DIANA GRIGGS, Cherokee - Choctaw

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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, 63135.

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.

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Sam Myers:
Today I am at Bacone College, talking with a young lady, Diana Griggs, who is from Charleston, South Carolina. That's a historic old town, isn't it?

Diana Griggs:
Sure is.

SM: And Diana has a unique background, different from lots of other people. Diana, were you born in Charleston?

DG: No, I was born in Salina, Kansas.

SM: How did you get back East?

DG: Well, because my dad is in the military.

SM: In the Air Force?

DG: Um hm.

SM: And so you've moved around a little?

DG: Yeah. Quite a bit.

SM: Do you have any sisters and brothers?

DG: I have one sister and one brother. Both of them are younger.

SM: And your folks live back in Charleston, South Carolina. You went to school there, public school?

DG: Um hm.
SM: Did you go to school other places too as you moved around?

DG: Yeah. We lived in New Hampshire for a while too, and I went there.

SM: So you know what the skiing is like up on the slopes?

DG: Lots of snow.

SM: After New Hampshire, Diana, where did you live?

DG: Well, then we got transferred to South Carolina.

SM: You're Cherokee, aren't you?

DG: Um hm.

SM: Are you all Cherokee?

DG: I'm Cherokee and Choctaw.

SM: One hundred percent?

DG: I'm half.

SM: In other words, your folks are half and half too?

DG: Um hm.

SM: Cherokee and Choctaw. Two of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes. It's interesting that you would get back into the Carolinas, because that is where the Cherokee people started from, isn't it?

DG: North Carolina.
SM: Have you ever dug into the pre-history background of your people?

DG: Not a whole lot because, like I said, I was raised in a white society, so my mom was kind of hush-hush about that.

SM: Oh, so you weren't any different than any other kid down the block, when you grew up?

DG: Well, I was darker than the other kids, and when I was young I got teased a lot about it, because they thought I was different. But as I grew up it wasn't that big a deal, since in the Air Force you have all different races. They knew I was Indian.

SM: You almost had to tell them sometimes, didn't you? Because you could pass for an Italian or a French girl. You aren't that dark, but you are darker than a blonde, let's say. So now you're down in Charleston, South Carolina, and you grew up with your folks not wanting you to go through the struggle of being a member of a minority group?

DG: Yeah. Well, like my grandfather even—they don't talk about being Indian. Back when they were giving out land to the Indians, my grandfather refused it, he wouldn't accept it because he felt like it was sort of degrading to be Indian. That's the way it's always been in my family. Like they didn't even register, so I don't get very many Indian benefits or anything, because, see, my relatives all thought it was so degrading that they didn't want to claim it.

SM: Are you making that a little strong?

DG: I got disowned.

SM: Fifty years ago it wasn't the thing, it wasn't an advantage to be an Indian, by any means, to put it mildly. Today, now, it's much changed.
DG: Well, I guess it's just because they're old, but they still feel the same way. My Grandma and Grandpa Fish, they just . . . uh uh.

SM: They just don't want to even have anything to do with being known as Indians. So then you never lived on a reservation, you never went to an Indian school?

DG: No, and I was never taught anything Indian, or any Indian ways or anything.

SM: Or attitudes or philosophy or whatever. So then, how did you get interested in it?

DG: I don't know. All of a sudden it hit me. I started reading these Indian books and all, and it all made so much sense to me. It kinda hit home—the Indians' sensitivity and all, and their love of nature. And I just really got into it, and especially the philosophy and the spirituality. That's what I still like the best. I wanted to come back, and now that I'm here I feel like I'm back home. I feel like I've retrieved something that was lost, that was a real basic part of me.

SM: It's a good feeling?

DG: Yeah, it really is.

SM: This is a nice place here, Bacone College. It's on a hill northeast of Muskogee, and the grounds are pretty, and the trees are nice, and the buildings, some of them are older, some of them are newer, but it's a pretty campus.

DG: Yeah.
SM: And then most everyone I've seen has been very nice and very friendly.

DG: Yeah, it's kind of like a family.

