DONNA JOHNSON,
Absentee Shawnee - Delaware - Caddo
September 29, 1975
Norman, Oklahoma

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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LISTENING TO INDIANS

NO. 48

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Sam Myers:

Today I am in Norman, Oklahoma, at the University of Oklahoma, where the famous football teams come from, and they have some very interesting people. I'm talking to one of them, she is Miss Donna Johnson. What tribe do you belong to?

Donna Johnson:

I'm an Absentee Shawnee, Delaware and Caddo.

SM: What does the Absentee Shawnee mean?

DJ: There's three clans of Shawnee, and our clan was absent when they were allotted land, so they gave them the name.

SM: The Caddo are originally from Texas, aren't they?

DJ: Right. There are very few here in southern Oklahoma, around Anadarko.

SM: And the Delaware came from back East, so you are a curious mixture of eastern Indians, Texas, and the Shawnees were in the Nebraska-Kansas country?

DJ: Right. They started from the south, kind of, through Florida, and they went up to Kansas and came back down to Oklahoma and went down to Texas, and that's where they were when they were allotted land, and they came back up into Oklahoma.

SM: Now, more important to our listeners, especially those in our regular classes, is that you recently won a contest, didn't you?

DJ: I'm Miss Indian Oklahoma.

SM: That must have been quite an experience.
DJ: Yes, it really was. Being crowned something like that is like being crowned Miss America. It's real exciting.

SM: How tall are you?

DJ: Five foot, eight and a half.

SM: You're a little taller than average, aren't you? And you're 18? Can I ask any more details, like your weight?

DJ: I weigh 120.

SM: You're slim.

DJ: Right.

SM: Did you grow up in this area?

DJ: No, my father was in the Army, and we just recently moved back to Oklahoma four years ago.

SM: Were you born in Oklahoma?

DJ: No, I was born in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and I have a sister that was born in Germany, and I have two sisters that were born here in Oklahoma. There are five girls and four brothers.

SM: Are you the oldest?

DJ: I'm the fourth.

SM: And some of you were born in the states and some even in foreign countries.
DJ: Overseas, just Germany.

SM: Your father was in the Army?

DJ: Uh huh, he retired.

SM: Retired now. Do they live here?

DJ: Right.

SM: Do you stay at home?

DJ: I live at home.

SM: Well, that's nice. You can go to the university here and live at home yet.

DJ: Right. It's real nice, convenient.

SM: Are you enrolled at the University of Oklahoma here now?

DJ: I'm a sophomore now.

SM: How's it going?

DJ: Oh, it's kind of rough. My first year was really interesting, getting acquainted, you know, with all the big college people, and now, everybody's to their self. You go to your classes.

SM: You went to school in various places then, because your folks moved around in the Army. Kind of like an army brat?

DJ: Yeah, that's what they call us. Usually lived in a place about two
years. The longest we ever lived was in Germany which was four years.

SM: Did you pick up any German over there?

DJ: Uh huh.

SM: Can you speak it?

DJ: I can speak, like "yes" or "no", "please" and "thank you."

SM: Say "thank you."

DJ: Danke schön.

SM: And "please?"

DJ: Bitte schön.

SM: Can you say "hello" or "good-bye?"

DJ: I can say "good-bye." Aufwiedersehen.

SM: Was that a nice experience in Germany?

DJ: It was real nice. Like over there the Germans don't know that much about Indians either, and they just kind of stare at you, they're not used to seeing Indians.

SM: They don't even know what you are?

DJ: Right. Or what they were. They think of you as the stereotype on T.V., cowboys and Indians.
SM: Oh, really? You have to be an Indian princess, and John Wayne shoots all the rest of the Indians?

DJ: Right. That's what they think about us. But I learned how to do ballet and Hawaiian hula over there in Germany, so I think I've gotten a lot out of travelling and meeting different people and different nationalities. Like people in Oklahoma when we moved back, and I'd say, "How long have you been living here?" And they say, "All my life." Well, how could you live here all your life, you never get out and know what else goes on. I just don't see how anybody can live in one place very long.

SM: You've kind of got used to moving around, so you feel that's the normal way to do it?

DJ: Uh huh. To travel.

SM: Do you have any place in mind to go from here?

DJ: Not till I get out of school.

SM: You're going to finish at the university first?

