LISTENING TO INDIANS

NO. 18

GABRIEL BRISBOIS, Chippewa
MARIANNE BRISBOIS
GEORGIANNA GATTENBY, Chippewa

August 17, 1975
Hibbing, Minnesota

Part I
Sam Myers:

Today we're up in northern Minnesota at Hibbing, Minnesota, where the big mines are, and we're talking to a family that came from the Chippewa Reservation, Gabriel Brisbois and his wife, Marianne, and Georgianna Gattenby, who is Gabriel's sister. We have a unique introduction, because we're going to begin this interview with a singing Indian dog. Gabe, do you want to let the dog begin?

Gabriel Brisbois:

All right. Then we're gonna sing, "Happy Birthday" to Sam, so here we go. The dog's name is Dixie. My wife, Marianne, and I will accompany her.

(Gabe and Marianne sing "Happy Birthday" and the dog joins in)

SM: That's neat. The only thing I couldn't understand were the words the dog was singing.

GB: Well, that's because she sings in Chippewa.

SM: Oh, I see. Well, now that Dixie has us started very properly and seriously, Gabe, you are Gabriel Brisbois, a Chippewa Indian with a French name?

GB: Right.

SM: Can you explain that one?

GB: Well, coincidentally I think, the legends in our family say that the sire of our family came from St. Louis, and was the black sheep of the family, and left to go up into the wilds of Minnesota and Canada, and we are not sure that this is true, but this is the legend, like I say, and from his adventure, our side of the Brisbois family started,
and he married an Indian woman, and his son in turn married a woman who was half French and half Chippewa, so from our father's side we get our Indian that way, and then my mother's mother, our grandmother, was also part Chippewa.

SM: That gives us the beginning of the family. Now we also have your sister here with us today, and may I ask your name?

Georgianna Gattenby:
My first name is Georgianna, and my last name now is Gattenby, my married name. My husband is part Indian from Oklahoma.

SM: Oh, what kind?

GG: Cherokee.

SM: So you are part Chippewa married to a part-Cherokee, right?

GG: Right.

SM: And do you live here in the area too?

GG: I live in Brainerd.

SM: Brainerd, Minnesota. There's a junior college over there too.

GG: Yes, there is.

SM: And also we have Gabe's wife, Marianne, that you've already heard singing with Dixie. Marianne has a remarkable voice, you heard that. Do you mind if we introduce you too, Marianne? You're non-Indian, right?
Marianne Brisbois:

Right.

SM: Is that the best way to refer to it—Indian and non-Indian?

GB: It doesn't matter, but I think the term "white," is used so much in other ways, like, "He's a real white man," he was really "white" about it. There's so many other connotations to "white: that non-Indian seems to be better to me.

SM: And non-Indian does not exclude blacks or Chicanos or Orientals, and so on, so that's a better, more-inclusive term.

MB: Right.

SM: Well, actually, Marianne, I think, is darker than you are, Gabe, as far as coloring goes.

GB: She is part Hungarian.

SM: Oh, is that where she gets those dark eyes?

GB: Right. I found her, Hungarian and German. Her maiden name was Klinkhammer.

SM: You found her in Germany?

GB: No, I found her in Beaulieu.

SM: Is that a town in Minnesota?

MB: It's about eight miles east of Mahnomen, and a mile north.
Marianne Brisbois:
Right.

SM: Is that the best way to refer to it--Indian and non-Indian?

GB: It doesn't matter, but I think the term "white," is used so much in other ways, like, "He's a real white man", he was really "white" about it. There's so many other connotations to "white: that non-Indian seems to be better to me.

SM: And non-Indian does not exclude blacks or Chicanos or Orientals, and so on, so that's a better, more-inclusive term.

MB: Right.

SM: Well, actually, Marianne, I think, is darker than you are, Gabe, as far as coloring goes.

GB: She is part Hungarian.

SM: Oh, is that where she gets those dark eyes?

GB: Right. I found her, Hungarian and German. Her maiden name was Klinkhammer.

SM: You found her in Germany?

GB: No, I found her in Beaulieu.

SM: Is that a town in Minnesota?

MB: It's about eight miles east of Mahnomen, and a mile north.
SM: Of Mahnomen, Minnesota, which is over in the northwest corner of the state.

GB: It's in the western edge of the White Earth Reservation.

SM: Yes, and the White Earth Reservation is in. . . .

GB: It takes up most of the Mahnomen County and part of Becker, and just a hair of Clearwater, I believe.

SM: Is the town of Mahnomen on the reservation?

GB: Yes.

SM: On the other end of the White Earth Reservation, Ponsford is just off the reservation, I believe.

GB: But Pine Point is on it.

SM: And Pine Point, the school, is on it. Gabe, you and your family grew up on the White Earth Reservation?

