

**Walter LaBatte  
Narrator**

**Deborah Locke  
Interviewer**

**Upper Sioux Community, MN  
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**AL = Aimee LaBree  
Minnesota Historical Society**

**DL = Deborah Locke  
Minnesota Historical Society**

**WL = Walter LaBatte**

AL: This is Aimee LaBree on April 28, 2011. Interviewee: Walter LaBatte Jr. We are in Granite Falls, Minnesota. Interviewer: Deborah Locke.

DL: Could you spell your name for me?

WL: L-A-B-A-T-T-E

DL: Walter usual spelling. Do you go by Walter Junior?

WL: No I go by Super. That's such a conundrum. If you referred to Walter here you'd think they were talking about my dad even though my dad's been gone since 1996.

DL: And your nickname is?

WL: Super. I've always gone by Super since I was little. So it's more than a nickname it's... Yeah I suppose you call it a nickname but when I went to school they tried to tell me what my name was – the teachers – "No that's not my name." [Laughter] So either way, it depends on if you know me before that. If you know me before, you know me as Super. If you don't then I go by Walter.

DL: What shall we call you?

WL: Choose whatever you want to do.

DL: All right, Super. When and where were you born?

WL: 1948 in Pipestone, Pipestone Indian hospital.

DL: Who are or were your parents?

WL: Walter and Genevieve.

DL: Who are or were your grandparents, both sides?

WL: On my mother's side was Fred Pearsall P-E-A-R-S-A-L-L and my grandma was Eunice Amos. My paternal [grandfather] was Phillip LaBatte and [my grandmother was] Sarah Renville.

DL: You've got some fairly famous names in there.

WL: Yes, I've got historical characters actually on both sides of my family.

DL: How long have you lived here?

WL: I've lived here since I was born.

DL: Have you lived anywhere else?

WL: Oh yes, I lived in the Cities for 20 years or so – 20, 25 years. That's where I made my mahzeska. That's where I made my money was in the Cities.

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

WL: Yes, I'm enrolled in Sisseton Wahpeton Reservation – Lake Traverse Reservation.

DL: Did you grow up on the reservation?

WL: I grew up here.

DL: Do you have family members at other reservations?

WL: No, they're all... Well I've got one son. He's enrolled at his mom's reservation at Fort Berthold, North Dakota.

DL: Where did you go to school?

WL: Granite Falls High School.

DL: Anything after that?

WL: I graduated from Macalester College in Saint Paul.

DL: What year?

WL: 1970.

DL: What kind of student were you?

WL: I was a good student. [Laughter] I was a well behaved student. I only got radical after I got out of school. Then I got smart.

DL: What's your earliest memory as a little kid?

WL: Oh my God, that's going back a long time. What is it 39 years, I think or 38? Oh no I'm a little bit older than that. [Laughter]

DL: You are.

WL: Let's see, my earliest memory, boy I don't know – oh my God – yeah I've got a memory. I was four, no I was probably about five and my sister Julie was, let's see she was maybe three or four. She is two years younger than me so maybe... Five or six, we were small and we were raking the yard and I heard this big voice coming out of the sky. I looked at my sister and I could see terror in her eyes. I threw the rake down and ran to the house and she started screaming and hollering. We ran into the house and said Mom, "God was talking to us. God was talking to us." To this day... My mom died last year but I asked her a year or two ago, I said, "Do you remember that?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Does Julie remember that?" "Yeah, Julie remembers that." Using all the logic in my mind I'm thinking back, where did that voice come from? This was probably back in the early 50's so where would that voice come from. The only thing I can understand is that God was talking to us. [Laughter]

DL: What did God say?

WL: I was so terrified that I didn't concentrate on the words. Somehow I almost think it was Dakota that he was speaking – because there was not a lot of understanding going through my mind at the time just... I shall never forget that moment. So some of the spiritual things that I read or hear about, it doesn't take a whole lot of faith when you've had God talk to you as a child. I don't know if you're familiar with the book called, Conversations with God but if you read that, it doesn't take any faith to understand that that's God talking. That's a conversation with God when you were five years old and God was talking to you. So it's not a whole leap of faith that's needed. That was something that I remember as a young child.

DL: You just mentioned your sister. I forgot to ask about your siblings; how many?

