VELMA JONES, Ponca
September 19, 1975
Ponca City, Oklahoma
Part I

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.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.
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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:
    Today we're in Ponca City, Oklahoma, talking with Mrs. Velma Jones.
    Mrs. Jones, you are a business woman here in town, aren't you?

Velma Jones:
    Yes.

SM: You have a restaurant?

VJ: Yes sir.

SM: And another one in another town?

VJ: Fourteen miles north at Newkirk.

SM: Keeping you busy?

VJ: Right.

SM: Have you always lived here in Ponca City?

VJ: I've always lived here, all my life. I was born and raised here.

SM: Right in town?

VJ: Well, no. I was raised in a rural area. I was not raised right
    straight south. Our . . . was one time a reservation. It stood out
    say about 14 miles west, it was a Tonkawa area, and they called it
    Indian Meridian Line, it sort of took in a big square about over
    half of Kay county.

SM: Oh, it was a big area. That was a Ponca Reservation?
VJ: Yes. That was a Ponca land.

SM: But it isn't a reservation any more?

VJ: No, any more there are no reservations in Oklahoma.

SM: Oh, I thought there was one left.

VJ: No. No reservations.

SM: That's a surprising thing, because there are more Indian people in Oklahoma than in any other state, but no reservations.

VJ: No reservations. That's true. So I was raised right on the west end of, you might say, the reservation. Of course, I was out there in the rural, and my folks were farm people, made their livin' by raisin' stock, and farming. 'Course I got most of my schoolin' from the rural area, and then some in the Ponca City schools, and then I went to Chilocco Indian School.

SM: Was Chilocco a high school?

VJ: Yes.

SM: Then what did you do?

VJ: Well, I came home and resided with my parents until I married. I married at a very young age, and I have been livin' with my husband since. We've been married 43 years, and we have five children. He and I ranched a while, and we also farmed in wheat a while, and he done public work, and I was a housewife. I never became involved with Indian tribal matters until I'd say about ten years ago. I got very interested. 'Course my children were older, and I felt like I
could be doing something rather than just sittin' at home, so I started in workin' with people, and joining civic groups, and this is what made me interested in seein' about how things was goin' along in the government, how the Indians were developin', and how some were not, and how much incentive they was gettin' into the area.

SM: When did you get into the restaurant business?

VJ: I've been in the restaurant business only about three years and a half. That's a very young thing.

SM: So let's go back there then ten years ago when you got interested in Indian activities.

VJ: Well, I was with a group called Oklahoma for Indian Opportunity, and 'course this is a very state-wide organization. And we worked with the community and, 'course I did not apply for the job with the Oklahoma for Indian Opportunity. I was recommended, possibly by someone in the area, and I know who this party was because he knows me very much, so they came and just sort of drafted me so I must work for them because they had heard that I had been workin' with my people a lot. And so I got started this way. It entailed some stipend that I was able to finance myself around to reach the people and so forth.

SM: A lot of travelling?

VJ: Yes, a lot of travel, and then I also was able to get some benefits, like goin' back to college.

SM: Well, did you go back to school again?

VJ: Yes, go back to school again, pick up some hours.
SM: Where was that?

VJ: In OU.

SM: The University of Oklahoma at Norman?

VJ: Yes. And then I had a lot of what you call cram sessions in different fields, like public speaking, and so forth, which was real interesting because I was tryin' to do things real fast, so I didn't have time to go back and pick it up normally. I was tryin' to pick it up real fast so I could get out with the people, and I was meeting a lot of non-Indian people, you know, which required education, required talent and knowledge, and so I realized I had to have a little esteem from education.

SM: Yes. Well, the organization itself. Would you repeat the name of it?

VJ: The Oklahoma for Indian Opportunity.

SM: And what is its program or goal?

VJ: Well, it has many departments in it. My particular job was in the field, workin' with people and familiarizing them with the resources in the area, you know, and then bein' able to get the resources to cooperate with the constituents of the area, and then I was also able to disseminate what the resources were, because a lot of times, sort of an interpreter.

SM: You were a sort of a go-between between the two groups?

VJ: That's right.

SM: And sort of a public relations person, and everything wrapped into one?
VJ: This is true.

SM: Did you carry that on while you kept house and everything?

VJ: Yes, I kept house, and I also worked with the public, and I also went into the restaurant business; and continued my work with my people.

SM: All this at once.

VJ: And, of course, there were many things that I got into. I got into a lot of legal problems, I got into a lot of hardship conditions, like welfare, and I got into a lot of problems with the health; I got into many problems.

SM: Do you mean your own health?

VJ: No, not mine. The people. I am in good health myself.

SM: If you had been in bad health, you couldn't have carried all that load.

