TAMECIA MOTLOW, Seminole
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This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

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

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

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Sam Myers:
I'm talking today with a young Seminole Indian from Florida who is a student here at Florissant Valley, and his name is Tamecia Clarence Motlow. Let's pin down that "Tamecia." [Täm-ë-se-å] Am I saying it right?

Tamecia Motlow:
Yes.

SM: Ordinarily you have to stop and explain that--it's an unusual name--so you use Clarence more often?

TM: Yeah, that's true. Not too many people can pronounce it very good.

SM: You are from Florida?


SM: What part of Florida is that?

TM: Everglades. The south, south of Lake Okeechobee.

SM: When we think of the Everglades we usually see in our mind one great big swamp. Is that right?

TM: Yeah, that's about what it is--all jungle.

SM: Jungle, swamp, water?

TM: Alligators.

SM: There must be dry land someplace where people live.
TM: Yeah, that's where I lived.

SM: Are they islands? Can you describe that place--it must be a fascinating place.

TM: They built a turnpike through the Everglades now--it's Alligator Alley--and as you go through, it's all just swamp water, but, you know, there's dry land where it's higher elevated.

SM: And they built up a roadway and they call that "Alligator Alley?"

TM: Yeah, that goes all the way through. I think that's about the only way you can get through now goin' across, like if you want to go from the west coast to the east, you know, get you from Fort Myers to Hollywood.

SM: In the Everglades, a place that is fascinating and I think just a little bit scary to a lot of people, because they think of alligators and snakes and water and wilderness, jungle--it is all those things, isn't it?

TM: Yeah, I think it's isolated from everybody, you know, just on the reservation. I think there's about . . . maybe a couple hundred Indians livin' there, that's about it.

SM: Is there a reservation there?

TM: Yeah, it's Big Cypress Reservation. There's three reservations down there, and that happens to be--I don't know how you can put it--the one that's most inadvanced, I guess you could say. Less advanced than the others.

SM: The most primitive of the three? Is this the one where you grew up,
or where you lived as a child?

TM: Yeah, I lived at all three of 'em, but I think I lived there the longest.

SM: How was it that you lived at all three of them? Is that a little unusual?

TM: No, I think they just moved around a lot or somethin'.

SM: Your folks moved from one place to the other so you ended up living in all three reservations. What are the names of the other two?

TM: There's Big Cypress, there's Brighton--that's real close to Lake Okeechobee, and the other one, they just call it Hollywood 'cause it's right there in the city, it's just right there in the metropolitan area.

SM: Hollywood, Florida, is a good-sized town?

TM: Yeah, it's a population of 100,000, I believe. Well, you can't hardly tell--it's just one big strip of cities stuck together, you know. It's like St. Louis County, so you can't really tell if you go in one city or out, you know, unless you go into Miami.

SM: The everglades are in the southern part of Florida, aren't they?

TM: Yeah. It's a little bit north of Miami, because Miami is right there at the bottom, but it's real close to the boot hills of Florida, it's right there in the Everglades.

SM: Have you any idea how big the Everglades are--how many miles across?
TM: Oh, probably about close to a hundred miles wide, it's close to about a hundred square miles.

SM: A hundred miles each way? That's a big area.

TM: Yeah, it's pretty big, but they chopped a lot of it up to make a national park, you know. I don't remember what they call it.

SM: There was a road, and they were talking about some kind of a dam to control the water there a few years ago, and wasn't that stopped by the government?

TM: Well, I don't really remember, but they got irrigation canals goin' through, you know. They have hundreds of locks that they control goin' in and out.

SM: Trying to keep the water level reasonably constant?

TM: Yeah, so when the tide comes in or somethin', it fills up, you know, and the water comes up.

SM: Is it salt water?

TM: Oh yeah. When it comes in they got like sharks and stuff comin' in in the regular canals, you know, and a lot of the Indians down there, they go giggin'.

SM: Gigging for sharks?

TM: Or fish, whatever. They gig lots of sharks, you know, comin' in after the tide's come up.

SM: Will you explain gigging?
TM: Well, I guess for anybody to understand it, it would be like gigging frogs with these big gigs, but it's a real long. . . .

SM: It's a long spear with two prongs on it?

TM: Probably about four.

SM: And then you stand in a boat or on shore and get the fish in the water?

TM: Yeah, go down in canoes and gig 'em. They do a lot of that.

SM: You were born on one of the reservations?

TM: Yeah, Big Cypress.

SM: And didn't you tell me that part of your ancestors were descended from Osceola?

TM: Yeah. I used to be an Osceola when I was real little, but I don't really understand how the thing works, 'cause a lot of 'em . . . I don't know, they get married Indian style you know, different ways from what whites, whatever . . . to get married and live together, then separate, and whatever, you know, a lot of kids runnin' around, they knew who parents are, but they. . . .

SM: Becoming married, being separated or divorced is, according to Indian law, easier than according to the other laws of this country?

TM: Yeah. The only thing . . . I don't know if you understand what clans are. We have different clans.

SM: A clan is a group of families.
TM: Yeah. See, I belong to the Panther Clan, and they got all these clans, and I don't really quite understand how it works either, 'cause when I moved I was like 13, and I understood it a little bit then, but not fully.

SM: Well, the other members of the clan, like some man or woman of the clan, would be sort of an aunt or uncle to you?

TM: Yeah, you're related to 'em in that order, but not as blood, you know.

