Listening to Indians

MICHELLE FOWLER, Quinault

November 25, 1975
Longview, Washington

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63136.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

Copyright © S.I. Myers 1978
Sam Myers:

I'm talking with Michelle Fowler, a young woman who is in a unique situation here. You're the only lady in the diesel school here at this college, aren't you?

Michelle Fowler:

Yeah. I'm the only one that they've got so far.

SM: Let's kind of explore the whole thing, Michelle. What tribe are you from?

MF: Quinault.

SM: That's one of the Northwest coast tribes, isn't it?

MF: Its reservation is Taholah, and the Quinault is a big reservation. You have your Quinault side, and then you have your Taholah side, and I'm from the Taholah side. Right on the Bay.

SM: That's two different parts of it?

MF: Well, there's a big mountain separates the two, it's still all the Quinault Reservation.

SM: Is it on the Puget Sound?

MF: Yeah. We have clams and crabs, and deer and elk.

SM: Back in the hills deer and elk?

MF: Um hm.

SM: Were you born up there on the reservation?
MF: No. I was born in Dothan, Alabama. My dad was stationed down there in the Service during the war.

SM: So you moved around a lot?

MF: Yeah. I was only there till I was about, maybe two months old, and then I came back. I've never even seen Alabama, I don't know what it looks like. Then my mom came back out here.

SM: So you spent your whole life here except those first two months?

MF: Oh, they were stationed around the country—in Denver, and they were stationed in Texas and California—and then they finally wound up back up here.

SM: Did you ever live up on the reservation?

MF: Oh yah, I've lived on four or five different reservations.

SM: Which ones?

MF: I've stayed on the Lummi Reservation, that's up by Canada. The Lummi Reservation and Tulalip Reservation, and the Quinault Reservation, and I have quite a few friends on the Yakima Reservation, and then I've been on the Nez Perce Reservation.

SM: That's in Idaho?

MF: Right. Lewiston, Idaho.

SM: You've had a lot of experience with the reservations.

MF: I have a lot of friends on all different reservations, and I go visit
with them, stay with them for a while, and then I have a lot of relatives that's married different Indians around the country, different tribes.

SM: Oh, in different tribes, so that you have connections with all these different tribal groups. Did you go to school on a reservation ever?

MF: No. Reservations ... well, Taholah is just now getting a school.

SM: So where did you go to school then, Michelle?

MF: Well, let's see. I went to school in Seattle almost all my life, and then I went to school in California when I was real little, and I went to school in Texas for about a year, and the rest of the time I was in Seattle.

SM: And then you were married, and you have children at home. How many?

MF: Five. My youngest is five, my oldest is sixteen. Three girls and two boys.

SM: And they're all in school now?

MF: Yeah. All five of them go to school.

SM: Mother is at school too, isn't she?

MF: I'm in school too.

SM: And what school is it that you're going to?

MF: I'm going to LCC Diesel College.
SM: That's Lower Columbia Community Diesel College.

MF: Right. Well, it's at Lower Columbia College, but I'm taking a diesel course.

SM: A course in diesel engineering?

MF: Technology.

SM: And you have some local fame here, because your picture was in the paper not so long ago where they showed you working in the shop, didn't they?

MF: Yeah, they wrote the story about me because I am the first female heavy equipment operator that the state of Washington ever hired, and I'm the only one.

SM: Have you worked for the state of Washington?

MF: Yeah. I worked in road construction, building, and repairing fire trails and installing culverts.

SM: When was this?

MF: Two summers ago.

SM: You worked up there in those logging roads?

MF: In the high country. Some of them had 500, 800 or 1,000 foot drops.

SM: Coming down the hill?

MF: Over the side of the bank. I drove a 12-yard dump truck and a back hoe
and a bulldozer for the state. And we went in here, and if the road was washed out we built a new one, and if it needed a culvert put in to keep it from sliding away, well then we installed new culverts.

SM: That was for the state of Washington?

MF: Right. We have to keep the roads in good condition because of the fire hazard in the forest, and it's an important job.

SM: Fire hazard is a serious thing out here, isn't it?

MF: Yeah. No matter where there's a fire, we have to have a road that goes in there to it, so we have to keep them all in good condition. They wanted me to go to work for them the second summer after I'd worked for them, but they had a recession to where they couldn't put on any more employees again, 'cause it's a seasonal job, so then this summer they wanted me to go to work for them, and I was already goin' to college.

SM: What do you like best--driving the truck, the back hoe or the bulldozer?

MF: I like running all the equipment.

SM: You just like to handle heavy equipment?

MF: It's just an exciting thing. When I first started I'd never been in a dump truck, and I had to take a run to get into the first step and pull myself up by the steering wheel to get in.

SM: Was it too high?

MF: And my legs are so short. And so my first couple of loads that I
dumped, I wouldn't look back, because you hang your two back tires over the edge of the cliff, and then when you raise the bed on the truck, the front end comes up off the ground a little ways and you're looking straight down the mountain about 500 or 600 feet.

SM: That would scare most people out of their wits.

MF: So I wouldn't look for the first few times till I finally decided, well, if I'm gonna do this I'm gonna have to look, so I got to where I could look, but it's a long ways down there when you figure you're hanging over the edge.

SM: Now this is in a dump truck with dual wheels, a tandem, so you would back it up until the rearmost ones are hanging over, and then you pull the lever and the box goes up?

MF: Right. My truck and my trailer together were 47 feet long. My dump truck was 22 feet, and I had a big trailer for hauling the equipment, and the roads were just about 8 to 12 feet wide and that's it.

SM: And they're dirt roads mostly, aren't they?