VJ: Right. So there's many of our people that was not able to get into public hospitals, because they did not have no ID cards, like if they were under welfare, they was entitled to identification by the welfare and they could use public facilities, and also, at certain age they was able to go for Medicare. They were not under Medicare because many of these things . . . they were just not aware of them. Many of our people are not aware. . . .

SM: You had to learn all of these things, and then you had to disseminate the information?

VJ: Yes. After I learned all the programs and the resources and all the state programs, well, I seen then that many of our people were left
out of them. I wouldn't say it was purposely, I just say it was a fact that they didn't know.

SM: It happened.

VJ: So I was able to be sort of a liason person, and I didn't exactly do this in a militant way, I wasn't interested in that, I was just interested in gettin' them to the resources.

SM: Accomplishing the good that you could accomplish without necessarily making trouble.

VJ: That's right.

SM: We find all shades of opinion in this kind of thing.

VJ: Well, there's lot of times different departments, you might say public resources, when they realize that there is someone there knows you are familiar with the laws--that you shouldn't lock up a juvenile in the public jail, that you should give them their legal rights to a lawyer, they learn all these--they see that there's a person that knows that these are things that they have to do, then they will sort of respect and honor the person they just brought in.

SM: So they're more careful then.

VJ: This is true, 'cause they do not want their departments exposed, and, 'course I wasn't interested in exposin' 'em, I was interested in the person gettin' their rights.

SM: What are some of the programs and the activities that you remember most vividly in those years that were the most satisfying for you?
VJ: Well, I worked with youth, and I thought this was real good. In the schools they had youth councils, and I'd go to the youth councils and talk with them, and ask 'em to look into their problems and see if they had a problem. And lot of the children didn't realize what a problem was. They would just look at me starey-eyed, and I would say, "Well, now one problem could be are you makin' good grades? And if you're not makin' good grades, I know how you can get helped to make good grades." So then I had gotten many of the teachers to volunteer to tutor them and bring them up to grade level with the rest of the children.

SM: Do you mean in some cases the students weren't even thinking in terms of getting good grades?

VJ: This is true. I think this works with non-Indians and all races. They figure they got to go to school, and they're goin' to school to please mama and papa. Puttin' in their time. But if we sort of get 'em nurtured to the idea that they should make good grades so they could compete, then they feel more confident.

SM: That's a very difficult thing to do--motivating children.

VJ: Yes, I enjoyed that. Especially a lot of times when you had a real good student in school, and you find his grade fallin' back in one subject, but it would hurt him in four other subjects.

SM: His average would drop?

VJ: Yes. So then you'd take this one subject and get him some help. Lot of times it just takes maybe two hours of tutoring, and he's right back up where he belongs. So I thought this was very interesting and rewarding.

SM: Did your own children all go to high school right here?
VJ: Yes, um hm. Well, my children went to school here in Ponca City, and they also went to Chilocco, and they all finished high school. They've all been in college—I had only one child that rebelled against going to college. I guess I'm not sorry. He's very independent today. That was just his desire, he is a very independent young man.

SM: Each one is an individual, after all. Did they like Chilocco better than the public school here?

VJ: Well, really I couldn't say there was any terrible distinction. Of course we were parents that could be with our children. Even though two of my children at one time were at Chilocco, we were with them quite often. We'd go up.

SM: How far is it from here?

VJ: It is only about 21 miles.

SM: It isn't far at all.

VJ: No, so we spent a lot of time with them, so it was really not away.

SM: So they didn't have to get so terribly homesick.

VJ: No, not at all. 'Cause I know that when my children were goin' there, that there were children come in from Arizona, from Alaska and other places.

SM: That must be kind of hard sometimes to go away from home.

VJ: They did look homesick, all right. But I'm fortunate to say mine didn't get a chance to get homesick.
SM: What were some of the other schools they went to?

VJ: Well, Tonkawa Junior College. It was a junior college then.

SM: Where is that?

VJ: It's straight west.

SM: Now is that a public school?

VJ: Yes, a public college. And then I had one boy go to a junior college in Arkansas City, which is just over the Kansas line like 26 miles or so. And I had a girl go to OSU.

SM: That's Oklahoma State University? Where is that?

VJ: That's south of here about 42 miles.

SM: We hear about their football team a lot now.

VJ: Forty-two miles. Stillwater's playin' tonight here in Ponca City.

SM: That's what we saw on the theatre marquee.

VJ: This is high school.

SM: Apparently the people are very interested in this.

VJ: Oh yes. Ponca City is a very growing town right now. It is really mushrooming, and then this made it more so too, that why couldn't our Indians be a part of the community.

SM: Of the growth of the community. Do you think they are now?
VJ: I feel like they are.

SM: They haven't been left out?

VJ: We won't let them leave us out. (laughter)

SM: That's the spirit, isn't it? If you won't be, you can't be.