WL: There are four of us left. No let's see, there are four sisters left and then me. There was... We had a large family. A lot of them are dead now. A lot of them are in the spirit world. I had three brothers. Two of them lived to adulthood, one died when he was a child. They are all gone. I had five sisters. One sister is gone.

DL: When you were a young child, what did you do after school?

WL: PLAY! Well we always had chores to do. We burned wood. I'll always remember the strict separation between gender roles between my sisters and me. I did the outside work and my sisters always had to do the inside work. I was always jealous of that because in the winter time I had to go... We had a kitchen wood stove and I always had to stock that up with kindling and wood. When you think about back in those days, we didn't have the warm clothes that we have today. I remember cutting wood with my dad and freezing my butt off. I had to stock that all the time. I remember always doing this – the minimum, the minimum. Just enough for Mom to make fire in the morning to cook in the kitchen. So I just got enough wood for that. I always thought if I was a little bit smarter I would have spent the two hours out there and cut wood for a week. But then we were always playing sports, football, softball. I see commercials today, "Play one hour a day." Nobody had to tell us to play one hour a day. I mean that was just starting. [Laughter] So we were really active and I see how that affected my body. Actually when I graduated from college I weighed 130 pounds. There was not an ounce of fat on me. I see the difference today. There are a lot of chubby kids today. And it's not healthy. Of course at 130 pounds, maybe they would have thought I was one of those POWs or something. I was pretty skinny. [Laughter]

DL: When you were playing games as a kid, was it just with your brothers and sisters or...?

WL: Neighborhood kids.

DL: Your homes were close together then?

WL: Yes, and we had bikes too.

DL: What did your dad do for a living?

WL: He was a high-line worker and a farmer. I enjoyed farming but I soon learned that it was not a money-making venture. It was something to keep you occupied but it didn't make you money. You got paid once a year and most of it went back to the banker to finance next year's crop. [Laughter]

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

WL: From my childhood? Boy, a news story. My grandpa used to call them those, "Damn Dixiecrats." Mostly political stories. I kind of remember the McCarthy era because that came up in class sometimes. I never knew what the specifics were about it. I remember the teacher saying... I think there was some kind of oath the teachers had to take saying they were not a communist. She said, "Well if you were a communist, of course you would say you were not a communist." Well I don't know, it didn't make sense to me. Then of course the Cuban missile crisis, man that was terrifying. As a young person you were wondering if there was going to be nuclear war. And, of course, Kennedy getting shot, but then that's my teen years.

DL: Did your family have a TV?

WL: Yes, we were actually the first ones on the reservation. I remember we used to have people come over and we'd turn the lights off. It was like a movie theater. [Laughter]

DL: What shows do you remember?

WL: Oh, "Adventures in Paradise" with... Oh what was...? You know that was an offshoot from Michener. TV came from the Cities and that was intermittent sometimes. It wasn't very good TV.

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

WL: Not knowing it at the time, probably my grandpa. Well let's see, I don't know if I should tell this or not. The first year that I sobered up, that was 25 years ago. I remember asking for help from Wakan Tanka [Great Spirit]. He brought me help. I remember that first year I felt, "I don't know who this is in this body but it certainly isn't me." Well you've been drinking for so damn long you probably don't know what it's like to be sober. I didn't feel like myself. Anyway, I was visiting with my mom and my sister was there too and she said, "Oh my God, you're talking just like grandpa." I remember that hit me real hard, "That's why I'm feeling that way." So I came to understand maybe that Wakan Tanka sent grandpa there to take over the reins until I was sober, until I had enough strength. After about a year I felt I'm Super again. I told this to a spiritual guy that I used to go to. He understood and said, "Well did you thank him?" "Yes," I said, "Thanks Grandpa for taking over the reins." So I do think he had an influence more than I thought he did. That was my mom's dad. He was a Wasicu {white person} but I didn't know that he was a Wasicu because he talked Dakota all the time. He was kind of a strict Grandpa. He used to scold a lot. "Talk Dakota, Dakota i'ya ha." Some of my nieces said that about me too that I'm kind of like Grandpa.

DL: Grandpa had a big influence. Grandpa may have saved your life. Do you think he did?

WL: Maybe, yes.