SM: Not blood relations, but you're related because you're a member of the same clan?

TM: But, like if you belong to the Panther Clan. If I wanted to marry a girl that belonged to the same clan, I couldn't marry her, even if I wasn't related to her.

SM: There's no intermarriage within a clan? You have to go outside the clan? You were born on the Big Cypress Reservation and you lived there as a child?

TM: Yeah, I think I lived there for maybe five years or so. Then I just moved around.

SM: You moved then to the other reservations. Do you remember going to school for the first time?

TM: Yeah, I went to school in a little town of Immokalee.

SM: Is that on one of the reservations?

TM: No, it's just outside of one. I went to school there for, I think
maybe till about third or fourth grade, then I moved.

SM: Now when you went to school, before we leave that first school, did you speak English?

TM: I didn't really know it, not too good.

SM: You spoke Seminole at home with your mother and father and the other kids?

TM: Yeah, that's all they spoke.

SM: You don't have any accent that I can detect. Maybe we'll find a word someplace that you'll say differently, but, you grew up then as a child speaking only Seminole—you had a few words of English?

TM: Yeah, then I just started gettin' into it more when I started goin' to school.

SM: During school did you have to speak English?

TM: Yeah, in order to make it, I guess you could say.

SM: Was the teacher white or Indian?

TM: She was white.

SM: Did she always speak only English?

TM: Yeah.

SM: There's a big thing about this right now in the country, you know.
TM: I think she gave me a break, though, a lot of times, 'cause I was probably a little slower than most of the students, 'cause I didn't quite understand what she was sayin' all the time, and I think she tutored me a little bit maybe.

SM: She did go out of her way to help you?

TM: Yeah, someone did, in my English, you know. 'Cause I had to learn what was goin' on.

SM: Well, that's nice, because so many times we hear the opposite of that, especially in the older days when the slower students were not only not helped, but were punished if they didn't speak only English. Can you remember when you were speaking both languages easily, talking to the other kids? How old were you then?

TM: I was talking both ways until I came up here in 8th grade. Then I just completely lost it.

SM: From the 3rd or 4th grade all the way up to the 8th grade you were speaking both languages?

TM: Yeah, 'cause my mom, she can't speak English too good now, you know, so, I mean she can understand what I'm saying now, but then ... she still speaks Indian to the kids.

SM: Does she speak mostly Seminole at home?

TM: Yeah, that's about all she speaks really.

SM: But she can speak some English?

TM: Yeah. She can get around now as far as English goes.
SM: May I ask how old your mother is?

TM: She ain't that old, I think she might be at 40 now.

SM: That's a little unusual to see someone in her 40's and still speaking primarily Seminole. This indicates how isolated the people can remain if they want to.

TM: Yeah. They, the people on the reservation, they don't get out and run around to see what's goin' on 'cause they just, you know, in their own little community or whatever you want to call it.

SM: They want to stay there, they like it there?

TM: Yeah, they have it real good, you know. Of course, you got the BIA that really helps them out.

SM: You said they have it real good. You know lots of Indians in the country feel that they are, well, some say, horribly oppressed. "The most oppressed people in the world," to quote one of our Indian militants the other day. And yet, it wasn't that way down there on the Big Cypress Reservation?

TM: No, I guess we're lucky, 'cause I know there's a lot of reservations that just aren't even places where you can live, really... .

SM: Some of them are very bad.

TM: I know that they're pretty bad off; I think that they should fix it up or somethin', but the Seminoles have it pretty good, I gotta admit. They're pretty well advanced. It's just like a regular subdivision, you know, houses and stuff. I have pictures, I guess I could come across them.
SM: Nice homes?

TM: Yeah, they're regular homes.

SM: Paved streets, lights?

TM: Oh yeah. They got a park right there, got two ball diamonds, a big gymnasium they just built.

SM: School?

TM: No, they just got a big gymnasium. I think most of the kids there, they go to school in Oklahoma. They go to school with the Choctaw at Chilocco.

SM: Oh, you mean they leave there and go away to school. After what grade do they leave?

TM: Well, any year.

SM: Do you mean any time you want?

TM: Yeah. They go to school there, 'cause it's all Indian school, you know. They go to school at Fort Sill and Seneca, I don't know if you've heard of 'em. Well, they go to school there. I think my whole family all went to school there.

SM: Went to school in Oklahoma?

TM: Yeah, except for me. I came up here.

SM: A moment ago you said something about going away to school when you were around 12 years old.
TM: Yeah. Thirteen, I came up here.

SM: You came up to the St. Louis area?

TM: Yeah.

SM: Well, why did you come this way instead of Oklahoma like your brothers and sisters?

TM: You got me. My sister was livin' up here--she married a guy from up here. Originally I think my sister was gonna come up here and stay, and I was just gonna come up and stay, you know, just for the winter. Just to see what was different.

SM: To see what it was like?

TM: Yeah. Then I ended up stayin' up here all this time. But I'd go home. It was quite different for me, I guess you could say, 'cause I never ran around with--it sounds funny to say "white people" you know, but I guess. . . .

SM: Well, you don't have any particular aversion for any of these terms, do you? Like Indian, non-Indian, whites or blacks? It doesn't bother you?

TM: No.

SM: You're very well-adjusted, I'd say--you don't get disturbed by these things?

TM: I used to, when I used to live in Hollywood.