GB: We were all--my sisters, Georgianna, and we have another sister, June, who lives in California--we were all born in the White Earth Reservation Hospital, which was in the town of White Earth, in the government hospital, staffed with government doctors, and so forth. Most of my life--anyway when we were living where my mother lives now. . . .

SM: Your mother still lives over there?

GB: Yes. We were cared for by the Indian Health Service.

SM: This would be under the BIA?
GB: Yes.

SM: Well now, the present health service, HEW, is a different thing than the old Indian Health Service under the BIA?

GB: Well, it's different in that ... different management ... less managed by Indians themselves, I would say.

SM: Less managed by Indians? It used to be more so?

GB: I would think so, yeah. I think the Indians before had more of a feeling that it was theirs, and now it seems like it's coming from some unknown place. To me that's the way it seems anyway.

SM: The HEW?

GB: Yeah.

SM: Georgianna, you grew up over there in the same town, same place with your brother, and does it strike you the same way--the HEW being more removed from the Indian people?

GG: Oh, it's a different, really a different system now. There's no hospital there any more--it's really different, you know, it's ... .

SM: Not as personal?

GG: No.

SM: At Pine Point, on the other end of the same reservation, they don't have a hospital any more. They have a HEW office with someone in attendance part of the time. But they do have their school, which they are running themselves now. Is there a school at Mahnomen or at White Earth too?
GG: Not an Indian school.

GB: There used to be an Indian school at White Earth, or a Catholic school that served the Indians, but at Mahnomen there is a public school where most of the Indians from the central part of the reservation go to, from Naytahwaush and that area.

SM: I'd like to go back there now, to where you were born, near Mahnomen, on the White Earth Reservation and bring us up to date, in a brief biographical sketch, if you will. And would you both contribute, both Gabe and Georgianna? You were born there in the old Indian Health Service Hospital--is that the right term?

GG: White Earth Indian Hospital is what it was called.

SM: The White Earth Indian Hospital, which is no longer there.

GB: No. Well, the building is still there, but it's no longer in use.

SM: You grew up there and went to school there?

GB: No. We were born in the hospital, and then we went back to our home, which is in the northern part of the reservation, and the people in the northern part of the reservation go to the surrounding public schools.

SM: They don't have an Indian school?

GB: No.

SM: Did you grow up able to speak Chippewa?

GB: No, I never learned any, except for a few phrases, and Bunny [Georgianna] learned more, I think.
SM: You grew up basically using the English language like the rest of us around the country?

GG: Right. 'Course we had a lot of Indian neighbors, and . . . 'course I'm older, and we had many that used to come down to our house and borrow things, and they would never speak English. So I learned by listening.

SM: You'd have to figure out what they were asking for?

GG: Yeah, and 'course my dad could speak Chippewa, and he could speak French also.

SM: And English?

GG: And English, right. But they wouldn't talk English when they'd wanta borrow something--some of these old gents that used to come down there.

SM: Could they talk English if they wanted to?

GG: Very broken. That's why they wouldn't speak English, because too many people laughed at 'em, when they talked English.

SM: They didn't like to be ridiculed and so they would stick to their native tongue.

GG: Right.

SM: At the Pine Point Reservation school, Indian school, on the south end of the White Earth Reservation, they have a Chippewa, or Ojibway, language teacher now. They're teaching the language to the children, because most of them come to school not knowing how to speak it.
GG: I went to school in Mahnomen for two years, and that's the first time that I really realized that I was an Indian, because all through 8th grade I went to schools right around our area where there were a mixture of Indians and white—more Indian I would say than white—and my mother was a teacher and she taught Indian schools. She taught Indian schools and so did two of her sisters. They are Indian teachers and they taught Indian schools. But when I left the 8th grade and went to Mahnomen to high school, I got my first taste of segregation. [sic]

SM: At high school?

GG: In high school. I found out that people don't like Indians for some reason—they didn't then. I was very unhappy there, and that made an impression on my life that's still there. I went there for two years, and I did very poorly in school. I was afraid to get up and talk in front of the class, ask any questions, and so I know how other Indians feel when they go someplace where they're segregated [sic] against. And then I went to Fosston to school, and there it was like opening up a new world for me. They didn't care if you were Indian or what you were there. They accepted you for what you were, and I was so happy, I know exactly how kids that are segregated [sic] against feel now that go to another place to live. And it's just like the sun shines—I'll tell you—if you live in a place where there's no sun, and all of a sudden the sun comes out.

SM: At Pine Point some of the people said that they went to the Park Rapids High School, and after a couple of years would drop out and just give up, because they felt left out, or in some cases actually discriminated against. And then you had that experience in Mahnomen, but you had the opposite experience in Fosston where it was like the sun came out and made a bright day of it.
GG: Right. That's just . . . that's the best way I can describe it.

SM: There are bright spots that we can find here and there. It isn't all bad, all the time, is it?

GG: That's why I . . . now you know things have changed quite a bit, but there still is segregation [sic] all over. That's why I understand the problems of the negroes, because I have the feeling inside of me.

