

**Ignatia Broker**  
**Narrator**

**Anne Kaplan**  
**Interviewer**

**May 16, 1984**

**AK:** Today is May 16, 1984. I'm Anne Kaplan, and I'm talking to Ignatia Broker about her life and her writing as an Indian writer.

The first thing I guess we need to know in your biography is where you were born and when, if you don't mind saying so.

**IB:** Well, I was born on the White Earth Indian Reservation. [Tape interruption]

**AK:** All right now start again. You were born, you said, on Valentine's Day, [February 14] 1919, on the White Earth Reservation, and when you were about five, you were sent away.

**IB:** Five or six, probably six. I went to Wahpeton Indian School [Wahpeton, North Dakota].

**AK:** That was about 200 miles away. You said it was a nine-month program.

**IB:** September to May.

**AK:** Tell me again what it was again, the courses you studied there.

**IB:** Well, we had just general [ones]. We learned to read and write there the old way, you know, 'Alice said, "Come cat"' and all that stuff. Then all through the grades, we had reading, writing, and arithmetic, [those] were the basics, the three 'R's. Then we had a science course and biology in the upper grades, and, let's see, geometry, algebra.

**AK:** What kinds of things did they have you read, in your reading, it was just that progressive sort of—

**IB:** Well, we read—we had good libraries there where we read, you know, the books that were—like we had *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little Women* and all those kinds of books.

**AK:** Did you have a favorite subject while you were there?

**IB:** Not really. Then we had a physical ed[ucation] program with a basketball team of boys and girls, a baseball team.

**AK:** You said you missed one year when you were at Gillette [Children's Hospital].

**IB:** I missed one year, and that was—oh, I must have been about thirteen. I think I finished there about when I was fifteen.

**AK:** After that you said you went to Haskell [now, Haskell Indian Nations University], and I didn't know what that was.

**IB:** Then I graduated from Wahpeton the next year. I went to Haskell for two years, it would be the tenth and eleventh grade.

**AK:** What was Haskell?

**IB:** It was called an Indian college. It was actually like a high school and a college combined, where you learned jobs—the college part had to do with business education and all. Then toward the end they had shop class.

**AK:** So it was like a vocational training college.

**IB:** Yes. They called it a college.

**AK:** Where was that?

**IB:** In Lawrence, Kansas.

**AK:** Oh my goodness. The whole time your family was still at White Earth, and you were going from place to place?

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** So you were pretty much trained to do some kind of a business job by the time you got out of this college?

**IB:** No, I didn't finish Haskell. You had to finish high school first, before you went into the business end, and then they went into the business college, see, and after you finished Haskell. Then I went back, and I didn't go back. Then I started my twelfth grade at Park Rapids.

**AK:** Closer to home.

**IB:** Yes. That wasn't very satisfactory, because Park Rapids wasn't too good a—I rode a country bus with, you know, country kids, and they were all non-Indians, and they were pretty much prejudiced, you know. There was a lot of prejudice at the school.

Then the following year I went to North Star up in Warren.

**AK:** That was an Indian school?

**IB:** No, it wasn't. It was a girls' school and it used to be Omar Star College. They still called it that when I came there. It was just like Haskell; it wasn't really a college. We had academic subjects. We finished up, you know, to get our credits and we took other—like shop. Girls had carpentry and shop and other things—it was one of the first ones that did that, I think.

**AK:** Yes, that seems ahead of its time, to let girls do that.

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** So you finished twelfth grade there?

**IB:** Yes, and then let's see—I went there two, three years, I think.

**AK:** So that must have been the late thirties.

**IB:** Yes. I was at Haskell and in Wahpeton—I've got to get my dates right. In 1925, I think. I was there nine years, so I was graduated from Haskell in 1935. Then I went to Haskell in '37 and I was there '39, then I went to North Star, and I was there about two years anyway, then I had finished up my education and then went a little further, took up business.

**AK:** Oh, you did take business.

**IB:** Well, I took typing and shorthand and filing.

**AK:** So it must have been directly after that that you came down to the Twin Cities.

**IB:** Yes, we went from there to Duluth. It was an all-girls' school and it was run by the government. It wasn't an Indian school. I don't know if you ever heard of the National Youth Administration.

**AK:** Yes.

**IB:** You heard of that.

**AK:** Yes.

**IB:** Okay. That was where they had the school there.

**AK:** That was after North Star, in Duluth?

**IB:** No. The North Star College was run by National Youth, and then they closed down, and we all went to—a lot of them went to Duluth or they went home or they went to Minneapolis, wherever they were born.

**AK:** So you went to Duluth.

**IB:** Yes, and we stayed at the Y [YWCA—Young Women’s Christian Association]. Couldn’t get a job, so I went up there. Then I went to Glenwood, Minnesota. A lot of the kids went there—they were taking— The government had set up some kind of—I wasn’t there too long, because they came and picked me up from Glenwood. They were taking, learning to do trades that would help in war work, those kind of war work skills, is what they were training [us for]. Then from there I went to Minneapolis and got [unclear] and went into a civilian personnel signal corps.