DJ: Um hm.

SM: Where did you go to high school?

DJ: I went here in Norman. I graduated from the Norman High School.

SM: Was that a good experience?

DJ: Not really, 'cause I had to get used to a different lifestyle. This was a completely different lifestyle than when my father was in the Army.
SM: Can you explain that?

DJ: In the Army everything is more . . . secure. You have a schedule . . . like, 8:00 to 5:00, and you have horns going off all the time.

SM: Telling you what time it is?

DJ: Yeah, telling you what time it is, and what you do, and things like that. Here the school's aren't as ahead as Army schools are.

SM: Are the schools more advanced?

DJ: Um hm, they're more advanced. And when we got here I was kinda set back.

SM: Then you should have found it easier here because you were better prepared?

DJ: It was easier to go to school.

SM: Usually it's the reverse. Many say that children who have lived on reservations and then come to city schools are behind because of a bi-lingual problem. Do you speak any other language besides German and English?

DJ: I've had four years of French.

SM: Have you had any Pawnee or Shawnee or Caddo?

DJ: No. My father's trying to teach us our Shawnee.

SM: Is your father Shawnee?
DJ: He's mostly Delaware and Caddo, but he's half Shawnee.

SM: Oh, he's all three of these. And your mother?

DJ: My mother's full-blood Absentee Shawnee.

SM: So that makes you three quarters Shawnee.

DJ: And a fourth Delaware and Caddo.

SM: So that makes you a full-blood Indian. That's something Indian people are sort of proud of, isn't it?

DJ: Um hm. To be full blood.

SM: And some who aren't, wish they were. Is that right?

DJ: Right.

SM: Those of us who aren't Indian at all, well, we have to be satisfied with what we are, and shouldn't each of us be glad we are what we are? you, you, and me, me, and so on?

DJ: Right. Should be proud of what they are. When I had my interviews in our pageant, they asked you questions like, "Are you proud to be an Indian? What do you think, how do you feel about being an Indian?" And I never think I'm an Indian, how do I feel, because I just take it for granted that I am an Indian, and I'm happy with it.

SM: And you have never run into any particular problems because of it?

DJ: No, not any racial problems.
SM: Why do you think it is you haven't encountered any problems like that?

DJ: Because of the travelling I've done, and meetin' the different nationalities. They accept people for what they are.

SM: You just got accustomed to that? People sort of respond to you the way you treat them?

DJ: Right. Just the way you treat them.

SM: You don't expect to be discriminated against, you don't expect to be different, you are treated as if you were.

DJ: Just like everybody else.

SM: Well, that's a good bit of wisdom there that we could all profit from. To go on now, you finished high school here at Norman. Did you participate in any activities? Were you crowned queen there too?

DJ: I was second runner-up in the Norman Junior Miss Pageant.

SM: Is there a first runner-up?

DJ: Yes.

SM: And if you had won that one, you would have gone to Mobile?

DJ: Then you'd go on to the Miss Norman Pageant, and I wasn't old enough for that. And the Miss Norman went on to the Miss Oklahoma, which is our Miss Oklahoma now. Our local girl won here, and now is our Miss Oklahoma.
SM: And then she goes to the Miss America Pageant?

DJ: Right.

SM: So you had a little experience with this?

DJ: Back in high school.

SM: Were you in cheer leading or any of those kind of activities?

DJ: No, I was never interested.

SM: Plays, speech, music?

DJ: I've had some drama, speech classes. I'm not interested in playing any kind of musical instrument. I just enjoy listening.

SM: You just enjoy it? Any particular kind you like best?

DJ: Mostly modern music.

SM: Rock?

DJ: Uh huh.

SM: How about the traditional Indian music? Do you like that?

DJ: Yes. We have what is called a stomp dance. This is usually done at night about when it gets dark. Usually young kids get together, it's a social activity, but it used to be a traditional dance, only done at certain times.

SM: Most of the people I talk to come from backgrounds that are much more restricted, and have a more definite point of view about something.
You're almost international, in a sense.

DJ: Well, the Shawnees are not really, like on my traditional costume. It's not supposed to be worn publicly. I'm allowed to wear it publicly, but ordinarily it's not.

SM: Is this sort of a special dispensation?

DJ: It's just for the traditional dances we have that the costume is worn, and at our dances you're not allowed to take pictures or anything at all.