MF: Washed out as well as dirt. Really in bad shape. We were called the environmental road crew, and we had to go in and fix the ones that were in the worst condition, because the ones that needed to be fixed the most got top priority for fire control, and then, during the summer, during the forest fire season, I was on 24-hour call for driving the pump truck in forest fires.

SM: Then when you get a call like that you have to rush, don't you?

MF: Well, you can't leave your house or anything without leaving a list of numbers where you're at, because if they need you to drive a pump
truck or a cat or back hoe during a forest fire, you have to be right there.

SM: What do they use the back hoe for?

MF: Well, digging holes. Sometimes you have to dig places for a back fire.

SM: Dig a ditch so the fire won't jump over?

MF: And maybe for draining water into certain areas so they can pump it. They use all sorts of equipment during forest fires, but the one thing they use most is manpower.

SM: Did you ever get into an actual fire?

MF: No, I was just on call. I got the training.

SM: You had all the training, you were on call, you did work on the roads, but you were lucky enough never to have been called on a fire.

MF: Yeah, I was lucky. I didn't want to go out in one. All fires have an explosive point. A fire will get to be a certain temperature, and then it will explode, and that's the danger with fire most people don't realize. Like even your house in a fire, it will reach a certain temperature, then it'll explode, and everything that's in that exploding area will be consumed. Where, if your house was on fire, if you shut the door between you and the fire, when it reaches that point that door will hold it, and you'll have that many more seconds to get out.

SM: In other words, if you were trying to escape the building that's burning, close the doors behind you?
MF: Right.

SM: Is there anything else you can add about a burning building?

MF: Well, I learned that safety's always important, especially with a bunch of kids. You should always take the time to show the kids.

SM: Do you do that at home?

MF: Yep. I showed my kids how to break the windows out. I told them it doesn't make any difference what we got, just get out. And I always teach my kids to shut the doors, and when they go, to crawl out of a house that's on fire. The reason people become overcome with smoke is because they'll stand up and try to run out of the house. Your smoke will rise to the top of your ceiling, and you want to get low. If you've ever watched firemen, they'll get down to where they're just practically on their stomach to go into a house to find the people. They'll go practically on their stomach in a house, unless they've got the oxygen mask, and then still a lot of them go under.

SM: Knowing that can save your life if you ever get caught in a situation.

MF: Yeah, even in a forest fire, you know. Your fire will jump through the trees, through the tops of the trees. The closer you are to the ground the better chance you have, wherever you can find a low gully or hole or anything that you can crawl into. The fire will go along the top of the ground so you'll be safe, as long as you stay low.

SM: Those are good things to know. You got this in that training you had, you've already passed it on to your kids, and now you're helping all of us a little bit too. Why did you decide to go into this present training program, the diesel school?
MF: Because, one of these days if God's willing, I'd like to be an operating engineer if I can get the proper training. In this state you have to have a lot of local hours for operation and before you can be in the union, and then, of course, you've got to find somebody to hire you, to let you in the union.

SM: Do you have to be hired before you can get in the union?

MF: Well, you have to have a certain amount of training. Well, if somebody won't hire you if you're not in the union, and you can't get in the union without the training, you're kinda up against a blank wall. And so, in order to become an operating engineer, you usually start out as an oiler, and that's the person that maintains the equipment. You keep them well-greased, you check the hydraulic fluids and check the brakes and check for any signs of something that might be ready to break, like your air lines and stuff, and you have to keep that equipment clean, and that's how you usually start out, and eventually you work yourself up to an operating engineer, and so far, the state of Washington doesn't have any lady operators.

SM: So you're going to still be the first one?

MF: Try to. I already have a combination license, and an ICC card that licenses you to drive interstate, and I'm licensed to operate any piece of heavy equipment in the state except a motorcycle. I don't have a motorcycle license.

SM: That's not heavy equipment anyway, is it?

MF: That's the only thing I'm not licensed to drive.

SM: Do you have to have a special license for a motorcycle?
MF: Um hm. In this state you do.

SM: Well, in the school now, what do you learn? How does it start out?

MF: Well, you get a book on diesel technology, and it teaches you how the basic diesel engine runs, to start with.

SM: You learn the theory of it all?

MF: Um hm. The only thing it takes to have a diesel engine run is your compression, your starter pump and your fuel. It doesn't have an ignition system like a car. It starts under heated compression. When your piston comes down, when it starts to move back up, there's a certain amount of air inside your cylinder, and as that air is compressed it makes it hot, and when it gets just a little ways from top dead center then the fuel injector will shoot the right amount of fuel in there and it ignites.

SM: So you learn all this theory then, but you actually work in the shops over there too, don't you?

MF: Right. We have to completely dismantle a diesel engine and rebuild it, and put it all back together. We take the heads and grind the valves and put in new rings and bearings, and refinish the crankshaft, and refinish the block and steam clean it. A diesel engine isn't like a car--it has cylinder liners, and you have to check all your cylinder liners for electrolysis, and electrolysis is pitting. If you have an aluminum pan at home and look at it, you'll see little black marks in it where it looks like little holes. That's electrolysis. That's where your metal is being eaten away, and so if you have any of this you have to replace your cylinder liner as well. Then, with a diesel engine everything has to be measured and microscoped, because it is a precision machine and just one thing off in the wrong place can ruin
a $40,000 piece of equipment. You have to have everything done just right to the letter. A lot of people don't realize that. It's not like a car—a car could be off a little bit. It's not good to have any motor off, but with the diesel, the price of the parts are so much more that you have to have it right. Like down there at the shop, we sent this block to Vancouver to be rebored, and they didn't get it straight. Well, the man only got as far as Woodland, which is about 20 miles from here, and the engine seized up.

SM: It stopped?