SM: Good. About how many people are there?

DG: I think there's something like 630.

SM: How long have you been here now?

DG: This is my first year. I've only been here since the end of August.

SM: Are you a freshman?

DG: No, I'm a sophomore. I went to college last year in Charleston, the College of Charleston.

SM: And then finished your freshman year there, and then came here for your sophomore year. Now this is a two-year college, isn't it? So then you're going to move on next year somewhere?

DG: Well, see, I'm in the Indian studies program now, that's what I'm majoring in here, and like all my stuff didn't transfer, so I'll probably be here again next year too.

SM: How did your folks take it when you came here?

DG: Well, my dad understood, I told him it was something I had to do, but my mother completely went crazy, and she disowned me. She said she didn't want to have anything to do with me.

SM: Now you're not just using a figure of speech, but you literally mean it?
DG: I mean she disowned me.

SM: You haven't heard from her since?

DG: No, and I don't expect to.

SM: Don't you think you'll patch it up sometime?

DG: Well, I mean I'd like to. I didn't have anything to do that this . . . I've tried calling and writing, but there's nothing. She won't talk to me, she won't write to me, and my friends have called her for me, and she just says, "uh uh, forget it."

SM: It's too bad she can't come out here.

DG: Well, she was born and raised in Oklahoma and she hated it. She couldn't wait to get away from it.

SM: Maybe this helps to understand. Did she grow up in a town like this?

DG: She grew up in a real small town. She grew up in Greasy Creek.

SM: Greasy Creek, Oklahoma. In the Cherokee Nation?

DG: Well, not really. I think there was more Creeks there than anything.

SM: And I suppose she ran into some problems, maybe, discrimination?

DG: Maybe. I guess that was it.

SM: You know that surprises me, really, Diana, because here in Oklahoma it seems to me that I have sensed less of this than I have in other states. There are more Indians here than any other state, for
example, and it seems to me that most of the people in Oklahoma are proud of their Indian citizens.

DG: Well, I think they are more today. I don't know if they were when she was growing up. I think a lot of it was just her own mind—the way she took it anyway.

SM: Maybe something like your grandparents. You said they didn't like the idea.

DG: Yeah, because they're so negative.

SM: And she picked that up too much, perhaps. I'm sorry to hear that anyway, and I hope it works out. I would be optimistic about it, because that's hard for me to imagine your mother not resuming her relations with you.

DG: It's hard for me too. I never would have thought it would happen to me, because my family was pretty happy when I was growing up, so this is kind of like a shock.

SM: But you're doing it anyway?

DG: Well, I had to do it. It was something that I felt, and I wouldn't have been happy if I hadn't.

SM: So you're strong-minded too?

DG: Yeah.

SM: You've explained the situation of your arrival here, and now you've come to like it?

DG: I like it a lot here.
SM: And you're majoring in Indian studies. Do you have any idea in mind yet where you might go after this?

DG: Maybe to Arizona to Tucson. There's a reservation there. I have some friends here that have told me about it.

SM: There are several reservations in Arizona, but you have one in mind?

DG: I don't know the name of it, but some people were telling me about it, and that's where my boy friend wants to go to school.

SM: At the University of Arizona at Tucson? I know a little more about the one up in Tempe, Arizona State University, which is a beautiful place and has a substantial Indian population. The goal that you set for yourself, I imagine it's a rather idealistic one?

DG: It's still kinda up for grabs. I'm not real sure what I'm doing yet.

SM: It's interesting too. There are schools like Tucson and ASU, and the University of California, that have extensive Indian studies programs or Native American studies programs, and other schools have none at all. But whatever the school, anyway, you're thinking in terms of Tucson right now.

DG: Um hm.

SM: When you graduate, then what do you plan to do with your education and your abilities?

DG: I want to put it to use to do something to help the Indians with their identity problem, because that has been such a big thing in my background, with my mother and all, and not being able to accept it. And around here even, in some cases, they make too big a deal about it.
Like, well, there's a big thing about apples on campus. I have a white boy friend, and so sometimes people give me a hard time about that, and say like I'm a traitor or something, and I don't get into that at all. I think that you have to accept what you are, and love everybody for that.