**AK:** That’s when they taught you Morse code and then?

**IB:** Yes, we had Morse code and we learned the basic elements of electricity, positive and negative ends, and electrodes all of that, all that junk. So that was about the basis of my education.

When I was out to—we went to Hanford, Washington, got sent out to Hanford. Well, I took a course. This was a compound, a government compound out there, and they brought in community courses, like extension courses, you know. I took a course in journalism, and it was from the University of Washington, we went to night classes there. I think it was sponsored by the YW[CA.]

**AK:** Was it about then that you started keeping your notebooks?

**IB:** Well, yes. I was writing all the time, you know. I wrote poems when I was in grade school, and in the summertime. I and another girl were always writing poems, you know, about everything we saw. Then I did keep a lot of records from there about what went on.

**AK:** Is that something that your family encouraged? What do you think made you first start to write poems or write?

**IB:** Well, I don’t know, but my dad kept records, you know, and a lot of records of everything that happened on the reservation. I used to read his records. He was writing all the time. My mother, too. She knew a lot.

**AK:** She knew a lot and she wrote it down, or did you start writing—?

**IB:** I wrote a lot of things down that I heard, that the people would tell me, and I wrote down legends or anything that I just heard, you know, that they told me. I wrote about ant villages—oh goodness. You know, like when Grandma and Grandpa Rock would ask, “What are those ants—what are they doing?” Then “they got a town,” she’d tell me in Ojibwe. “They got a town,” you know, “and that’s where they lived.” I wrote all those kinds of things down. Anything I heard.

**AK:** And all this moving you were doing, you were always carrying something with you to write things down?

**IB:** Oh my goodness, yes. I had so many records, and I had clippings. Anything I had about—clipping, like when we went out West, Martha said, “What are you taking all those—that junky paper?” Big box of junk paper along, I had clippings about Indians, you know, that—anything that you read about Indians in the papers. There was an article about Indians in any of the magazines, I took that.

**AK:** So the journalism course you took was probably your first real formal training in—

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** That just sort of caught your interest and you decided to do that?

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** Did you ever write for newspapers after that?

**IB:** Well, let me see. No, just the way other people did, like you write a column for the local newspaper about, you know, the doings on the—it wasn’t a professional— It was just volunteer thing where they came and asked you to do a column for your community. Well, you know what I am talking about, all those walleye dos I did that while I was home.

**AK:** While you were at White Earth?

**IB:** Yes, when I came out of Gillette, I did that.

**AK:** You were pretty young then.

**IB:** Yes, but I used to hear everything, you know, because of my dad, people were always coming to our house and talking. They were organizing this. At the time they were organizing this—under that Wheeler-Howard Act, the Indian Reorganization Act. They used to meet in our house, and my dad and my uncle Hank, and Frank Clark and Pete. They wrote up the first constitution for the consolidated Chippewa Tribes. Some other like men from the reservation used to come all the time. They were on the committees, Pemberton, and all those old—

**AK:** Those names, I know those names—

**IB:** They used to come over to our house quite a bit. I met this one Pemberton at Upper Midwest [American Indian Center], at Denzelbed [phonetic], he was in a wheelchair. I can remember him coming over, he was my age, with his dad, and we'd play, you know, I can remember too—

**AK:** Let's see. You were in Washington until the Germans surrendered, you were saying last night.

**IB:** About '45, yes. We went out there '41, '42. I was in training, I was out there about three years, a little over three years.

**AK:** And there weren't very many Indian people around you?

**IB:** There were no Indians that I ever saw, in that whole compound.

**AK:** And nothing to clip from the papers about them either, probably.

**IB:** No, nothing. I did have some clippings from the Seattle paper. The Blackfeet Indians, you know, came over and they would work in the hop fields. They had hop fields there. They'd show their camp on the hill and how clean it was and how healthy they were. There were these other transient camps, I think the newspaper called them, where there was trash, and there was an epidemic of— What do you call that disease that you get from drinking water?

**AK:** Dysentery or?

**IB:** No. I can't think of the name. I still have that, the clipping. It really showed the Blackfeet. They had beautiful pictures there in the paper. I don't know if I have the pictures. I have the article. I think I have part of one. Something happened to the other part. But where it showed their tepees and how they were decorated, and it showed their blankets hanging, their homemade blankets. That was really nice.

**AK:** So after the government pretty much ditched you halfway between here and there on a train—

**IB:** I just got home the best way I knew how.

**AK:** Slowly, sounds like it took you more than a few weeks to get home.

**IB:** It took—let's see. That was in the spring, I think. I think I got back here in the fall. I went to Park Rapids because my mother was living there, and then we went over to the reservation and I stayed a year and a half. There was nothing there and we just couldn't live on nothing. But my, uh, they lived off the reservation, across the road, and there was a big garden, yet, they still grew

a garden and I helped with that. That summer we made artifacts, we made placemats out of oilcloth and we painted them, we painted in the pictures and we sold them to tourists.

Then I worked at the [Wabaunaquat] Boy Scout camp at Many Point Lake [Becker County], as a cook. [Laughter] As a breakfast cook, which wasn't too bad. It was a good job when I lived out there, but I hated it because—it was a nice job, but they had so many bedbugs. We lived in a lodge. Oh my goodness, you know. And these bats are the ones that carry it. You get a bat up—we lived over the dining hall, and these bats would come.