SM: And other minority groups like that, Orientals, Chicanos, and so on?

GG: Right. I know how those kids feel.

SM: But when you went to school now, you were able to speak the language that the minority spoke. You didn't have any language barrier?

GG: Oh yeah, there was no language barrier. It was just a feeling, you know, all of a sudden you find out there's something wrong with you, and you can't figure it out, you know.

SM: Do you remember any incidents that hurt?

GG: Well, they just shunned you and, too, to me it seemed like the teachers were not interested in you, while they appeared to show more interest in the white kids.

SM: Would it possibly be that some of the Indian kids came to school less well prepared too, that is, from their previous elementary school?

GG: Well, it could be. I wasn't aware of those things in those days, I wasn't aware of that part of it, you know.

SM: This occurred to me after I talked to the people at Pine Point when they said they dropped out of high school after going to Park Rapids.
I wondered if the Pine Point school had prepared them less effectively, or if it was just pure discrimination?

GG: I don't know, but I failed classes in Mahnomen. I took the same classes over in Fosston and got "A's."

SM: So then in a happy situation you did well?

GG: Right.

SM: And you and Gabe then both finished in Fosston, and graduated there? Where did you go to school after that, Georgianna?

GG: That was the end of my education for that time anyway. Later I went on to school.

SM: Gabe, you are a school teacher now?

GB: Yes.

SM: And where did you go on from Fosston?

GB: I went to St. John's University at Collegeville, which is in central Minnesota. And I went there for three semesters and found out that I and my family could not afford to pay the tuition there. That's an interesting point, though, too, when you deal with the amount of Indian we are. I had a scholarship to St. John's from the Indian Department; I had all the papers and everything saying I was going to get it; and when I got down there it did not arrive and they had changed their mind. But I went there anyway for three semesters, and then I went on to Bemidji, off and on—I'd go winter quarters and work the rest of the year. All in all, it took seven years to get my four-year degree.
SM: To get the usual four-year degree. But you stuck it out and made it?

GB: Yeah, I finally...

SM: A young man from Florida said that he was in school on a grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs of $1,500 a semester, and he was under the impression that any Indian child, boy or girl, could apply to the BIA and get similar grants to go to school. Did you find anything like that, or is that some kind of an isolated case?

GB: I don't know if there's a limit to the amount of funds, but there are some funds available.

SM: But you never got any of them?

GB: No, I didn't. I was promised...at that time, which was 21 years ago, I was promised $500 for the year.

SM: Of course $500 would go a lot farther then than now.

GB: Yeah, it would have paid the tuition.

SM: And then you'd have to support yourself.

GB: Of course now it wouldn't even pay for one semester.

GG: But then he didn't get his scholarship because he wasn't enough Indian blood.

GB: That's why I pointed that out.

SM: This young man from Florida was a full-blooded Seminole.

GG: You have to be a certain degree of Indian blood.
SM: Isn't it one-quarter or more?

GG: I'm not sure what it is now.

GB: I think it's one-quarter. That's the BIA standard, I believe.

SM: If you're one-quarter or more and enrolled too.

GB: Oh yes.

SM: You have to be enrolled on a reservation with the tribe, on the tribal roll, in order to get these aids from the BIA office?

GG: One thing about being born in the White Earth Indian Hospital like we were, you're automatically on the Indian rolls.

SM: Regardless of whether you're one-quarter or one-eighth, or one-sixteenth, or whatever?

GG: Right. You're just automatically on the Indian rolls.

SM: Did you ever figure out approximately what proportion you are?

GB: Well, I figure I'm one-eighth.

SM: And Georgianna is one-eighth also.

GG: Well, we have the same mother and father. (laughter)

SM: Your brother was teasing you a little bit a moment ago about being more Indian than he was. Is that because you married this man from Oklahoma?

GG: No, it's because my father brought me up more. He always was talking
Indian culture to me as I grew up. I grew up closer to my father. See when my brother grew up, the Second World War was here, and my father was in the Second World War.

SM: Oh, he was gone when you were at that age, Gabe?

GB: Well, when I was from one to six, something like that.

SM: So your father was gone then, and Gabe missed that association with him that you had.

GG: Right.

SM: That's why he teases you about being more Indian.

GG: Yeah. Being more Indian. And then I grew up and I went to school in Mahnomen where I ran into that situation there which he never ran into.

GB: It's interesting to note that I went to school in Mahnomen maybe 10 years later, and didn't experience that same thing. 'Course I'm very light in complexion.

SM: Yes, you could pass for a Norwegian, Swede, Scot.

GB: But nevertheless my associates were very dark Indians at Mahnomen, and I didn't see them experience any of that.

SM: You weren't aware of any of them running into any discrimination?

GB: But I think it did exist when she was there anyway, but it changed.