SM: Have you any experiences in your background that might have led you into that point of view?

DG: Well, when I lived in South Carolina I lived in a commune for three months.

SM: When was that?

DG: That was back in March.

SM: Was that a good experience, or one that you'd warn people to avoid?

DG: Well, I wouldn't advise everybody to jump into it, but for me it was a real beautiful thing, because I learned a lot about relationships and sharing, and give-and-take, things like that. It was a family.

SM: How is it known?

DG: It was Ananda Marga, that's a meditation society I belonged to. It's a spiritual service and social change organization, and that's one reason even why I'm here, because they emphasize working with minority groups, and one of them that they're just now really getting into is the Indians.

SM: Is there any particular person or other group that sponsors or is starting this?

DG: We have a guru.
SM: The leader, the teacher?

DG: Yes. Guru means, "dispeller of darkness."

SM: In other words, the bringer of light? So three months of good experience there. Can you describe that?

DG: O.K. Like it wasn't a hippie-type commune. Like my mother was afraid I was having sex with everyone there and smoking dope, but both of those were strictly prohibited. And I shared a room with one other girl, and there were four other guys and they divided the other rooms, and we took turns with the chores and preparing meals. And you didn't really own anything yourself, everything was shared, because it was all for the common good. It was a family-type relationship, but it was even more sharing and loving than the one I'd actually known in my real family.

SM: More toleration? That sort of thing?

DG: A lot more, 'cause you had to accept everyone's faults along with their good things too.

SM: Is maybe one of the reasons there seems to be less toleration because, in the case of your parents, they were so concerned about you?

DG: That could be it.

SM: So where was this? Out in the country or in town?

DG: No, it was right down town in a college town, and it was like three minutes walk from my school. It was in a real old, old house, you know, and it was two story, because Charleston is real ancient. It's one of those historical cities. This was one of them, like all our neighbors' houses were always in the paper--you know, they were
showing their houses.

SM: Well, why did you decide to leave that situation there?

DG: Well, because right there I needed to put myself to use. I was having a good time and all, but I wasn't being very productive.

SM: You weren't helping anyone?

DG: Right.

SM: You were just being there and enjoying the experience and sharing things, but not helping people that needed it, because the other people who were there then didn't need your help either?

DG: No. We all grew together. I used what I learned there to go to where I am now, and that's kinda like, I think, for everyone, it's like a stepping stone.

SM: So then you came here, that was the next step. I suppose then that had something to do with your decision to come here in spite of the objection of your mother?

DG: It really did, because all those people supported me, and they were such good people, and their opinions meant so much to me.

SM: I wonder if your mother really understands what that experience was, or is she still thinking something other than what the truth was?

DG: Well, I've tried explaining it to her, but I don't think anyone could really understand until they experienced it themselves.

SM: Maybe so. And then she didn't want you to come here, she disowned you. That kind of shatters me a little bit to have you say that,
and then mean it. I thought at first you didn't mean it, but you do.

DG: I mean it.

SM: But now, you're hanging on, you're making it anyway. You seem to be a reasonably well-adjusted and happy young person. Do you feel that way too?

DG: Well, I think that if I didn't meditate I might not be. Like my roommate is so lonely for her family that she's not even going to stay. She's leaving Saturday.

SM: She's going home?

DG: To Arizona. That's not as far as South Carolina.

SM: Of course, a hundred miles could seem as far as a thousand, I guess, if you're homesick. Maybe that's what it is. You're not homesick?

DG: Yeah, part of me is very homesick, but I still know if I went back there it would be the same old thing, and I could never be happy just doing that.

SM: You feel like going back would be giving up?

DG: Well, it would be more than that, because that would make it sound like a game, and like I was out to really prove something. It's more like you have to find your purpose in life, and you have to do something or life really has no meaning. And if I just stayed there, I'd just be there, I wouldn't be doing anything. I'd just be.