**AK:** It makes me itch to hear about it.

**IB:** By that time, Russell [Martin] was with me.

**AK:** He's your nephew, cousin.

**IB:** Yes, and he was out there, too, he came out there. They were always saying, "He's going to get lost because he's trouble, he goes away when you're supposed to go in pairs." But he used to attach himself to one tent group and go with them.

**AK:** So you came back eventually. At least in the introduction to your book, you came back to the Twin Cities after the war.

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** Was that after the Boy Scout camp?

**IB:** I spent the summer at the Boy Scout camp, and then I came back to Minnesota, I mean to Minneapolis. Let's see, we had work down here. When I went to Park Rapids, I came back here and I worked, and I joined this—oh dear, American Indians Incorporated, I think it was, but they weren't doing anything, just talking. We used to meet at the Jack Mies American Center.

Then that summer I went back up North, you know. You just couldn't get a job. So I went back up there and I got a job up there. Then I came back that winter from the job up there.

**AK:** And did you take any additional training or you were looking for secretarial or—

**IB:** Well, Yes, and then in—let's see. In about 195—Let's see, I try to go by, Russell was [born in] '46, about '52 or '53, he was about five. I went to—'53, '54, I went to Minneapolis School of Business and took a course, a business course.

**AK:** Was that where you were when you were telling the kids yesterday you met with a lot of Black people and Mexican-American people?

**IB:** No, this was after. Then after I finished the business school, I couldn't get a job.

**AK:** You were still—

**IB:** You still ran into that “We don't hire Indians,” you know. That was before the Civil Rights Movement came. I think the Civil Rights Movement came—was starting just about then, '56, something like that. I finished business school in '53, '54. I have to get my dates right. Maybe I remember good but—Let's see, let me think, yes, about '53.

**AK:** Okay, so from there you had all this training but still no job, and you had to—

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** So what did you do next then?

**IB:** Let's see. Well, I worked in people's homes, you know. I did what they called day work. It wasn't too bad. I had Debbie [Deborah Sargent] then. Because with that you could kind of be choosey, you know. If you get a good family, you stick. I had some really good families, so I only went to a few homes. I went to one home twice a week and another home I only did once a week. Then you were making better wages, anyway, going out and doing day work than if you were working in a shop, because even today if you go out and clean people's homes, you can get about on the average of \$7 an hour.

**AK:** That's not bad at all.

**IB:** They had to pay more than— They usually pay more than you do in a factory or any other kind of work, in order to get the people to come. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to get anybody in. Then everybody would be looking [for work] in factories. But that's the way it was though.

The wages were better, and you got a lot of—well, we didn't have any benefits like Social Security or anything like that, but we had other benefits, like you'd get a Christmas bonus check, and you got—let's see. Like you got clothes. I worked for one lady. They had this Verre brand hosiery. She was nice, you know, and so for two years, I think, before they moved, he was a distributor, he took orders for this Verre brand, so I got underclothes for the kids, and socks. She was nice. She would bring me home. She knew the kids and she put all that—at Christmastime, the kids got a package or on their birthdays or on my birthday.

**AK:** You wouldn't find that in a factory, that's for sure.

**IB:** No. Then I used to get clothes, you know, that they didn't want, nice, and I used to cut down the shirts for Russell, you know. So he always had nice shirts. Then I would makeover clothes for Debbie. So then clothes wasn't a problem. Just the shoes, you know, that we'd have to buy.

**AK:** Those are expensive, too. So then at some point you did go back to school again?

**IB:** Well, let's see. We lived at Sumner Field [Housing Project, Minneapolis] then, and then the kids were getting too big, and I think I moved in 1961 from Sumner Field, or '60. I'm going by Debbie's age now, I think she must have been about seven then, because she was born in—this was '61. I don't know. She was in the first grade, I think, so she was about seven. So she was born in about '53. She was a little girl.

Because, you know, I'd have to come home—I'd take the kids, we'd go and I'd take them to the Lakes on the weekend, you know, and then I'd come home and on Saturday or Sunday or maybe sometimes in the evenings I'd have to, they liked to bowl. The bowling was up on Broadway [Avenue] there, so then we moved. Because we were in Sumner Field and that was kind of hard to get to.

Sumner Field, when I was there, was a pretty nice place to live. We had a nice apartments and everything, and it was a nice area. The crime wasn't as bad as—they called it the Near North side, you know, crime, pretty bad up around there. But it wasn't like that when we were there.

That's about all my education. Oh, and then I took community courses. Then I worked, Upper Midwest was just getting started in about '64 or '65 time, and I think they had a funny little office out of a house on the south, and then they had that—you know where old Unity House was?

**AK:** Yes.

**IB:** And where that old nursery school was. That was in the Upper Midwest offices. The Indian people were kind of like—liked to organize things. They like organizations. They like to join something. They like to have a drum group or a dance group or a sewing group, you know. So we had a guild on the north side. We had a sewing group, and we worked out of Unity House.