MF: It froze up. And so when they brought it back down to the shop, he thought it was something we had done. Well, we took it back apart again, and that brand new piston was just in pieces, and it was just crumpled and frozen, so when we got to measuring it—we have a fake core that you run down in the middle of them—we found out that it wasn't running true, and that boy that worked on that, he didn't take the time to run that core through there to find out it wasn't true, and wound up ruining the whole new cylinder liner and new piston, and the whole works had to be redone, plus the man had his truck down.

SM: Out of operation?

MF: Right.

SM: Well, do you actually do repair work here in the shop then?

MF: Yeah. We've got engines, starters, starter-pumps, we have hydraulic pumps.

SM: So the shop is not just theory, you actually are rebuilding and repairing?
MF: On-the-job training. Right. We have to be able to tune a diesel engine, we have to be able to time a diesel engine, and we had hydraulics, and a lot of it's engine repair, but the most important thing with any heavy equipment is your hydraulic system. Almost everything has hydraulics, and you have to have a lot of training in hydraulics.

SM: That was an interesting picture of you in the paper, showing you working on an engine. What are you doing there? You've got a big wrench in your hand, and you've got a grim look on your face like you're clenching your teeth.

MF: I'm tightening down the bolts that hold the head on top of the block. I rebuilt those heads that they took the picture of in the paper. I ground the valves in them and put them all back together and reseated them, and rebuilt that particular engine there myself, and this one here we're just doing.

SM: Do you have a good time over there, Michelle?

MF: Yeah. I'm the only woman in the shop. I get teased a lot. I just tease them right back.

SM: How many people do you have in the class?

MF: Thirteen.

SM: And then your instructor. In this kind of class where you're working on this equipment, you couldn't have 40 or 50 people very well, could you?

MF: You'd have to have another instructor to keep up with those all, because it's fast moving. If you miss too much, you miss a lot, you
have to catch up a lot if you stay out too long. You have to keep busy.

SM: So then, when will you be able to graduate from this course?

MF: I graduate in April. We've had the hydraulics, we've had the motor rebuilding and the tuning, and we're doing the electrical part of it. We cover alternators and starters and voltage regulators and generators—we have to rebuild all that equipment. We're learning that end of it too.

SM: Then when you get out of school with the credits from this course, you're going to try to get a job again?

MF: When you graduate from the school we're supposed to have the equivalent of two year's apprenticeship as a mechanic. It takes four years to become a journeyman, but I imagine that we'll all probably have to have at least four years in the field, because it's a fast-moving course, and you can only learn so much in the shop. The most best experience is your best teacher, because the more you work with something the more you learn.

SM: Do you have any idea where you might apply for a job then?

MF: Probably back with the state. I like working up in the mountains, and the tall trees. It's a beautiful country to work in.

SM: On the western slope of the Cascade mountains?

MF: Yeah. It's really pretty up there. It makes you feel close to God, and you get up there, it's fresh air, and really a lot of beautiful things in this country to see if a person looks.

SM: Yes, it is a beautiful country out here. You also like to go hunting, don't you?
MF: Yes, I like to hunt. I hunt every year.

SM: Did you go hunting this year?

MF: Yeah.

SM: Did you have any luck?

MF: I got an elk and a forked-horn deer, and then my son got a small deer, a spike.

SM: You took one of your older kids with you?

MF: My kids all hunt, even my five-year old.

SM: Does he have a gun?

MF: No, he doesn't have a real gun. But my ten-year old daughter and my fourteen-year old son both have their rifle safety training certificates, and my five-year old, ever since he was born, the first two years he was too little to get out in the brush, so I ride road hunter with him, and let him ride around in the car seat. But his fourth year and his fifth year, both these years he's gotten out in the brush with me. In fact, last year I set him on a stump on a stand and made him sit there, and I had a little rifle, an air rifle, just makes a big noise. It was deer season so we couldn't shoot an elk, but he was up there just popping away with that little rifle, and I thought, "Boy, that kid's gonna scare everything in the country." And it was unusual because I already had him trained that he's got to be quiet. So I go trotting back up the hill to see what he's making so much noise about. There's 18 head of elk coming across that hillside in one big bunch. And there were seven bulls in there. In fact, I got one out of there. I watched him all deer season, and we got one out of there, but that little guy, if he'd have had a real
rifle, he'd have had elk laying all over the mountain, that kid.

SM: Where do you go elk hunting?

MF: Usually Weyerhaeuser country. But I like, oh, I hunt up in cougar country.

SM: Where is that now?

MF: That's up toward Ariel where D. V. Cooper jumped out of the plane.

SM: That man who hijacked the plane and then jumped from it.

MF: I hunt up there a lot. I worked up there when I was running for the state. It's really quite high country. How anybody can jump out of a plane and survive in that country, I don't think so.

SM: I read an article just the other day theorizing that he had a less than 50% chance of survival.

MF: I've been all over that country, and there's places down there that man has never been, and probably will never get down far.

SM: Now where is that from here? We're on the Columbia River, and that would be east of here?

MF: You go down south to Woodland, then you turn at Woodland and you go east.

SM: South of Woodland 25 miles?

MF: Probably 25 miles, and east.

SM: Up into the Cascade Mountains?
MF: Right. And this place is down there. That is really rough country. Most of the time I hunt up on the 2700 line, up here towards Castle-rock, and then you head east, because it's not quite so steep.

SM: Up there that's the Cowlitz prairie country, isn't it?

MF: Yeah, it's not quite as steep, but that Ariel country is very steep, very deep.

SM: Deep and rocky, lots of trees.

MF: Canyons. If you got down there and shot something you'd have to eat it right there, and pray for a helicopter to come and get you out.

SM: Have you ever had an accident while you were out hunting?

