. Did you have family members who lived through that time?

LW: Yes, our relatives were Little Crow’s first cousins and my grandpa was his cousin, William. I think that’s where a lot of them stories come down. They never tell the truth how Little Crow was. I mean, it’s just like Abraham Lincoln, when they tell all the good things about him, but they don’t tell that he had all those Indians slaughtered and hung. But the way they talk about people, just like now, you never hear the good things about Little Crow. You hear the things that were not right, or were not good. It’s too bad they can’t write good things.

DL: What would you say about Little Crow that’s not well known?

LW: I wouldn’t even say it, because I wouldn’t be able to prove it, but there was a lot of good things, just as a human being, the things he did that weren’t recorded, or put into history, but the things they did put in were still not right. I just think that you just, like I said, leave the past alone. It just like kind of stirs up some dust or something like that. That’s why I don’t know why you’re doing this thing. But maybe it’s important to some people. Maybe it’s important to people who study history and want to know the truth.

DL: Do you think it’s good for children to know the whole story of Minnesota history, which would include some of the harder periods like the war of 1862?

LW: Yes, I think it helps them with their own lives and how to make decisions in the future, how to have a better world. I think they should know everything. Some of these young people ask me how their mother was so I tell them how she was as a person and
then they're happy. And you don’t have to make things up because there are good things about everybody. People do good things that aren’t recorded, like I said, and only the bad stuff is remembered. They’ll say: “Oh, this person drank.” But that person might have been a good person that helped people, went into their homes and cleaned or cooked, or helped families, or sat at funerals. There’s a whole bunch of good deeds that people do that just aren’t recorded. Almost every funeral, you can stand up and say a whole bunch of good things about people. But they’re not said. Just think; that’s sad. It’s like they forget them as soon as they’re gone. I know people like that; you’ll never forget them. They come back and see you all the time anyway. They check on you, they can come on holidays, graduations, weddings; they can come back just to see how we’re doing. I remember my daughter, that’s her up there (photo on stand), that’s what me and Peps were talking about; she knew everything, even before she was born. We were out here, that back road; me and my sister-in-law were driving and moving somebody’s stuff. And she ran over a dog. She said she was there. I said, “You weren’t even born yet.” “Yes, I was there.” I said, “Where were you, then?” “I was in the back seat.” We had a full carload, how was she in the back seat? But see, they travel with us all the time. Before they come into a family they get to study the family and see where they want to be, so that’s how they get to know everything before they’re born.

Well, anyway, the story is, my one young brother died and we were having a party at Christmas. Somebody knocked on the door, and my mother got all nervous, my stepmother, and she said, “Oh I went to the door and nobody was there.” Then my daughter said, “Well that was Uncle Tubby. He just came to see how we are.” If people would listen to little kids, they would hear all that. People get so busy they don’t pay attention.

That’s why when you hear things, don’t make fun of them because then they’ll tell you more things. If you make fun of them or tell them not to talk about it, then they get quiet and they don’t talk no more, but they could tell us everything. Even newborn babies, when they’re born, they can talk. I can talk to them and they can talk to me. I got sick. I didn’t want to go to the hospital because we were at a big meeting, a Christian meeting. Finally at the last minute I said, “Oh, I better go.” So we jumped in the car and went, and my only reason for being there was for a little baby. I had to suffer and everything, just so the spirits could get me to the hospital to pray for that baby who was hospitalized. That baby died anyway. That’s why I wonder why I went through all that. I prayed for the baby, and here the baby said, “Thank you for praying for me, but I don’t want to come back.” So a whole bunch of things amaze me. That little baby drowned in a tub, but she was with a family that was all drunks. She wanted to die, so she got to die. She got to go home. When I was lying on that table in the hospital, they said, “We gotta move you because somebody’s coming.” I was glad, because my pain was kind of subsiding. I went and sat out there and I was praying for the baby and that’s when she said, “Thank you for praying for me, but I don’t want to come back.” Here she was a baby yet. She couldn’t talk that good, but she could talk. That surprised me too. I told my husband and he didn’t believe it. So I quit telling him things. But people think you’re crazy and stuff, but you’re not. There’s a real spiritual war. Yes there’s warfare...
going on, but there are real spiritual people that can talk if you want to talk to them. They could tell you a lot of things; they know everything.