**AK:** Was that for community projects or did you like make quilts and sew them?

**IB:** Well, yes, it was just for— They made like pajamas, and we got sheets and made sheets and pillowcases and blankets, whatever, you know. They tried to help, they gave them away to people coming into the [Twin] Cities, or had a fire or something. We never kept any records about that. I suppose we should of, but we weren't record-inclined. That came later, you know. But we had a lot of, you know, people that are still around, that belonged to that little sewing group. One night a month we'd have a little dance down there, and they'd bring all the children, all the Indian children. The Indian children would go down there and they were doing, I don't know, some kind of dance. I think maybe it was the twist or something.

**AK:** But early sixties, it would have been the twist. You were sort of one of the founders of Upper Midwest, weren't you? You were involved at the very beginning.

**IB:** Yes. No, I wasn't really one of the founders. I was involved with them, you know, and I helped out with a lot of projects that they had, but I think you would go back to Winnie [Winifred] Jourdain, Emily.

**AK:** Emily Peake, that is.

**IB:** And what were the other—a couple of non-Indians then that helped. It was really started by Indian people. Reverend—he was from Alaska. Who was the minister from Alaska? I've forgot what his name was.

Then when they organized for a board, they got some non-Indians on that first board. And then I said, and then I was in— They went through a couple of directors till they got Bob Carr, and then he was on the board for a while. Then I went to work.

In the beginning, then we had Concerned Indian Citizens, which was a group of Indian people that were working, again working in the Indian community, and that was like the Raishes and the Buckanagas and the Martins and the Roys. It was a Northward, North Side, you know, just like being organized. Then we were kind of affiliated with Upper Midwest again. We did a lot of volunteer work for them. I went to—you know, someone would get into a hassle, they were getting AFDC [Aid for Families with Dependent Children], you know, and then they would have a cousin or somebody from the reservation come and live with them, the landlords and the AFDC really didn't like that, and they were being stripped, with their grants being cut.

So we used to start—so then I thought, well, we'd better start studying some of these things, so we got a little group together to study the welfare laws. Let me see. We had somebody from the state. I think she's Barbara Kroller or something like that, whatever her name is. Anyway, but she came and we started, and then we learned all about appeal and we appealed these decisions. Then we told the welfare that this was the Indian way of helping each other.

People would come. Like this girl, the first appeal we had, she had her nephew or her cousin, he came and stayed with her, and he was as old as she was. To any outsider it looked like she had a boyfriend living in, you know. In those days, they were strict about that, having anybody living in that home. So they threatened her, and we went and we told them that he was like her brother, he was a first cousin, and that he would only be staying until he got a job, you know, and got on his own feet, his own two feet. That's the way Indian people did things. They take in another family.

They were in trouble all the time with the landlords. For example, one landlord, one time we went to a meeting, he said, "Well, I don't like to rent to Indian people, because when you've got one Indian family, the next thing you know," he says, "you've got three Indian families." So we had to deal with that.

**AK:** What other groups were you a member of at that time?

**IB:** Well, in the beginning, STAIRS and Indian Upward Bound, but at that time, you see, I had Debbie and Russell, and I could have been on the board, like it was for parents, but they wanted parents—they didn't have that clause where they were adopted or anything like that. So I just stayed, and when they got organized, like Winnie [Jourdain] was on there, too, on both of those boards, but she withdrew because she didn't have any children in the school system. There were a lot of them that worked that way and didn't have—so when you got parents interested, you just got off the boards.

So let's see. Concerned Indian Citizens. Then Charles Deegan, Charles Buckanaga, and Dolores Raish, and I, and Ada Deer. I don't know if you've heard of Ada Deer. She's a very prominent Menomonee. She's national. She's interviewed by that Wolf, you know, and she was the one that really worked in Washington to get the Menomonees—you know, they terminated them. She got them their status back.

We started this—by that time there were so many little Indian organizations, there was little dance clubs, you know, and little song groups, and then there was little church groups, and then there was AIM [American Indian Movement] and there was Concerned Indian Citizens, STAIRS, Indian Upward Bound, Upper Midwest, and Indian Employment. But anyway, there were about fifty-five organizations in the Twin Cities area, in that area, you know.

Then they had the educational group. We had another group that I was involved was the advisory committee to the public schools, you know. So we formed this—we got this Minnesota Urban Indian Federation, and that was to cover—that was an umbrella group. Everybody elected representatives to this group, every little group. It kind of made some people mad, because these little drum groups, you know, maybe was only five or six people, but still, you know, it's an organization. And the little songs groups maybe had twenty people. So the bigger organizations, they said, well, they each get two, you know, votes, and we've got 300 people and they've only got six, you know. [Laughter] All that kind of thing.

Charles Buckanaga was the first president. I don't know if you ever heard of him.

**AK:** Oh sure. I know that whole family name.

**IB:** And then Larry Bissonette. I don't know if you heard of him. I can't think of who the other—and Dolores Raish was the secretary, we had a vice chairman, secretary, and treasurer. We never had any money in the treasury. [Laughter] Nobody paid our dues. More went out in paper. All it was, was just paper, paper, you know, notices about what everybody was doing.