SM: The experiences you've gone through leave one a little breathless. Have you sort of caught up with yourself now that you're here where
it's a kind of pleasant, you-drop-out-of-the-rat-race kind of experience here?

DG: It's kind of like a community away from the world.

SM: Here you are, like we were saying a while ago, off to the side of a small city, on the top of a hill, with some big trees and some old buildings, and about 600 or 700 people, and it's been here a long time, there's kind of a tradition, I suppose, here, isn't there?

DG: Yeah, there really is.

SM: But most of the students here are Indian of some degree or other, aren't they?

DG: Um hm.

SM: A few whites and blacks?

DG: Yeah.

SM: And you like it?

DG: I like it a lot.

SM: Have you engaged in any of the other activities here on campus?

DG: I'm in the Indian club.

SM: That seems like almost a redundancy, where we have most of the students Indians, to have an Indian club. But, what's the purpose of that club?

DG: I think it's to get us all together, so that we can work towards
goals together, 'cause scattered we don't do very much.

SM: So you can begin to realize the value of organization and so on?

DG: Uh huh.

SM: They have football teams and basketball teams and that sort of thing here too, don't they?

DG: My boy friend is on the basketball team.

SM: And he's white, but he's going here too.

DG: Well, he wants to teach on a reservation. He wants to teach basketball or science.

SM: He's interested in Indian people too, especially you.

DG: Well, that's nice.

SM: Well, tell me, what else are you thinking about here now. I'd like my students to have the benefit of talking with you through this medium. If you were to come back and sit down in one of my classrooms, they would have a thousand questions for you. You're glad you did this whole thing, at least the part of you that doesn't feel bad about your folks?

DG: Yeah.

SM: Do you correspond with your dad?

DG: I get a letter from him about once a month. He's not much of a letter writer, but we're very close. My mother was always a little jealous of that. I have a real close relationship with my father,
and I hear from my sister and my brother too. Just not my mother.

SM: Maybe she'll come around and begin to understand, or at least will make an effort again, and you hope she does too, don't you?

DG: Yeah. When she realizes how serious I am about it, maybe she will.

SM: And you think it's a definite seriousness?

DG: Well, it's something I wanted to do ever since I was in the ninth grade. I've been telling everybody I was coming here, and they got so tired of hearing it after a while, I guess they stopped believing, but then I came. It's not something that I just really jumped into, because I was going to the guidance center and I found out about Bacone back when I was just in the ninth grade, and I was corresponding to the school and stuff.

SM: Have you corresponded with students here?

DG: Just the ones about activities and stuff.

SM: But you were in touch. You knew about the school, and you were in touch with it and found out the requirements and all the rest of it?

DG: Yeah.

SM: Is it an expensive place to go?

DG: Well, I'm going on grants. Since my mother disowned me I don't have any money. My parents aren't paying for anything for me at all.

SM: How do you manage that?

DG: Well, I'm going on a Bacone grant and I'm doing work-study--I clean--
and I've got a Basic Opportunity grant from the government, and a supplemental grant to that. I'm going on four different things.

SM: But unfortunately, not being on any Indian tribal roll, you can't qualify for federal assistance. Like one young man told me that he applied to the BIA and got $1,500 a semester to go to school; simply because he was on the rolls, he put in for it and they gave it to him.

DG: Um hm. A lot of my friends are like that.

SM: But you can't get that because you are not on the rolls. There's no way you can "prove up." Well, that was pretty good to be able to get those grants all put together so you could make it financially. And then you're working too. Does the working take a lot of time every day?

DG: About two hours a day.

SM: Not too bad?

DG: No, I don't mind.

SM: It's not like working six or eight hours a day.

DG: No.

SM: Everybody lives on campus here?

DG: Most of the Indians kids do. Some of the whites commute. Most of the blacks live on campus too.

SM: Some of the whites come from Muskogee?
DG: Um hm.

SM: So they come out here to a two-year college. There isn't any other in the neighborhood?

DG: No.

SM: Where is the next nearest school? In Tulsa?