SM: One young lady, she'd be 26 or 27 now, and so she was in high school
about eight or nine years ago, said discrimination was bad, and her sister said the same thing. Twenty years earlier I think there was a little less. Would that hold up, or is this a peculiarity that changes by towns?

GB: Yeah, I think it is. I think there's less discrimination around Mahnomen than there is around Ponsford, or around Park Rapids. 'Course I don't live over there, so I don't know. You'd have to live in Park Rapids to be able to compare, but just judging from the incidents that are reported, it seems like around Mahnomen there's more inter-marriage between non-Indians and Indians.

SM: So the situation has changed?

GB: My wife lived in Mahnomen, went to school in Mahnomen, so she could give you the point of view of. . .

SM: Did you meet her there in Mahnomen?

GB: No, she was . . . I robbed the cradle. She's very young.

SM: She agrees, I see.

GB: Well, what did you think? When you went to school, were the Indian kids discriminated against, do you think, in Mahnomen?

MB: Well, I don't know if they were, you know, probably not like when you think of discrimination, but I can remember feeling that I thought I was better than they were.

SM: Until you met Gabe.

MB: Yeah, until I met Gabe. But I was brought up with the feeling that
the Indians were... dirty; they weren't responsible people. You know, they'd get some money and they'd go spend it and they'd get drunk. In fact, I used to be afraid to ride east in Mahnomen past this one little place called Clune's Corner—it used to be a bar-grocery-store type thing, and on Saturday nights it was really wild, you know. It was a frightening experience to ride past there on Saturday night because you didn't know if they were going... you know, you lock the car doors, roll up the windows, and, you know... .

SM: Is it also true that if some white people were out there causing trouble, the Indians would still be blamed?

MB: Correct. Yeah. I agree. Yeah, I think they would, because of the location.

SM: And the attitudes in the area.

MB: But that's the way I grew up feeling, but I certainly don't feel like that now. I've been educated by Gabe.

SM: Well, we've got Gabe through college, and we've got Georgianna through school, and we have found out your wife's attitude, who lived there too. Did you go to school after that at all, or is that it now. After Bemidji State?

GB: I spent the summer at Morehead State College, concentrating on English.

SM: You have taught English?

GB: Yes, for 12, 13 years.

SM: 'So you've been an English teacher for 12, 13 years. You don't speak
Chippewa, but you teach English.

GB: Yes. But last year and this year I have been and will be teaching American history in Hibbing Junior High School.

SM: And Georgianna, you're not a teacher?

GG: No, I went into the Navy after I left. I was in the Navy as a WAVE, psychiatric technician.

SM: That took some more schooling, didn't it?

GG: In the Navy, yah. And then after that I got a G.I. bill--I was in during the Korean War so I had the G.I. bill--and I went to school in North Dakota and I became an R.N. Now I work at St. Joseph's Hospital in Brainerd in surgery, surgical nurse.

SM: You've overcome the fainting that many people experience the first time they're in surgery?

GG: Oh yeah.

SM: And Marianne, you're not a teacher?

MB: No.

SM: You just keep Gabe squared away so he can do a good job over there?

MB: Yeah.

GB: She works at a nursery school.

MB: Part time.
SM: And you have taught your dog to sing.

MB: Yeah, that's my big achievement.

GB: By the way, she played the lead, the female lead, in "Little Abner."

SM: I heard this, and I heard you have some remarkable plays, drama here. You have a unique coach who is very capable. Is that true?

GB: We have several.

SM: Coaches?

GB: Um hm.

SM: And I've heard that you've done well, and that you sing outstandingly too.

MB: Oh, thank you.

SM: I heard this even before I talked to Gabe.

MB: Well, it's nice to hear.

GB: She made a good "Daisy May."

SM: Does she sing quite a bit?

GB: Oh yeah, um hm.

SM: And she wears those cut-offs?

GB: Right. And she wears a blond wig.
SM: Oh yes, because her hair's dark.

GB: She really got a chance to find out if blondes have more fun.

SM: Do they?

MB: No they don't, really.

SM: It's all the same?

MB: Yeah.

SM: Well, O.K., I think we've brought it up to date where we sort of introduced ourselves at least. Now then, we were going to say something about Indian lands.

GB: Well, the thing that reminded me of it is that we mentioned the timberline—where the Red River Valley starts. The thing that gets me, I guess "gets" is a good term, "peeves me," maybe—is that the White Earth Reservation encompasses Mahnomen and the city of Mahnomen, and surrounding the city of Mahnomen is the beginning of that good land. And when the reservation was originally laid out, all of that land belonged to Indian families collectively. And then—it seems to be a scheme; and I believe it is a scheme, but this is my own opinion—whenever they find out, "they" meaning the government or the people in power, find out that they've established a reservation where the land all of a sudden becomes valuable as times change, their system of getting the land away seems to be to—the term is—"open the reservation up" for white settlement, and they divide the land, rather than collectively, up into individual families. They allot so many acres to this family, Indian family, and this family, and then... let's take that good land around Mahnomen—really nice, flat land which is very valuable—all of that land at one time belonged to Indian families by this system. And when the reservation
was opened up, very quickly non-Indian people purchased the land from the Indians, because the Indians—I believe, and maybe other Indians might disagree with me on it—but the Indians, I believe, didn't see any value in owning anything individually—their's was always collective ownership. That's the difference in cultures. And so, as a result—we were talking about that timberland—you can go down the timberline, and on the west side of the timberline is where all the valuable land is and now under white ownership, non-Indian ownership, and on the east side of the timberline is where the Indians are sort of grouped together in their little. . . .