VJ: We don't feel like we're 100% participating, but we're workin' to that goal, and I think eventually it will be worked right into.

SM: You've got a pretty town here. Ponca City has a population of about 25,000, 30,000?

VJ: Well, no. I don't think the census is correct, because we have an awful big urban area. The city limits is not as large. And I think very well we can reach 45,000.

SM: That big? And you have all these nice big parks in town, very pretty.

VJ: Yes. Ponca City is . . . I like it here.

SM: Does it get hot in summer?

VJ: It got pretty hot this summer.

SM: Humid also?

VJ: Our weather's not real humid at all. Oh, I'd say, take it down to the Texas line, that is very humid on south. I don't think we're too humid here.

SM: But you have good farm land here, don't you?
VJ: We have good farm land and agriculture.

SM: Right out the window here you can see some rich land. Is there a river bottom over here?

VJ: Yes, the Arkansas River is right over here east of us.

SM: That looks like that rich bottom land like we see along the Missouri River back in Missouri.

VJ: We have very fine farmin' country here.

SM: What is the major industry?

VJ: Farming and oil are the two big major things. We have no mines or anything like that.

SM: Do most of the Indian people work in farming or in jobs? Now you're in business for yourself. Are there quite a few people doing that too?

VJ: Well, I'd say about our average is the low. I'd say it is about 40% on a scale. It isn't up yet as good as we like to see it.

SM: Do you mean income-wise?

VJ: Yes. But now, we've got a late start, and I think one reason is that we've had so much non-Indians migrate into the area that they have consumed all these jobs. But our Indians are workin' their way into the jobs pretty well.

SM: One man was saying that when he went to work for Continental Oil he was one of three or four Indian people, now there are several hundred working for the company.
VJ: This is true, absolutely. I think I know who you're talkin' about. I think he was about one there for a long time; pretty soon two, three, and five. Then for a long time it was about five Indians, but now I guess they've got maybe 200.

SM: It might be a bit of encouragement to you since you're involved in working for these goals here as well as everywhere, for example, in a northern Minnesota community, a young man was the first Indian student in this college, he was the only one. Now there are 200 in that school. Or the same way with the elementary school which used to be a part of the larger school district, they have even gone so far as to separate themselves, and they're running it their own way, ungraded, and so on, teaching the language and everything.

VJ: This is what Ponca City is tryin' to go into, part of the school to go into the ungraded, sort of open unit.

SM: I don't know whether that's good or bad, frankly.

VJ: I don't know. I think they have proven that lot of their schools that went this way has done real good.

SM: Well, they're very enthusiastic up there at Point Point. Now it's only been five or six years, but if it works as good as they feel about it, it's going to be great.

VJ: Our Indian people . . . we're a different type in culture as to a white man, you know, and this is one thing that the non-Indian, or white race, cannot absorb—that we are of a different culture. We just don't push ourselves out there, you know, and there has to be somebody sort of push us. But it can't be another white man push us, it's got to be another Indian to do the pushin'.
SM: That's a point I'd like to have you explain now, because this varies in different parts of the country. In the far southwest, some of the people there feel that they do not like the idea of one person becoming a stand-out, and that he is even ridiculed back into his place by his contemporaries, his peers. They don't like that competitive kind of thing. But now, up in the northern country they said an outstanding student is a sort of hero. Well, how is it here?

VJ: Well, the only one that makes heroes out of us is the white man. We look at one another as individuals, brothers and sisters, and "one of us." Me, one of them, and they, one of us.

SM: Nobody more important or less important?

VJ: This is true. But it's only the white man that makes a hero out of us, and I'm sort of the same feelin' too. Why can't we have ten heroes out of this class instead of one? And I kind of feel this way too.

SM: You kind of lost me there.

VJ: Well, I feel this way too. Why can't we have a whole bunch of heroes instead of one hero?

SM: From among the Indian people?

VJ: This is true, and that's the way I feel. I don't feel like makin' a hero out of one, a symbol out of one at all. I feel like we all should be unified in our way, and I think this is what causes some of our in-tribal Indian problems.

SM: There are differences of opinions among Indian groups?

VJ: This is right. I think this is what causes it, tryin' to make one more outstanding than another, and it hurts so badly. Now I'm very
much on a kick of helpin' the educated type of Indian to go out and make an image for us. But a lot of times some of the people want to keep on a level of some guy that is a big talker, or a good talker, or something like that. This is the way he made his way through--big talker or something--but I like to see a student that has gained his merits by studyin', gettin' his education. And I like to see him placed in positions that would reward him, where he has graduated from university, and so on, and put him in a rewardin' position.

SM: Then do lots of the young Indian people who get educations come back home to help out?