**AK:** This whole time you were doing day work, too?

**IB:** No. I went to work at the [Minneapolis] *Star and Tribune*. I worked in the circulation

department, when I really became active there, and that was only part time. That was a six-hour day, so I had time. Then I left, I worked there quite a while and then all the time I'd be organizing. Then I went to work for Minority Task Force. They used to call it Minority Task Force in public schools. I don't know what they call it. Urban Affairs, I think they call it.

**AK:** Right.

**IB:** Urban something, they call it now.

**AK:** Let me shift gears a little bit. How long have you been telling stories?

**IB:** Well, I don't know. I started, used to tell stories to children, you know, in the schools. Like in the middle of winter we'd go in and tell legends, with the Title IV [Indian Studies Curriculum].

**AK:** Back in the sixties, probably.

**IB:** Yes, somewhere in there. Well, not all of that, either, because, see, then I worked for Upper Midwest for a long time and went back to the schools. That's when I started telling stories, or we'd go in and tell legends in the Indian studies, Dakota and Ojibwe legends.

**AK:** So you first started telling them in the schools. I assume that you sat around and told your own kids stories.

**IB:** No, in the schools we told them.

**AK:** And you've kept that up now and you do that still?

**IB:** Well, I go out to the schools now and then. That's strictly for stories, legends. We tell legends in the winter. But, you know, I speak to the students on just about anything.

**AK:** Sort of like you did yesterday?

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** About Ojibwe culture and how people lived.

**IB:** We change you know. You get some—I think was it Murray High School, where you get some teachers that want you to come in there and tell them what a bad, bad life we had, you know, kind of from a militant situation, a political science class or something.

**AK:** And you did some of that, too, before you kind of changed your—

**IB:** No. They have, like at Murray High School, this one teacher, he had the students all primed up to ask questions about the American Indian Movement and things like that, which I couldn't very well answer, because I didn't really know. But the purposes of it, I told them, well, we all just really needed the American Indian Movement in that time, because nobody was paying any attention to the Indians, and it was the only way to get attention. Then a lot of Indian organizations, you know, they opened a lot of doors, for Indian organizations to do some productive work. So that's about all you can say, you know, about that.

**AK:** You took a journalism class and you wrote newspaper columns and all. Were you writing other things at the time besides your notebooks?

**IB:** No, not for—oh yes. With Upper Midwest I would write. When somebody in some little paper wanted an inclusion from Upper Midwest, I would write something or else I would—or I wrote mainly the dialogue for a proposal, you know, the historical part of it, and the others filled out the blanks that came out of Midwest.

I did writing for Upper Midwest in different areas like when they wanted a proposal for—well, we did some very good work at Upper Midwest. For instance, we did legal research. I was in the research department, and we did legal research and we did research in education. In legal research, we went to the courts and I spent about maybe two years in that court system.

What we were doing is we were cataloguing the number of people that went to the courts, how many used public defenders, how many made a plea, how many had private defenders, what their offenses were, and if they were being put on probation or conditional release or whatever, you know, and how many were being bound over to a district court from city court, you know. They go there first, the old way. I don't know how they do it now. You would go to the city court and then they'd listen to, either dealt with you there if it was a misdemeanor, you know, and then if it wasn't, they sent you over to district court. You had to go through the whole thing again.

So that was a lot of work. I sat through that city—and then went over to district court to listen to how they were dealing with Indian people then. We catalogued this and put it all together. Then we had it all on record, you know, and you could pick up these papers. All the cases come in, all the arrest sheets, and so we got all of that. We put together a paper. I thought, 'What in the world are we going to do with that paper?' I think the League of Women Voters came, and Emily [Peake] let them read through that, and Augsburg [College].

Then part of the other research was like I was head of the research department and it was just general statistics—how many people, Indian people, were in Minneapolis, and what kind of jobs they had. We did a little housing survey to establish a mobility pattern, and then how many were on AFDC, how many were given general assistance, and what the problems were. We had two workers that worked with the welfare.

We did a lot of work, just cataloguing everything that— I got these records, too.

**AK:** I was going to ask you. Those are really valuable documents.

**IB:** Yes, but the thing is, they're all there, because I just called Ona [Richards] there at Upper Midwest, and we've got to get them out of there. But all that work is there. We put together a statistical book for that period of time, for that census period from 1960 to 1970, then 1970 to 1980, documenting where the Indians lived in each county and how many Indians in each county and what the populations were.

**AK:** The Historical Society, I bet, would love to have that, if they want to donate it. That's really valuable.

**IB:** Then we put that together, and that took a lot of work. It took several people doing that, because, see, we were all doing other things, too. Amy Flocken worked on that. We went over the census records, you know, and then I said, "Amy, go and get some of those records." And she brought great big sheets of paper. We went over those together.

So when Longhouse [a halfway house] in Minneapolis, they needed some census figure for how many—they were having trouble finding a place. People didn't want that kind of a house in their neighborhood. Up there was just strictly kind of a Black neighborhood. There aren't that many Indians. So we provided them with information about how many Indian people, and they were surprised to think there were that many Indian people living in that area.