SM: Where the land is less valuable?

GB: Right, and where there's no agriculture, so to speak.

SM: I think the Dawes Act of 1887 certainly was one of those kinds of things where the tribal areas were broken up, and I guess it was even proposed and pushed through Congress by a couple of idealists who hoped to help Indians, and all it helped to do was break up the tribal relationship and damage the Indian condition.

GB: I don't believe that the good intentions were there, really.

SM: In the Dawes Act case?

GB: No. No.

SM: A superintendent of a reservation in Oregon pointed at the map, which looks like a checkerboard—land owned by non-Indians and Indians—and mentioned something of the same nature that you were just explaining, and he said that the BIA has come in for an awful lot of criticism, but they protect the Indians. He was an Indian, an Indian superintendent of this reservation. He said about 95% of the
criticism of the BIA is unfounded. Does that jar you, or stir you up a little?

GB: Well, I think that the idea of the BIA is a good one, but that if the thing becomes a tool of, you know . . . I don't like to say "society" but a tool of the people who would like to encroach upon the Indian lands, then it's not. But we have the case of the Menominees in Wisconsin that came out from under the BIA. They became, they were not wards of the U.S. government any more, and they found out that self-sufficiency was not . . . they weren't ready for it yet or something, so they needed that protector somehow--the assistance of the BIA--because the dominant society, as the Indians call it, has not left them with anything to support themselves with.

SM: It's a tough, competitive situation that they aren't prepared for?

GB: Yeah, and then what do they have to compete with? You know there's nothing. . . .

SM: Sometimes lack of education? In your own case, you were more fortunate in that you either got it or were able to dig in and get the education necessary to compete, but those who haven't, find themselves at a decided disadvantage.

GB: Yeah, and I don't think that in a capitalistic society that everybody can become service dispensers out of the whole society. Well, this is what the . . . dominant society expects the Indians to do. They expect everybody, all they have to do is go to college and become a dispenser of services--like I teach, and she is a nurse. You know, in a capitalistic society, it seems to me for a group to maintain its identity, part of that group has to become business-oriented, and there's no collateral anywhere that I know of on an Indian reservation, you know, for becoming. . . .
SM: For the sake of acquiring capital, and so on.

GB: Right. Right. I mean, people who dispense services don't accumulate much capital. We just pay bills.

SM: You're distinguishing between those who dispense services, like a teacher or a nurse or a doctor or a lawyer, for example, and those who are in business using capital to make more?

GB: Using capital to make money.

SM: And build industrial plants.

GB: So that their own local area can thrive. You know, they just want Indians to . . . say, use education to go out and become servants. What that does is just destroy the whole thing, and would destroy all of their group cohesion, you might say, and they have to be assimilated.

SM: Georgianna, have you anything to add to that?

GG: No, I don't.

SM: Well, then, let me ask both of you. In the last few years there have been some changes. Like, for example, the Taos Indians got their Blue Lake country back, and the Pyramid Lake situation in Nevada has been corrected to some extent at least. Do you see any hope for improvement in this sort of thing--progress, in other words, being made by the Indian peoples?

GG: Oh yes. There are more Indians becoming educated now than there were, than we were aware of anyway before, because they're becoming more educated-minded, and things may have been as available to them
before, but they didn't make use of them like they are doing now.

SM: Was there a cultural resistance to making use of these things?

GG: I really don't know what it is . . .

SM: Like your father talking to you about Indian culture?

GG: Yeah. But when I was younger not too many Indian kids even went to high school.

SM: They didn't put any value on it?

GG: They started high school, but they never stayed. I suppose maybe if I hadn't moved from that one town to another town it might be that I wouldn't have made it through high school either.

SM: Does going to high school and then going to college represent, to the Indian point of view, a sort of concession, a giving-in to the dominant culture?

GB: I don't think so.

SM: Does it represent a using of the dominant culture's advantages for the sake of helping Indian people?

GB: Well, that might be . . . the resistance might be the giving-in type of thing, the sort of passive resistance that they have, but I don't know if I can really answer that question specifically. But just getting back to your general question of do I see any improvements. I don't really see any great improvements over the past few years. Maybe we have gotten a few more sympathetic people in Congress, like Abourezk and McGovern, and, well, there's a few more that I can't
think of right now. Mondale seems to be quite interested.