SM: That's Hollywood, Florida, and you were 10, 12 years old?
TM: Yeah, that's when I was gettin' maybe from 5th grade to 8th grade. There was a lot of us still livin' there, I think. In my grade, you know, there was about, maybe 15 kids my age that were still hangin' around, you know, and a lot of 'em were goin' to school.

SM: Fifteen Indian kids?

TM: Yeah. We were goin' to a public school there.

SM: And the public school was predominantly white?

TM: Yeah, it was all white.

SM: All white except for the 15 of you who were from the reservation?

TM: Yeah, and we never ran around anywhere; we just stayed on the reservation a lot. And the kids, the white kids, come through on bikes, think we were crazy, we'd kind of gang up on 'em and stuff, you know, get 'em down and tear up their bikes and stuff. And I was, I guess you'd say, anti-white for a long time.

SM: Well, did they pick on you at school?

TM: No, not really. But, we never caused trouble, I guess, except for when we were home, you know, on the reservation.

SM: But when you were at home on the reservation, and the white kids came through, you figured they were sort of trespassing and you didn't like that?

TM: Yeah, we were actin' kind of crazy. I got over that when I came up here, though, 'cause . . . they still use that term "white people," though, down there in the offices that they have. We have these two
big offices down there in Hollywood—that's where they run the main thing, you know—they control everything there, you know, as far as real estate and finance and all that, coming from Washington, whatever. And they talk over the phone in Indian, and it sounds funny for people, you know. People come in, they're sittin' down, whatever, and they're sittin' there talkin' Indian over the phone, and I guess it's kinda different for someone that hasn't ever heard that. But it's all right, I guess. Then I came up here, and I lost completely everything as far as the Indian language.

SM: You don't speak Seminole any more? You've forgotten how to say it? You can't say, "Hello" in Seminole?

TM: I forgot everything.

SM: Really? That's quite remarkable. Usually you'd retain a few words.

TM: If I would have maybe not left until now, I think I would retain, you know, a lot of it, 'cause my sister, she can understand everything, and she's been away for about eight, nine years now.

SM: She's older than you?

TM: Yeah.

SM: She was older when she left home?

TM: Yeah. Around my age now, 19, 20, something like that. Now she's 26, I guess. They moved back.

SM: Can you tell me any more of your experiences back home in the Everglades on the Big Cypress Reservation—going to school or going fishing, or alligator hunting or whatever you did?
TM: I used to go huntin' a lot with my grandfather and this guy, this older guy, his name's James Billy. He runs the tourist attraction we have down there--he wrestles the alligators, and he's the manager of the place, you know. And he just runs everything, but he used to do a lot of huntin', and I used to run around with him a lot--bring home all kinds of weird stuff--animals. Tried to make rattlesnakes and rabbits live together, and just all kinds of weird stuff.

SM: And it doesn't work.

TM: No. It didn't work.

SM: Do you mean you'd catch a rabbit and a rattlesnake and put them in a cage together?

TM: Well, he tried, but it didn't work.

SM: Do the snakes try to eat the rabbits?

TM: Yeah. Did it!

SM: They did eat them?

TM: No, just killed it.

SM: The rabbit was a little bit too big for a snake to eat?

TM: Yeah, it didn't eat it.

SM: Don't they swallow them whole?

TM: Yeah, they just eat like mice and stuff.
SM: Whatever is small enough that they can swallow? You caught rattlesnakes frequently then?

TM: Yeah, I used to play with 'em a lot, but now I hate 'em. Yeah, I'm completely different. My life style has changed so much, you know, it's unbelievable.

SM: Would you be afraid of a snake now?

TM: Yeah. I don't even like to touch 'em.

SM: But then you used to play with them.

TM: Yeah.

SM: Well, how would you play with a poisonous snake without getting bit?

TM: You got me. We used to do all kinds of crazy stuff, but I can't do nothin' now.

SM: You don't like to do it any more?

TM: No. I just caught a lot of 'em, 'cause I don't know why.

SM: Are there a lot of them in the Everglades?

TM: Oh yeah, moccasins, and...

SM: Water moccasins, rattlesnakes, all kinds of snakes?

TM: That's about the only two I know that were pretty dangerous, I guess. All the others were just black snakes and stuff.
SM: Black snakes, cottonmouths?

TM: Yeah. We couldn't hardly go swimmin' too many places, you get leeches and stuff stuck on you. But we did a lot of swimmin' in the Everglades 'cause, you know, there's water everywhere.

SM: You could find places where the water wasn't infested with snakes or leeches, or alligators?

TM: Yeah. Alligators. They don't really bother you, 'cause they just lie around, unless they're, you know, unless you bother them.

SM: If there's a big old alligator lying on the bank sunning himself, and you go swimming 20 feet away, he won't bother you?

TM: No, I never got bit. And I know that they wrestle them down there. I've seen a few people get bit by 'em, but we used to go swimmin' all the time with 'gators lying around, and they never jumped in the water and chased us or nothin'.

SM: What do they go after when they go in the water? Fish or ducks or something like that?

TM: Yeah, just whenever they get hungry they feed those alligators chickens and stuff, you know, whole fryers. They just pitch 'em in there, they swallow 'em whole. But I seen 'em come up, and I seen a dog drinkin' some water out of a canal, and it came up and bit its head off.

SM: Did it tear it right off?

TM: Yeah, they do all kinds of that. Those are weird animals, I guess you could say.
SM: They're reptiles, aren't they? And they get big?