DL: So how did he help you? Did he sit you down and...?

WL: No, he was always so... At the time he understood that Dakota life was changing and he wanted to preserve that. My mom said, "Oh Grandpa would have been so happy to see you dance." I'm a dancer you know and I do a lot of things for my Indian-ness. When I look back at Grandpa, he was pretty amazing. Right now, we're trying to bring back Dakota and sometimes it seems insurmountable. But you look at a Wasicu who was raised to speak English maybe the first 20 years of his life, then he married my grandma and he became completely Dakota. I remember some elders that would say, "You know I used to go over to your grandpa and ask how to say..." They were fluent in Dakota but some words they didn't know and they would ask my grandpa. They had to go ask a white man how to say something in Dakota. So he was thoroughly... OK, I've got a story that comes into my mind right now. My grandpa and my dad went to Fort Thompson to a dance, a powwow. They were dancing in front of some Dakota ladies and the Dakota ladies were talking in Dakota about my grandpa. They were disparaging remarks. "Look at that white man trying to dance" or things like that. My

grandpa turned around and said, "Hoco damakota " [I am a Dakota]. Those ladies, he said, their eyes just got, "Oh my god, he heard everything we said." [Laughter] So there are possibilities to learn Dakota.

DL: It sounds like he took over your life and ran things for a while until you were straightened out.

WL: Yes, I guess so.

DL: What was Grandpa's name again?

WL: Wamdiska, White Eagle.

DL: What was his English name?

WL: Fred Pearsall.

DL: Who taught you the most about being Dakota?

WL: My dad did. He was like my grandpa. He was very... He asked me for years and years to dance and I told dad, "No, I'm drinking. I can't do that." But thank God he was still alive when I danced and he was proud. He really never said it but in his way you understood it. I think I had three years of sobriety and I was over at a Sisseton powwow. If you know something about powwows, people honor people. He gave money and said, "I want to recognize my son out there. "When you're still a little bit sober, you don't have a lot of self confidence." I wanted to say to Dad, "No, don't do that. I don't want the center of attention on me." But he did it and I came to understand that it was not about me. It was about him. He was showing his pride. So he never came up to me and said, "Son I'm proud of you." He did it in his own way.

DL: You're a lucky man to have such relatives.

WL: Yes.

DL: What did you learn about...? Oh let me back up here. Did you learn of Dakota spirituality or religion, did you learn of Dakota ways as a child or as an adult?

WL: Mostly as an adult. I would hear a lot about it from older people but I wasn't interested in it then. It was only after I had sobered up for a number of years, three years, that I felt like I was lacking something. I didn't know what it was. I knew

something was lacking and that was that spirituality that was missing and I was lucky to find it.

DL: Do you have a Dakota name? And can you tell us who gave it to you and what it means?

WL: My grandpa gave it to me. Wamdiska gave it to me. It was Phillip LaBatte my other grandpa's name. He gave me my other grandpa's name which is Wasicu Hdinazin which in literal translation doesn't make too much sense. You know in Dakota names, there is always some sort of story to it. It means Spirit Returns in the sense that there is a spirit that's always walking with you. You might say a guardian spirit that's always walking with you. There are two translations for that Wasichu. Of course today we always call a Wasichu a white man. But before the white man came, that word was used for that spirit that always walked with you. And Hidinauchi means to return. So I translate it as Spirit Returns. When grandpa gave me that name, he always translated that Wasichu as Spirit and I knew that Wasichu was used for the white man. I never asked him or I never questioned him. It was years later that I looked in the... That came up in one of the Riggs Dictionaries of a translation of Wasichu. What it said in there was "guardian spirit."

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

WL: I learned oral history from my dad. Stories that his mom had told him about life then, about how there were Indian villages all the way up the Minnesota River Valley. That was before the war. She was four years old and was brought into Camp Release in that summer/fall of 1862. Her and her mother and brothers took a walk to Lower Sioux. That's where the trials were held. Coincidentally her future husband's cabin [log house store] was used as François LaBatte... If you know history you know that François LaBatte, the trials were held at his store. I'll tell you a story about that later. She told him about the horrors of that walk. It's pretty well told about some of the horrors. One of them was walking through this town and they threw hot water on them in December. She remembers that.