DG: Tahlequah.

SM: That's east of here. What kind of school is that?

DG: Northeastern. I think it's a junior college too.

SM: That's the headquarters for the Cherokee Nation, isn't it?

DG: I'm not sure. Yeah, it is. I went to their powwow.

SM: Did you ever get over to that play they have?

DG: The Trail of Tears? No. They had it at school, but I missed it. There was a Cherokee powwow.

SM: They have one back in Carolina too, don't they?

DG: Yeah, they do.

SM: Have you seen that? That's a pageant-like production, isn't it?

DG: Yeah, but I haven't seen it.

SM: And then this one at Tsa-La-Gi. It's too late now because it ends
about the first of September, and here we are nearing the first of October. Any other experience that you've had here coming to Bacone? Your younger sister, for example, could you tell her how to handle things?

DG: I'd just have to tell her to defend what she believed in, or she'd never make it.

SM: Is she interested in Indian things like you are?

DG: Well, I don't know how serious. I think it's like a fad, because she's proud that she's Indian, but I don't know whether she'd be willing to dedicate herself to it or anything.

SM: You don't think she's going to break with her parents like you did, because she doesn't feel that strongly about it?

DG: No.

SM: How about your brother?

DG: He's pretty young. He's only 13, and she'll be 16 in November.

SM: Would you recommend to your sister, if she asked your advice, to follow in your footsteps?

DG: Uh . . . yeah, if that was what she really wanted to do. I wouldn't try to coerce her into it.

SM: You wouldn't try to persuade her?

DG: No, but if that's what she felt.
SM: If you recognized a conviction on her part like yours you would say it's a good thing to do?

DG: Yeah.

SM: Now you're going down to Tucson, probably, if things work out the way you'd like, and then, you end up with a BA or BS degree in Indian studies after four years. And then what? Do you plan to go to graduate school?

DG: I don't know yet. I don't like to plan that far ahead.

SM: Because you've been so sure of what you wanted to do up to now, I thought maybe you'd have a pretty clear plan.

DG: I don't know exactly, I just know what area.

SM: So you don't know whether you'll go to graduate school, but you do want then to work with Indian people?

DG: Uh huh.

SM: Teach maybe?

DG: Yeah, I'm kinda thinking in that direction.

SM: What else could you do besides work in a government office?

DG: It would be real hard for me, being the kind of person that I am, to work in a real structured type job, because I need a lot of movement, and I always have. I'd kind of like to work--maybe if I take silversmithing next semester--you know, I would like to get them back into their crafts, but into the philosophy and stuff like that too. Not
just the exterior Indian, but the internal too.

SM: Do you mean you'd like to take silversmithing yourself?

DG: Oh yeah!

SM: Your friend that made those rings you're wearing. He is an accomplished silversmith now, isn't he?

DG: Well, he just started, but he's pretty good.

SM: That one is particularly beautiful. He made those for you, so it is something that you can master without 20 years of struggle?

DG: He's only been taking it a couple of weeks.

SM: And he did that well already? I wouldn't think he could do it that fast.

DG: He's got a real special aptitude for it, I guess.

SM: You think you might like to go into silversmithing and become a silversmith or an artist in silver, that sort of thing?

DG: Yeah.

SM: It can be very rewarding, I guess, in satisfaction as well as monetarily.

DG: Well, also it's very profitable. This one only cost him $15.00 to make, and the teacher said he could sell it for $75.00 to $100.00, so that's pretty good.

SM: Is there anything else that you have in mind right now that we can
add to this tape so our listeners can benefit from your experiences?

DG: Well, the reason I came here was to get into the philosophy and the spirituality of Indians, you know, because so much emphasis is placed on crafts and all, and that's good, but most people don't realize what's behind those crafts--how really symbolic they are--like colors and the way things are done, and just everything about them. You know, there's a real reason behind everything.

SM: Are you finding a way to get into that sort of thing?