MF: Usually either a flat tire or getting stuck.

SM: Stuck some place in the sand?

MF: Mud. I had a big old one-ton panel truck with 17-inch tires on it, and I put snow chains on it, and I went places even the jeeps couldn't go, but that was expensive hunting season, because I took it through water about three feet deep for about four hours, and wound up putting a new rear end and new drive line and the whole works in. Hard on the bearings.

SM: Well, this year you got an elk and a deer both. What do you do then, freeze them? Preserve them?

MF: I take the backstrap off and make steaks out of it, and the rest of it I ground into hamburger, 'cause my kids like hamburger best.

SM: That's nice hamburger?
MF: Well, elk's pretty tough.

SM: Is it? Can you mix it with something?

MF: No, you don't want to do that, but elk is best if you just get a real young one, like a spike, that's your calf, that's good eating. They're real nice and tender. But you take a cow or a bull, they're pretty tough, you're best to grind them up. And of course a deer, deer is really good. It's not tough at all. Deer is really good eatin'. The kids don't like regular meat. I raise beef, but my kids don't like the beef as well as they do the wild meat.

SM: How do you raise beef? Do you buy a steer and raise it?

MF: I bought a white-face and a holstein. I raised my holstein on a bottle.

SM: A calf, a nursing calf?

MF: Yeah, he's a big pet now.

SM: Is it going to be hard to butcher him?

MF: Yeah. It was really funny about me raising that calf. I didn't know that they didn't have any teeth.

SM: At first they don't?

MF: They don't have any.

SM: Not ever?

MF: At the top. They don't have any teeth ever at the top, and I had
gone through about $20.00 worth of milk, hand feeding him this powdered calf milk, and then I bought starter grain that was $6.00 a sack, and I must have went through $30.00 of that. I finally called the vet and asked him when he was gonna start getting his teeth, 'cause I was afraid he was gonna starve to death, and I was out there hand feeding him and poking that stuff down his throat because I thought he was starving to death. The vet said, "How many did you raise?" I said, "This is my first one." And he says, "I can believe that. Don't you know that they don't have any teeth at the top?"

SM: They only have lower teeth?

MF: Right. They'll take their tongue, and they'll wrap it around the grass and they'll jerk their head and that breaks the grass loose. And I didn't know that.

SM: And then they chew their cud. That's the teeth of the lower jaw against the gums?

MF: Against the back teeth. No front teeth. They got front teeth on the bottom that they use for cutting grass, but no top teeth. And then I bought two beef besides those two since then, but he was so little, I'm gonna wait till next year to butcher him. But I butchered my meat for this winter already, one steer.

SM: Do you freeze it to keep it during the winter?

MF: Um hm.

SM: Because in this country it doesn't get cold enough to stay frozen outdoors, does it?

MF: No, you've gotta freeze your meat or can it. If a person takes and cans venison or elk, it's really good.
SM: Do you have a way of storing other food products—vegetables, other things?

MF: I can. I make all my own jelly. This year I used 200 pounds of sugar. We have elderberries out here, and blackberries and blueberries and strawberries.

SM: And they're all big and lush, aren't they?

MF: Yeah. Salmonberries, we've got three or four kinds of blackberries.

SM: Do you go out and pick a lot of those?

MF: My kids and I do.

SM: All six of you go out and spend a day picking berries and come back and can them, make jam?

MF: We have a family project out of it.

SM: Well, they're learning a lot too, aren't they?

MF: My daughter that's 15, I got her started this summer and she made almost all the jelly while I was going to school.

SM: She's a real helper?

MF: She's a good cook. She's 15, and she's in junior high. They just started home economics, so she said, "Mom," she says, "do you know what we gotta make?" "What?" She says, "Plum jelly," and I had went and got about 100 pounds of plums, and her and I just got through making plum jelly. And she just got through telling me, "I don't care if I never see another plum," went to school that next week, and she had to make plum jelly. She said, "Why can't I just take them a
jar from the house?"

SM: It didn't work?

MF: No, she had to make more jelly.

SM: Well, she probably learned a few things there too that were done differently.

MF: Well, me and the kids all stick together as a family. If a mother's gonna go to school, like I am, to try to better herself, she's gotta have the cooperation of her family, or it won't work.

SM: Yes. And the kids are helping?

MF: All the kids are helping. They all work together.

SM: That's great. They're all in school, and you're in school, and the kids are all pitching in to help.

MF: I got a lot of laughs when I first started. I started out on an old farm tractor in Woodland, working for a guy bucking hay, and I'm short and fat, but I'm strong. Those bales of hay weighed anywhere from 85 to 95 pounds, and I'd get them up over the top of my head. When I'd get so many on the truck I couldn't get them any farther, I'd bounce them off my head, boosting them. I bucked hay for that guy for four summers, running all his hay equipment, and running his crew, and that's where I first started working, right at the bottom running farm tractors.

SM: That was when you got kind of interested in the equipment thing?

MF: Um hm.
SM: That's hard work, though, isn't it?

MF: Oh yeah. I worked from daylight until dark, from around 5:00 in the morning until around, in the summertime it don't get dark here till about 8:30, 9:00 o'clock.

SM: And incidentally it gets dark early now, because you're pretty far north here.