SM: Like the stomp dances or the ceremonies?

DJ: None at all.

SM: Stomp dancing is not ceremonial, is it?

DJ: Well, they don't allow any non-Indians to participate, so you can come and view it, but you can't participate.

SM: There are other cases where visitors are permitted to take pictures of Indian dances. My little granddaughter was telling me that she had been invited to participate on a trip to South Dakota, and she did, and it was quite exciting for her. Did your scholastic work go O.K. in high school?

DJ: Oh, it went fine.

SM: And especially because in the Army schools you had gotten ahead of the other kids anyway. So then you decided to enroll at Oklahoma University?

DJ: Right.
SM: That was a little over a year ago, and you finished your first year. Do you know what your major is going to be in?

DJ: I wanted to major in fashion merchandising, but they really don't have that big of a field that really goes into it.

SM: You mean here they don't?

DJ: Here they don't. I know a lady who's associate director of the Mademoiselle magazine, and I modelled for the magazine.

SM: That's quite an unusual thing.

DJ: I thought it was at first. So, anyway, I'm interested in clothes, so she told me the best school to go to would be in New York, F.I.C., Fashion Institute of something, that's a specialized school for going into that. I'd like to get a degree here.

SM: What would that degree be in then?

DJ: I'm not sure.

SM: Liberal arts maybe?

DJ: Yeah, I'm just in the arts and sciences.

SM: You can take lots of art and design courses.

DJ: Right, and get familiar with them.

SM: So that when you go to New York, you would have some background of some kind of design, at least.

DJ: Right.
SM: And you think you might go to New York?

DJ: I don't know. I'm engaged, so I don't know.

SM: So you might decide to be married instead, but you could still go to school?

DJ: I could still go to school, and go to a smaller school that deals with it.

SM: There probably are others. Do you still have the connection with the lady at Mademoiselle magazine?

DJ: Uh huh. She comes to Oklahoma a lot.

SM: Do you keep in touch with her?

DJ: Uh huh.

SM: Well, is there a chance that you could do more modelling work for her without going to this school?

DJ: Probably, but she doesn't come to Oklahoma very much, and when she does come it's like buying things, taking it back to New York.

SM: What kind of things does she come here to buy?

DJ: Indian things. She takes them back to New York and she sells them, and there are some designers now, they're women, they're really going into the business of designing Indian contemporary clothes, like evening gowns that have the Indian look. So she comes down here and visits with them, and takes their clothes back up to New York.
SM: Well, now, this is a whole new area of activity. In other words, you have women, mostly women, men too, who design contemporary Indian clothes, that would be then contemporary designs that would fit in with the general style trends, but with an Indian flair to them?

DJ: Right, like an Indian design to it.

SM: Like for example, I saw two Indian women modelling some beautiful Indian jewelry. It was in Arizona Highways, and they had very plain, long black dresses on, designed largely to set off the jewelry. This kind of thing?

DJ: Uh huh. And like they design long gowns that might have Indian beadwork on them, or a floral design that looks like Indian.

SM: In fact the two models were not unlike you. They were also tall and slender. In New Mexico and Arizona there might be quite a bit of this going on too, do you suppose?

DJ: I think so. There probably is. I've only travelled through Arizona and New Mexico.

SM: This person you know at Mademoiselle magazine, does she ever go to New Mexico, like Albuquerque?

DJ: Yes she does.

SM: And to Arizona, Phoenix, Scottsdale?

DJ: She does a great deal of travelling.

SM: If she gets in those areas, she might be able to guide you, and help
you avoid mistakes and so on, because I imagine this is kind of a center for this sort of thing too. *Arizona Highways* alone frequently has pictures of striking Indian women wearing this jewelry, and of course they have the very native people, like the Pueblo women, who make the pottery and stuff. They have lots of those. In fact, you could have exchanged places with some of those models and would have fit very nicely. Well, that sounds like an interesting career possibility too, doesn't it?

DJ: It sure does. I'm real interested in clothes, and in modelling you make quite a bit of money for little work, I think. It takes a lot of time, but I haven't really done that much. I don't like doing photography, but doing the fashion shows, you kind of get tired of going out the walk, turning around. . . .

SM: Have you tried that?

DJ: Uh huh, I've done that.