TM: Yeah, I seen one that was about 16 foot long, but then, like in South America, I seen one that they said was 32 foot long.

SM: Well, tell me more about wrestling alligators. They don't do this out in the swamps of the Everglades, they do this in pools, don't they?

TM: Yeah. I had some posters of it, but I don't have them any more. It's in Hollywood at that tourist attraction that we have there, and they have alligator wrestling shows, you know.

SM: Is it an Indian village?

TM: Yes, it's right next to the reservation, but they've made a replica of like maybe 100 years ago.

SM: Of an old Seminole village?

TM: They have souvenirs and the works--everything you can think of.

SM: Plus wrestling alligators.

TM: Yeah, wrestling 'gators. They got snake shows and all kinds of stuff, you know. And every February, every year, they have a Tribal Fair, you know, there must be a couple thousand Indians from all over the States, whatever, come down. They have a three-day thing, you know, a three-day fair.

SM: Do you have any idea how many Seminole Indians there are in Florida now?

TM: Oh, the last I heard I think there's about 1,500. Maybe not that much.
SM: They seem to be increasing rather rapidly, because 150 years ago the population was down to around 100, after the Seminole Wars.

TM: Yeah, that's pretty small.

SM: Is it also true the Seminoles are one of the very few tribes that never surrendered to the Union troops?

TM: Yeah. From what I hear, we're the only unconquered Indians in the country.

SM: And you're still there, and proud of it?

TM: Oh yeah. Yeah. I don't know, I think it's a big joke now, but they're supposed to own the state of Florida, you know, and I think when Nixon was President he was supposed to pay for the state--I think he was supposed to pay like $45,000,000 to the Seminoles, but that never got around.

SM: Well, you know, in several cases lately the various Indian tribes around the country have been bringing suit in the Indian Claims Courts, and they've been winning.

TM: Yeah, well, someone was in the office there that was an Indian, I heard, that wouldn't accept a certain amount of money one time--I think it was about 10 years ago, and that was pretty much money and they didn't accept that, and I think they should have. I guess they figured they'd get more money, but I don't think they would.

SM: They refused to accept it because they thought their claim would be larger?

TM: Yeah.
SM: Back to your own personal life now, Tamecia. You went to grade school through 4th, 5th grade, and from there then you came up to St. Louis?

TM: Eighth grade I came up.

SM: And you didn't have any particular problems; in fact, like you were saying, one of the teachers--at least some of them--even gave you a little extra help. So, would it be safe to say that generally your experiences have been on the favorable side? You haven't felt all this abuse and oppression and being picked on that so many people talk of?

SM: No, I didn't have it that good when I was down there, 'cause when I used to live on the reservation and Big Cypress, I don't think we even had electricity.

SM: That's not surprising. I can remember when electricity was just coming in to the rural areas all over the country.

TM: Yeah, and, well, they didn't really work anywhere, what I can remember. They just did a lot of huntin', you know, eatin'. I bet I ate a lot of deer meat—that's all I ever ate, I think.

SM: There's lots of deer in Florida?

TM: Yeah, small deer. They're not as big as up here, you know. They got small deers down there.

SM: Did you have a brother who used to wrestle alligators?

TM: Yeah, he still does it, but not very often.
SM: Is he older than you?

TM: Yeah, he just turned 21 this month, I think. He is going to be 21 this month, 21 or 22.

SM: Tell me about wrestling alligators--that sounds frightening to me. What do they do?

TM: Well, they got a pool there, and they got all these 'gators lyin' around. They usually have two of 'em in a pool where they just dive in the water and drag one out--they do it different now, 'cause the last time I was down there they don't really wrestle 'em, not like they used to, you know. They get 'em out and they don't do a whole lot with 'em. They drag it out. . . .

SM: How do they get hold of it?

TM: They used to grab it by the tail and then go on up by its head.

SM: They grab it by the tail and then work up to the head? Do they hold the mouth open?

TM: Yeah, that's after they get 'em out of the water. They get 'em on the land and . . . let's see. They get 'em on the land and then they get on their backs. They try to turn it over, 'cause it's pretty hard to turn over. You know alligators, see they got that big tail that will knock you silly. So after they turn it over, all the blood rushes to their head, and they pass out real fast.

SM: Do you mean upside-down?

TM: Yeah, they pass out. They have this alligator call. You can call 'em and that wakes 'em up, and after they get up they open their
jaws, you know, for the people, and then they close back up, then they hold it underneath their chin while they're sitting on top of the 'gator, and then, they don't do a whole lot after that. They do about three or four things with it, and that's about it.

SM: And then throw them back in?

TM: Yeah. They did a lot of stuff with it that I can't remember.

SM: Do the 'gators actually get a little used to this?

TM: Yeah. I think they're used to it now, 'cause they don't do a whole lot of fightin' like they used to, like I can remember when I was a little kid. Them things used to really wrestle.

SM: Did you wrestle some when you were little?

TM: No, never. I was going to. This summer I was gonna go home and wrestle 'em this summer, but I didn't go.

SM: You kind of lost your taste for snakes and 'gators and stuff?

TM: Yeah, I'm pretty domestic, I guess you could say now.

SM: Well, you're getting to be more like the rest of us. They'd scare me!

TM: Yeah, I couldn't get out there and grab one and have one chew on my leg, you know, 'cause I seen this one guy, he got bit. He just took a big hunk out of his arm.

