Listening to Indians

NETTIE STANDING, Kiowa

October 3, 1975

Anadarko, Oklahoma
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Sam Myers:

Today I'm in Anadarko, Oklahoma, talking to Nettie Standing. Anadarko is called the Indian capital of the world?

Nettie Standing:

Yes, and right now you're in the Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Co-op building. A museum is on one end, and the gallery shop is on the other. I'm Nettie Standing, from Gracemont, Oklahoma. I'm the manager of this co-op that was formed by Indians in 1955, for promoting authentic Indian things, such as beadwork, featherwork, paintings, dress sewing, and we also sell records of different Indian chants from different tribes. I was born and raised west of Anadarko.

SM: Is there a background for your name?

NS: I married a Wichita by that name.

SM: What was your maiden name?

NS: Lara.

SM: Are you Wichita?

NS: I'm Kiowa.

SM: Do the Kiowas and the Wichitas live close to each other?

NS: The only thing that divides the Kiowas and the Wichitas is the Washita River.

SM: The river where the Cheyennes under Black Kettle were massacred by Custer?

NS: Yes.
SM: Do you know how your husband got the name, Standing?

NS: When the Quakers first came to this area, they started one of the first Indian schools at Riverside.

SM: That's just north of town?

NS: At that time it was a different location, and they were enrollin' all of these children. I imagine they had Indian names. They enrolled these children, and my father-in-law was one of the students that was at that old Quaker school. So he was one of the first little boys that went there, and there was a Quaker teacher by the name of Alfred Standing. He went under the name of A. J. Standing, and so he gave his name to my father-in-law.

SM: Because it was easier to remember. Have you heard any stories about the old Quaker schools?

NS: The only story I heard was how the Standings got their name.

SM: Because the Quakers I heard were very considerate and kind and gentle people when they came out and started schools and so on.

NS: I'm pretty sure the Wichitas got along with the Quakers, because at that time they had maybe ten or eleven children that went to that school, and each one got a Quaker name of some sort. The Wichitas are about the only tribe that I know of that has names such as Miller and Standing and Warden and Wheeler, names that white men would have. They don't have names like Runnin' Bear, you know.

SM: That school is still out there, isn't it?

NS: Well, that's a new location for the school. It's still Riverside Indian
school, but it has been moved. The first school burned down, and it was just east of the road there, and this is a new location for it. This one has been there I don't know how many years, but it's been remodelled, and it's one of the best lookin' Indian boardin' schools that I know of.

SM: The students come from far away?

NS: Yes.

SM: Where did you grow up?

NS: Most of my years has been spent in Gracemont, about nine miles north of here.

SM: Did you go to school at Gracemont?

NS: I think I went to every Indian school that you can think of. My first school days were in St. Patrick's Mission, which was a little boarding school. It was a Catholic school, and my first six or seven years were at St. Patrick's Mission, which is south of Anadarko. Right now they have closed the school down, and they tore down all the buildings, but they still have the mission, the chapel and the stuff there. And after I got out of St. Patrick's Mission, I attended Riverside for one year, and at that time they just had grades as far as the seventh grade. So when I finished Riverside, I was transferred to Chilocco Indian school, which is close to Arkansas City.

SM: When you first went to school, did you speak Kiowa?

NS: My father was Mexican, and I talk English most of the time, but I understand Kiowa real good. My mother was Kiowa and my father was Mexican.
SM: Was your father part Indian?

NS: Yes.

SM: So you would be part Indian and maybe a little European, like Spanish?

NS: Probably.

SM: Are your father and mother still living?

NS: My mother died when I was about the age of six, and my father died about a year and a half after. I was raised by my oldest sister on the home place, which is located about 4 1/2 miles west of Anadarko.

SM: What was the next school you went to?

NS: After Chilocco I went to Santa Fe. I took art at Santa Fe in 1934 and 1935.

SM: That's a BIA school?

NS: Yes. It wasn't such a big school when I went there for art. It's much bigger now, and the town has grown so much, I don't know if you can find the college now.

SM: After the Santa Fe school, any more schools?

NS: After I got out of Santa Fe I married, and I have seven children, three boys and four girls.

SM: Are they all in the area?

NS: I think I have three girls that's close, the rest of them are all gone.
SM: Do you see them very often?

NS: Yes. My oldest daughter works here with me, and she goes to OCLA. She goes with me whenever I go out makin' lectures. She does most of my driving.