VJ: Well, this is what is comin' to that point. When they do come back, why they have no help, because they're not given these positions. Some of our people will sit on them, that have a lot less education, and they have students come back from universities or colleges. . . .

SM: They can't get a good job?

VJ: No, they can't get a good job. They'll probably get a teacher's aide job. And maybe they'll be carryin' more unified education than even a teacher in that school. They'll be carryin' majors and minors, but still they have to take a teacher's aide job. This is real bad. This is one of the things that I sort of protest.

SM: As a form of discrimination?

VJ: I thought it was.

SM: If it was done because the person was an Indian?

VJ: Well, I've wanted to look at it in this term, because I know when they were screening for aides and they felt like since there were so many Indian children in school there should be Indian aides too, you
know, well then the applicants were great. They were students comin' out of colleges and universities, and a teacher's aide, it only requires a high school education, that's all it requires, but here it was, a lot of our educated Indian students was getting aides jobs.

SM: Well, does a teacher aide get paid?

VJ: Yes, they're paid, but it's low. Yes, it's a low pay, not like a teacher's pay.

SM: And do most of the schools here in town have teacher's aides?

VJ: Yes. They have teacher's aides here in Ponca City.

SM: Are most of the teacher's aides Indian people?

VJ: No, they have about half and half. Maybe they'll put one aide in each school. One Indian aide and one non-Indian aide.

SM: How many Ponca Indians would there be about?

VJ: This figure that I will quote, there are more than that. But we say around 2,300. But there are more, because we go according to a quarter degree. The quantum is a quarter. But there are a lot more that are descended from the half breeds and the less than half breeds which don't quite make the quarter line, but they still are Ponca Indians.

SM: And being a Ponca Indian or not being one is as much a state of mind as anything else, isn't it?

VJ: Oh, this is true. Um hm. This is true. Even though I have grandchildren now that are one-eighth Ponca Indian, but they feel, because I am Ponca, they feel like they're all Ponca.
SM: They're proud of their grandma!

VJ: Yes, because of their grandma. And this blood level they got set on us is bad.

SM: Did you grow up knowing how to speak Ponca?

VJ: Well, no, not fluently, sir.

SM: Could you tell me what is the word for grandma?

VJ: Well, I don't speak fluently. I know it, but I say I don't speak fluently. We spoke the English language in our home, you know, and at the time I was growin' up, this was really odd. Today it's so much different. When I was growin' up our parents told us not to talk Indian, because we were gonna have to have an education, and we were gonna have to compete with the white man, and we were gonna have to learn to talk good English, and that's what we were told.

SM: So you talked English at home.

VJ: And now it's reversin'. Now they're wishin' their children could talk Indian, and some of them can't talk Indian.

SM: Is there any place around where they can learn to speak the Ponca language?

VJ: We have no classes goin' on right now.

SM: No place. No teachers. Well, maybe you'll discover somebody and get it started.

VJ: Well, I think there are going to be some programs right away set up for Indian language, and I think even the colleges are workin' on
this. Now the University of Oklahoma, they had injected some Indian language there, but it was, I think, the Cherokee language, and I think the Comanche and some Cheyenne, but we have never had a Ponca class. But I think a lot of the universities are really wantin' to do this thing.

SM: At Haskell they have approximately 37 states represented, and some sixty different tribes, and if they had a teacher for every one they'd have to triple the staff just for language alone. So they do teach four or five of the major languages where they have the greatest demand. Now that doesn't satisfy the people who are of a smaller group, but it's better than nothing.

VJ: See, this doin' away with the reservations is what's caused it. We sort of all mold into one, and it's all very much frustrating to lot of our young people.

SM: Do you know how long it's been since the reservations have been eliminated here in Oklahoma?

VJ: I couldn't tell you exactly, but it's been quite a while.

SM: I believe where they exist the people want to keep them very much, even to increasing them.

VJ: Many of the . . . well, I guess the grants and supplements out of Congress, the money allocations, was all designed for reservations. So when it done away with reservations, we missed the boat on a lot of it.

SM: That sort of left you hanging there?

VJ: Right. Yeah, but there was so many of the Indians after they came out of college, and so forth, they constructed their own proposals
and their own needs, and so forth, and got money back into the areas for this purpose. And where Congress has laws all set up under the BIA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, where money is to go into reservations, you know, and of course when Oklahoma has no reservations, we're left out of a whole lot of this.

SM: Now you've overcome some of this, somehow. How did you do it?

VJ: Yes, well, we've overcome it by a lot of our educated people makin' proposals to different funding groups, and gettin' money into the area for the people to overcome poverty.

SM: Now, instead of a tribal government disbursing the funds as they do in some cases, how is it done here where you don't have the tribal entity?