SM: These are in this area - in Minnesota, Dakota?

GB: Right. And Abourezk is chairman of the committee that oversees the BIA.

SM: They have some good friends in the Southwest too?

GB: Maybe we do, but I'm not familiar with it.

SM: There's Udall and Goldwater.

GB: (chuckle) Well, I don't know about that. But anyway, I think that the only way there's going to be progress as far as Indians are concerned is to find a way to allow them to develop an economic base on the reservations, so that they don't have to leave their culture in order to go out and try to earn enough money to maintain their families.

SM: Some of the reservations are becoming--because the land is poor in many cases anyway--overpopulated, so they need more land too, don't they?

GB: I don't know if that's true or not. I can only speak of the White Earth Reservation and the Nett Lake Reservation. I don't think that they're....

SM: They're not becoming over-populated?

GB: But we were talking about AIM earlier. And AIM's made a few mistakes and, you know, in the heat of battle you're bound to make mistakes and things like that.
SM: Is that a Minnesota-originated organization?

GB: I think the idea started somewhere else, but Minnesota really got it going. Like Clyde Bellecourt and Dennis Banks especially.

SM: Are they Chippewas?

GB: Yes. But it's my view that the Indians are never going to force the dominant society to do anything unless they put pressure on; and that's the kind of pressure that the dominant society recognizes. I firmly believe that the blacks would still be riding in the back of the bus if it hadn't been for the pressure that they put on, because the dominant society doesn't give you anything—you have to take it from them. And I'd like to see civil disobedience, peaceful civil disobedience. I think that's a good tool, and the Indians seem to have the nature for it, if they would apply it, but you need an AIM organization to organize that, or an organization like AIM.

SM: Some of the people over at the other end of the White Earth Reservation mentioned that AIM had started "here." That was the word they used, and they said that while maybe some of the incidents had been unfortunate, especially the way they appeared in the news, that they believed in some of the things—and they said, "some of the things"—that AIM stood for.

GB: Yeah. Well, that's what I mean. Like you get into a situation like taking over some of the things like they've done—the Naval Station at Minneapolis was the first one—and there's always physical violence, and that comes to the fore, you know... .

SM: That gets the attention?

GB: Right. And the issues are forgotten, and that's why I think peaceful
civil disobedience is better, because then the violence doesn't get in your way, and the dominant society always has to deal with the issues, and never can they say, "Ah, those Indians or other minorities are rowdy, and, "you know . . .

SM: Destructive, trouble makers?

GB: Right.

SM: Which has been said.

GB: But they will say, "Well, look at the issue. Here's the issue. If we're honest with ourselves, we're wrong."

SM: You would agree more with Martin Luther King's philosophy than with, say, Russell Means' philosophy?

GB: Well, I'd like to apply Martin Luther King's philosophy to Russell Means' enthusiasm and . . . (chuckle)

SM: Organizing ability?

GB: Right. Yes. But I wish he would adopt some of that, because I think he'd be very . . . both Dennis Banks, and Dennis Banks more so than Russell Means, because Dennis Banks seems to be . . . more respected in the . . .

SM: In the movement?

GB: I think so, yeah.

SM: Than Russell Means?
GB: From my point of view.

SM: Which one is the leader?

GB: I have no idea. The only thing I know about it is what I read in the newspapers, but judging from what I've heard Dennis Banks say, and from what I've read that he said, is that he would be the best one to apply the civil disobedience thing, if they would go for it, you know. I don't know if they would or not, but it would be a tremendous instrument for them, I believe.

SM: Several people have expressed similar sentiments, like a man from the Rosebud Reservation who was at Wounded Knee and said he dropped out because of the violence. He would be, I think, in total agreement with you. What do you think, Georgianna?

GG: Well, Dennis Banks is from the Leech Lake area there, and that's right close to Brainerd, and when he first started out with his beret, he started out right around Brainerd, fighting for Indian things right around there. I don't know where Russell Means came in, but Dennis Banks is . . . he was the forefather, I would say.

GB: Clyde Bellecourt was first. Clyde Bellecourt was the one that really got it going.

SM: Clyde Bellecourt was the first leader?

GB: He's from White Earth. He has a brother named Vernon who is also active.

SM: Vernon and Clyde Bellecourt. And then Dennis Banks is from the Brainerd-Walker-Leech Lake area?
GG: Leech Lake area.

SM: And Russell Means is a Sioux from South Dakota. Right?

GB: From what I've read in the papers, yeah. I don't know.

GG: Well, Dennis Banks, for a while there he had quite a bit to do in Brainerd—good things, you know, for the Indians. This was before there was any violence.

GB: Can I relate a story to you?

SM: Sure.

GB: Last year, last fall, almost a year ago, I believe, the AIM had their national convention at that ranch east of Mahnomen.