MF: It gets dark early here now. Around 5:00 o'clock at night it's dark here. A person, like a mother, should never be discouraged, you know, like if you're on welfare. I was on welfare for years, and it really makes you feel bad. I was on welfare for a few years, until I decided that I was getting stuck in a rut. A lot of women on welfare, you figure, well, there's nothing else you can do. You got a bunch of kids, and you got bills to pay, and no way to feed 'em, and no education. You should never let yourself get slowed down for that, because if you have enough faith in yourself, and enough faith in your kids, and enough faith in God, He'll help you, and you can really get going. Just find something that really interests you, and just make your mind up that you're gonna be determined to succeed. And just keep right at it. You're bound to fail sometimes. I do a lot of things that's wrong, or I'll break something that I've done that wasn't right, and I'll ask my teacher, and he'll say, "Well, you didn't do this right." I gotta take it apart and do it over. And when I was working for the state, until you learn the short cuts, until you learn a little bit--if it hadn't been for all the men staying by me, showing me how to run the equipment, teaching me what I'm supposed to do, I probably never woulda made it. I had a lot of people that had faith in me, because I had faith in myself, and you have to have faith in yourself.

SM: People tend to respond, don't they?
MF: Right. If they know you're really trying, and you're really making an effort to help yourself, to better yourself, people will go backwards to help you.

SM: That's a good message.

MF: People that worked up at the state, they showed me how to run the equipment, they showed me all the short cuts. Lou Davis is one of the fellows who is a mechanic up there, head mechanic, who told me that I was more help to him in the shop than the guys that the state had hired to work in the shop. The mechanic from Olympia--and he's the #1 mechanic for all the state--he said that if I was in Olympia he'd do everything possible to get me to work in the shop up there, because he thinks I'd make a good mechanic. This was before I even had any intentions of even trying to go to mechanic school. This was just when I was working, but he said I was an automatic ability.

SM: Had a talent for it.

MF: Right. That I could pick up the trouble with a piece of equipment, I could hear it going bad before it went bad, and my truck, when I took it back, was in better shape than when the state give it to me.

SM: You worked on it yourself?

MF: A lot of it. And a lot of it I took it in, I kept it up. So they really kinda stuck by me and they helped me. Like over at the unemployment office. Jerry Schuler--he's the one that asked me if I'd be interested in going to school--he looked up my records. If it hadn't been for him I probably wouldn't have got into the school. He more or less instigated me getting into school.

SM: Was there any resistance to the idea of your going to school?
MF: No. He said I qualified to go. I took an examination, so that's how I got in, but if the people know that you're just really trying, they'll help you, and it doesn't mean that you have to be a woman libber, that you think you're better than men, because there're too many jobs you can't do. There's a lot of things that a woman just can't do. The fact is there are a lot of things in the field that a woman can do, and you just have to find out which one you're suited for, and not try to get out there and show that you're better, or that you're an equal, just try to show that you want to help yourself.

SM: And that you can do a worthwhile job.

MF: Right. Because a lot of women, they'll get out and they'll try to show that they're better, or I don't know what they're trying to show. I never figured it out because I'm not one of them. I just want to make a good living for my kids, and some day I'd like to own a place in the country, a little farm for my kids and I to have some fun on. And that's all I want. And a person has to have a goal, what you want to do for yourself. The kids, they agree with me, and they help me. But I'm not gonna go out here and try to show these guys that's been running equipment for 30 years that I can go to school for two years and know more than they do. That'd be impossible. If anything, I'll ask those guys that's been doin' it for 30 years if they can show me a little more, to help me, rather than try to overrun them.

SM: It would be a wiser approach, wouldn't it?

MF: Yeah, you can get a lot more with sugar than you'll ever get with spice. A lot of those men, if I ask them, they'll sit right down and show me.

SM: Like they did before, they helped you.
MF: If I was trying to act like I was trying to take their job over, show them that I'm better than they are, well then they wouldn't even want around me. And I'm not old enough or smart enough yet to be able to teach anybody. I'm still learning my own self.

SM: Well, then, pretty soon now, next April, you're going to be through at the school?

MF: Yeah.

SM: And you're going to start looking for a job in some aspect of heavy equipment--repairing, driving, operating, whatever.

MF: Whatever is intended for me to do, that's what I want to do. I don't know yet what my intentions are, because we don't anybody know. Whatever is supposed to be is gonna be, but I would like to see a lot of girls kinda have kinda the attitude I do--that it's out there if you want it. You gotta go after it.

SM: A good living and a satisfaction with yourself and your own efforts?

MF: You can't push your way into it, you have to earn it. You've gotta look what you want, go after it, but not in an overbearing way. You hafta really have a desire to go through with it and finish it.

SM: When you started at the school or when they were talking with this man about starting in this school, did you have some second thoughts? I mean, were you a little worried about it?

MF: No. I was a foreman for Weyerhauser on an all-women crew, planting trees, and they didn't think women could plant trees, and I convinced them, just walked up in the office and told them I wanted to talk to the head forester, and I talked him into trying girl tree planters, and my girls done a beautiful job. I was up there this hunting season
and all our trees are growing, just beautiful trees.

SM: That was up in the Cascade country?

MF: Right up above the Kalama River road.

SM: And you planted trees up there?

MF: With my girls. With an all-girl crew, and they planted beautiful trees. I took the time with each one of my new girls. I'd take one tree, and with the big contractors, they'll give these guys a bag of trees, they'll shove them in the woods and tell them to plant. Well, the survival rate's low. So, instead of doing that, I'd take all my new girls and I'd give them each one tree and I'd let them plant that one tree, that way they planted it right. Then we only lost one tree, because they die within seconds after they hit the air.

SM: They're covered when you get them?

MF: They have trouble with the men crews hiding the trees, not planting them, which is a terrible waste, because those little trees are two years to three years old before.

SM: How big are they when they're ready to plant?

MF: Oh, maybe five inches, six inches.

SM: Five inches high, six inches?

MF: Yeah, but that's including the roots.

SM: Now do they come in some kind of package?
MF: They come in a bunch that's maybe four inches around, and you'll have maybe 50 trees in that one bunch. That's how little they are.