SM: Those jaws are powerful, aren't they?

TM: Yeah, you can't shut them things after they open them up.
SM: Unless they want to shut them and clamp down on you.

TM: Yeah. That's if they want to bite you, you know. They open 'em up, and they shut 'em back. Those 'gators that they wrestle, I think they weigh about 200 pounds, and they're about maybe seven foot long. Those are the small ones.

SM: They don't wrestle the big 13, 15 footers?

TM: No, you can't hardly haul them things around, 'cause that's a lot of weight. They probably weigh 500 pounds.

SM: Do they get that heavy? You know it would take a lot of food for animals like that to grow that big.

TM: Yeah, they have food all day long.

SM: But then, in the wilds, in the Everglades themselves, what are they living on?

TM: They eat a lot of fish, whatever swims. They can get ahold of ducks, if they can get 'em, birds.

SM: Are the alligators increasing in numbers now substantially?

TM: Yeah, they don't know what to do with all of 'em now. I think they're gonna probably let 'em, you know, hunt a few of 'em.

SM: Have open season?

TM: Yeah, like they do, you know, a limit to so many on a kill, 'cause I think it's going to be over-populated with alligators pretty soon.
SM: And then they'll tend to kill off the other game, like fish and ducks, and so on. They have to keep it sort of in balance. That's if the balance is not disturbed by human beings, I suppose. We have to worry and work at it. Well, then, anything else you can think of in Florida, before we leave there and go on up to the St. Louis area?

TM: No, it's just two different lives, I guess you could say, from down there and up here.

SM: Yes, because down there you were living actually on a reservation, and your life, your language, your outlook, everything was about 90% Indian--you were using the language with your folks and your sisters and brothers. By the way, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

TM: I have three brothers and three sisters, seven in the family.

SM: Are they all older than you?

TM: No, I have two older and four are younger.

SM: And are the four younger ones still down in Florida?

TM: Right now because they're out of school they're all back down there, you know, until August.

SM: Where do they go to school?

TM: Well, my sister, my younger sister, she goes to school at Chilocco—I don't know if you've heard of that, in Oklahoma, and my brother that's a little bit younger than her, he goes to school out at Utah, it's a Indian school out there.

SM: Do you know the name of it?
TM: No, it's close to Brigham, somewhere around there. He goes to school out there, and I talked to him the last time I was down there on spring break last semester. And my little brother, the youngest, and the littler sister, they go to school right there in Hollywood.

SM: They go to a regular public school, just off the reservation?

TM: Yeah.

SM: There aren't any Indian schools in Florida, are there?

TM: No, there isn't any.

SM: None that is like Haskell or Chilocco. Do you think it's an advantage to come to a school like this, which is not an Indian school, or would it be an advantage to go to, say, Chilocco, where your brother is going?

TM: Well, if you're lookin' for a better education, I think you'd probably profit more from goin' to school here, 'cause if I was goin' to school at Haskell, you know, like I was goin' to go originally, I've talked to a lot of guys that went there, you know, that lived down there and came back; they all get together and party too much, you know, and they don't get their studyin' done or anything, where I'm up here, you know; I do some studyin', but I still, you know, party, but I get more studyin' in than I would if I went to school with those guys. I would never, I don't think, I could make it.

SM: It's like everybody is from the same place, we're all the same group, let's have a ball?

TM: Yeah, it's all good times.
SM: Well, you have more strangers around you here, and so you tend to work a little more. You did well in my class.

TM: Well, I guess I got lucky.

SM: I thought you worked hard, I didn't think you "got lucky."

TM: Well, what happened was I took a lot of notes, I guess, and studied. That's what it was. 'Cause in high school I never really studied, 'cause I didn't really like school too much.

SM: Are you liking it better now?

TM: Oh yeah.

SM: It's more fun, isn't it?

TM: Yeah, it is. It's a lot more. I'd like to get a degree.

SM: Now when did you come up here then in the 8th grade?

TM: At Christmas, you know, the vacation, the two-week vacation. I came up then, that was in 8th grade.

SM: You went to high school here?

TM: Yeah. Pattonville High School, it's out on the other side of Northwest Plaza. It used to be right across from the Northwest Plaza, that's the old Pattonville High School, and they built the new one on McKelvey Road, out there at Creve Coeur Mill.

SM: Were there any other Indian kids going to school there?
TM: Not that I know of.

SM: It always does amaze me that there are so few here at Florissant Valley. So, you went to school out there at Pattonville, and you had no bad experiences or no particularly good ones, it was just a comfortable going-to-school experience?

TM: Yeah, everybody was pretty nice. I guess you got to be noticed a little more bein' Indian.

SM: You were a little conspicuous?

TM: Yeah, but we all ran around together.

SM: And then you graduated there?

TM: Yeah. I went a year at Ritenour too.

SM: Ritenour High School?

TM: Yeah, 'cause my brother-in-law moved across the border line of the district.

SM: A different school district. Which one did you graduate from?

TM: Pattonville.

SM: And then you decided to come here to Florissant Valley?

TM: Yeah. I was gonna go home, and go to school down there, and then they wanted me to go to school at Haskell, and I didn't really want to 'cause I knew that I wouldn't, you know, get no studyin' done, 'cause they just party too much up there, so I thought, well, I'll
just go to school up here for about two years, and go on back and
go to school down there.