SM: Where have you done that?

DJ: At Oklahoma City for luncheons and things.

SM: Then there are some big stores here in Oklahoma City that have luncheon fashion shows?

DJ: It's mostly these Indian women designers that put on these luncheons.

SM: Oh, then they design specialized clothing too?

DJ: Uh huh.

SM: Would you model, for example, other things besides Indian styles?
DJ: Yes I would. I've looked into some modelling schools. The people that run the modelling schools come out to these luncheons, and I've talked to one of them. They wanted me to get into their agency, but it took too much time, and I wanted to go to school.

SM: Now you mentioned you're engaged to a young man. He is here at the university?

DJ: Right. He'd be a senior this year, but he got accepted into dental school earlier, so he lives in Oklahoma City and goes to school.

SM: Dentistry is a good profession, I've heard.

DJ: I think it is too.

SM: Is he also Indian?

DJ: Uh huh. He's Kiowa, full blood.

SM: Does he approve of your modelling career?

DJ: He doesn't want me to really get into it, because it takes up a lot of time, and Oklahoma really doesn't have that much business with modelling, but it is growing.

SM: He doesn't want you to go to New York to become a model?

DJ: Right, yeah.

SM: Well, I don't think I would either if I was him.

DJ: I'm not that interested in it any more.
SM: You're interested as long as it's not too inconvenient?

DJ: Yeah.

SM: But he comes first, and your future here together?

DJ: Right.

SM: Are you planning to live on in Oklahoma then?

DJ: Well, he wants to move to Arizona to go into dentistry out there.

SM: Any particular place?

DJ: No, I'm not sure. Phoenix, I think it was.

SM: I like Arizona too.

DJ: I've only travelled through it, and that was through the desert.

SM: Even the desert can be beautiful.

DJ: And I don't know what Arizona is like.

SM: It does get hot, down in Phoenix especially.

DJ: I'm sure it does.

SM: But then it's no worse than the cold up in Minneapolis.

DJ: Oh yeah.

SM: Now, Donna, you're in your second year at Norman. Let's go back to
the time when you became Miss Indian Oklahoma. How did you get into that?

DJ: I have a sister that was baby-sitting for this Catherine Redcorn. She's well-known.

SM: Who is Catherine Redcorn?

DJ: Redcorn Damont. She's president of this native foundation here in Norman. She used to work for the BIA in Washington, and my sister was babysitting for her daughter one night, and they were interested in getting a girl into the pageant. And Pam's tall like me and has real long hair, and tall and slender, and they thought she'd be a good contestant, but she was only 16, and you have to be 17, so she said she had a sister that she thought would be a good contestant, so then they asked me and I told them no, because it would take too much work, and I didn't have any talent. I didn't think I had any talent. So they said, "Why sure you do. Think of all the hula you can do." I said no, so they talked to me about it, and I thought I didn't have a chance, but it would be a good experience, so I sent in my application and we stayed up in Oklahoma City, and it was a two-day affair.

SM: Well, then, you sent in your application, and it was accepted?

DJ: You had to write a 500-word essay, in the application.

SM: Fill out a form, and then write an essay, and send it in with your photograph?

DJ: Yeah, you have to send in a photograph in your traditional costume.

SM: Because this is going to be Miss Indian Oklahoma you have to wear a traditional costume? And so you sent all this in, and they called you to come and appear and compete?
DJ: Uh huh.

SM: How many girls were there?

DJ: There were 13 from all over the state from different tribes. But this year we had about three girls that were Cherokee, and one or two girls from other tribes, but there weren't that many. It's growing every year. Last year they just had about 12, but every year it gets bigger.

SM: Who are the judges?

SM: The judges are from all over. We had one man that was from Washington, and they try to get judges that don't know the girls.

SM: So they'll be impartial?

DJ: Uh huh. So we had five judges, and I can't remember for sure who they were. They had a tribal leader, four Indians and one white.

SM: But they were chosen from all over the United States, and came here to Oklahoma City where the judging was? What did you do when you went through those days of competition?

DJ: We had interviews. One day you would wear your traditional costume, and they ask you about your tribe, tribal government, and anything having to do with Indians. And then in the next interview, they talk to you about your knowledge of how you get along with other people, non-Indians. And we had interviews, and one night you had traditional talent in which I shook "cans." They're turtle shells you usually wear on your legs, and I did that for my traditional--that's the stomp dance.
SM: You'd better explain that a little more, because you're leaving us wondering what happened there. You wore turtle shell rattles on your legs?