DL: Was this your great-grandmother?

WL: No, my grandma. My grandma was four years old in 1862. My dad was born in 1900.

DL: Your dad was born in 1900?

WL: 1900 yes.

DL: Your grandma was a young girl...

WL: A little girl, very little.

DL: Which town did they go through?

WL: I don't dare say because I might get it wrong and historians will say, "Well if that's wrong, then the story is untrue."

DL: But the water is true.

WL: Yes, but I understand there's a controversy on some of those things where some historians are trying to prove that that didn't happen in New Ulm and happened somewhere else. So Indian people look at it this way: what's important is that the event happened. Whether it happened in this town or that town is immaterial to Indian people. What is important is that it happened. I guess from a Wasichu standpoint they would want to know that it was not "my" town. It was that other town. [Laughter] So there are two conflicting viewpoints and whether they'll ever come to an understanding...

DL: Was your grandma hurt?

WL: I don't know if she was. I don't remember my dad saying that. She was four years old so... I don't know.

DL: Maybe they protected her.

WL: Yes. When I was a kid and my dad would tell me those stories, I kind of questioned them at the time. You always question things in your mind but you are always respectful of your parents. You never ask, "Are you sure this is true?" The event came up because I was a stupid little boy and I thought, "Okay, if you are going to go from here to Fort Snelling, why do you go down to New Ulm and Henderson and all that? You go right straight across [Highway] 212. You go to Fort Snelling." Dad didn't talk about those towns. So I thought, "It can't be true." But see I was a stupid little boy because I didn't know that at that time those towns didn't exist. When you wanted to go east, you followed the river. Years later, when I did my family history – in the 70's or 80's – I was able to substantiate some of those things. St. Peter's Catholic Church in Mendota which is across the river from the park and from the internment camp is where they baptized a bunch of Indian kids. They were proselytizing. I found my grandma's

name there and I found a brother of hers. But that brother, I never heard of him before so I don't know, maybe he didn't survive childhood or died. I can't remember the name off-hand. I've asked. Her two other brothers are Moses and Victor. Moses Renville and Victor Renville and Sarah: that was the family. There was another son in there. I've asked other relatives, so I suspect he did not survive.

Now I meant to tell you another story that my dad told me. His maternal Grandma was a Mdewakanton that lived at Lower Sioux. She was married to François. Some oral history Dad tells us that... See this François, he sounds like he's just a Frenchman right? He's not because I've done my history on him. His dad was Michel and Michel married an Indian woman. According to the written record at the time, he married a full blooded Sioux. They were married at Prairie Du Chien. So out of that came François. So François was half French and half Dakota. Today when you look at it [a picture of him] you would say he's a Frenchman. Well Dakota too. So when that war started at Lower Sioux, he said he stood out in front of his store and said, "Makte sni , makte sni, damakota do, damakota do." – It's translated as, "Don't kill me, don't kill me I'm Dakota, I'm a Dakota." They shot him, killed him. That's the story that we know about him.

My dad wanted to find out where he was buried. This was some years ago. He said at Lower Sioux, they told him where he was buried. He was kind of buried behind the store there on the cliff bank but dad said he walked back there and couldn't find what he thought would be a depression in the ground. Philander Prescott, if I remember right, was a trader there. He was killed, too. They took his body back to the Pioneer Cemetery on Lake Street and Cedar. So I did some other research trying to find out... Well when Sibley came, was it Sibley? They came through there, they dealt with the dead people. I thought maybe there might be an account of what happened to François but I could never find anything about it. Her name was Mary LaBatte. That was François's wife. She probably dealt with it – buried him. She was a Mdewakanton from Wapasha's Band. Someplace I think is said that she was a daughter of Wapasha. So I don't know if that is true, that's just what I've read. Sometimes like you say somebody can write something down and it might not be true and you think it's true. I don't know if it's true or not.

She died at Lower Sioux in 1909. I'm trying to think of her Indian name but I can't think of it right off hand.

DL: The Dakota knew that he was half Dakota, they had to know that.

WL: Yes.

DL: But they shot him anyway. Have you thought about that? Why they would have done that?