VJ: The only tribal entity we have now is that they just take care of our land resources, is all. Like when the Poncas were allotted, and they still own this land, it's under the United States Government trust. Well, this is all our Bureau is set up for, is to sort of monitor this, but as far as me gettin' a paycheck from the BIA, this is not so. My paycheck comes from the sweat of my brow.

SM: Do the Ponca people still maintain the tribal rolls?

VJ: Yes, we do have a roll. We are fortunate, the Poncas are, that we do have what we call a constitution by-laws that was enacted about 1950, and it was approved by Congress, so this maintained us a whole lot as a parliamentary government, and so we elect our councils, our chairman, and so forth. We elect them by votes, by popular vote.

SM: Democracy?

VJ: Yes, the way of democracy.
SM: So it is working now. Although you don't have a tribal government, per se, you have practically the same thing functioning in each group. How do you feel about these other things going on around the country? Like the BIA situation in Washington a couple of years ago. Do you think that accomplishes very much?

VJ: Well, I don't think military and militant issues accomplishes anything. The big problem now with the whole nation is about going down and fightin' in countries where they don't belong. So then why do we want to sit here at home and fight one another also? And I think that sometimes the American Indians get hostility up against one another, and this is wrong, this defeats ourselves, so I don't believe in fightin' another Indian at all. I believe in helpin'.

SM: Have you heard about this St. Mary's school situation up in Kansas?

VJ: I read some in the paper about it.

SM: Now there's a case where the Jesuit Catholic Order has offered to give it to the Potawatomi people, but their tribal leadership is so factionalized that they can't figure out who should accept it.

VJ: Well, one example is, we won a claim from the government, you know, for lands that we lost, our forefathers lost, but we won it through legal statuses. So I feel that the laws are set up, and why can't we fight 'em with their laws.

SM: It worked for you?

VJ: It worked for us, right.

SM: Did the people collect then?

VJ: Yes, we were awarded.
SM: Did they collect a reasonable amount?

VJ: Yes. Well, it wasn't exactly reasonable, but, you know, if a judge adjudicates it, you can't change it. You just don't go and knock him in the nose because he didn't please you.

SM: Could you appeal the case?

VJ: Oh yeah, we could appeal and appeal and appeal, but we took what we thought would be justifiable.

SM: Was this for the Ponca Tribe?

VJ: This is Ponca.

SM: How did it come out?

VJ: Well, we were awarded our claim, and our forefathers fought for it through legal statuses. Then it handed on down to our present-day council.

SM: This was in the Indian Claims Court?

VJ: Yes, it was in Indian Claims Court for years. Well, I guess maybe we could of took the other route--just go up there and tear up the Indian Claims Court and say we want our money, but this wouldn't accomplish nothin'. So that's the way I feel about it in our home base, too. We have laws here that says that you have to be treated like a man, or treated like a human, so we feel like we come under the same laws and we want the same justice. And we want to aware our people that if they're not gettin' the same justice, that they will know that they're not gettin' it.
SM: If they had known about it in the first place, then they'd know how to complain about it in the second place.

VJ: This is true.

SM: Do you have an organization here now that helps the people in case somebody gets into a problem that he can't handle?

VJ: Well we have many organizations that does things, and we have social workers and so forth, but I think they do their duty. I try to do mine. I work all phases, like legal, as I said, and I'm as liable to be at the police station, bailin' somebody out on their recognizances or something, and I'm liable to be at the welfare office. I'm planning now, in the very near future, settin' up a seminar on the food stamps that's been issued. I have done a small survey myself, and found some very low income people that are not gettin' the food stamps. They have applied—I asked them why they don't get 'em and they said, "We have applied and we were denied." I said, "Why were you denied?" And they said, "Because I'm workin'." Well, you workin' don't mean a thing, because you might be workin' for $1.00 an hour, you know. So these things have all got to be evaluated and investigated, and I think this is a very negligent part of our state and local counties, that don't go out and survey these conditions real closely. This is one of the things when I met with the school board out there. Teachers and school board met and I was there and I said, "I think if teachers would visit the homes of many of their children, I think they would know more how to treat 'em in school." Because you go to some homes where maybe there's seven or eight children sleepin' in two rooms, and see, this child has a barrier. When it gets to school, how can it compete with another child that came from an eleven room house? So that was one of the things I said. So one of the principals of the school said, "This is very good, I would like to do this." And I think if you know the condition of
people, then that's when you could be able to relate to somebody. 'Course you have to maintain your own . . . behavior. I wouldn't lie for a family. If I seen they had ample money comin' in to the home, then my advice would be for them that they have ample budget, that someone else needs it more that has a lot less. So this is the way I work.

SM: You've had a lot of experience in the last few years, with all these various problems and programs.

VJ: Oh yes. One experience leads right to another one.

SM: Yes, they kind of do. Do you sometimes feel like there's no end to this?