DJ: Uh huh, that's the stomp dance.

SM: What's the rest of your costume?

DJ: Just a dress that comes to the knees.

SM: A traditional dress? And then you go through a dance routine?

DJ: Right.

SM: With the turtle shells?

DJ: Right. It's just usually around a fireplace, but in the stomp dance it's a man, woman, man, woman.

SM: Can you do this alone?

SM: Yah, you can do it alone.

SM: You were doing it alone?

DJ: Yeah, by myself. I had my music with me and singing, so my shells fit in. And for my modern talent I did the Hawaiian hula dance. And then Saturday night was our final crowning.

SM: Did you have a lot of interviews?

DJ: We just had two interviews.
SM: Two interviews where the judges sit around and ask you things?

DJ: Ask you questions.

SM: Was that embarrassing or difficult?

DJ: Well, one question I thought they would ask me was, "What is an Indian?" And I never thought about what is an Indian, so I thought about that.

SM: Did they ask you that?

DJ: No, they didn't ask me, but I thought they might. They asked other girls what it was.

SM: What would you have said?

DJ: To be an Indian is not being black-haired, brown eyes, what a typical Indian looks like, but what you believe, and your heritage, and what you know. Like I know this one guy who is completely familiar—he knows everything about an Indian and their traditional culture and everything like that. And then there's another Indian person that has brown hair, black eyes and looks just like an Indian, that has no knowledge at all, and is not an Indian because he doesn't act like one.

SM: But do they both have Indian blood?

DJ: Yeah.

SM: But one of them knows nothing about it and the other one knows everything about it.

DJ: The full-blood Indian knows nothing about it, and I would think that's
not being Indian. But this person that's maybe a quarter is Indian.

SM: Then actually Indian is more a state of mind than anything. I think I know what you mean about this being Indian idea. There was an old Nez Perce lady, and even though she was not 100% Indian, she was entirely Indian in her mind. She thought and felt and was simply not interested in anything non-Indian. So her daughter then said it's more a state of mind than anything, and you are spelling that same thing out. They didn't ask you that, though. What did they ask you?

DJ: They asked me who my tribal chairman was, and what's involved with our tribal government, and what are they doing for the people.

SM: You knew all those things?

DJ: Right. I studied on it.

SM: Did you have any preparation for this? Did you know what might be coming?

DJ: Uh huh. The lady that was sponsoring me found out.

SM: The kind of things to prepare yourself for?

DJ: Right.

SM: Now in your case, where you're from three different tribes, was that awkward and difficult?

DJ: I thought it was, because I thought I'd have to learn about the Shawnees, Caddos and Delaware, but they didn't ask me that much, but I was ready, because I knew all three who my chairmans were from all
three tribes. Generally all the problems were with the different governments.

SM: Which one did you describe most?

DJ: The Shawnees. They're here, and I was able to get in contact with them, and learn about them. And what I thought about AIM, the American Indian Movement.

SM: Do you want to tell me your answer?

DJ: I told them I thought that in the beginning I thought they were working for a worthwhile . . . they knew what they wanted, but now they may be going about it in the wrong way, trying to get it, and they told me that's what everybody was saying about it, but mostly people don't talk about AIM any more. Just kinda let it fade out. And then they asked me about that, and they asked me what I think about the Indian people nowadays. I used to think that they weren't too much interested in going to school and furthering their education, and getting more out of life than what they had, but now they are. There's a lot more students that are going to OU that I would never think would even think about going to school, and I think that's because they didn't know how to go about getting accepted into college, and they thought it's so hard that no one is gonna help 'em. There's a lot of people that are there to help you go to school and get through it.

SM: Now at OU yourself, as a student in your second year, have you ever gone to anyone for help of any kind?

DJ: We have a program here that helps, if you need tutors or anything for your different classes.
SM: But you haven't needed that sort of thing?

DJ: No.

SM: But you have needed once in a while, let's see, "How am I going to master this next test coming," that sort of thing?

DJ: Yeah, and what classes to take, and things like that.

SM: Yes, you get plenty of help with all those things?

