JERRY LUJAN, Taos
October 8, 1975
Taos Pueblo, New Mexico

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

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

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

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Sam Myers:
Today I have a unique opportunity to talk to a young man up at the Taos Pueblo, Jerry Lujan. You were born here, Jerry?

Jerry Lujan:
Yes, I was born in my parent's residence here in Taos Pueblo.

SM: Is that where you parked over there a few minutes ago near your parent's residence?

JL: No, that was in front of the governor's office. The governor's name is Henry Lujan, he's a relative of mine.

SM: And Lujan is actually a Spanish word?

JL: Yes. A long time ago when the Spaniards came around to Taos Pueblo, they converted us into Catholics. We were never Catholics at all, we had our own tribal religion, but they converted us into Catholics, that's how come we got our Spanish names: Lujan, Martinez, Romero, and all down the line. And the last estimated count on the census was 1,700 people living here.

SM: It's a remarkable place, isn't it?

JL: Sure is. We have our own tribal religious dances, our activities, and all the collection here from the tourists has been turned over to the community for tribal program purpose, and this is how the people benefit from working from the tribe.

SM: You grew up here in Pueblo?

JL: Yes, I grew up here in the Taos Pueblo.

SM: Where did you go to school?
JL: I first started my schoolin' here at the Taos Pueblo day school. It was located right where the water tower is at.

SM: Oh, just on the east side of the pueblo there?

JL: Right. I started off at kindergarten. I never spoke English at all, I spoke my own native language.

SM: What do you call that language?

JL: Tewa.

SM: In other words, you're a Tewa Indian from Taos Pueblo, and you went to school here.

JL: Yeah, I started from the kindergarten, and that's where I started to learn the English language. It was taught by Mrs. Geraldine Harvey, who is still around the Taos area yet.

SM: Did she speak Tewa too?

JL: No, she's an Indian from Wisconsin, and I started off my elementary here, and then the school only went up to the ninth grade at that time. And I graduated from the ninth grade, and then I went down to the Catholic high school in town. It's a private school.

SM: That's in the village of Taos. That's about two, three miles south down the road?

JL: Right. Right behind Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in town. But I didn't stay there long, because I couldn't get along with the nuns over there, so I transferred from there to the Institute of American Indian Arts.
SM: In Santa Fe?

JL: And that's the one where I got my education and finished my high school, and I went to post-graduate courses. They went up from the 12th to the 14th grade.

SM: So you actually have the equivalent of two years of college?

JL: Yes.

SM: Did you study law enforcement there?

JL: No, I didn't study law enforcement at all. I took up the regular academic courses, plus arts and crafts. I majored in pottery making, on a potter's wheel.

SM: Do you make ceramics?

JL: Yes. My ceramics instructor was Ralph Pardington.

SM: Is he still down there?

JL: He's still down there, the last I heard, and also some of the former students that I went to school with, are instructors there at the school.

SM: Now this ceramics instructor, is he a Tewa man too?

JL: No, he's an Anglo.

SM: Could he tell us more about the pottery-making in the area?

JL: I think he probably would know, because he has the education to study
on this pottery, and also Mr. New, that's the director there at the high school in Santa Fe.

SM: Jerry, we have an extensive law enforcement program in our school, so I've had some law enforcement men in my classes before, but I never expected to be sitting here in your police car talking to you, as we are parked here in the middle of Taos Pueblo. We'll show people a picture of this too, so they can see the handsome uniform you're wearing, and what a good-looking young man you are, if you don't mind my saying that now, and this unusual interview situation we're in. And after you graduated from the school down in Santa Fe?

JL: After I finished high school, they asked me if I wanted to take post-graduate courses, and I said, "Well, I'll think about it," and I didn't return back until late in November. So I went ahead. I had already applied for a vocational training course to go to school either to Dallas or to San Jose, California, so I chose to go to school in San Jose, which I was given the opportunity to take two courses. One, if I didn't like it, I could go jump to a second choice, which was electronics, and the second choice was for weldin'. So I didn't care for electronics—I was doin' pretty good, but I didn't care to be cooped up inside the plant and everything, so I chose my second choice, which was weldin', so I went to Johnson Weldin' courses in San Jose, California, and I was certified as an aluminum welder, and also as a pipe welder and combination welding.

SM: You've got several trades you can follow. How did you get into law enforcement?

JL: I spent about five years in San Jose, and I went out there as a single man, but I came back married to an Anglo.