Sometimes as human beings, we hear things and we try to say, “Oh, I didn’t hear that.” But we heard it. We try to pass it off that we didn’t hear it. They hear it—they just refuse to believe it. If you have an inkling you shouldn’t go someplace, you shouldn’t go, because they’re trying to help you, protect you. But people jump up and go anyway, and get in an accident. Then later I’ll say, “Did you have a warning?” “Yes.” So almost every one of them had a warning, but they get up and go anyway.

I remember one day we had to give somebody a ride to the jail. My niece’s boyfriend had to go to jail. I told Dion, my son, “This is a bad day for me; I’m not supposed to go out.” And he’s really a hardhead, he doesn’t believe in stuff like that. “Oh, how do you know; come on.” So I said, “Okay.” Then I prayed: “if I’m going today, then I’m ready.” Nothing happened. But meanwhile, Peps was there with that little girl we were talking about, and that little girl said, “Lillian has to be careful because she can get in a bad accident.” It was a good thing I prayed before we went; nothing happened. But I can tell what a bad day is and what a good day is. I can walk into a room and feel somebody’s sadness, or happiness, or which ones are smart, which ones are good, which ones are no good, which ones are raising cane. I can feel all that, just walking in. We used to have AA meetings and I could know who to sit by and pray for, I could tell all that. I don’t know why; probably because that’s my job. Go help that person, or this one’s having a hard time, and this one just wants somebody to talk to – like that. So it’s a job. It’s a real job, like everybody else, you don’t get paid or anything for it, but it’s your job and you’re doing it, like that.

DL: In some Indian cultures the person who has the special gift might be called the Medicine Man or Medicine Woman. Is there a similar term for that in Dakota that would apply to you?

LW: Yes. But most don’t know about it. It’s just like in the Christian world. The big thing that’s going on is the prayer warriors. These prayer warriors are praying for those evangelists and these preachers and all the Sunday school teachers. The prayer warriors are the ones with the power. They don’t talk about that much. Even in churches you don’t hear, “Thanks for all the prayer warriors”, but they’re the power behind things. They’re the ones that make the miracles happen, they’re the ones that say, “God, can you do this and help?” Then that evangelist can go over there and touch them. But he’s not alone. He’s doing his job, but he’s not alone. He’s got power behind him. And a lot of these people don’t know that all this goes on. It takes a bunch of people to do one thing. A lot of times people are sick and they die because they don’t have positiveness. They don’t have the strength to say: “I can beat this; I know I can get rid of this.” I did that a few times, but it’s kind of hard for me to help myself. I’m supposed to help others. But I did that out here once. I fell down steps and my ankle got just big, and so I hurried up and touched it and I prayed for it and I said, “You know what? I can’t deal with this today, I’m real busy, I got a whole bunch of stuff to do.” That’s not a good excuse, but it worked. I have a whole bunch of stuff to do. That
swelling went down and I was amazed. Usually when I pray for myself, nothing happens. I have to suffer like everybody else. But a lot of times people don’t realize that they can call for help. If we could teach them, geez, call for help, He loves all of us; He’ll help us. But they don’t. And they think they have to say a special prayer; you don’t. Just say, help me. But you have to say where you need help, like, help me with my ankle, or help me at least get the swelling down, or help me with the pain. If you say the right words to your spirit guide to the Creator, then he’ll help you. But a lot of people just say, Help. Help what? But you gotta say it right outright. You gotta say where you’re hurting, what you want.

DL: Can I get your opinion on something I read? You mentioned that leaders have both good and bad in them. And you mentioned Lincoln as a leader who said, let’s kill these thirty-eight men. Some of the accounts I’ve read said that at the time of the 1860’s and after the war, there were non Indians who were absolutely red hot with hatred for Indians. The rage was unbelievable.

LW: Yes, it was.