DJ: They have Indian counselors who help you with that.

SM: You have non-Indian counselors too that'll help you?

DJ: Uh huh.

SM: Now as an Indian girl you can go to the non-Indian counselors, can't you?

DJ: Right.

SM: You can go to anyone you want, but if you prefer to go to an Indian counselor the school has them?

DJ: Uh huh. Like I'm on a program now that the Indian BIA pays for my tuition and books and things like that.

SM: Because you're on the tribal roll?

DJ: Right.

SM: So you get tuition from the BIA then?
DJ: Yeah, it pays quite a bit.

SM: One boy told me $1,500 a semester.

DJ: It costs lots of money, but it works out real nice.

SM: Now you have several hundred young Indian students in the college here. Do you think any of them will go back and work with their people back home where they used to live, or are they all going to take off for the city some place?

DJ: No, I think they'll go back and help their people.

SM: Most of them?

DJ: Um hm.

SM: So then, as a result of this, where, like one man told me, he said he was the first Indian student at this college, a small college up north. Now he said there are over 200, and a complete Indian program, so that was only within the last six years that change has occurred, which is amazing.

DJ: It sure is.

SM: That's 200% in the last six years. Well then, if we get lots of young Indian people with good educations in all the professions, like your young man in dentistry, and you in your own background, they as a composite group could quickly contribute to the solution of any differences or problems the Indian people may have.

DJ: Right.

SM: It's a pretty hopeful note then, isn't it? It seems so to me, but
then I talk to others who leave me depressed after a half hour, because they just feel it's hopeless.

DJ: Right. There's a few like that. In fact, there may be some Indian students that are going here to the university are just going to school to get the money, whatever there is there. They're not really interested in getting an education, but I think the majority of them are going to school to get the education. And in that pageant, that's what they were interested in, finding a girl.

SM: And you won.

DJ: And I won!

SM: Wasn't that kind of a thrill?

DJ: It really was! Personally I didn't think I'd win, but it was just a lot of fun getting to know all the other girls.

SM: Are they all about the same age?

DJ: I was 18. I think the age limit was 18 to 22 or 23.

SM: So you were one of the youngest.

DJ: Well, we had one that was 17. There was only 13 of us, and I thought it was real small, but you didn't get to know every girl personally.

SM: Now what is the decision based on?

DJ: Poise, personality and your Indian-ness.

SM: That is your knowledge of all these things they asked you about the
tribes and so on? And then talent.

DJ: Well, it wasn't based too much on talent.

SM: That was sort of incidental. And you did the stomp dance and the Hawaiian hula. You can do the hula just like in Hawaii?

DJ: Yeah.

SM: That must be kind of hard.

DJ: Well it was, but I learned it real young.

SM: Do you have to learn young in order to get the flexibility?

DJ: Yeah, to be able to move. I think it's easy, but I haven't done it in such a long time, that when I was preparing for the pageant, getting back into it, it was kinda hard. I had to practice a lot!

SM: To get back in condition again. Well, how did your folks take this? Were they very proud of you, or were they reluctant to see you win something like this?

DJ: They were really proud. My parents are divorced, and the night of the pageant--I'm living with my father--and at first it was kinda sad, you know, to have my mother not there.

SM: She didn't come?

DJ: No. But I was real happy and he was real happy, and it was real nice.

SM: Do they both live here in town?
DJ: No, my mother lives in Oklahoma City. It was just a recent divorce, so it was kinda awkward to get used to things, and having all the people flashing pictures at you and things like that. I wasn't ready for that yet.

SM: Now sometimes people take a cynical attitude about these beauty contests, that they're called. That's not quite accurate, but they call them that, and say, oh yes, the girls they have to pay, and so on, and the ones who sort of make it up to the judges usually win, and all this. Was there any of that kind of hanky-panky sort of thing?

DJ: No. Well, last year I helped with it. My sister and I did the choreography, had a little dance routine, just to pass the time, and there was one girl that you could just tell by looking at her--the way she acted around the judges during luncheons or something like that—and she ended up winning, which was terrible, because I could just tell by looking at all those girls that she was the one that was gonna get it, and she did. But this year—I was in it and it's kind of hard for me to tell for being with the other girls who was gonna win—but I didn't think there was.

SM: Now last year this one girl—how would you describe her activity then?