SM: You would go to school here at Florissant Valley for a couple of
years, and back to Florida then? Going to what school there?

TM: I wanted to go to the University of Florida at Gainesville. I
wanted to go there, 'cause they have a pretty good program there,
as far as what I'm gonna do, you know.

SM: What do you want to do?

TM: I want to be an anesthesiologist.

SM: Anesthesiologist and work in a hospital?

TM: Yeah.

SM: And have you seen the news lately about the high cost of malpractice
insurance? You're not worried about that?

TM: No.

SM: I think that'll probably be worked out before you get there.

TM: Yeah, it probably will.

SM: Is that your major that you're aiming at now?

TM: Yeah, that's what I want to do, but I have it a little rough in my
chemistry class, 'cause it gets a little rough.

SM: Chemistry's hard for you?
TM: Yeah.

SM: I almost flunked it too.

TM: I almost did too. I didn't do too good in it. It was my fault, 'cause I didn't study.

SM: But if you determine to make it, you surely can. You seem to have the native ability.

TM: Yeah, I really want to make it, 'cause there's, that I know of, not too many Indians that's went to college and got degrees, but except for the people that are workin' down there in the offices for the BIA.

SM: There are a lot more now. Arizona has lots of Indians, and as recently as 10 years ago the proportion of Indian students was almost nil, and now it's up to almost equal to the proportion of population in the state, so there's been really quite a bit of progress. Now, Tamecia, you came here from Florida, went to high school here, living with your sister and your brother-in-law, and then coming to Florissant Valley. Of course, you've got tuition and everything to pay; you've had a job, various jobs; you're working now, but, did you get any kind of grant or aid or scholarship or anything like that to help out?

TM: No, I just have to go back down there to get any kind of grant, you know.

SM: Back down to Florida?

TM: Yeah. They have forms that you have to fill out to get this grant,
and it's not hard at all, 'cause they have funds for education, and they have plenty of it. They always have money left.

SM: Who has funds?

TM: The BIA.

SM: Oh, the BIA has funds to help Indian students?

TM: Yeah, I guess the government sends money down there, couple thousand dollars, whatever it is, you know. They pay for everything, 'cause I got, for this last semester that I went, they gave me $1,500 for just one semester.

SM: Fifteen hundred dollars for one semester to cover your tuition, books and board and room?

TM: Yeah.

SM: That's not bad, is it?

TM: No. So for these next two semester I think I'm gonna get $3,000, so I figure that'll be plenty enough for me to get by on.

SM: From the BIA, and you have been working also?

TM: Yeah.

SM: Did you work last semester when you were in school?

TM: No.
SM: You weren't working while you went through this last spring semester, but you are working now?

TM: Yeah, I'm working now.

SM: And this fall, are you going to be working, or are you going to use your grant from the BIA only?

TM: What I'd like to do is save a little more money than what I got now, and then ... I'll have plenty of money to get by on. I don't think I'll need to work, but I want to work part-time 'cause I want to just maybe go 12 hours next semester, and I have plenty of spare time. Last semester I had all kinds of spare time; I coulda worked, but I didn't do it, so I want to work this semester.

SM: Is it fair to say, then, that Indian students can get help from the BIA if they want it?

TM: Yeah.

SM: Can all Indian students get help like that, or do you have to meet qualifications, pass tests?

TM: No, I guess you just gotta be a graduate.

SM: Graduate from high school?

TM: Yeah, you gotta be registered to a tribe, I think, before you can get anything.

SM: You have to be registered on the rolls as Indian?

TM: Yeah, you gotta be a quarter blood before you can be enrolled into
the reservation.

SM: I never did ask you. Are you full blood, quarter blood or what?

TM: As far as I know I'm full blooded.

SM: You don't know of any other ancestors that have crept in there somewhere?

TM: No. All I ever knew is that my family is all Indian.

SM: You have a nice, dark brown Indian color. Most people spend a lot of time and money trying to get a tan like yours.

TM: Yeah, I hear that all the time at work.

SM: Yes, if we could only get a tan like Clarence, or Tamecia.

TM: Yeah. I get kinda light in the winter, I guess, but the rest of my family, they're really dark down there, 'cause it's sunny all the time, you know, and they're dark to start with, and they just get really dark.

SM: Your hair isn't straight either. Do you mind if I get personal?

TM: What happened was, it used to be real straight, just long and straight. But then when I had it cut she layered it, and when it's short, it just got curly, you know.

SM: It curls up when it's cut short. Did you used to wear it long and tied in back?

TM: Last summer I guess I did. I had it pretty long, and it was all straight.
SM: But it isn't straight now. There are thousands and thousands of people that would envy you that head of thick, black, curly hair.

TM: Yeah, well, after she cut it it got like that, but I don't mind either way. I don't like to get it too long.

SM: By the way, as long as I'm talking about you personally, I'd like to mention what one of the ladies here said about you--"A charming young man," she said.

TM: Oh, well, that's very kind.

SM: Well, is it really true then, that any Indian student who has made it through high school can get BIA assistance?

TM: Well, I don't think they'll refuse anybody, as far as you're Indian--I don't think they'll refuse you, if you want an education.

SM: If you're a quarter blood or more, and apply, you can get aid to go to school?

TM: Yeah, I'm sure you can, 'cause, you know, they encourage Indians to go because they really want 'em to go, and they've got, I know they've got plenty of funds, 'cause they always have money left over after the end of the school year. It just lays there.