SM: Do you live here in the village?
JL: I used to live in town, the town of Taos, but now I moved back up to the reservation.

SM: Are you living here in the pueblo now?

JL: No, I live right next to my parent's house, down below.

SM: In other words, the reservation is a larger area than just the pueblo that we see in front of us here.

JL: Durin' the time that President Nixon was still the President, we had this fight goin' on with the Blue Lake deal. And 60 years of it we tried to fight for our rights to own that land, and 46,000 acres of it was returned to the reservation, which is located to the northeast of the pueblo.

SM: Now that's restricted area, isn't it?

JL: It is restricted area, and we have our own forestry department, which they patrol the area every day with helicopters, and also we go up campin', spent several weeks up there, patrollin' the area.

SM: That's sort of like sacred territory to the people here?

JL: Yes, it's like a sacred church that we have a pilgrimage every year.

SM: I've seen pictures of it, it's a beautiful spot.

JL: It sure is!

SM: By getting it back you mean it is a part of the reservation?

JL: It's part of the reservation, it's part of the tribal community. And we've got the title for it, and we're proud that we got it back.
SM: When you got the title for it, does that mean that the tribe owns it?

JL: Yes, the tribe owns it, and they're responsible for maintaining the cleanliness and everything that goes with it up there at that Blue Lake.

SM: Is the government involved in any way, like in trust?

JL: Yeah, in trust. They are involved, but the whole aspect of the whole thing is controlled by the government of Taos Pueblo.

SM: Now back to you, and how did you get into law enforcement?

JL: After I finished my vocational training in San Jose, I went out and got me a job at the San Jose Steel Company where I worked as a welder for five years, and I didn't like the city life, and me and my wife came back to live here in Taos, and I found out that there was a job opening for law enforcement, so I applied for it, and there were about five other guys that applied for it. They screened us down the line to see how our community life was, our activities was, the background we had in the community, and it narrowed down to two guys, me and this other guy that had the application in. The rest of the guys had some kind of felony charges. . . .

SM: You had ample education, plus a good record.

JL: Right, a good record. I finally got the job, and I was on probation for one year, and after the year was over, I was sent to the Roswell Indian Police Academy in Roswell, New Mexico. I spent three months out there.

SM: Now which unit of law enforcement do you work for?
JL: Well, I work for the Department of Interior, with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

SM: Do they have a special name for your group?

JL: Our department is recognized as the law enforcement services.

SM: Then actually you're a federal officer.

JL: A federal Indian police officer.

SM: So that you could be called to duty any place in the United States?

JL: Any place in the United States at any reservation. I belong to a riot technical team, that was newly formed with the department, so I belong to that group, and I can go anywhere in the United States if there's any kind of riot going on, or any kind of trouble.

SM: Your authority could extend any place in the nation?

JL: The department can extend any authority anywhere in the United States on reservations, with the authority of the person in charge of that reservation—the tribal council, or the tribal leader, or whoever is in charge of that reservation. They can designate the authority to us.

SM: As a federal officer, do you, for instance, work as a highway patrolman on the highway?

JL: We work as highway patrolmen, we work as investigators in criminal investigation, and we have to turn all our preliminary investigations over to the FBI, and the FBI takes it to the United States attorney and it goes down the line, and we follow the procedures, and if the
United States attorney declines any felony cases or federal cases, we can demand they refer it back to the tribal court.

SM: Can you arrest people on the reservation and also off of it?

JL: Well, like myself, I'm deputized with the county of Taos, and also within the Rio Arriba County, which is located in Espanola, and also I am authorized here on the reservation, so any non-Indians or any Indian people that might visit the reservation, I am authorized to arrest them and cite them into their designated areas. Like a non-Indian I can cite him into a magistrate judge in Taos.

SM: And if you arrest an Indian person?

JL: They go to the tribal court here.

SM: Can you arrest somebody down in the town of Taos?

JL: Yes I can, because I am a deputized officer.

SM: This is the point I was getting at. You have authority off the reservation as well as on?

JL: Right. But I cannot investigate any other crimes, except just maybe minor violations, that's all.

SM: Have you ever been assigned to duty other than here in the Taos area?

JL: Yes, I've been assigned to patrol the Laguna Pueblo, which is located about 55 miles west of Albuquerque, at one of their activities, their fiestas, and I've been assigned to Pine Ridge, South Dakota, for the Wounded Knee incident, in '73. I spent 28 days out there.
SM: It was cold too, wasn't it?