VJ: Right. This is true. Sometimes you do feel like you're just at an end, you can't go no farther, and you just feel like you're tired, you'd like to give up. Then somethin' else pops up. Like, well, I got into a case here the other day where they arrested an Indian girl, and I found out that her arrest, I thought, was just very, very uncalled for, because it was two families fighting, you know, it was sort of an in-law affair. Well, I was in Newkirk today, I was at the courthouse today and I was explaining there to the Judge and the D.A. and all, and I said, "Now, this family's been fighting for years, but this one lady becomes a victim. She is arrested and under a $300 bond, and she can't afford this bond. I want her hearing set up immediately, so that she can be released, 'cause I think it is very unjust to her, 'cause this has been a family fight for a long time." And here comes her brother-in-law, happens to be a deputy, and then he's the one that signs the warrant against her.

SM: Oh, he's on the other side of the family feud?
VJ: Yes, he tossed her in. So I said, "Here we are all involved. I'm involved, because the lady cooks for me."

SM: She's one of your employees?

VJ: Yes, she's one of my employees. And I said, "You're involved here, because you're gonna take your time, you're gonna take people's tax money and have all this to go through, when this family has been fightin' for years. Now the thing I think I would have done, was load the whole bunch up and took 'em to jail. I'd get enough paddy wagons out there and took 'em all, and let's settle this now, instead of victimizin' one person." And so see, these are pretty hard things to . . . but I don't care if it's a D.A. or if it's a Judge, they appreciate to hear this, to know it.

SM: They're happy to have someone come along that can offer a solution.

VJ: All they got is the paper before them that this person's fighting, this person's mad, and so forth. That's all they got before 'em. So a lot of times they appreciate it, but once in a while you run up against some says, "Well, who are you, and what are you doin' here?"

SM: They think you're interfering?

VJ: Yes.

SM: But you do anyway, don't you?

VJ: I do anyhow, some way, somehow.

SM: You can't let that discourage you. How did the case come out?

VJ: Well, they're gonna set a hearing right away so she won't be under this pressure, and get it cleared up. And I also pointed out to
them, I said, "Any good lawyer would simply throw this out of court, because it's been takin' up people's time, expense, and what have you." And the judge agreed with me.

SM: Is it a kind of feud between the two families?

VJ: It's a family feud. It's been goin' on for a long time.

SM: Is there very much of that going on?

VJ: Well, no. I know this particular one. I'm satisfied there's more, but I know this particular case, I'm very familiar.

SM: It seems like a terrific amount of energy and everything else is wasted in that kind of quarrel.

VJ: This is true, it sure is. And, as I said, all the people that's involved--I'm involved since it's my cook, you know, and as far as I'm concerned, she has a very good standin' with me--she's on the job every day, she's supportin' her family, and there never has been a day that she's ten minutes late, she calls in, you know, to say, "I might be ten minutes late." So I said, "You're really hurtin' me, when you keep her under this kind of pressure."

SM: All these people getting hurt because the whole thing isn't known and understood. So you helped there. The food stamp thing, have you got something going there?

VJ: Well, I started out on this. I don't know how come I got off on somethin' else. But we're gonna call it a seminar, we're going to publicate it and make it look very sophisticated. I like to have some of the state agencies in, you know, also the county agencies. And then get a scale and let everybody be familiarized with the
scale. If you make $2,000 a year you're entitled to food stamps. If you make over the limit, whatever the limit is, maybe it's $3,600. If it is, you're not entitled to it, then you're aware that you're not entitled to it.

SM: Well, then, you'll invite people to this seminar, whether they are other social workers or the people themselves. Anyone can come?

VJ: Anyone can come.

SM: I guess you'll have to go out and practically drag some of them in?

VJ: Oh yes. I'm doin' a survey for some of those that need to be there to know and be familiar with the scale, whether they're entitled or not entitled. And this is the whole essence of the food stamps--to supplement a family, so it doesn't mean they're giving you anything, you buy it and then it supplements you. I'm not too familiar with it, but I will be after this seminar. Say I buy $35.00 worth of food stamps, and I'm able to buy maybe $75.00 worth of groceries.

SM: I don't know if it's that much.

VJ: I don't know, I'm just givin' it as an example. But it's a supplement, this is where the supplement comes in. And with the high cost of food now, so many of our people are really hurtin'. 'Cause I know, I have about 11 employees. Well, there's about four of 'em on a very low wage, and I can only pay them $10.00 a shift, because that's all their wage calls for. Well, one of these ladies, she has three to support, the other one has five to support, plus herself is six, and the other has three, the other has four, so I look at this, right there is my very first picture. They are entitled to it, very much. They're not able to go out and get other jobs because I took 'em in and train 'em.
SM: And then you fit their schedules to the time that's available?