SM: So that's why you said when they hit the air they die within a short time.

MF: The roots on them, you have your tap root is the one that goes in the middle, and then you have your little hair roots, the feeder roots. They'll die within 60 seconds after the air hits them if you don't have them in the ground.

SM: They're really delicate, aren't they?

MF: And so, at Weyerhaeuser, I convinced them that girls could plant trees, that they'd be more honest, and I had a trailer house plumb full of trees. They have inspectors they have to pay a lot of money to guard these tree crews to see if they're hiding trees, and there's a large fine for hiding them. But they still keep hiding them because they don't care, but I expressed to my girls that it was important. We're not planting a future for anybody but our kids. Women have a maternal instinct. A woman will work hard for her kids, she'll even work for her grandkids she doesn't even have yet, if she thinks she's building something or making something, "Oh, I'm putting this away for my grandkids." Maybe her kids aren't even old enough to get married yet, but she's still doing it. So I convinced Weyerhaeuser to try it, and it really did work. Eventually some day they'll probably have quite a few girls planting trees.

SM: Have they got other girl crews now?

MF: There's girls on the crews, but the trouble is finding a contractor. The bond money is so much that the men contractors don't want to mess with the women crews, where maybe some day if I made enough money in
the field of construction, maybe I'd start my own crew and have that as a sideline.

SM: Do you know how many tree seedlings the timber companies plant compared to how many trees they cut?

MF: Well, let's see. I can plant 1,000 trees a day my own self.

SM: Do you have to bend over to plant every one?

MF: Yeah.

SM: So that's hard on the old back, isn't it?

MF: The more you work at it the easier it gets. Some of those trees are what they call #3's and #4's, and they're a much taller tree, they're probably a foot in height, and maybe another half a foot or so in roots, but they're a little harder to learn to plant but they plant easier.

SM: Now back East they use machines for tree planting. Do they do that here, or is it too much of a slope?

MF: Oh yeah, rocks and slopes. You have to do it with a hoe dad here. I think you're talking about a auger.

SM: Well, they have a machine that people ride on as they drop the seedlings in place, but here it's done by hand?

MF: It's done by hand, and I told all the girls that we're planting a future for our grandkids and our great grandkids. The trees have to go in the ground.

SM: Is it true that the timber companies plant 100 trees for every one they cut?
MF: Oh, at least that.

SM: More than that maybe?

MF: If they get the right crews that are planting the trees they get.

SM: How do you go about it. You get a supply of these seedlings, these little trees, four or five, six inches high, and you take them up there in the country where it's been logged off.

MF: Yeah, some of it's been scarified and some of it hasn't been scarified.

SM: What do you mean, scarified?

MF: Well, you take a cat in there, and you take all the slash and you pile it up into piles and then you burn it and you have clear ground, but if they burn it it has to sit two to three years before they can plant it, before the ground is suitable for planting to recondition so the minerals will go back into the ground. So then you go up there and you usually take three to four steps and you plant a tree. But you've got to go over the brush and under the brush and around the brush and up the mountains, and sometimes you're climbing at a 45° angle.

SM: Then you don't have to bend over so far, do you?

MF: You don't have to bend over, no, just figure out that you don't go backwards down the hill. But it's a good job. I had a woman that was 50 years old that was planting 1,000 trees a day. Boy, she was a hard-working woman!

SM: One thousand trees a day, imagine.

MF: And she's from Arkansas, and she made enough money to go back to
Arkansas to see her family, planting trees.

SM: Do you get paid by the tree?

MF: They paid the girls by the tree, because they didn't think the girls would do as well as the men.

SM: And they did better, you say?

MF: Well, they didn't do better, but they done as good. They got more trees in the ground. They didn't get as many trees in the ground as the men can plant, but the survival rate for the women was more.

SM: So the net result was as good or better?

MF: If you plant 100 trees in the ground, 50% of those trees are either gonna freeze, not take root, or the deer's gonna get them the first year. The second year another 25% of them trees is gonna die from damage or being planted close to another tree, or eaten by deer or elk, so you only wind up with about 25% of your 100 trees that you planted that will survive to be a timber.

SM: So for 1,000 trees planted you get about 250 trees growing up into marketable timber.

MF: Right.

SM: So you have to plant more than just an equal amount that you cut.

MF: Right. You have to really put them in the ground.

SM: What kind of trees are these?

MF: We plant Douglas Fir out here. Sometimes we're planting Noble Fir.
SM: Noble Fir? That's a different species.

MF: It's a beautiful tree. It looks something like Shasta Fir. They're the Christmas trees. You see the branches where they're just spaced so many inches apart, that's either a Shasta Fir or a Noble Fir. I sell Christmas trees.

SM: You do that too?

MF: Right. Every year. When my kids and I, we didn't have any Christmas, and I couldn't figure out what to do for Christmas for my kids, so we gathered up $50.00 worth of pop bottles, beer bottles and beer cans.

SM: When was this?

MF: This was four years ago.

SM: Fifty dollars worth of pop bottles. That's a lot of bottles.

MF: Me and my kids worked hard, boy. We gathered up bottles and bottles and bottles, cans, beer cans, beer bottles, anything we could find to gather up, and we wound up with $50.00. And I thought, "How am I gonna get five kids Christmas with $50.00?" So I went driving around out in the country, and I seen these Christmas trees so I asked this man how much he'd charge me for these trees. He had some culls there, but they were beautiful trees, but they needed to be shaped and trimmed. I thought it couldn't be that hard to shape and trim them. So I bought $40.00 worth of trees and he sold them to me for $2.00 a tree, and I brought them back down, shaped them and trimmed them, bought me a peddler's license--you have to have a permit here to sell trees.