JL: Cold, and pretty rotten, to my knowledge, and I didn't like it.

SM: You were there as a federal officer?

JL: I was there as a federal officer.

SM: Did you feel in any way uncomfortable in that situation?

JL: Oh yes, I felt very uncomfortable, because of the way the people were treating each other out there, and also treating the police officers, because I, as myself, am talking as an individual, and nothing for anybody but myself, I sympathized with the American Indian Movement, but they are doin' somethin' wrong in their part when they have to bring in other outsiders, like non-Indians, to run their whole show and everythin'.

SM: Did they have some non-Indian people there?

JL: Yes, they had some non-Indian peoples, like hippies, and all that. And also, the treatment of the prisoners, the officers mistreated them up there in South Dakota.

SM: Some of the officers did?

JL: Right. And I went ahead and wrote a memorandum in that behalf to my supervisor, but still I was suspended, because I was told to go up for the second time.

SM: You protested the treatment that some of the native Indian people up there got by the law enforcement officers, and then you were suspended?
JL: Yes, I was suspended, because I didn't want to go back up there. I refused an order, and I didn't want to go back, because if I wanted to go up there I wanted to be treated, and I want people to be treated, the way they're supposed to be treated. And instead I was suspended because I refused an order, and I was suspended without pay for two weeks.

SM: Did you ever go back again, then?

JL: No, I didn't go back again.

SM: Can you tell us any more about that incident up there? What really started it?

JL: Well, I don't know the really exact facts of how it happened, and why it happened, except that I was told to go up there by my supervisor, to get ready, pack my things, I would be there for one week, and I was never notified to take some warm clothing, that it was going to be this cold, and, "You go to this place and everythin' is provided for you, that accommodations, where to bed down and everything would be provided for you." When I got up there I had to use my own money out of my own pocket to pay for my own meals, and also to pay for my room and board for the time bein' until I got impressed cash.

SM: And later on you were reimbursed?

JL: Right. Reimbursed, but as an individual, I can say that if any federal officer or any officer is assigned to go to any reservation, I think it is that reservation's responsibility for the officer to be treated and to be rendered accommodations, that they are here to help the reservation, instead of being told that, "You go there, and this is where you're gonna go," and instead of helpin' us get everythin' all ready for us, we had to go on our own. And I spent almost 16 hours on patrol, out in the cold.
SM: Was there a lot of shooting?

JL: Yes, at the time I was there, there was a lot of shooting, and we had the FBI, the United States marshalls, the federal police officers from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and also from the Pine Ridge police department.

SM: Did you meet any of the principal people, like Dick Wilson?

JL: No, I never did.

SM: Did you meet any of the AIM leaders?

JL: No, I never met any of the AIM leaders, because I was out in a rural area, and patrollin' and there wasn't time enough for me to meet anybody, because at the end of the hard days' patrol activities, I was too bushed and too ready to go to sleep, and that was it.

SM: You know there's been a tremendous amount of interest in that incident, because of all the publicity it got, and that has annoyed some Indian people too, that it got so much publicity, when other things they were doing did not get any publicity. But you protested in your memorandum the treatment of some of the prisoners?

JL: Yes, and also the treatment of their personal properties that they confiscated, and I notified the supervisors up there directly, but they told me that they would do something about it, but they never did, 'cause I was out there as a person that didn't know anythin' about the reservation, or any of the people.

SM: Did you see any instances of prisoners being treated badly?

JL: Well, they've been treated badly at the Pine Ridge police department.
SM: By whom?

JL: By the Pine Ridge police officers.

SM: How about the federal officers?

JL: Well, the federal officers were conducting themselves as people, you know, as they were trained to do so.

SM: They were trained to be careful?

JL: They were trained to be careful, and to be careful what not to say and what to say.

SM: You were one of the federal officers, so all of you and your colleagues there were trained to treat prisoners properly?

JL: Right.

SM: So the federal officers did?

JL: The federal officers did.

SM: But it was this other police unit that was a little rough?

JL: The Pine Ridge police department was the one that mistreated them. Even the vehicles that the American Indian Movement left on the roadway, which were being confiscated by the United States marshalls and the FBI, they deliberately went ahead and vandalized it and destroyed it, by shooting at it and busting windows and doors.

SM: Who did that?

SM: It makes it a good deal more authentic to hear this from you, because you've been trained to observe, and also you were there on the side of law enforcement.