DG: Well, I have some friends in South Carolina. One of them was an Indian, and he meditated and all. I want to meet a medicine man, I've always wanted to talk to a medicine man, that's what I'd like to do. I'd kinda like to be a medicine man's apprentice, or something, for a while, because I think they know so much.

SM: The meditation you've mentioned a couple of times. What does that mean to you? It means something probably just a little different to everyone.

DG: Meditation is like a very intense form of prayer, but we have different techniques, different lessons that we receive. Like right now I have my first lesson, and that's one step above initiation, in which I've been given one meditation technique. Meditation is part of a system known as yoga, and yoga means "union with God." It's an attempt to find divinity within yourself, and then to turn around and look at everything on the outside as a manifestation of God too. It's identifying with God, and seeing that in other people too, and treating them with respect because of that.

SM: Seeing everyone else as a part of this spiritual being?
DG: Yeah, we're all one part of the whole. It's just a big thing.

SM: A Methodist or a Baptist might speak of meditating too. Is that the same sort of thing?

DG: Well, I guess there's a lot of forms of meditation. When I'm trying to explain it to somebody like my grandparents, I just say it's very intense prayer, and it is that, but I think it goes beyond every day experiences. It's very intense, and it's very internal, and you develop sensitivity and patience, and you get real calm inside.

SM: Do you have a system or method of going about this to get yourself into it?

DG: Well, you go into a quiet room, and I guess if you dim the lights and get the mood right that helps. We have different techniques that I'm not allowed to go into.

SM: By "we" do you mean back at the commune?

DG: Yeah. Well, the organization I belong to. Like Ananda Marga, there was a chapter in Tahlequah. There's some people in Ananda Marga in Tulsa that I went to see over the week-end, and I'm going back on Saturday.

SM: This commune is not just that one isolated group?

DG: Oh no. Ananda Marga is in India, it's in Japan, it's a real big organization, it's all over the world.

SM: So then there are people you could go and visit at Tulsa, for example, and participate in one of their . . . what would you call it?

DG: Well, we call it dharma shakba. That means group meditation when
three or more people are together, and I'm going to go to one on Sunday.

SM: Does the group being together help too?

DG: It does a lot, because the energy is so much more intense, and there's like reinforcement from other people that are in the same kind of thing that you're into.

SM: Actually what you're saying, I think, from my cursory understanding of the whole thing, is that this happens in any religious group experience, whether it be Catholic, Protestant, Native American Peyote, and so on. The group interaction helps the meditation, the feeling. That's what you're saying too, except that it is almost . . . is it organized in the sense of having a method?

DG: Very organized. It's a very structured thing. It goes into every phase.

SM: But you don't like structured things, though.

DG: It's structured, but there's a lot of freedom too. It stresses creativity and originality and things like that, but at the same time, some structure is necessary for it to go on. Like Ananda Marga was in the paper not too long ago, and there was a big demonstration in Washington because Indira Ghandi, she has outlawed Ananda Marga and she doesn't like them because they're good guys, because, not getting into politics, well, my guru set up all these schools for the needy and poor so they could develop themselves, and the Communists over there don't like that. They're trying to keep the people down. So they've imprisoned Baba, who is my guru, and they don't really have any reason. He's in prison in India right now.
SM: Was he at the commune in South Carolina?

DG: Oh no. He's never been to the States. We have what are called "ocharias." Ocharia means "one who teaches by his example," and they're the ones that give us meditation techniques, like my Sanskrit name, and things like that. They're like messengers, I guess. They bring it over here. Baba went to the Phillipines and he's been in India, but he hasn't been anywhere else, and now it's all over the world. It's in Sweden, you know, just about anywhere.

SM: Is he the leader of the whole movement?

DG: Yeah.

SM: Is it a movement or is it more than that?

DG: Well, it's a way of life. But I guess all movements are that. It's tantric yoga, which is an ancient system. It's nothing new, it's just that the way that Baba has set it down. I think it came about in the early '50's or '40's, maybe before then.

SM: You spoke of him as your guru. But then this man in South Carolina, would he be your guru also?