Then we put how many were living in the fringe area that they would be serving. So we helped them with that and with Anishinabe. That was an Anishinabe Longhouse. We did the work for another halfway house on 30th and Park. I was on that board.

When I was in courts, too, you know, we found out they weren't, that the Indian people weren't—well, anyway, I wrote a paper and gave it to, I think Bob Evans was his name, was head of that conditional release, and just told him that the program on conditional release was discriminatory in the way it was written up against Indians and probably against Blacks, too, because what their conditional release was based on was how long you lived in an area, if you owned your own home, what your education level was, you know, because they were looking for stability. So we told him that Indian people could be stable, you know, if they had—and then we established a mobility pattern.

We told them on that housing survey that we interviewed 100 Indian families and six months later we went back to the same places, and about fifty of them had moved [away] and of the fifty remaining ones, about twenty-nine of them had moved [locally]. So the moved and the remaining ones and the mobility patterns, and not only that, we asked why, you know. Then we located some of them that had moved. Why did you move? "Because our children couldn't get along in the school." Or, "We were having trouble with the landlord. My sister came to stay, and our landlord didn't like it, and he evicted us." Or, "I couldn't pay my rent." "Well, why couldn't you

pay your rent? You were on the AFDC.” “Because my kid got sick and I couldn’t get them to pay for the drugs, so I had to buy the drugs myself and I was short on my rent. I paid half of the rent.” You know, all kinds of things like that we came across.

Then we showed that to the courts, and we told them it wasn’t that the Indian people living there, if they would change it in that regard, is the fact that any Indian family that comes into the Twin Cities area goes to an Indian organization and registers either with the United Church Committee, Upper Midwest, or with American Indian Movement, or they go to any of these other, and we listed the Indian organizations. The proposal we made is, I said that the fair thing would be that you could ask these Indian people when they came, about their families, how many were in their families, where they came from, what reservation, and if they had registered with an Indian organization, because we could always put our hands on them. Because most likely if they took the male out of the family, you know, was in jail, well, then you’d have the family anyway.

**AK:** When did you first start writing down the story of Oona [*Night Flying Woman*]?

**IB:** Well, you know, I thought about it, but I really never had any time to do it, you know. Then I thought, well, the first excuse is, “Well, I don’t have a typewriter,” which is right, you know. I couldn’t afford a typewriter. They’re [priced] kind of high, you know. And then I started writing it down when I started working for Upper Midwest.

**AK:** Back in the sixties.

**IB:** Or else I went to—I did some typing at the STAIRS. I used different typewriters, because I didn’t have a typewriter, wherever I could type, or at the schools or somewhere where I could get a typewriter, and typed it up.

Then I had to go through all these notebooks, you know, and pull out what I needed, because they’re just a mishmash, you know, of all kinds of peculiar information. [Laughter]

Then I got it together, and then I just let it lay for a while. Then after I retired, I dug it out again. Then I dug it out and I did a typing job, and then I was going to edit it. Then I quit again, because then I started working for Seniors in Community Service.

I moved out to Brooklyn Center and I got a nice brand-new typewriter, which I maybe had only seven months, and I went down to the laundry room. My mother was there in the apartment, but she had a room off the bathroom. She had what was called the master bedroom, a room and a bath, then the hall, a bedroom, and another bath, then another hall here that goes out. We had kind of a little galley-like kitchen with a dining room at the end of the living room. The door came in like this, and I worked here in the dining room. My work material was there, and my typewriter was there. I said, “I’m going to leave the door open now, going down to the laundry room.” Went to the laundry room, come back, my typewriter was gone.

**AK:** That fast.

**IB:** And I wasn't in that laundry room, I don't know, I couldn't have been in that laundry room more than fifteen minutes, you know. I used two washtubs and run both, sort the clothes, get them in there, put the soap in, and then come back. I came back and my typewriter was gone. It would have been better if the plug had been on the other side, but the plug was just where you came around here. So they could just pull it out and haul it, whereas if it had been around the other way, been around a leg or something.

So that was a setback.

And then by that time my mother wanted to move back to the reservation or to some—so we moved up to Bemidji and I was kind of retired anyway, you know, getting Social Security, too.

**AK:** You sent some of those chapters off to other magazines, though, didn't you? Because when I first got them, you had the number of words on the top—

**IB:** Yes, I changed the—erased that. No, I think the only thing I ever sent out was the thing I did on the lumber. But I was going to send them out, you know. I was going to send them out to—No, I didn't send them to anybody. I sent that lumber—I can't even remember what I sent that lumber thing out to. The only one that had them, really, was Roger Buffalohead. I sent them to him, and he read it over and he thought it was pretty good, and he said, "Just continue. Make it a little fatter." And all of that, you know.

**AK:** Then you just decided to send them to us.

**IB:** Yes.

**AK:** Lucky for us.

**IB:** I went to the library, and I went to *Writers' Market* and I went to what kind of material each publishing was, and then I looked at, uh, and then I wrote some letters to different companies to see if they would be accepting that kind of material. Then I saw your ad in the paper. I saw where you were listed as one. Roger told me, "Well, why don't you keep it kind of regional, try to get somebody in this area that was regional." Then I saw that, so I sent it.