DL: And there was some real fear in a few of the Dakota communities by their friends who were non Indian, that these people would all be wiped out and everybody would be killed, if there wasn’t some sort of punishment for what was considered the perpetrators of this war. Because a lot of non military white folks died. They were farm people, and some of them were not involved with the war at all; they were innocent, just like the Dakota women and children who were innocent and died. So there was deep antagonism, red hot anger, and from what I’ve read, when Lincoln heard that, that’s the point at which he was advised: You’ve got to do some sort of public punishment, or they’ll all be endangered and possibly killed, run off. They said “this is a real serious situation in Minnesota right now.”

DL: Do you agree that is it possible that Lincoln did what he did because he was hoping to mollify the non Indians who were just crazed with anger, and in that respect it was a good decision?

LW: I think he didn’t have to do it because a lot of people are easily swayed. Each person has light and dark, they get to go where they want. Each decision is real important in everybody’s life. Just like I told you about my aunt: I refused to pray for her because I said, oh, she wouldn’t want any prayer, and I made a bunch of excuses: let my husband pray, he’s the minister here. But it’s important to God for each person to do what they’re supposed to. Just like He said, if you don’t do what you’re supposed to, somebody suffers. Lincoln didn’t make the right decision, so we had to suffer. But Lincoln gets his payback. His whole ancestry, just like the ones that hung the thirty-eight, all their relatives have something. If people would look into that, they’d really be amazed. They’d be amazed what happens down the line. If I do things wrong, then my children have to suffer too. I look at my children now and say, geez, I wish they wouldn’t drink. I drank when I was little; my parents drank. It’s handed down, but I keep
telling my son, “You can be the one that'll stand up and be the one that stops all these things from falling, falling, falling.”

Each of us has an important role. Just think, every human being has an important role. If they could do their part, they'd save a whole bunch of trouble. Just like you—every decision you make, you think they're not important, but they are, because it affects your children, it affects your grandchildren, right down the line. It's just like if a whole little crew was standing here. Whatever you do here today is going to touch their lives. I always feel bad because all the stuff I knew, I could have pushed it into my children—I didn't. I don't know why. Probably because I didn't think they would listen. But now as I sit here, all the stuff I know... I could have done better by my children. I could have taught them good things that I didn't instill in them. But now they're drinking. One of them is really drinking, and I always think, what is going on here? But its part of us, part of what we do. If we do something wrong it comes off on them, just like leaving a shadow on them. They have to suffer in some part. Just like our eating— if we don't eat good, then our little children, they suffer too. They taught us when we were young how to eat right. We started out good. We started out good from gardens and we were healthy. We didn't get sick. Funny, we didn't have pneumonia and everything. The Creator must have took care of us, because we would never have any help, we would never have doctors care about us or worry about us, or try to help us, or have money for medicine and stuff. So probably he helped us in that area. But still I think it's because we ate right. Now, nobody eats right. There is so much cancer. Cancer is here because the people that are growing things are trying to use all new things and they're hurting people more than they are helping. And it's scary because the people that aren't smart are going to eat what they can. We don't read all those nutrition things—I don't. Even I get mad at myself. They say: “Read those things and see how much fat is in there.” It's just because I never learned it, I don't care—I'll just go eat.

I still have a deep belief that you're gonna die when your time comes, even if you're healthy. You're still gonna die. Do you want to enjoy life and eat well and be merry or do you want to just sit there? I had a friend whose house was so clean. I told her a lot of times, “Geez, you don't have to clean it. You have to have germs once in a while. How's your body going to learn to fight against something?” She took Hi-lex all the time; wiped off everything. If she had dinner, I'd say, “Can I help do dishes?” “No, no, I'll do it,” because she didn't want anybody touching anything. She died real young. She died from a drug thing. Just think, she was so clean, you wouldn't think she'd be sickly. She was too clean.

DL: Do you have any opinions about the treaties that were signed in 1858, 1851?