JL: Right. And like for Indian police officers to fight their own people, it looks kind of ridiculous.

SM: Did it make you feel uncomfortable?

JL: Right, feel uncomfortable. I know they're fighting for a cause and everything, but, like I said, instead of using violence, they should go ahead and proceed this matter in the proper way. They would accomplish more, and they would have a better environment with other people, instead of getting people involved that aren't supposed to be involved. Like some of these urban Indians that don't have a reservation were involved, like from New York. They don't have a reservation, or they don't have a set tribal governor or wherever to go back home to and say, "This is my reservation, this is where I come from." It's just a name that they carry that they're Indians, but they're urban Indians.

SM: Some of them were there too?

JL: Right. I didn't agree with that, and I think if it's going to be done, it's to be done with the people in that reservation, that are havin' the conflict.

SM: If you were having some kind of a problem here, you would expect the Taos people to handle it?

JL: Right. Like we had one group called themselves, The Brown Berets. It's a Chicano movement. They wanted to come here to the reservation, but
the governor and the lieutenant governor went down and met 'em halfway down the road here, almost west of here, and told 'em that they didn't want no trouble, and they should leave the reservation.

SM: What did they want to come up here to Taos for?

JL: Aw, they just wanted to protest their rights and everythin'.

SM: Oh, their rights. But they thought this would be a dramatic place to do it because of the fame of your location?

JL: Right. So they told 'em to go back, and the local people went down and met 'em face to face and told them to go back, and they agreed, and they left us and left the reservation alone. I forgot to tell you that the tribal governor and the officials that are elected here, are not elected by the people. They are elected by the senior council members of the kivas. It is not a public votin' or anythin'. Nobody has a hand in balloting in a public votin' place, it is all done by the senior council members, and they're the one that selects who is gonna be the governor next year, and the office is only held for one year. So the senior council members, they have to select a person for governor and lieutenant governor, secretary and a war chief, and a lieutenant war chief.

SM: So then the Taos government here is not a democracy including everybody with a vote, but it's run by the senior council members. Now how are they chosen?

JL: Well, they have been designated down the line from the kivas that they should hold this office.

SM: The kivas are your religious centers?

JL: Religious centers. It's like a church. The rules are made by the
senior council members. Like now here, you don't see any T.V. antennas or electric wiring of any kind. Everything is all the way it was a long time ago. They want to keep it, because if you go and compare this reservation and the different reservations down south, you go into a reservation, and the first thing you'll see is electrical wiring, a telephone pole and T.V. antennas. But Taos is famous for the way they have preserved this reservation, and the senior council members want to maintain that tradition as long as they can.

SM: How many people here?

JL: Seventeen hundred people here.

SM: What is the altitude here?

JL: Seven thousand feet.

SM: It gets cold up here in the wintertime, doesn't it?

JL: Right. And also, like for myself, I'm not married any longer, I'm divorced from my wife and everythin', but I have three kids, they live in California with their mother, and like everybody's inter-married now. Everybody's married to an Anglo or to a different Indian or to a Chicano. So it's not a person is married to each tribe, it's all inter-married to different people.

SM: Is that tending to break down the control of the council?

JL: It's getting down to that this young generation wants to get into the modern ways of life, but as long as the senior council members are strong and are powerful in this reservation, they won't be able to over-run the council. So that's the way things are, and we got our tribal religious activities which start from January on through
September 30th, and then starts off again in December.

SM: How old is the pueblo?

JL: Well, I can't tell you exactly how old it is, but I'm still a young person, I don't know much of the history yet. It might date back to the 1600's.

SM: So it's quite old already?

JL: 1600, 1500, maybe around that area.

SM: Some of the Hopi towns over there are even older?

JL: Right. And the National Historical Society have designated this Taos Pueblo as the historical place.

SM: It's protected by the federal government from change without permission of the people here. Very interesting place. This is the first time I've been here, and I've been fascinated.

JL: Well, any time you feel free to come up here and enjoy yourself, and any time you bring your students, feel free to stop by my place and let me know, and I'll be glad to take you around the place.

SM: I'll tell them that too.

JL: I'll be available any time as long as God is willin' and I'm still around here.

SM: Jerry, I'd like to talk to you for a couple of hours really, but I know your supervisor just called in to have you take care of something, so the long arm of the law calls, so, thank you very much for your time.

JL: You're welcome, sir.