SM: Have you encountered any prejudice around here?

TM: No, everybody's pretty nice, I guess. But, I've had it pretty good, I guess, 'cause I'm just goin' by what my experiences are. As far as the Seminoles, you know; I've never really kept up with any other Indians. I've read a few books, I guess, but as far as I know the Seminoles they got it pretty good--they built 'em houses
and all kinds of stuff, and funds to go to school, you know, everything's paid for.

SM: If anybody wants to start a small business down there, can he get some kind of loan for that too?

TM: Yeah, I know you can. They got all kinds of loans to get you started. They got loans to build you houses, and I don't think you have to pay any kind of interest.

SM: You realize of course that some of our Indian militants wouldn't agree with you?

TM: Yeah.

SM: But they make everything look as bad as they can so they can make a case?

TM: Yeah. Well, they're still, I guess you could say, anti-white. And . . . I don't guess . . . they're just goin' by what happened a long time ago.

SM: Well, then, there are reservations, though, where conditions are deplorable right now, and it is discouraging—it's almost unbelievable, some of them are so bad.

TM: I know it's . . . I'd like to do somethin' but I couldn't do nothin'.

SM: Well, the best thing you can do is to do what you're doing—get an education—because then you can do so much more.

TM: Yeah, I'd like to be able to get a little more education behind me,
and then go back down there and I might be able to do somethin', you know, with the money they have down there.

SM: Do you know of any other Seminole Indian kids around here?

TM: No, not that I know.

SM: There aren't many. I've only run into two in my whole travels—you and a fellow named Johnny Osceola down in Pearl River Community in Mississippi. So there aren't great numbers of Seminoles like there are, say, Navajos or Sioux.

TM: Yeah, maybe that's why they have it all right down there—I don't know.

SM: Because there are so few of them?

TM: So few, and they might not have that much money, you know, maybe I'm just lookin' at it different or somethin'. It seems to me that they got it pretty good down there. The rent they pay ... my mom pays about ... maybe $18.00 a month rent, and it's a big house, you know, three bedrooms.

SM: A nice, big, new house?

TM: Yeah, it's pretty new. No, it's only about 10 years old, and that's fairly new for a house.

SM: It's an all-modern home now, isn't it?

TM: Yeah, everything electric. It's got electric heat in it--portable heating in the walls, or something.

SM: And that costs $18.00 a month?
TM: Yeah, that's all she pays, and that's all most of 'em pay, I think, and they all work and stuff, you know. My mom works at some... it's not a factory, it's some kind of... Southern Bell, or somethin'.

SM: A telephone exchange?

TM: Somethin', whatever it is, right outside the reservation. She's been workin' there ever since I can remember when we first moved there.

SM: Do they make telephone parts?

TM: Yeah, telephone parts or somethin'. She's been workin' there for a long time.

SM: Does she like her work?

TM: Yeah, she likes it. A lot of the women on the reservation work there, about maybe 15 of them or 20, whatever. They all work there 'cause I don't think you have to have good English or whatever it is, you know, to work there.

SM: If I go up to Wisconsin as I plan to next month, and run into some Menominees who are unhappy with the situation up there, would you say that it would be good for me to encourage them to come on down here and go to school?

TM: Yeah, you ought to. They should... I don't know... that'd be good, I guess, 'cause a lot of 'em just don't want to face... they just wanta take over the country--they wanta be boss--but you know you can't do that.

SM: Well, we've all got to learn to live together, I guess. None of us are going to go away, are we?
TM: No, no one's gonna be just one big boss that I know of. We gotta face it.

SM: Peter McDonald of the Navajo Tribe, the biggest tribe in the United States now, was speaking over at Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in May, about a separate nation for the Navajos. Have you heard anything about that?

TM: No. If I got into it, you know, I don't know which way I'd go. I'd probably go . . . all anti-white again . . . probably.

SM: If you got into one of these groups?

TM: Yeah, if I got into one of the groups, but I think those guys get carried away sometimes, you know.

SM: What would you do with all your white friends that you like now?

TM: I don't know.

SM: That's a hard question, isn't it?

TM: Yeah, it is.

SM: But you could understand, though, how you could get back into the pro-Indian, anti-white, because of what you've seen around?

TM: Oh, easy.

SM: And yet your own personal experiences have been rather pleasant?

TM: Everybody has been nice to me up here, you know, that's why I guess I . . . you know, I like everybody.
SM: Well, actually, that's what I was getting at. You see, this thing about the Menominees in Wisconsin. Up there, particularly since the termination of their reservation—that's been reversed now—but then the take-over of that monastery near Gresham, Wisconsin, this has precipitated a situation where the tension is great and the antagonism is bitter, and so on, and many of the students are dropping out of school because of the pressure. So I was thinking, if that situation there is uncomfortable, and if they can get help from the BIA, which you were explaining a moment ago, then why couldn't they come down here to St. Louis, to Florissant Valley, and go to school here, where they could very likely have a pleasant experience.

TM: I'm sure they could.

SM: Would they run into any prejudice here to speak of?

TM: Not that I see. It'd be good for whoever wants to come down here, you know, 'cause . . . I know they can get help from the BIA, 'cause if I can get it I don't see why they can't get it, you know.

SM: There's no better way to really find out than to ask someone like you who has gone through it. And you found that it has worked out O.K.?