LW: I think that the United States is suffering because they made so many mistakes, and that's one of them. I heard one time on TV that evangelists got up and they all said: “we're sorry for how we treated the Blacks.” I think that's what has to take place. I think the president has to stand up and say “we're sorry how the Indians were treated.” I think that's the only thing that will lift the United States. The United States is going to suffer some more; they still have a lot of suffering to do because they cannot say: “We
did wrong.” They’re such a people with high esteem they don’t think they’re in the wrong. When they do say that, the cloud will be lifted and then the whole nation can do good again. But it’s not just to Indians, it’s to other people, too, that they did some wrong things. They’re throwing people in prison that don’t even belong in prison. There’s a lot of sad things that the judges are doing, the leaders are doing.

I had a vision where He said all the people in high places are the jackals. And he showed me. We were all sitting at a table and he said all these people in high places are jackals. And I was thinking to myself, I don’t even know what a jackal is, but it must be bad. But he said: “pray for that, because all these leaders, they shouldn’t be in there.” So our United States, I can see a lot of things are coming. There’s gonna be floods, earthquakes, there’s gonna be landslides, there’s gonna be fires, all the volcanoes. I’ve seen it and it’s scary. I watched every one of them all going by and I could hear all the people hollering and screaming and stuff. And I said, “what is going on?” Because it seems like I was watching it from a picture window, like in the movies-one thing here, one thing there, one thing there – all the people – it was really scary, the way they were all hollering. And then I thought to myself, well, what could be done? Then I see a lady-sized being- they weren’t like a man, like God or Jesus, they were lady-sized, really pretty. And she said, “Don’t be afraid because whatever house you’re in, you’ll be safe.” So then I told Pepsi, “Geez, something’s coming for this world, but people are not ready.” People are not ready and people are living like that little mouse. The one that danced and played and didn’t get ready for winter. A little grey mouse danced while this other one was storing nuts and getting ready for the winter. Then this mouse suffered when it came winter. That’s what I think of the United States. I think they’re all having a good time, and it’s sad. They better start trying to build their spiritual part. They better take care of their spiritual part because doom and gloom is gonna come for our country.

DL: You’ve touched on this, and we sort of understand your feeling. The question is: Is it good to commemorate the events of the mid 1800’s, and what’s the best way to commemorate them?

LW: Yes, I think it’s always good to do something like that. It will help a lot of people that need it. Some of us don’t need it because our priorities are higher; we see different things. But some people need that. Some of them need to know what happened and they have to hear it. Just like I told, everybody’s on different levels. There are people that didn’t hear the story yet. There are people in the spiritual realm. There are certain people that are called to dig up the truth and bring it out; that’s their job. And there are some people that have to listen to it and want to hear it and want to learn. You’ll be surprised how different people are, because everybody has a different job.

DL: After high school, what did you do next? Did you get married? How about your occupation? Children? What was your next big step?

LW: I got married after school. I went to Haskell first, and then I had to get married. I got married to a Chippewa and we had two kids, and we probably weren’t ready for
them, so they took one away and my brother took one; the boy. I don’t know why he didn’t want the girl, but he took the boy. And then the girl was taken away. I got her back later on. We finally split up. The big difference was our up-bringing. The way we were. We weren’t the same kind of people; we didn’t get along. We finally decided just to forget it and move on. And my aunt had a lot of help in this. She said, “You get out of there, because you’ll be killed.” So then I said: “Yes, well, maybe I better get out of here.” So I moved on. And he did kill somebody; he killed somebody later in a fight. He was a drunk and a mean person. We were just so thrown around in our lives and we didn’t even know what love was. I mean, we didn’t learn it. It was just good to be with somebody, a partner, somebody that treated you good at the beginning. But later on, you’re not treated good because you don’t feel- you don’t know how. Nobody taught us real love; just our preacher man, our minister in South Dakota. And we always used to think, geez, he talked about such good things – where are they at? Where are those things? That’s why it amazes me when I see people that are happily married after all these years, walking together, and sometimes they’re holding hands. I say: isn’t that nice? How come my life wasn’t like that? I was the one that wanted that. But I think that people are pushed into their job, whatever it is. If you learn all those tragedies and hardships, you become a different person. You can empathize; you can feel what that person’s going through. Even like drinking- people are always saying, “oh those drunks.” They’re real human beings. They’re so sensitive, that’s why they drink. They don’t like the way things are in this world. They’d rather drink and try to block it all out and live in that little world they’re in. It’s easier for them because they’re too sensitive. It always amazes me.