SM: The ranch that they're trying to use as a rehabilitation center?

GB: Well, I'll give it to you from the eyes of an editor who runs a little paper he distributes once a month in Clearbrook, Minnesota. It's called Common Sense. I'll try to relate it as he wrote it. First I'll preface it with this, that the whole area around that ranch, a 50-mile radius maybe, was concerned that the AIM Indians were coming to the ranch for their convention. Thinking of, you know, Wounded Knee and all.

SM: Yes, big trouble.

GB: And so stories started flying around, you know, that bands of Indians were moving in every day, and that thousands of Indians were coming into the area, and so forth, from all over the nation. And it reached its peak, these rumors, when a young lad in one town said that a band of Indians, and notice the term, "band," that's what they used.
You don't hear of a band of white men, but a "band" of Indians came by, stopped at his filling station, beat him, and took the money out of the cash register, and he was all bloody and everything to prove that the story was true. And so that spread like wild-fire, so the Saturday night of the main celebration of the convention...

SM: On the ranch?

GB: On the ranch. This editor decided he was going to go and see what was going on, so he left Clearbrook, which is roughly 50 miles from there, and he travelled through little towns like Gully, Convick, real small towns, and he thought he'd stop at the liquor store in Gully, or one of those towns, and it was closed. The first time in history that the liquor store in Gully was ever closed, 'cause that's the big night in those areas. He went to Convick - closed. All the places that sell liquor were closed, and he couldn't figure it out. Here this was nearly 50 miles away from the ranch, and he determined from people in the town that they didn't want any trouble with the Indians, so they just closed the liquor stores, you know. So he journeyed on to the ranch, and when he got there he was stopped by some great big Indian guards at the gate, and they wouldn't let him in unless he would submit to a search of his car. And they would not allow him to go in if he had any firearms, any drugs or any liquor. He had one choice--if he wanted to go in, he could give up those three things if he had any of them, or else he could turn around and go back wherever he wanted to go. So he had some whiskey in his trunk, I guess, so they confiscated that, and he went in, and then he went on to describe that it was one of the most inspiring things he'd ever seen—the celebration, the powwow, and the people, all talking in Chippewa rather than in English—he was really impressed. And here was this—these wild, wild people that were coming to destroy the area, just doing their own thing in there, and not having any liquor, and not having any drugs, and not having any firearms and not having any violence.
SM: And not permitting any of these things even to be brought on the ranch. And the ranch is their own property, isn't it?

GB: Right.

SM: Who owns the ranch?

GB: The Chippewa Tribe of Minnesota. And then the capper is that the young lad at the filling station admitted to breaking a window himself, cutting himself, and taking the money himself. So you see, this is how AIM is misunderstood many times, I think—their reputation that the media has given them has preceded them, and they have no chance even of approaching anybody.

SM: Well, this is the general thrust of the comments from this young lady over at the Pine Point school—that she did believe in some of the things that AIM stood for, but she wished they didn't get this image in the news of being violent, and the BIA thing in Washington, and the Wounded Knee thing in South Dakota had been played out of proportion in context to the total activity of the organization. Is that true or not?

GB: Well, I really can't tell you if it's true or not. The only thing I can do is give you my own opinion which is that I think they'd be a very effective organization if they'd adopt Martin Luther King's tactics.

SM: And avoid this image that they have unfortunately, for their own purposes, acquired.

GB: Right. They have so many issues on their side, and there's so many injustices that are just blatant injustices, and that the, you know, conscientious members of the dominant society—that they call
dominant society--would not ignore.

SM: Don't you think there is a lot of desire to be fair and do right by the minority groups, by lots of members of the dominant society?

GB: Well, there certainly are a number of people who probably have the attitude that you just described, but you know the words aren't as loud as actions, and there aren't many actions.

SM: They just think it and say, "Well, everything isn't so bad?"

GB: One thing that was encouraging when the Menominees took over that monastery, which has since fallen through, our Duluth paper here, which is generally pretty conservative, gave them a favorable editorial.

SM: Ada Deer was against the take-over, and was the successful leader of the reversal of the termination policy. Wouldn't you say that reversal was a great help to the people there?

GB: Getting back under the BIA. Right. Well, I don't know how it's helped them, but apparently they seem like they need it.

SM: They got their land back, for example. They didn't get it all back, though, because some of it had been sold--people bought it for summer homes on the lake.

GB: Yeah, right. I go back to the Cherokee situation all the time, where when they were moved from Georgia--and it was done in the face of a constitutional ruling against it, Supreme Court ruling against it. You know, even though we have a lot of people who're maybe pro-Indian, so to speak, as far as being fair, if your power structure is not, then it doesn't do much good.
SM: The administration had just presented to Congress seven different bills which would have put more of Indian affairs in the hands of Indians who could make their own decisions, and then, after the BIA take-over, Congress wouldn't act on it. And maybe Congress would have moved on one or two pieces of that legislation if that incident hadn't occurred.