SM: How much did that cost?
MF: Five dollars. And set me up a little lot in my mom's front yard down in North Kelso. And I sold my trees, and the first year I got $100.00, then I got some more trees. Altogether I come up with $150.00 for my kids for Christmas my first year.

SM: That was a lot better than $50.00.

MF: Right. So the next year I done a little bit better, and then one year the trees were too high and I didn't sell any at all, because if you've got to sell for a bunch of money for a tree, then they're not worth selling. The lots downtown here, the Elks and them, they sell cultured Christmas trees for anywhere from $16.00 to $25.00 a tree. Well, I know how much they pay for those trees, and I sell the same tree. In fact, I go around and deal with the tree farms after they're done cutting for them. I go in and give them a bid on what they've got left since I've learned more. And I get my trees and I sell my trees, the most expensive tree I had was $12.00, and that was for an eight foot tree that was about six to eight feet around the middle, and woulda sold for about $40.00 downtown. But I go and I take one whole day to pick out my trees, and I go around there cutting, I do my own cutting and my own hauling.

SM: You cut the trees down and bring them in?

MF: Yep.

SM: How do you cut them?

MF: With a handsaw, hand-bucking saw.

SM: So that you can get under there and make a nice clean cut.

MF: Right. And I go twice a week and cut trees, to where my trees are fresh. Now they've already got Christmas trees cut right now, and
Thanksgiving isn't even here yet, and I've already seen whole semi truckloads of trees going up the highway. Well, they're complaining about the fire hazard. That's why they have a fire hazard. They're already over 30 days old when you go down here and buy them off the lot from the Elks and from these different places. They're over 30 days old.

SM: How old are yours when you sell them?

MF: The oldest that they are is three days old when I sell them. That's right, because I wait till they're all done, then I go and cut them and sell them twice a week. Cut my own trees, and then that way... .

SM: Do you have a way to haul them?

MF: My dad has a little pick-up, and I haul my trees. I've got the same customers coming back since my very first year, because they just can't find fresh trees downtown, and you can keep a tree that I sell you clear to after New Years, and you won't have to even worry about it.

SM: Drying out on you.

MF: In fact you can take it outside after Christmas, and the needles will still be on your tree two or three months after you're taking your tree down if you set it outside--they'll still be there.

SM: Now you're able to make a little more on them because you know more about it?

MF: Yeah. Well, I know how to deal with them. 'Course this year I don't know if I'm gonna sell trees 'cause I gotta finish school. I don't know who's gonna watch my lot.
SM: You've got too many things going.

MF: Getting too many irons in the fire.

SM: With your hunting this fall, and all that canning you did, and berry picking and going to school and looking after the kids.

MF: We're pretty active. I'm coming and going. Then in the summertime we go to the powwows and the dances, Indian dances and Indian picnics, and I do beadwork, Indian beadwork.

SM: The Indian beadwork, do you make that and sell it?

MF: No, I don't sell it. I just give it away.

SM: Why don't you sell it?

MF: Well, I just haven't got around to selling it. I've got some friends that always ask me to make them something.

SM: So you make it for them?

MF: Um hm. They pay for the beads and I make it. I do art work.

SM: Drawing, painting, do you mean?

MF: Let's see. When I was a kid I had pictures in the art museum in Seattle. I do water color painting that is real difficult. Very few people can paint water color. Lot of people can paint oil, and now I'm on a new kick. I do conery.

SM: Making things out of pine cones?
MF: Right. I make beautiful swan pictures and vases. I make flowers out of the cones and then mix artificial flowers with them. I was offered $85.00 for one picture of a swan that I made, but I gave it away to a friend of mine in South Dakota. Art loses its value if you sell it. I mean, anything that you have, if it's special, if you put part of yourself into it, and you give it away as a gift, it will always be pretty, but if you put a price on something that's pretty or something that you've got part of yourself in, then sometimes they don't turn out so good. You have to share what you have, and you'll have a lot, but if you don't share and you're greedy, and you put a price on things that are pretty, then sometimes they turn ugly.

SM: That's the way you feel about it, and you like to oftentimes give away the beadwork and the art work.

MF: Right, because then it's appreciated. Like an animal, you know. If you've got a dog or a cat, and you find somebody you want to give it to, and you give them this dog or this cat, then they'll take good care of it and they'll love it, but if you tell that person, "I want $50.00 for this dog or this cat or this horse," or a large price where a person can't afford it, then the person who does buy it, maybe he's got enough money he can buy anything he wants, so he really don't care if he's good to it or not.

SM: Oh, I see.

MF: With my picture I made this last year for the fair, I took a piece of black velvet and I made a white owl, and I made an artificial body and made it out of real feathers, and I got the eyes from a taxidermist, and I got a piece of driftwood from the river, and I made him some artificial feet and mounted him on the driftwood, and he stands, oh, five inches off the board. The store down here in Longview offered me over $100.00 to make them and sell to them, but I made just this one for the fair, and I won a grand champion on that, and then gave it to my mother.
SM: This was the Cowlitz County Fair?

MF: Um hm. And then my swan I gave to my mother-in-law in South Dakota, and then all her sisters and her daughters I made these other pine cone pictures. I took over $200.00 worth of pictures back there and just gave them away to their family back there. They'd never seen any conery. There's very few people that do good conery. They haven't gone into it technical, like I've really gone into it very technical. With my birds that I make in conery, I show all the details of the birds with the cones. Takes you hours and hours of work. I'm making, right now, a glass mosaic of Hans Christian Anderson's "Little Princess." It's a fable story--I don't know if you've ever heard of it--but they have a brown statue in Denmark. I sent away for a small photograph of her, and then I made this picture. I drew it free hand on a piece of plywood, and it's about three and a half, four feet wide, and about three feet tall, and I drew a 16th century galleon in the background, and it'll be all solid glass when I get done.