WL: From my viewpoint sometimes emotions don't make sense. Sometimes insanity, it doesn't make sense. If you're enraged, if you've been oppressed, and somebody may be innocent but a symbol of the oppressor you probably could take out the symbol rather than the real. I don't try to understand it. I don't try to explain it. I'm a Dakota. I don't blame. You know that don't go anywhere. That only makes you...

I've got to tell you another story. I'm full of stories. [Laughter] Like I said, I did my family history in the 70's or 80's. But when you do that family history, you do a lot of other reading and a lot of other Dakota history stuff. When I was reading I used to get really angry. Oh man, especially when you read the treaties and what we were... I mean it was bad enough that we lost a lot of land but there were some things in that treaty that we were supposed to get that we never got. It would make you angry because you'd look at it and say, this is what they said we were supposed to get and this is what we got. We got nothing. It really made you angry. It made you angry about all the other things that happened. You'd read the accounts of what happened on that walk, THAT WALK. It would make you angry because you knew that your grandma was on that walk. I remember one night I went to bed and I had a dream. My grandma came into that dream and she scolded me. She said, "That was my pain, not yours." And I put that away, I put that anger away. I think that was very healing for me because I can recognize what happened but I don't have to be a victim of it. We have a lot of victims and sometimes that's a choice [they make].

DL: Do you recall any other stories from your dad about that period or maybe even before the period during and or after? About the scattering of the Dakota, was your family scattered?

WL: Well, here's what happened to my mother's family. I'll tell you that story first. My mother's grandma, her Indian name was Ta Sina Suspe Becawin but in everyday life they just called her Suspe. Ta Sina Tusweca means Her Blanket, Ta Sina means Her Blanket – her robe, her blanket. Tusweca means dragonfly woman. So I don't know, her dragonfly blanket or something I don't know. I can translate literally word for word but it doesn't make too much sense so I don't know. She was nine or twelve years old. She was just a young girl. They were Mdewakanton. They lived at Lower Sioux. They went to Pipestone and they dug pipestone and they were on their way back. They had their wagon loaded with stone and they were coming back. They must have been on the coutou because they could see over east and they could see just smoke, smoke, smoke coming. They didn't know what that was so they continued on and they

encountered some Dakotas on horseback. They were fleeing and they said, "Don't go back there, there's a war started over there." So they buried their pipestone in the ground and then they took off north. My grandpa wrote these stories down so I shall shorten it. They eventually made it to Canada. On the way of course, they were being chased. They made it to Canada. She went up there. She met a man up there. His name is Sihowicasta which is Prairie Chicken Man. Somehow he gets killed. He goes off hunting and he never comes home. She is a young woman then. I don't know what happened to her family. Maybe her family died up there. Anyway she's a young woman now and she gets lonely for Minnesota. I'm thinking this is about 1890 or something. So she comes back to the United States and she marries. His English name is Joseph Amos. His Indian name is Hototona. It means Animal Makes a Noise. That's where my grandma comes from. They lived in Sisseton. Well it's a long story. They lived in South Dakota but eventually Hototona gets Consumption.

DL: Tuberculosis.

WL: He gets TB and he wants to die in Minnesota so they move back to Minnesota and they eventually live in this little area over here called Heku that means Below the Hill. That was a little Indian Village. There's Heku and then of course there's Kahmi. That's another area around here that Indians lived in. But they lived in Heku. He died in 1896. By then my grandma is married and they live in Sisseton. They live in the Big Coulee area. She died when my mom was only... My mom says she doesn't remember her because she was one or two years old when she died. Then Grandpa, they're still living in Sisseton and his in-laws are living here. Well then he decides after his wife died that he's going to... he moves back to Granite. So that's where my mom was raised, she was raised here. She went to Pipestone. Am I lost? Did you ask me a question? I don't even know if you asked me... I keep telling these damn stories. [Laughter]

DL: Tell us some more stories.