**AK:** Oh, I see. You also had written down some of the stories, if not legends, too, isn't that right?

**IB:** I sent some of those off, yes, but I didn't sell anything. What is that big company that does school things?

**AK:** Lerner [Publications], the company here?

**IB:** No. Not here.

**AK:** One of the big ones in New York like McGraw or Holt?

**IB:** No, it's in California. They print a lot of educational material. I can't think of the name. I sent that to them. The children's stories. I just sent the stories, not any pictures or anything. One story I sent to them. I can't remember what the name was.

But the thing is, I found out afterwards, somebody that worked in a publishing company, that with cultural stories, especially Indian stories, that they're not too sure. See, a lot of them have their own illustrators, and if you're going to do—and a lot of them don't know anything about different tribal cultures.

**AK:** They wouldn't know how to begin to do it.

**IB:** And they like to rely on illustrators that they knew before.

**AK:** And now your future plans. That was one of the questions, too. You're writing another book that's going to take us up to—

**IB:** Well, this is all there, too, you know. I'm just almost done with that, and I'm going to go over the notes. This has to do with the people on the reservations, you know, from the 19—that I can remember, you know, to about World War II. That's when most Indian people left the reservation, and how we lived, the work we did. It was mainly just to get rid of some of the stereotypes.

Even today I belong to a senior citizens' group in Bemidji. I just went to the Nutrition Project, you know, and I was voted on the board. Then the RSVP Award, the Retired Senior [Volunteer Program]. They still have the stereotypes. "Well, do you know anything about Leech Lake [Band of Ojibwe]? Those Indian people are really living good." They have an idea that we're still getting, that our monthly income—and like I say, "I'm living on my Social Security." "Well, don't you get any of that Indian money that Indians are getting?"

So there's still a lot of stereotypes, that the government had been—they're dyed-in-the-wool believers, because they're my generation, and they probably heard it from their parents, that the Indians were being taken care of by the government. So that's one of the stereotypes that I'd like to get rid of. I just like to tell or show them that these people that are—how hard my parents worked, growing seven acres and canning and waxing, and how they picked berries, you know, canned those, all kinds, strawberries and wild berries, pink cherries, and the jams they made, and the blankets.

Indian people just applied their natural talent for doing craftwork, to making blankets and rugs. My mother braided rugs, and she would sell these to a farm lady who would order a rug. It was a trade. A chicken or meat when they butchered, you know, and things like this, she'd put a price on it and they'd put a price on theirs, and there would be an exchange.

Then how I went around with my mother and she sold Sayman products. I don't know if you ever heard of that. We went around, and she went to a lot of the farm people, you know, and they sold Sayman products.

**AK:** Is that like the Fuller Brush Company or something, cosmetics or household items?

**IB:** Well, it was like a salve, you know, that she sold and she took orders for, and she delivered them, went around in a little horse and buggy.

**AK:** So you weren't exactly sitting back and having the government take care of you.

**IB:** No. And then the Indian people would make—you know their little artifacts. With the birch bark, they made those little birdhouses. You've seen a lot of those.

**AK:** I've seen those.

**IB:** Okay. They just made all these little craft things and sold them, you know. The tourists would come and buy them. So they were earning their own, and there was no welfare on that, no way. We didn't get anything from the government. We didn't get anything from the county or the state. There was no welfare. The only welfare that we had on our reservation was what the promoted ourselves in the line of sharing.

When I was a kid, they used to have that sharing system, you know, where everybody donated to that family. Okay. Then we had an Episcopal and a Catholic Guild Hall. The Episcopal, when a family had a death or they had something happen to them that they couldn't survive, the people had a dinner for them, either the Catholic or the Episcopal Guild Hall, and they brought things and they gave it to the family. Just to symbolize it, they put a blanket on the table.

**AK:** Like the birch bark.

**IB:** Yes. So that was, you know, by our own people. Then they'd have a big dinner. Everybody would bring food and they'd eat after they'd presented this family with everything. If it was nice out, they'd have a little powwow. They did dance indoors in those days. Then we had a roundhouse, you know. We took powwows out.

That's what I want to tell about our Indian people. We're self-sufficient people. They weren't ever rich. I remember one of our—married a Butler from Minneapolis, a white lady, and he couldn't get a job. This was during the Depression. They weren't working. Things were terrible

in the Cities then, you know. We didn't know it, because we were still living the way we lived, so we didn't feel that Depression that much.

So he brought her to the reservation and he gave her a little house, you know, and she had three children. They looked so white, you know, because his name was Boswell, too, and he didn't have that much Indian blood. But she got a little house, and people went and they took blankets, sheets.

Then she had food. They came in the summer, and she got a share of her grandmother's garden, you know. She said that day, I can remember, she didn't want to go back when her folks came, she said because there was so much hunger, and there was so much food there, you know. She said that's the first time they'd had food every day. So she was kind of like a—you know, and she said, "I'm going to tell everybody."

Her sister came up and her brothers. I remember they were kind of red-headed Butlers. They lived in that 6th—you know old 6th Avenue North there?