A man has a book out that says “I’ll show you how to quit drinking.” But there isn’t just one alcoholic. There are people that are addicted because they need love, companionship. There are people that are addicted to just the drink itself. There are people that just want a place to escape. There’s so many different alcoholics that I don’t know how he’s gonna cure them. I’ll be glad to see. I’ll be surprised. Of course, I believe in miracles.

DL: The next one is: How many children and grandchildren? You have four children and how many grandchildren?

LW: I have seven children, the same as our family. They had seven- I have seven. Some of my grandchildren are way off. Some are split up, so they take the children with them. So it’s really hard. I miss a lot of people that I should be involved with. I was praying one night and somebody said, “Don’t forget about me, Grandma.” So see, people, they should never interfere with lives. They’re not God. I really get mad at social workers because they come in here and say: “We have to remove these children from there, and we have to try to get these guys out of the house.” God put those children there for a reason! There’re supposed to learn a lesson from all this, and then they become a good person. The United States, they’re so into trying to do God’s work that they’re messing up the whole balance of things. These children, if they would have stayed in that home, they would have become a good, strong person. They would have learned something from it. But now they’re messing up. I should be able to see my
grandchildren and spend time with them, but they’re all way off, everybody’s split up. I’ve got a lot of grandchildren. I must have twenty-something, and then some more great-grandchildren. I just don’t get to see them all. But I pray for them all.

DL: What do you do in your free time?

LW: I hardly have any free time. I help people a lot. I give people rides. I pray for people. If somebody’s sick, I have to rush over there. If somebody needs help, you have to go visit them. Our family is so big. We just can’t go off and take a vacation or something, like everybody else. Our family’s so big right now; I don’t know how many are sick. I have a son that needs a kidney. Peps has a son that needs a kidney. Just think the odds of that; there shouldn’t be two in a family, but there is. They’re both not real young, but her son is younger than mine. They both have the same disease, like my brother had. And those odds are so great. Their names are almost the same— one’s Willard and one’s Willis. And they have to each have a kidney. We have a lot of sick people. Peps’ husband is sick, my brother is sick; my two brothers both had massive heart attacks, the youngest ones. They are not healthy. And my other brother had something wrong with his stomach and my other brother has a pacemaker. Peps’ husband had a pacemaker and a defibrillator, so she has more problems than all of us. But my biggest problem is that my one son drinks. He drinks a lot. He could sit home and drink by himself; who ever heard of that? When we were young, we would go out and dance, go to picnics, have things together with a whole bunch of people. You didn’t just go drink by yourself. He has a problem. There are a lot of sickly people in our family.

DL: Do you have hobbies?

LW: Yes. I put things together. Like little coasters. I do mirrors. We do things on shades. We could put Indian pictures on shades. Every time I do one, they’re gone right away, so I don’t have any on hand. I do beadwork. I do a little fabric work, but somebody does the sewing for me. I’ll do the design and the cutting out and stuff. I do pictures. I don’t have any on hand now, because those are always gone. Every time I do something it’s gone right away. I keep really busy. I always wish I had more time to do something.

DL: This question sounds a little silly, but what TV shows do you watch?

LW: I hardly watch any. If I do watch them, I like to watch Oprah. I like to watch John Edwards. I don’t like all the spooky shows they have on TV; I don’t think that’s good for people. I know it’s happening, but I still don’t think it’s good for people to see. I like the talk shows, I like the news. But that’s what I’m not supposed to watch. I watch it when I can.