TM: Yes, they could . . . I tell you, there's a lot of schools in Florida that have scholarships just for Indians . . . you know, just a scholarship to go to school there. You know, just different scholarships to go to school down there, and whoever wants to go can go, but they're not being used.

SM: They're not being taken advantage of? A lot of people could go to school are not doing it?

TM: Yeah.
SM: Well, then, we should be free to make our own decisions too. In other words, we can't say, "You have to go to school," if they don't want to. If your name is John Smith you don't have to go to school if you don't want to either.

TM: Yeah. They could ... Indians, just different tribes of Indians could move down to Florida, and I know they could live at the reservations there and go to school, 'cause if they wanted to I know they could, 'cause I know a lot of guys from Oklahoma what used to come down and live there and go to school--not a lot of'em, but I know some of 'em did.

SM: And most of the Seminoles go to Oklahoma for college?

TM: Yeah, they all go out of the state, most of 'em.

SM: And you came here, and I'm glad you did, because I'm glad I had a chance to know you. Can you think of any other experiences you had here at Florissant Valley that would help one of these prospective students, say up in Wisconsin or South Dakota? Any problems to overcome, any fatherly advice for them?

TM: No, just, you know ... come here and go to school. It would be a good experience.

SM: Just come and go to work?

TM: You don't have to study that hard.

SM: You don't have to work that hard?

TM: No. I did pretty good here.
SM: And when you finish here then, you're going to go back to Florida to the University of Florida?

TM: Yeah, I want to go to school at Gainesville.

SM: And you can get a scholarship to go there?

TM: Yeah. Full scholarship. Yeah, from what I understand I can go to school as long as I want, you know.

SM: And become an anesthesiologist? It's kind of hard to say, isn't it?

TM: Yeah. Yeah, it is, it's a long word.

SM: That's a good profession, they earn a good income.

TM: From what I hear they make pretty good.

SM: And in the major city hospitals they're in great demand.

TM: Yeah, at that school they have a special course for just minorities that want to work in medicine, whatever you call it, doctors or whatever.

SM: You're working over at an apartment complex. How is the job going?

TM: Pretty good.

SM: Do you live there too?

TM: No, I'm stayin' with a friend of mine now that I went to school with and stayin' there for the time being.
SM: Are you anxious to get back to work?

TM: No. I wouldn't mind takin' the rest of the day off.

SM: Well, you've got a good job, haven't you?

TM: Oh yeah, I like bein' outside.

SM: You're outdoors most of the time, cutting grass, fixing windows?

TM: Yeah, changing light bulbs, just general maintenance.

SM: Is it a big complex?

TM: It's pretty big, yeah.

SM: Do you look after the swimming pool?

TM: No, they got a guy that does that. He sits around mostly, 'cause there's not a whole lot to do to a pool, you know. He just keeps it clean and makes sure no one drowns in it, you know.

SM: He's a life guard too?

TM: Yeah. I think he worked there last year--he's a pretty nice guy.

SM: Have you worked at this place before or did you just get the job this summer?

TM: No, this is the first time.

SM: How did you get the job?
TM: I just went and applied over at LPC. Have you ever heard of Lincoln Property?

SM: Is that a real estate firm?

TM: No, that's who owns all these apartment complexes. They own all kinds of 'em—it's a big company, I think their main office is in Texas, and they just have some complexes here that they own.

SM: I thought of one thing more I'd like to ask you. You said that you let all the pictures you had of the family go back—that're at home now?

TM: Yeah.

SM: So if you get a chance to get some of the pictures, for instance, your mother, your father, your sisters and brothers, pictures of the home back there, or any pictures of back in Florida, or when you were a little guy. . . .

TM: Oh, I had a newspaper I was gonna bring you that they publish, you know, our reservation, they publish a small newspaper and I was gonna bring it, but I forgot it.

SM: Well, the next time you're out this way, and if you have those things, we can copy them—we can make the pictures that you have into slides, they'll reproduce.

TM: Yeah, I ought to drop it off sometime durin' the week, 'cause I know it's real interesting—the newspaper. It's about, maybe 10 pages, and it's got articles of everything—of just everything, you know. They even have a part in there about how you can get help from the government as far as bein' Indians, you know, these funds. You were
sayin' that you're supposed to be able to get any kind of help, you
know, as far as goin' to the hospital, medicine, whatever.

SM: Talking to you today, we're learning about these things; and here
you are, an actual living proof that it works. You may have helped
a lot of people that otherwise simply don't believe it does happen.

TM: Yeah, that's if you wanta make it. I just gotta wait until I get a
degree before I can help, before I can do anything. I'd like to be
able to go out West and do somethin' for some of the reservations
out there, 'cause I know it's pretty bad out there.

SM: Some of them are. When I get back I'll show you some pictures of
some of them, and you can listen to tapes of people out there.

TM: You see, I couldn't do nothin' until I get a degree, so I can, you
know, plan on . . . I'd like to do somethin' you know. I just gotta
wait till I get some more education, go down there, and work with the
government, somehow, you know, and figure somethin' out. I'd like to
be able to do that, I'm sure I can. I still want to get a degree for
an anesthesiologist, but, I might just turn the other way, you know,
I'd like to work for the government and try to help out some of these
Indians.

SM: That would be a worthy goal too.

TM: I think it would.

SM: Well, we're just about out of tape, so I want to thank you very much,
Tamecia. It was good talking to you, and I think your conversation
and experiences will help other people.