VJ: That's right. Just like one of these ladies stated, "I walked this town over, and I couldn't get a job, and I was sure glad to hear you was in business. I said, 'I'm goin' over to Velma's.'" So I interviewed her and asked her if she was willing to take about a three-day training, with pay--I didn't expect her to do it for nothin'--but I said, "I'll be frank with you, I won't pay you for sittin' or standin', I'll pay you for workin'. This is the first steps of training," I said. And I said, "Later on, after you get well trained, maybe you can figure how you can sit and stand and get your work done too." 'Cause see, I took a training for them, and this is how I was able to get help and keep help.

SM: Do the minimum wage laws and things like that bother you too?

VJ: Well, yes, because I really don't know what the minimum wage is in Oklahoma now. They're talkin' about it bein' $1.65, but I think the legislature says $2.00. But I don't think anybody really knows. I have asked many times, but our legislature in Oklahoma is very, very slow about that.

SM: It's a problem. At what point can you, as an employer, afford to have someone working there, and at what point they can't afford to come, or can afford to come. It almost has to be figured out locally, doesn't it?

VJ: Yes, right.

SM: This is a problem where, if the Congress in Washington figured it out according to the wage level and expenses and so on in Washington, it doesn't necessarily fit Ponca City.
VJ: That's right. Well, sometimes I feel like a migrant worker boss, but again I think, well, I'm givin' that person an opportunity to work, and now when they leave my establishment, why they can go somewhere else and do the same kind of work and maybe get more salary, and God be their speed, so I won't stand in anybody's way to make more money. I've told 'em this too, "Any time you can get more wage anywhere, that is your right."

SM: Is there anything else going on in the area now? Any other organizations or movements or some of these protest movements we read about?

VJ: Well, I think I've been hearin' about the American Indian Movement tryin' to get organized here in Oklahoma, in this main area only, you know. But I have sort of discouraged it. I talked with several of the young boys that's tryin' to join up, I try to discourage them very much, because I don't feel like they're safe in this area doin' that. We have a very, very strong... oh I would sort of say, it is a sort of clannish area, and they're not gonna let nobody break in or bust in, and I said, "I think this will be the place where you might get shot between the eyes." I made it that plain. I said, "A lot of areas in some parts are kind of used to this thing--fightin' on that end of the street, another fight over on this end of the street," but I do say we keep quite a lot of that down, here.

SM: So this is a peaceful area and people are more determined to keep it that way?

VJ: Right.

SM: Do you think that is harming the causes of any other groups of people?

VJ: Well, it sort of holds back prosperity for a lot of the low income people.
SM: People at the bottom of the scale?

VJ: Yes, it sort of hampers. But this is something, I guess, that you have to learn to cope with, to live with. And that's the reason why I did one time hold legal seminars, where I had lawyers and judges come in and sit and talk with the people, explain their rights, and so forth.

SM: Did you get a lot of people out?

VJ: Yes, it did.

SM: It helped quite a lot of them?

VJ: That's true.

SM: If they know their rights they can handle themselves much better.

VJ: This is true. It sort of alleviated the problem of an Indian runnin' to a lawyer and givin' up his last dime for a lawyer to protect him, because he could walk up to the Judge and plead his own case. And, of course, we don't have fees for lawyers. Too high.

SM: They are expensive?

VJ: When we had our legal seminar, I think the questions came from the floor. We prepared a lot of questions for them. I say, "we." I had people helpin' me, you know, and we prepared a lot of questions for them, saying, "Ask, do I have to have a lawyer if I have a traffic violation?" Well, many times a person will get a traffic violation ticket, they get scared. First thing they think of is jail, and so forth. Well, then the Judge comes out himself, or the D.A. comes out himself, and says, "No, you don't need a lawyer." So then this
relieves the person's mind.

SM: So they know they're not going to prison because they went through a red light?

VJ: Right.

SM: I suppose that is an anxiety on the part of someone who doesn't really realize what might happen to him.

VJ: That's right. It sure is. Especially, we go in cycles around here. Sometimes on our police force we get officers that gets pretty hostile, you know, and kind of rough up people, and pretty soon we'll go along and we just have a fine bunch of officers. So we never know what we're gonna get, so it always pays . . . in our legal seminars we give 'em every kind of education that we could possibly give 'em. As a citizen--when an officer stops you on a highway, well he's gonna ask for your driver's license. If you have one, present it, don't rebel. If he asks to search you, let him search you. So we try to educate our people to cooperate, to protect themselves--it's self-protection, that's what it is.

SM: You've been engaged in all these things, working now in this group, this organization, organizing the seminars, and everything. Do the local law officers see you as a help or a problem?

VJ: I don't know how they look at me, as a help or not, but they certainly do respect me real nice. I get along with them.

SM: You don't feel any animosity vibrations coming from them?