DJ: She'd be real friendly like to the judges. You weren't supposed to talk to the judges.

SM: But she found ways to be friendly with them.

DJ: Right. Like go getting coffee for them, little things like that. And she was very talkative, she was a loud person.

SM: But that was about as bad as it got?
DJ: Right.

SM: Some of the people in the women's lib movement object to the Miss America contest, saying that it's nothing but an exploitation of women. Would you think so?

DJ: No, I think . . . maybe . . . I'm not for sure. Like some girls go in it to get their scholarships so they can go to school, and me, I just entered the pageant because people wanted me to, and I thought it'd be a lot of fun.

SM: Having worked in it the year before probably helped you a little, because you had a little more self-confidence?

DJ: Right. I knew what went on behind stage.

SM: Well now, since May you have been Miss Indian Oklahoma. Have to travel around the state?

DJ: Right.

SM: Make appearances, have to make speeches?

DJ: It's kinda hard to make speeches, because, speaking to all the people, and you know they're probably listening to every word you say. You know, you might say the wrong thing.

SM: Is this hard for you?

DJ: At first it was, but now I think, well, they're not listening to me anyway, so it doesn't matter what I say to them. You know, say it's nice to be here and all that, but I haven't had to make any big speeches or anything like that.
SM: Did you get any scholarships?

DJ: I got a $500 scholarship, but as yet I haven't received it. I don't know what's happened to it. I've talked to some people, but they haven't heard anything yet, so I don't know.

SM: Well, that would kind of pull the rug out from under it if they don't come through. Who runs this sort of thing?

DJ: The Federation of Indian Women in Oklahoma City. It's national.

SM: Well now, as Miss Indian Oklahoma, you can also compete in the Miss Indian America, can't you?

DJ: Right. I went to the Miss Indian America pageant, it was in Sheridan, Wyoming. We had 30 some girls, and you can represent your state or your tribe--just enter. I represented Oklahoma. We had two other girls, one was Miss Seminole from Oklahoma. We had another girl was from Oklahoma, she just entered, and she was the one that won. Kiowa and Oto.

SM: Did you know her before?

DJ: She was our first Miss Indian Oklahoma.

SM: She was Miss Indian Oklahoma the year before you were?

DJ: She was the first, I'm the third.

SM: So it's a comparatively new thing?

DJ: Right. It's just in its third year, and that's why not that many girls know about it.
SM: It hasn't been publicized enough yet? Do you want to tell me about that experience you had at the Miss Indian America contest?

DJ: The whole thing lasted a week, the pageant. You had four panels of judges, media, Indian panel, non-white panel and then one other panel I can't remember. But then you went to one panel of judges every day. Oh, Miss Indian America panel, past-Miss Indian Americas. And they'd ask you all kinds of questions, and the interviews didn't bother me at all. We had interviews every day from the different panels, and they'd ask you various questions. We had talent. I did the stomp dance again. And you had your talent, then the final night, which was on a Sunday, they had the crowning, and you have your alternate, your first runner-up, your second runner-up and your third runner-up, then Miss Indian America. So they had already called off the runners-up and the alternate, and they said, "New Miss Indian America is" and also they had read part of an essay that we had written and sent in, and the line they read was my essay. So I thought I had won it, and they said, "She's 18 years old, from Oklahoma, and her name is Donna Jo," and mine is Donna Elaine. And people were already pushing me up there, and everybody was screaming and everything, they were putting my banner on, and they said, "Oh, I think we have a mistake, I'm sorry, it's Deanna Jo Herriguerra." And I thought I was just hearing it, and they said, "I think we made a mistake." So they took off my banner and my flowers, and everybody started crying, and that's what made me cry. I didn't think about it at the time, and people were saying, "No, no," because they didn't want this girl to win that had won. So I just turned around and walked off to the back, and then all the other contestants came and they were saying how sorry they were. So everybody was congratulating the new Miss Indian America, and I thought, well, I should congratulate her and no hard feelings, and so I was going to take all the other girls back up there, but they were really mad about it and they wouldn't go, saying congratulations, but we all went up there and told her
her congratulations, and she didn't think anything of it, of what happened. Then afterwards people were saying, "Well, you can come back next year," but I told them I'll never come back to them, and I've received a lot of apologies and things.