Oh, I know another thing that happened to me: I was at the kitchen when the two towers fell, when they got hit by the planes. I was there washing dishes, and the TV came on by itself. And I was thinking, gee, what’s going on? Somebody turned the TV
on for me so I’d know what to pray for. I had to sit down and pray for that; quit doing dishes. A lot of times things are more important in this world than just having a clean house, or clean dishes, or everything in place, or even what you wear. People have so much judgment. They always say to me: “How come you always have just a tee-shirt on?” I don’t think it’s real important what you wear. I think if people look good in certain colors, they should wear them, but I think you should be comfortable and happy. All of those people that try to wear girdles are messing up the place they’re supposed to be. So I have a hard time with trying to be who I am, because everybody else tries to get involved. “Why don’t you wear this, why don’t you do this, why don’t you …” But the spirits told me, “We want you to grow old gracefully.” I don’t know what “gracefully” means but I try to live my life by what’s important, like doing my homework or doing my house cleaning, or seeing my son, or seeing my grandson, or helping my grandchild do this or that, or giving Joanne a ride. We have a lot of people that don’t have a license or car that need help. Sometimes I get lost in the shuffle. I have to hear from the spirits that say, “You better take care of yourself. You better get some rest.” Once I ended up in the hospital and they said, “We told you to take a rest.” So see, I get carried away too, and really don’t pay attention all the time. And it’s not good, because if you pay attention, then you will be where you’re supposed to be.

DL: Do you like to go to the casino?

LW: I go there quite a bit. I think I started because when my daughter died, I hated to be alone. It’s kinda good to be among people, and sometimes your relatives are busy. Like Peps has a whole bunch of stuff. Everybody’s life is so busy, you can’t count on them. So if I feel alone, I’ll go sit over there. And I don’t play big money; I’ll play nickels or something for a while, or go sit and talk to somebody, go talk to all those old people. I don’t go there just to gamble. I already know I’m going to win a big amount. I was told. I don’t know when that’s coming; two of them. But I’m not worried about it. I just think that when I need something, I get it. Like, if I’m out of gas, somebody will come and say, “You want some gas?” So I never have to worry.

If I need a purse, or if I think I need a purse, I’ll go someplace to a rummage sale and the lady will say, “These are all $10.00.” I look at that purse and want it. Then when we’re walking around she says, “Well, we’re dropping all these purses to a quarter,” or something like that. Then I will say, “thank you, Lord,” right away, because He knows what I need. Sometimes my gas will be way down and it will go up and I’ll get in the car and say, “What happened?” Then I know that He helped me out.

He always feeds you. I remember I was in Granite one time. I was getting hungry and I said: “I didn’t bring money along.” I put it in gas to help a person with a ride. So then I went up to the desk and I said, “Do I have anything on my comp [casino compensation card for enrolled members of community]?” And I don’t play that much, so she said I probably wouldn’t get any compensation. She said, “Yes, you have some.” I said, “Enough for a sandwich at that little shop?” And she said, “Well, I’ll give you a buffet.” I didn’t have it coming. I only had a little bit in there, probably $3.00 or something. He said, “My children will never go hungry”. You get used to it. You don’t look for it, you
just get used to it. If you need help, you'll get it, because you help other people. He said, "Whatever you put into the lives of others, it will come back in your own." So my life is not by routine, my life is not by getting up at 8:00. They always tease me: "How come you can't get up early?" It's because most of the night I'm busy. And then if I'm not praying, I'm busy in the spirit world, so I need my rest. I need my rest; they don't realize it, all the stuff I'm doing.

DL: Throughout your life, who are your heroes? Who are the people you have admired the most—living or dead?

LW: I think my dad, my aunt. But I also had a lady that helped me get into Haskell. She was just a stranger, and it was amazing to me that she could reach out and go through all the trouble she did. She just asked me what I wanted, and she said, "Do you just want to wander around, or what would you like in this world?" I said, "You know, I really liked school. I'd like to get an education now, without all the hindrances behind me." So she helped me get into Haskell. She filled out all those papers herself. I mean, she didn't have to. That was amazing to me; that she did that. We stayed at her place because they found us after we ran away. We slept on a bridge in St. Paul. We went way up there and slept. Lucky we didn't fall off. We slept up there and then we got down early and the cops picked us up and they took us to her house. But she said, "You just can't run away and you must want something out of life." So I told her, "Yes, I'd like to go to school." So she looked it up. "Okay, I'll help you get into Haskell." She did. I got in just like that. It was late too, but I still got in. So there are different people throughout my life that have been a help when they didn't want to. They were sent by the Creator to intervene and to help, and I realize it. I could tell, because they don't know you. They don't owe you anything, and they didn't have to help you, but they did. I know there was a whole bunch of people throughout my life that were really an encouragement and that did good.