VJ: No.

SM: I would imagine they rather admire you.
VJ: Well, I get along with all of them. I even know the judges, I know about everybody. They're real nice to me. This is something that you have to do too. You have to sort of watch your own self—keep yourself, your moral standings good, keep your character clean, and so forth. 'Course I've always tried that anyway. I always wanted to do that anyhow.

SM: You didn't do it just for this cause, you did it because you thought it was the thing to do. Your experiences are a good lesson to these young people, like the young fellows you were talking to there, and so on. Do they listen?

VJ: Oh yes, they do. They do listen. I know I went with a boy that entered a beer tavern, and he only went into the beer tavern to take a message in to someone else that was sittin' there, and the bartender, she just immediately ordered him to get out of there. 'Course he turned around and walked slowly out, and she come over and said, "I mean for you to get out." So he said, "I was headed for the door all the time, and I just got around the corner when the police car picked me up." And so he called me.

SM: Was he under age?

VJ: No, he was legal age. So he was taken to jail and they called me from the jail. I got up and went to the jail. So I said, "I want him out, if I have to pay his bond or a guarantee, or if you want a recogni-zance, or what, I want him out." So they said, "All right, we'll let him out for you." So he got out. Well, he immediately had to go to court, I think the next day. So we went to court together. I said, "You don't need a lawyer, I'll go with you up there." Well, the city attorney, he was very, very aggravated with me. He said, "I don't think you have a right representing him." And I said, "He's going to represent himself, I'm not representing him, I'm only with him, he's going to represent himself." So I told him, I said, "Now you just
tell your story." So the boy wasn't gettin' the point over enough, so I spoke up. But I addressed the Judge. I said, "Your Honor, Judge, he did not go in there to drink beer, and he did not have no beer in his hands, but he did go in there to see this party, and he was headed to the door when he was shoved and put out. And this is all right, we're not talkin' about the tavern. We're very aware that if she so mind wants to, she can refuse service." But, I said, "What we're talkin' about is, why is he arrested?" The Judge said, "I see no cause." So he dismissed the case.

SM: I don't understand yet why they asked him to leave the tavern, because he was of age.

VJ: Well, see, this is somethin' that's built up inside there--this lady thinks he doesn't spend enough money there. She probably would cater and pamper more to people that spend more money. He probably maybe never has spent a dime in there, you know.

SM: Was she trying to kick him out because he was an Indian boy?

VJ: Well, no, not really that, because there were other Indians in there. But I. . . .

SM: Simply because he wasn't a good customer?

VJ: Well, this is what I summed it up to, 'cause he doesn't have money.

SM: That could happen to me then if I walked in there, because I never spent any money there?

VJ: That's true, that's true. And, of course, it's her place, and she has a right to throw you out.

SM: I don't think so.
VJ: I questioned this too, you know. So this is what I mean.

SM: Unless you're causing some kind of trouble.

VJ: That's right. He was not. He was not causin' a disturbance.

SM: If you open the doors to the public it's a tacit invitation for everybody.

VJ: And the Judge, right now he just dismissed it. But I don't know that I helped the deal, but I don't know why he's goin' to court.

SM: Well, I think you did. Otherwise he would have gone to jail, or maybe they would have gotten the story straight out of him, but maybe he wasn't articulate enough to tell them.

VJ: No he wasn't. He wasn't comin' out articulate.

SM: Or else he'd have had to hire a lawyer. This way it was all done and over with, and it was finished in a matter of a few hours, and you didn't charge him a big fee.

VJ: Right. Didn't charge him anything.

SM: Well, these years have given you a lot of satisfaction too, haven't they? Because you have been able to help.

VJ: This is true. I have been able to help. I worked with some of the college students, where they go to school on scholarships and grants. These are not ample, you know, this is very small, and they really do hit it hard. And Monday I'm gettin' some emergency food for a college boy that has a wife and one child.
SM: That will help him.

VJ: Yes, we'll help him, hold him over, 'cause their grants and scholarships are very low. They all pretty well suffer under these grants and scholarships, they're just not ample at all.

SM: Velma, you've had a long day already, haven't you? Did you run the cafe all day?

VJ: No, I was out there just this evenin' helpin' out.

SM: Oh, come on now, you're supposed to be working hard all day. (chuckle)

VJ: Well, I worked hard all day, but I mean to say, I was out there this morning, I guess about three hours; I go out in the evenin' about two hours.

SM: Everything going O.K.?

VJ: Yes, everything's goin' O.K., and I pitched in there and helped cut up some chickens, and I help pull 'em through the rush hour.

SM: It seems to me, Velma, that you have helped quite a few of the people who have needed your help, and you might be helping people that you haven't ever seen, by talking here. So, thank you very much for coming over.

VJ: I appreciate being here.