WL: That was kind of an abbreviated story of my mother's family. Oh did you ask something about my dad's... Oh what happened to my dad's family. Most Dakotas were exiled out of the state of Minnesota. Dad's grandpa François LaBatte, he's the guy that got killed at Lower Sioux. His mother, his wife and dad's dad Phillip and his sister, U'pa Sawee—that was my dad's sister. They were taken to Faribault and there were some Indians there that were maybe under his protection or something. They lived in Faribault. If you remember something about history, there was a small Indian community around Faribault. That's where my grandpa lived. I remember a statement, I can't remember where but he said, "I worked for old man Faribault." Then in the 1890's I can't remember what it was, Faribault wanted that land back. I have some

relatives that he kicked out. But whatever the story is, they moved those families back to the Lower Sioux. So that's where Mary LaBatte ends up spending the rest of her life. Phillip, he was Mdewakanton, but he moved to Sisseton. He gave up his Mdewakanton rights and became a Sisseton Indian. He had a lot of brothers but they were half brothers. They also went west. One of his half brothers ended up in Canada in Saskatchewan. 20 years ago, I made contact with them or they actually made contact because there was a woman up there that was doing her family history too and found out that we had a common great-great-great grandfather or something. So in effect my dad's family didn't get exiled out of Minnesota.

DL: Are you related to any of the chiefs from that time?

WL: Yes, my dad's grandpa was Tiwakan. Chief Gabrielle Renville, he was the head Chief of the Sisseton Wahpeton people. On my mother's side, I don't know of any chiefs, just Tiwakan.

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

WL: Yes, I've been there.

DL: Did you have any particular emotion at that time?

WL: Oh, I suppose a little bit of sadness. Recognizing that something terrible happened there. I didn't fall over crying because that happened years ago. It's a symbol.

DL: I'm going to name a few places and if you could please tell me if you've ever been there or know of them or have talked about them. The first one is Fort Ridgely.

WL: Yes, I know Fort Ridgely. Last October while riding horseback out there I got thrown and ended up having surgery on my arm. Yes I know Fort Ridgely. [Laughter] In a historical context, yes I know that's where they attacked; they attacked Fort Ridgely. I can see where they talked about those wooded hills, where they attacked. I'm sure that looked the same as it did then.

DL: It doesn't seem like a wise place to build a fort.

WL: Yes.

DL: What about Birch Coulee?

WL: Yes, I know Birch Coulee. I've been there.

DL: Can you talk about that in historical context?

WL: No, not really. Well one of the battles was the battle of Birch Coulee. I remember reading about it but I can't remember any specifics about it.

DL: How about Lower Sioux Agency?

WL: Yes, that's where my dad's family came from.

DL: Yes. That's where Mr. LaBatte met his end. How about Traverse des Sioux where the treaty was signed?

WL: Yes, I've been there. That was the beginning of our reservation days.

DL: What about Sibley House?

WL: Yes, I've been there too.

DL: Any reaction to that? Did you tour it or just drive by?

WL: No, I toured it. I went through there. I was kind of interested in how it was built because they had a little cut out of the house and what the walls were made of.

DL: But no real reaction. It was just a house?

WL: General Sibley was not a friend of the Dakotas. [Laughter] I went out to Rapid City this weekend and stopped in Chamberlain, South Dakota. I stopped at this antique house. They had a Sibley Stove in there. Supposedly Sibley had invented it to keep tents warm. At the end of the writing it said that Sibley died an alcoholic in such and such a year. I didn't know that. I was not unhappy about... No I can't say that. That's glorifying in somebody's misery. I shouldn't feel that way. [Laughter]

DL: What about Fort Snelling?

WL: Yes, I've been there many times.

DL: Can you talk about Fort Snelling?

WL: Oh, I don't know.

DL: What should be its fate? We've heard the Dakota people say it should be burned down. We've heard them say it should be left alone as a memorial. We've heard veterans say that their connection to it is as a member of the military [and] that it should be left alone. We've heard a number of perspectives from Dakota people.

WL: I don't know if I have an opinion on it. Sometimes getting rid of things doesn't have the effect that you want. For example, sometimes books may have been written in the 1800's which were disparaging to Indian people. But to get rid of them shows more about the author than anything. If there's a racist book out there written in the 1800's, why would we want to get rid of it when it shows what the attitudes of the people in the 1800's were. Do you want to hide that? I don't understand that logic because you can never get rid of anything. So if you get rid of Fort Snelling because it was a symbol of colonialism, then it's no longer a symbol of colonialism. Colonialism still existed at the time. Gosh if you're feeling hurt by that, I think maybe you better work on yourself and get some healing. [Laughter]

DL: Camp Release?