DG: No, he's like a representative of the guru, and he gets respect, but he still has fallacies, you know, he's not perfect. A guru is perfect. A guru is the same as God, he's like God only in human form, an incarnation of God, like Buddha and Jesus. Jesus is considered a guru.

SM: You're helping us understand. And Buddha and Mohammed, these people would be thought of in the same sense as the person you think of as a guru?
DG: Yeah, and not only that. We equate him ... like I love Jesus and I love Buddha and I love Mohammed and I love them all, because I think they're all the same—they're all one. I think they're just different phases. Because we say that one shoe wouldn't fit all feet, and one guru doesn't fit all people, because different ones respond to different needs that people have, and that's why there's different denominations and things like that.

SM: That's a pretty neat explanation of something that's hard to follow or grasp until one makes the effort. And let's face it, a lot of us don't make the effort. You've encountered that, haven't you?

DG: Yeah.

SM: You've encountered quite a few people who think you're unusual because of this?

DG: Yeah. Because we have the supreme command that says you'll meditate twice a day, every day without fail, and we do yoga twice a day, and we have different spiritual practices which some people can't understand. And we're all vegetarians, but I was a vegetarian way before I got into Ananda Marga. I've been a vegetarian for almost three years now, and that freaks a lot of people out in the lunch room. It's taken some getting used to.

SM: Is it hard living in this society to be a vegetarian, because so many dishes, so many meals are built around meat?

DG: Yes, it really is.

SM: A vegetarian—does that eliminate fish and fowl too?

DG: Uh huh.
SM: Does it eliminate milk and eggs also?

DG: Some vegetarians are stricter than others. I usually don't eat eggs intentionally, but, like if they're in bread or something, I know I'm eating them then. And I drink a lot of milk, I like dairy products.

SM: Because that doesn't kill anything, isn't that the idea?

DG: It's also health reasons too.

SM: The death of plants though. That doesn't matter?

DG: Well, unfortunately, there's not any method of eating without taking some life, so you take the lowest form of consciousness, which in this case is plants. They're lower than animals. Animals we tend to think of as having some form of consciousness, it's just not as developed as humans. You take the lowest form you can find. If there weren't any plants around, then it would be perfectly all right to take animals, I guess for someone . . . I wouldn't want to.

SM: Have you ever read about the philosophy behind the Aztecs and their approach to religion, the ancient Aztecs of Mezzo America?

DG: What part are you talking about?

SM: Down in the Yucatan peninsula.

DG: Like human sacrifice and things?

SM: You see they could rationalize it all the way up to that. Everything feeds on the death of something else, like the animals feed on the death of plants, and the humans feed on the death of animals, and then their gods fed on the death of human sacrifice. So therefore they were doing a good thing.
DG: Yeah, I'm not so narrow that I'm going to say that I'm right and you're wrong. It's just that this is my way, and I expect you to have respect for the way I have chosen, and if you want to eat meat, I'm not saying that's wrong. I don't feel like eating meat is wrong for someone else, just for me, because it's against my convictions. But for somebody else--my boy friend eats meat--that doesn't bother me at all.

SM: That's part of the things you learned in this communal experience, the almost complete toleration of other people's feelings and attitudes even when they disagree with your own? How about a practical problem, like if you and your boy friend should get married and you're fixing meals?

DG: I don't fix meat. I don't touch meat.

SM: So then he's going to have a problem?

DG: Well, he's a good cook.

SM: So you've overcome that?

DG: Yeah. Like when we go out for pizza and we get half of whatever I want and he'll get the other half like beef and I'll get half mushroom and cheese and something.

SM: So he then is tolerating your views while you tolerate his?

DG: Yeah, you have to.

SM: And you're getting along O.K. that way?

DG: Fine.
SM: That's good. Maybe that would solve the problems of the world. That's kind of one of your background theories, isn't it?

DG: Yeah, it is.

SM: Well, I hope it works. Even you, one person, can contribute.