GB: Maybe this is rambling, but another thing is that, many times, like we always kid that we're waiting for our payment, see, because the lands that the Pembinas were supposedly in control of have never been paid for.

SM: Now the Pembinas—would you explain that?

GB: They're a band of Chippewas. See the Chippewa Tribe is so large that, in the times before the white man, or as the white man was shoving the Indians to the west, you know, a group that large could not be governed, so they broke up into smaller groups so that government was possible. And so our group was called the Pembina band, and there's a Mississippi band and a Pillager band.

GG: Mille Lacs or Mississippi.

SM: Mille Lacs and Mississippi are synonymous?

GG: Yeah.

GB: But anyway, the reason for the bands is that there's an orderly group.

SM: And you are from the Pembina band?

GB: Right. And our Pembina band has not been compensated for its land under the treaty.
SM: And there's a Pembina, North Dakota, isn't there? A town up there?

GG: There's a town named Pembina, but I don't know...

GB: I don't think there's any relation.

GG: That Indian Pembina band, that comes from an Indian word meaning "cranberry." That's not the pronunciation of it. I don't know the correct pronunciation, but that's what it originally came from. It meant cranberry.

GB: Anyway, I think the money has been awarded now by Congress for compensating for the land. In fact, I think it was done about six years ago, wasn't it? It seems like six years ago that we got those papers that we were supposed to fill out.

SM: Did you fill them out?

GB: Yes, and the funny thing is that when the government awards money to Indians to pay for something that hasn't been paid for, for land, the administration of the money comes out of the grant.

SM: Out of the award?

GB: Right. So, six years of administration, I don't know if there's any left. It's the same thing if I owed you $25.00, and I said, "Well, O.K., I'm going to pay my debt now, here's $5.00." And you say, "Well, you owe me $25.00." And I say, "Well, it cost me $20.00 to pay you the money, so I used that $20.00 to come over here; I live a hundred miles from you. I used $20.00 of it for gas, but here's what's left." You know, that's an injustice.

SM: But so far as you know, it's still that way?
SM: And there's a Pembina, North Dakota, isn't there? A town up there?

GG: There's a town named Pembina, but I don't know. . . .

GB: I don't think there's any relation.

GG: That Indian Pembina band, that comes from an Indian word meaning "cranberry." That's not the pronunciation of it. I don't know the correct pronunciation, but that's what it originally came from. It meant cranberry.

GB: Anyway, I think the money has been awarded now by Congress for compensating for the land. In fact, I think it was done about six years ago, wasn't it? It seems like six years ago that we got those papers that we were supposed to fill out.

SM: Did you fill them out?

GB: Yes, and the funny thing is that when the government awards money to Indians to pay for something that hasn't been paid for, for land, the administration of the money comes out of the grant.

SM: Out of the award?

GB: Right. So, six years of administration, I don't know if there's any left. It's the same thing if I owed you $25.00, and I said, "Well, O.K., I'm going to pay my debt now, here's $5.00." And you say, "Well, you owe me $25.00." And I say, "Well, it cost me $20.00 to pay you the money, so I used that $20.00 to come over here; I live a hundred miles from you. I used $20.00 of it for gas, but here's what's left." You know, that's an injustice.

SM: But so far as you know, it's still that way?
GB: Well, it is as far as . . .

SM: As far as the Pembina band and its grant is concerned.

GB: I've read--I don't know how true it is, but I've read--in fairly good, reliable books that they've even . . . they've built buildings to house the people who distribute the money.

SM: They built the buildings already, Gabe?

GB: Right. The money that was to be used to compensate the Indians for the land taken up by the treaty was used to build buildings to house the office people who would then in turn distribute the money to the Indians who had the money coming in the first place. And a lot of times the buildings take up a good share of the money.

SM: Do you suppose there's any of that award left for the Pembina band of the Chippewa people?

GB: I hope so, because then we might get some, and we certainly can use it. But I know the Mississippi band and the Pillagers have received theirs.

SM: Did they likewise have a lot of administrative expense involved?

GB: Yes. The individual allotments were very small. I can't remember. Bunny--we call Georgianna Bunny, by the way--do you remember what Uncle Sy got?

GG: He got $384.00 once. He's a Pillager Indian.

GB: And I think Lorraine, my cousin who lives in town here, got some, but I can't remember what the figure was.
GG: She's a Mississippi.

SM: Mississippi, that would be the Mille Lacs people?

GG: Well, some Mississippi live in Mille Lacs.

GB: But they're around the area. Her mother was a Mississippi, that's why she's considered a Mississippi.

SM: The Mississippi band of the Chippewa?

GB: Yeah.

GG: And it's always the mother who decides . . . it's always the mother who says what band they're gonna be.

SM: Yes, it's a maternal, matrilineal descent.

GB: A lot of Plains Indians were that way.

Part II follows.