WL: I've been there yes, because there's that connection to my grandma. You know, my grandma was... Supposedly the government called those Indians in. To me it was a ruse to get them to come in. Then they experienced that walk and the internment camp. It seems like, "Come on in. Come on in and you'll be safe. You'll be safe under us." Okay, that happened to my dad's family. They came in. My mother's family, they fled and escaped.

DL: Wood Lake?

WL: Yes I've been there. [Laughter] Some of these are controversial. That's where the war ended. That's where we lost. That was the last battle. That pretty much ended the war. We lost. Is it understandable that Indians don't want to celebrate that? [Laughter]

DL: New Ulm?

WL: Yes I've been there and I have more of an attachment to New Ulm because it's German. [Laughter] Oh, I sound like a traitor. I've got a degree in German you know. [Laughter]

DL: German language?

WL: Yes, but nobody down there probably speaks German anymore. I understand the historical context of the Germans. The Germans seem to have been... That's all generalizing or "colonel-izing" I call it. That's why they call them lasicas. That means "Bad Talkers." Whether that was meant because they couldn't speak English good enough or because they talked nasty about Indians. I don't know why they called them "iasicas." The Germans didn't seem to be particularly understanding of Dakota culture. This was generalizing, "colonel-izing" – maybe they had a superior attitude. You know sometimes we want to make blanket statements about certain people. Look at the French people, those French fur traders that first came in here. They accepted the Indians. The Indians had been here for ten thousand years maybe and knew a little bit more than they did as newcomers to the country. So they were a little bit more understanding and accepting. Even sometimes thinking, "These Dakota are superior to me in that they know how to survive in this country and I don't." So they were willing to learn from them. Maybe other ethnic Europeans didn't hold that view. I don't know.

DL: Camp Coldwater?

WL: I've never been there. I've heard about it. That's in the Cities. I like to stay out of the Cities. [Laughter] I lived there for many years and now it's time to stay away.

DL: What's your opinion of the war?

WL: It was a last-ditch effort to, to survive or to... I don't know. Because it wasn't getting any better. Food rations weren't coming in as they were. We got screwed on the treaties, you know. Tiwakan is reported to have said to the Mdewakanton, "If you would have counseled with us, we Sisseton Wahpeton people may have helped you and went to war, also." But he said, "You went to war without consulting us and now we suffer the consequences of your actions." The war doesn't sound like it was very well planned out.

DL: What do you think about the treaties?

WL: Now we hang on to them as our lifeline but at the time it was a terrible deal we got. If you ever study the consequences of them, you know we sold all this land for X-amount of dollars per acre. The way it was written, the government never intended to pay us the full amount. They would pay us interest for 50 years. "You sold it for six million dollars", they said, "We'll pay you the interest for 50 years." That's just the interest. They never even planned on paying the principle. Wow, we really got screwed there. That's the stuff that I was talking about that made me angry. But also in those

treaties they said, "We'll entice them. I mean we know they are getting screwed but we'll entice them. We'll educate your children and we'll give you health care." Well, that's the basics. Some idiot on TV was disparaging the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Well, there's no Bureau of Black Affairs or Bureau of Spanish Affairs. So he made it sound like them damn Indians are getting special privileges again. It goes back to treaties. That's what we're holding on to. Even though at the time they were terrible, now we've got something that binds the government. They don't fund anything the way they are supposed to. They don't fund our Indian healthcare like they are supposed to. The education, when I went to school it was good. I mean I got a lot money to go to school but nowadays it seems like its kind of hard. There were things in there that bound the government to pay. I'm sure the government wished, "Gee, wish our ancestors wouldn't have promised them that." [Laughter]

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

WL: What does commemorate mean? Does that mean to remember or to hold dearly? Remember, I would think, yes.

DL: Yes. We don't call it an anniversary which sounds almost like something to celebrate. So commemorate sounds more like, well this happened. Is it good to remind people that it happened?

WL: Yes, absolutely.

DL: Why?

WL: I'm hoping that it would engender some interest so you don't have idiots like... Oh I'm being very mean. So you don't have people who are ignorant of Minnesota history. So they will understand that two farms does not equal millions of acres. So maybe they might just understand why things are such.