DL: When did you run away?

LW: I ran away after I graduated. I was seventeen and got tired of taking care of kids. So we said, "let's get out of here." So we took off and we made it all the way to the Cities and that was scary. The Cities is big compared to your little bitty life on the Res. We didn't know what to do. We slept all over, we slept in train depots, we slept in bus depots, old doorways. We found places where they have steps way up to attics and you could sleep there because nobody's up there. Oh, we slept all over. We slept on that bridge. But it was just that life was hard. We had to babysit, we had to raise all those kids, we worked hard. We worked hard when we were little. I'm surprised at the response now when you ask kids to do things like take out the trash. To my one daughter I said, "Bring my brush and comb." And she said, "Geez, I'm just like Cinderella." I had to laugh, because if she knew all the stuff we did when we were little. They think they don't have to do anything.

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

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LW: I think that they’re still going to make them, and one of them is wisdom. We know what’s coming to this world. When something starts going on, people are going to run to the Indians. I think prayer, too. There’s a lot of prayer people that are not known. Not just me, but there are a lot of people that pray from their hearts and are keeping things like a reservoir to try to help what’s going on here. I think some day that all this is going to be known and that people are going to be thankful. And I think that a light is going to be shed on all the things that Indians can do—their talents and gifts. They have a lot of talents and gifts that can be used in this world that are going unnoticed. There’s a lot of artists that need help just to sell something. They don’t have to be famous, but they do good art. They aren’t looking for fame; they’re just looking for a way to live. I think that’s why God gave these casinos, to help the people that were shut out of things that were rightfully theirs. But they’re still using these benefits wrong. The benefits are going to places where they shouldn’t go. They should be used for people that are hungry, or need homes, or electricity. They should be used for Indians. That’s what God gave them for. But they’re not; they’re getting way out of hand like everything else. And they don’t want to give the benefits to everybody, that’s the saddest. Everybody should get it. There’s going to be a law written, I heard, that everyone has to be equal, treated equal. When it that going to take place? I don’t know.

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

LW: I wish for people to go back the way they were and not be poor, to the way they used to get along. They used to help each other. They used to have love, honor and respect for each other. They were a real family. Things were different. We didn’t need psychiatrists. We didn’t need doctors. We didn’t need to have people teach us how to eat. If Indians could go back to the things that they learned about how to get along, to help each other, to care for each other... All that is lost. Everybody’s farther south now. You have to lock your doors now. People will come in and rob you, your own family. I don’t know if they could ever get back. I doubt it; it would take a real miracle. But it’s supposed to be strived for. I saw a vision where there’s a whole bunch of chairs all around. Some are facing in and some are facing out. I still don’t know what that means. I have had so many visions, I’d like to write a book sometime and show the pictures of the things I’ve seen, the things I’ve heard. I think when the time comes, when it’s right for the time, then I’ll be approached and somebody will write it. But I know a lot of things that are going to take place that I wish I could go up and say to somebody, “Hey, you’re going the wrong way. Hey, don’t go that way. Hey, don’t do this...” But you can’t. That’s their life lesson. Just like if you could see someone coming to the edge of the bridge and then there’s no more – like that, but you can’t tell them. They have to learn their own way. It’s scary. I always wonder why, if you get knowledge, what good is it then?

I think there’s going to be a big awakening. I’ve seen it where the Indian people are rising up. First a small group, then a larger group, then another large group. Billy Graham said that they are like a sleeping giant. I’ve seen it too. They were all sleeping but they’re starting to rise up now. So I think more will be heard from the Indian people. There will be knowledge that was suppressed. There will be all that wisdom that was
never brought out, not just about food, but about life. I think a lot of stuff is kept under wraps that they don’t want to share, that they have to start sharing now.

DL: Is there anything I missed that we should talk about, or a question that wasn’t clear?