DG: Yeah, it's kinda strange. People will come up to my room now, because I guess word travels in a dorm, you know, hey, there's somebody strange up here. And so they come up there, but they don't come up there and say, "Ugh," they come up and they're really curious, they want to find out, and ask me, "Well, why do you do this?" And they're really sincere about it, they're not just making fun or anything. And I tell them and they say, "Wow, that's far out." And I have Indian music, Hindu music stuff, and they really get into listening to it, and all the pictures and all, but they're not making fun, they really want to know why. Some of them go away and they say, "Man, that's strange," but some of them go away and they're kinda open and they say, "Hey, that's kinda nice." And they take it in.

SM: You, one person, making a contribution to the world, that seems to be your goal. I get that feeling as you talk. A lady twice your age up in Wisconsin--she's a famous Indian leader--made quite a strong statement that you can, you, anyone...and she proved by her very life that anyone can, if they want to make up their mind to change things. She said, "You've got to pay the price." And the price sometimes is high, but she said, "It does work and you can do it and we have done it." And they have too, because the facts are a matter of record. They have reversed a disastrous trend among their people to a very healthy one.

DG: Well I know that's true. Everything involves sacrifice. Like when I moved into the commune, it was called a joggerty. Joggerty means yoga house in Sanskrit. I moved into the joggerty, some of my friends
and my parents too, they were kinda uneasy about it, and they just said, "Oh, you don't know what you're doing." But it was something I felt I had to do, even a lot of my friends wouldn't associate with me after that. But I felt so strongly about it that I had to do it, and then I came out here and some of my friends again were, "Wow, you're just taking off." And my family too. But I don't regret these things, even though they hurt a lot, but I think it takes pain.

SM: But on the other hand, you don't stick to your ideas so hard-headedly that the other guy's got to have his head bashed in because he doesn't agree with you?

DG: Right.

SM: That's another basic point, isn't it? Because I have a feeling that some of the trouble in the world is caused by idealists, too, who will not listen to the other person's point of view, and that doesn't accomplish much except trouble.

DG: That's just as bad.

SM: I didn't expect when I met you here an hour or so ago that we'd get into a conversation like this. I thought you would simply be able to tell me about some of your experiences as a young Indian student here at this college on this beautiful fall day. What else can we add, Diana, before I let you get away?

DG: I don't know. I'm really glad that I got to talk to you.

SM: Well I think this is going to be a very interesting tape because you have said some of the most unusual things that people do say to me. I think you're aware of that because you've encountered reactions several times as you've explained.
DG: Yeah, when I was growing up.

SM: But you're handling it O.K. aren't you?

DG: Um hm.

SM: You're satisfied that you're doing what is best for you?

DG: Yeah, I'm pretty happy with the way things are going. I'm not going to be happy forever--tomorrow something might come up and I'll get downhearted again, but I think when I stick to my ideals, it usually works out for the best.

SM: So now, what do you do? Classes the rest of the day?

DG: Now I go back and start cleaning for work-study.

SM: That's coming down to the mundane, isn't it? Talking about meditation here, and now all of a sudden you're going to go out and do some cleaning work on campus, one of the buildings?

DG: Cleaning the bathrooms. That's getting down.

SM: Well, still, it helps make the other things you want possible, and so that's one of the prices you're paying, right?

DG: Well, even then I kinda meditate while I'm cleaning, because external cleaning helps clean my mind at the same time.

SM: That reminds me of a thought too, because there is something very neat about the Hopis, at least the ancient traditional Hopis. Remember you have a mental picture of the Hopi woman grinding corn
with a mano and metate, hour after hour on her knees, grinding away. And you say, "What a horribly monotonous, demanding job, oh, that would be awful." But not to her, because corn was the symbol of life, and she said, "Isn't life beautiful, isn't it wonderful?" And like you were saying, your thought triggered another one. And it's really kind of a beautiful idea, that she could take this very hum drum, mundane thing and see the seed of a new life and the nourishing of a human life through the corn and her hard work. Isn't this wonderful, isn't this beautiful?

DG: That's nice.

SM: The Navajos have a saying like that, "walking with beauty." I'm very glad I met you today, and I thank you very much.

DG: I had a good time.