SM: Making little glass pieces in mosaics?

MF: Um hm.

SM: Do you glue those on?

MF: Um hm.

SM: Do you put something between the glass pieces?

MF: No. It will be all one solid piece of glass, all the different colors, all the pieces will blend together in a picture when I get done.

SM: It won't be quite like a stained glass window with the leaded strips?
MF: No. It'll be just like—if you seen a shag rug with a picture on it, a bird or something—it'll be like that, but it'll be all glass. And I don't know what the value of that would be when I get done, I have no idea.

SM: Have you decided who you're going to give that to?

MF: Well, I might keep that one on my wall. I've been working on it for two years. It takes a long time to collect that much glass.

SM: And get all the colors you want. Some colors are harder to get than others too, aren't they?

MF: The blue's the hardest. I have a hard time finding any blue.

SM: How do you go about finding the colored glass? Do you have to go to hobby shops?

MF: No, I run around to all my friends and ask them to save me milk of magnesia bottles and any kind of broken ash trays and any kind of broken bowls, anything that they break, I'm always gathering it up.

SM: But now, can you use curved pieces too?

MF: Curved pieces, flat pieces, any kind. You heat your glass and then you put it in cold water. When you do this you get one of those large tea strainers, the big ones, not the little tea strainers, the big strainer. You heat your glass in the oven and you put this glass in your tea strainer, and then you put a lid over the tea strainer so in case it was to fly up you wouldn't get hit with the glass, and then you put it in cold water.

SM: What happens?
MF: That will crack your glass, see?

SM: It cracks it up into little pieces?

MF: Right, and then you have that to work with. But be sure to cover it with a lid for safety reasons. And then you can work with it.

SM: That makes all these little squarish and rectangular, odd-shaped pieces?

MF: Right. Just shatters it.

SM: And you fit them all together?

MF: Into a picture, right. Takes hours, and months and years to finish a big project. I made a tiger out of glass and gave it to a girl. She took it to school and got her A on it, and I didn't know she was doing it for a school project.

SM: You haven't got any other activities like this now going on?


SM: Where do you go fishing?

MF: I go fishing in the ocean, and I go fishing in the rivers.

SM: Like the Columbia, Cowlitz and so on?

MF: Yeah, I got a boat.

SM: A big one? To go in the ocean with?
MF: It's a 16-foot boat.

SM: Can you go out in the ocean with that?

MF: You could. You could go across the bar in it.

SM: Across the bar means out past the mouth of the Columbia, doesn't it?

MF: Right. You could take it out that far. It'd make it, it's a good boat, but I don't like to go out in it that far. You can go down, and for $20.00 get on one of those big boats and they take you out all day, and so for what it costs you to take a little boat out, you can ride a big boat, so you're better off with the big ones.

SM: What kind of fish do you get mostly?

MF: Salmon and steelhead and trout.

SM: Is steelhead a type of salmon?

MF: It looks like a cross between a trout and a salmon. It's a much smaller fish. They weigh about 20 pounds. Some of them, they get a pretty good size.

SM: How big do the salmon get?

MF: Oh, salmon can get up to 50 to 80 pounds, but you'll never catch nothing like that on your hook. One woman that I know in Longview holds the record down there in Longbeach, and I think hers was 75 or 85 pounds, but it took her all day to get the fish landed.

SM: Do you fish with hooks or with nets?
MF: I'd like to fish with nets. On the reservation we fish with nets.

SM: You can, can't you?

MF: Right. It's legal there, but out here we fish with poles. Salmon like cluster eggs. You take the egg roll and put your hook through there and then you wrap it with thread to hold it tight, and then you drift-fish with the hook and the cluster eggs. Then sometimes they're biting on flies. It just depends on what they happen to be chewing on at the minute. And then we have sturgeon out here. In the Columbia we have sturgeon, and that's a very ancient fish.

SM: They get really big, don't they?

MF: Well, there's some sturgeon down at the bottom of that Columbia River that would probably make your eyes fall out if we ever found them.

SM: I've seen them as big as 150, 160 pounds.

MF: Oh, they're huge. And then down around the mouth of the Columbia they have green sturgeon too. They're different. We have white, a kind of a gray color sturgeon, but they're so good that they even put halibut to shame. If you ever eat sturgeon you'll never like halibut as well.

SM: Do you have any fishing rights?

MF: Yeah, we have . . . well, like clam digging up here. I think you're only allowed 16 clams, and, like with me, on the clam tide, we can go out and dig 200 pounds.

SM: If you want to.
MF: Right. And there's a guy down there right on our reservation that buys them.

SM: You can sell the clams if you want to?

MF: Right. There's guys right down there on the reservation that buy our clams as we sell them.

SM: Now ordinarily you're not supposed to dig clams and sell them, are you?

MF: The Indians can, but we don't let the white people on our reservation.

SM: And that's up the Sound a ways?

MF: That's at Taholah. You go right up the highway, down the coast past Aberdeen and keep going and you get to Taholah. When the road runs out that's my reservation.

SM: Oh, that's over on the coast then?

MF: Right on the coast.

SM: On the Pacific coast, that's west of here. Michelle, we're out of tape, but it's been fascinating listening to you and hearing all the things you do.

MF: I just hope that it helps somebody else, women especially. I'd like to see a lot of women get off of welfare and really get out and make a drive to really . . . they just never will know how much it will make them feel better if they'd really get out and try. Really makes you feel good. Girls really need a future, and it's there for women if they really want to go after it.

SM: Thanks very much, Michelle.

MF: You're welcome.