LW: I think that we have to remember the ones that have died, that we should have something in the house for them. You don’t have to have a big cross, but a candle or a picture. Indians were funny – when I was young they said, “Oh, don’t put that picture up. She died. It’s scary.” It’s not scary – you remember them. And they’re still around us. They like to be remembered. I think people should do that, even if it’s on their own. Just put a picture up, and a candle or a small flower, even if it isn’t real. They see that. They see that and they hear that. They hear when you talk about them. Every time you try to talk about somebody that died, nobody wants to hear it. I say, my gosh, what are they scared of? That was their relatives. How they could be like that is beyond me. I’m going to do a picture, I told them, and put everybody that died in it. Everybody. What are they scared of? That’s our relatives. And that’s just a picture. They’re here, right around them. If they knew that, I wonder what they’d do. They’d really be scared. But they see us every day, they can talk to us; they choose not to sometimes, probably because we don’t listen. Just like people that pray – they sit and pray and pray and pray, and then when the Lord’s going to give them the answer, they’re gone. They aren’t even there anymore and they aren’t listening. They said their part and they’re gone.

So I think that our world is going to change. I don’t know what it’s going to take; maybe a big catastrophe. But I think people are going to start waking up. They talk about this thing where the earth is teetering on its axis. I always think about that. I don’t know much about that kind of stuff, but maybe that’s what it’s going to take. Some psychics said that people are sleeping more because they’re getting ready for something and they’re growing spiritually. Maybe that’s why I’m tired all the time. But I try to listen to the big minds, even the people I don’t know.

When Kennedy died, I saw myself sitting with my relatives and they said to me: “Did you know that Kennedy died?” And I said “Yes, I was over at his house”. I could still talk to them and they could talk to me. They try to talk to you, but you don’t listen. They say that about everybody. My dad said, “I tried to talk to this one, or that one” – of my brothers and sisters – but they just sit there, they don’t listen.” Sometimes we hear things and we try to not believe it. Like your friend might be trying to say something to you and you don’t hear it, but one of these times it’ll be just clear, just like right in the room with you, and you’ll hear something. It isn’t that they’re trying to scare us. They’re trying to help us, or guide us. They don’t want you to cry. They’re in a good place. I always wondered why the Mexicans celebrate death. When I was younger I heard that. How could they celebrate? It’s so sad. But it isn’t sad. We’re supposed to be rejoicing for those people. All their stuff is over, all their hardships, all their hard times, their sadnesses. Just think, they’re in a good place now. Now I understand that part. It took
me a lot of years. The Indians used to say “It’s a good day to die.” They knew it was good to go home; that’s where they belong. We’re only here for a short little time.

DL: So that’s why the thirty-eight died not afraid.

LW: Yes, because they knew where they were going. And the things that are in this world are small to the heavenly father; they’re small compared to how we make things big. And when people die, you think they suffer- they don’t suffer. When I was in that car accident I could see a light, so I turned and all the metal started crunching and I could hear it clearly. I could hear, but I didn’t feel pain. I almost died in that; and I realize now that you don’t feel pain. People get all upset thinking about what dying people go through; they don’t. He takes your spirit out right away; you don’t go through all that. People that drown; they start not breathing right away, but after that they leave the body right away; He takes you. You don’t sit there and suffer. He comes and gets you. You don’t go through all the things that people think. They’re scared of nothing.

People that are scared to die; they should have seminars for them. They’re sitting there wasting their time, scared and worried. It’s not scary to die. It’s just a blink of an eye, like He said. You blink your eye and you’re gone and you’re in a good place. I saw my aunt, first she was small and skinny, then I carried her someplace, and then I saw spirits get a little water ready, they gave it to her, and she turned out all nice again. She wasn’t skinny anymore; she was happy and thankful. And I saw her in the sunlight. I wanted to drink some and they wouldn’t let me, “No, that’s not for you.” So people who die must get something when they go, because she had to drink something. So life is us, what we make it, what we make out of it, even how our ending is. Everybody gets to do their own ending. They get to pick a date. That’s why some people linger in the hospital, or old age is forever; they don’t want to go. But pretty soon they just have to go; it’s better to just go. It’s amazing all the suffering we go through just because of lack of knowledge. We’re naïve, we don’t know what’s ahead, but we’re still scared.

DL: Thanks for your time.