DL: What do you mean by two farms don't equal millions of acres?

WL: We had a local official that was mourning the loss of the tax revenue from two farms that the tribe bought and put into trust. When you put it into trust it becomes government property so you can't tax government property. He's saying that this county lost two farms. How much acreage did the Indians lose when we lost our reservations, from New Ulm to the South Dakota border on both sides of the river—how many acres is that? You know, we lost that. I'm just putting it in perspective. "We did a number on those people" and *they're* mad. I can't understand why they're mad.

DL: What's the best way to commemorate those events?

WL: Oh, I don't know if there is a best way, just history, tell history.

DL: You majored in German, what was your occupation? You mentioned living in the Cities for 20 years.

WL: As soon as I graduated, I went to work for Burlington Northern and I worked in downtown St. Paul. Shortly after that, I got promoted to supervisor where I taught a computer system. I worked all over the system but I got tired of traveling so I quit in '73 or '74, something like that. Then I moved home and got into construction. My folks were as disappointed as maybe I was. "What the &%#@ are you doing?" But it [construction work] fit like a glove. You know, you get a certain job and it fits like a glove. I came home from a hard day's work and I didn't have to think about the job. When I was doing the white collar job it seemed like you were on 24 hours. I often wondered if there was some kind of genetic thing there because my dad was... I swore I would never do what my dad did because he worked highline and he was telling us how cold it was. I said, "I'm never going to do that. That's too cold. I'm going to college and getting an inside job." I ended up doing exactly what my dad did, construction. So I did that. I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life. Shortly after that I got into the union and all the benefits of the union and I was able to retire at 52 but I worked another year and a half. So I retired when I was 53. It turned out to be okay in that respect. I do a lot of artwork now and I was able to have the time to do that.

DL: What's your medium?

WL: Well I make drums and then I paint on them. I make my own buckskin. I tan my own hides and then I do beadwork. I'm a woodworker too, on furniture. So I do all kinds of things.

DL: Can you tell us about your family? Did you marry? Have any children?

WL: Yes, I married once. I'm divorced now. I've got two boys.

DL: Any grandkids?

WL: Yes, I've got three girls.

DL: What's a typical day like now?

WL: Oh, I get up and I've got to go get the paper. I drink my half a pot of coffee then I go do my work, whether it's beading or making buckskin. Right now I've got a kind of a sore arm so I probably won't be able to make hides now until this fall. Or I do woodworking, whatever, do my artwork. I'll do beadwork for, I don't know, a month at a time and then I get sick of it. Then I go do something else and do that until I get sick of it.

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

WL: Oh my God, well look at all the place names. How many Dakota names [do] you know...they're badly translated.

DL: So the language for sure, a language contribution.

WL: Yes, a language contribution. We have a food called, pasdaypi. I don't know if I'd call it famous but it's really good. It's an Indian corn soup. It's so hard to make. Traditional foods aren't like opening up a can and in five minutes later you're eating. It's an all-day process or it's kind of an afternoon process.

DL: What's in it?

WL: It's called pasdaypi, P-A-S-D-A-Y-P-I.

DL: And it's got corn and maybe dried meat?

WL: Well it's Indian corn and then it's got meat and vegetables in it. What other contributions have we made? I kind of think Dakota people, Indians in general; they have a certain philosophy... In the Dakota way anyway, we have what's called "mdakway oyasin," which means all our relatives. It means that everything that God created is a relative of ours. That includes the animals. So that when animals are killed for food, there's a little offering brought, either tobacco or... To me it doesn't make any difference what. Some people say, well I do this or I do that. That's good just as long as you're acknowledging that that deer is a relative of us, that Wakan Tanka created as well as he created me. So then you come to understand that wanton killing like what happened with the buffalo... I read of accounts where Indians would come across this whole slaughter of buffalo and they would sit and cry because their relative was wantonly slaughtered. I think that the conservation movement maybe has an influence on today's society. Some do but there might be some people that still don't respect mother earth.

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

WL: Boy that's a tough question. [Laughter] Because there are so many things. Oh man, I don't know if I want to answer that. I would love to see us strong. Because when you have unity, you can do many things. But if you've got ten people going in different directions, you don't usually get things done.

DL: That concludes our interview. Thank you.

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