SM: What happened? Did the judges get confused?

DJ: Well, they wanted a girl that was familiar with reservation life. I wasn't that familiar with it, but the girl that won was not either. There's no reservations in Oklahoma, and she wasn't too familiar. But this person was trying to find out what happened, and this girl has worked up at the capital and she has connections, and the people that ran the pageant in Wyoming were all white. It was run by white people, which was real strange. They were real interested in her connections from Oklahoma that she had, and also she said that she was in law school, which she isn't, and she has a straight A grade point average, and they were just interested in that. So they had a party after that, and I was just hurt. I really didn't want to win.

SM: You really weren't that concerned, but it sounded like you had won, and then to have it switched at that moment. That was pretty hard to take?

DJ: It really was, and for people to tell me how sorry they were, and I wanted to tell people that I really didn't want to win, because I wanted to come back to Oklahoma, and if you won you had to stay in Wyoming and travel out of Wyoming, and they thought that I was so hurt that I wanted to tell them that I really didn't want to win, and they'd probably think if I'd won I wouldn't have been too sincere, and if I did I would have been. I put eye drops in my eyes and went to the party, and it didn't matter after that.

SM: You carried it all off, didn't you?
DJ: Yeah. People thought, "She's got real poise."

SM: One of the hardest thing about it was those people who were expressing anger about you not winning. That was the hardest thing to handle. You could have handled the switch easier than that.

DJ: People were up there saying, "No, no," and a lady that's in charge of the pageant here was up there, and she was one of the judges, but when I was in her interview she didn't ask me any questions, you know, for them to think she was gonna raise my score or anything. And she told me she knew this girl was gonna win because she's a judge. And she goes, "When they made that mistake," and she started crying, and you know, to see someone like that crying, it really hurt me to see that. And then I thought nothing like that really happens in pageants, goes on with the judges. And also I heard recently from this lady that was a judge, she told me that some of the judges thought I was too pretty, that if I went out in public that's all people would look at me as.

SM: As a pretty girl?

DJ: Yes.

SM: Well, maybe that's true.

DJ: And they thought I wasn't smart enough, or something. I'm not sure what else they thought about me.

SM: Now you had these interviews, you had the talent, you had more interviews on various things. Well, that was over finally, but now you're back home, and you're still on call as Miss Indian Oklahoma, and you've been around the state quite a bit travelling?
DJ: Mostly up north in Oklahoma. I go to Tahlequah, Cherokee things, and different powwows. But that was during the summer, lot of dances they have, but now that people are working and school's started and things, I don't do that. But like I go to parades. I get kinda tired of riding in parades, you have to smile all the time.

SM: Have you got any technique for appearing to smile genuinely without getting a fixed smile on your face? That's hard, isn't it?

DJ: It is. I get started right away and smile, but then you see somebody in the audience that really makes you smile.

SM: Is that the trick, to try to pick out a face here or there, a child, and smile?

DJ: Yeah, that makes you smile.

SM: And then you're doing it really. Once in a while you detect some of these people or politicians or actors, and the smile is too sadly phony.

DJ: Yeah.

SM: Hard to do it though. And the waving.

DJ: Yeah, your hand's just going like that. It's kinda hard.

SM: So that's the trick, to pick out people.

DJ: Yeah, I see people in the audience that really make me smile.

SM: Even if you don't know them?
DJ: Right. Just looking at them.

SM: Now you're back in school, you still have a few appearances to make, but it's slowed down, and the semester is in full swing, and you're carrying a full load?

DJ: Right.

SM: And you're engaged. You plan to finish your education here?

DJ: At OU. Right.

SM: And the future then, that's just a little bit tentative. You haven't got hard, fixed plans for the future, Donna, but you are going to finish school. Anything you can think of that you'd like to add for our listeners?

DJ: Not really, except I'm kinda amazed that there's people that don't know anything about Indians.

SM: Well, there are people in parts of the country that just haven't had much opportunity to be in contact with Indians. You here in Oklahoma are unique in that you have the largest Indian population of any of the states, and no reservations, except that one semi-reservation of the Osages. In some states there are very, very few Indian people, so it isn't surprising when you stop and think. So then, Donna Johnson, Miss Indian Oklahoma, I do appreciate your talking to me today. I think our students will enjoy listening to you.

DJ: I hope so.