**AK:** Yes.

**IB:** I don't know if you remember that.

**AK:** It was before my time, but I've seen maps of it, yes.

**IB:** Okay. That's where they lived, in there, kind of ghetto area. There's a lot of black people there and poor white. So I can always remember her saying, you know, that the Indian people were lucky. then she waited for— she said, "When do you get your checks?" [Laughter]

**AK:** She was waiting for that, too, huh?

**IB:** And we told her, "We don't get a check."

I'm going to go get my coffee.

**AK:** Okay. I've just got a few more—

**IB:** Can I heat some water for you?

**AK:** No, I don't think so. I've got a couple more questions. Basically, I wondered, you've done a filmstrip for the Minneapolis public schools, that was *Ahmik* [*Nishgahdahzee*]?

**IB:** Yes. I did some pamphlets for the public schools when I worked for what they called the Urban Affairs now. I still call it Minority Task Force, because that's what they called it when I worked there. We did filmstrips, actually by ourselves. We looked at the pictures, we wrote the

script, broke it down, and put the pictures and dialogue together, you know. Then it was sent to the lab and we got the people to narrate, you know.

**AK:** You narrated at least one. I heard that.

**IB:** Yes. But with these other ones, I think there were six of them that I did for the [Minneapolis] public schools [Audio Visual Based Indian Resource Unit] and for the old Minority Task Force, and one was “This is Indian Country,” “The Rising American,” and one on (and called) Maple Sugar. Then I worked on that “Ricing.” We did one on ricing which I wasn’t satisfied with. “Indians in General,” “Rising America,” and “Indian Values.” Okay.

I would like at some time to do a really good one on ricing, because when I think of all the things that I’ve seen on ricing, they’re not satisfactory. They’re not. I would do it in three parts, really, the way I’m doing the book, because a transitional period is what I’m working on, as far as the book is concerned, and then when I get that done, I’m going to start on that “Indians in the Urban Area,” you know, the things that we did, problems we had during this Civil Rights Movement. That I’d like to do.

And I’m going to—you know, probably I really need to get back to at least St. Paul and Minneapolis, because I am going to have to fill in with this transitional period, because I’ve already seen some of your records over there. You have records where Indians are getting payments. You know, newspaper pictures. I’m going to have to go to—I don’t know if I can afford it. I’m going to have to go to Detroit Lakes and pick up—but I know what I want, and it should be easy to find.

**AK:** Maybe you can get that school to bring you back out there. You’ll already be out and paid for the trip, and you can do your research out there.

**IB:** I have a first cousin that lives—a Leitheiser that lives in Detroit Lakes, so I’ll probably go there and then do that.

But one thing I do need and I want very badly is, there’s a lot of walking involved, and I would like an electric mobility trike. Have you ever seen them?

**AK:** No. It sounds like a wonderful idea.

**IB:** I’ll show you. I sent for their ad, and I looked at LARC and all this, but I think this is the best, because then I could just—you can go winter or summer. I can just go right into the library with that, or into something. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Then just from that little trip-- [Tape recorder turned off.]

**AK:** One more question here. You wrote some books for Cass Lake very recently.

**IB:** Yes. Last year, as a matter of fact. And they were really nice. Do you know, they were so cheap, they didn't even give me a complimentary copy?

**AK:** I can't believe that. And those were more about Indian culture and history?

**IB:** Well, they were under that for the 312 Chapter, and that's the bilingual cultural—and what they were about, there was a series of five, and they were geared for K [kindergarten] kids or elementary. They were about like—“*Ahmik*” was the first one. He started to build his little town, and then each page you'd take maybe six or seven words and give the Ojibwe meaning to them, you know, easy words. Then you introduce them to animal words, through that.

Then there was “*Wah booz* the Rabbit,” and the partridge, you know, and *Bine*, the partridge. And then mallards, rabbit, *Ahmik* [beaver], partridge, and the bear. Then in that, like you see, Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit came. They're really cute.

It was kind of a—I don't know whether Judy [Roy]—whether she's running out of funds, but they didn't have enough money to hire an artist, except for maybe the partridge and some of the bear pictures. Clara came and did it. She did it very cheap because she wanted to, you know. The rest of it, they had a lot of animals or they had a lot of animal pictures or animal cutouts that they evidently used in their language course. They were colored.

So all I did was, I would take these—like for instance, this is a bear and this is a white sheet of paper. I drew the scene, the basic beaver-dam scene. Then the trees here. Then I put that on. And then when I needed—I'm very good at drawing scenery. That's about all I can draw. Then I would take the little bears and put adhesive or tape under them and place them the way I wanted them, then put it on the copy machine, you know, copy it. We got a nice picture. Then lighten it or darken it the way we wanted it, and then had to outline all of those in ink.

So the pictures turned out very well. The books are very nice.

**AK:** Have you done any more of those kinds of things for other school areas or districts?

**IB:** Well, I did the script for Judy Roy up at Red Lake, and Clara did the art, so I didn't have to do anything like that. Just do the script, you know, and then decide, go over with Clara what pictures we were going to use. I did the teachers' guides and wrote a teacher informational book on that. That's all.

**AK:** Okay. Thank you.