SM: Do you lecture in the area?

NS: Yes, I've gone to OU, different places.

SM: Oklahoma University. When did you get into this craft or art work?

NS: I've been in crafts since 1947. At the time that I took up crafts I didn't know that much about beadwork. I took art, but beadwork and art is not the same thing.

SM: You don't consider art as beadwork?

NS: Well, it's art. After the years I decided it was an art. I had a hard time learning. In '47 when they started teaching beadwork here, I didn't know that much about beadwork. I could sketch, but beadwork was something else that I didn't care too much for, but I picked it up because I had a family, and we used to do most of our work, like choppin' cotton or pullin' bolls, and that's season, so durin' the winter months when I didn't have nothing to do, you can't get out, so I started takin' beadwork lessons here, in '47. So I took up beadwork and I picked it up real fast, so they took me and put me in a sewing class. Well, I picked up the sewin' real fast, so, in the meantime when I picked up the sewing, well, the store that was here, that was teaching the Indians, by the name of Inter-tribal Guild, which was sponsored by the BIA on a $20,000 grant, went bankrupt. I had learned quite a bit of this craft, so at home I started takin' orders. I'd order my material from different stores, and I just
continued until, in 1955, there was a man that was here at one time—he was a curator of this museum—and he wrote to about 100 craft workers, trying to reorganize this craft shop. All appeared was 10 out of the 100, so he decided to have several meetings tryin' to rope in different tribes, and not just Kiowas, but other tribes also.

SM: What other tribes would those be?

NS: We have several different tribes here. This co-op consists of about 12 different tribes—Kiowas, Wichitas, Caddos, Delawares, Comanches, Apaches, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, Cheyennes, Arapahos.

SM: Are they all in this area?

NS: They're all in this area, about the radius of 100 miles.

SM: Then they all do craft work and bring it to the center?

NS: Yes.

SM: What is the name of the museum here?

NS: The Southern Plains Indian Museum.

SM: And it is run by?

NS: The Bureau.

SM: The Bureau of Indian Affairs. And while you're in the same building, your operation is. . . .

NS: Altogether different. We are an Indian co-op.
SM: And you are making craftwork and art work and you have it for sale here, and your shop is within the museum building, but you're two separate operations?

NS: Yes.

SM: Yesterday you were doing some beadwork on a piece of cloth. What were you making?

NS: I was making a shawl.

SM: With beadwork on it, intricate. Isn't that hard on your eyes?

NS: It is. Sometimes when I get out of here I can't hardly see to drive.

SM: Besides all the beautiful things that you've made, you have one whole wall covered with round beaded medallions. But they're not for sale. You just made them to decorate the wall with?

NS: Well, really, it started out as a project for the World's Fair, Expo '67, in Canada. In 1965 they, the U.S. Information Bureau, gave us a job offer of puttin' out 800 or 1,000 medallions for the World's Fair, representin' this area. So for two years we had to freeze all medallions that came in, and it took us two years. We didn't get quite 800, and they were all different sizes, they run from about an inch and a half, to some of them were four, four and a half.

SM: They're all round?

NS: Yes, and they all have different patterns, none alike. They're all different.

SM: And they're made by all these various tribes?
NS: Yes. And when the World's Fair was over, they mostly discard everything. They either burn it or get rid of it. So the arts and crafts board stepped in and asked for them. And they were on burlap. They had cut the burlap across and had rolled the burlap up with all the medallions on it, so the arts and crafts board got them and sent them back.

SM: Who is the arts and crafts board?

NS: That's in Washington, D.C.

SM: Part of a government agency?

NS: Yes, that handles the museum end. We knew how much they were worth, because they had paid us so many thousands. When they shipped them back we took them off the burlap. I and my daughter repaired, I'd say maybe 80, 90 of them, maybe more. Those that could be finished, you know, fixed over. But some of them were just cut in two.

SM: How did that happen?

NS: Well, I don't know. We know how much the medallions are worth.

SM: The idea of all the work, the artistic talent that goes into them, sometimes even religious symbolism.

NS: Most of those medallions, most of them, were made by one family. This lady had four granddaughters. She had taught all of them, and I would say even 2/3 of those was made by this one lady.

SM: A Kiowa lady?

NS: Yes. But overall, consist of about 19 different workers, some of
them were not members at all.

SM: That explains then how you got them back here and you got them repaired, those that you could, and they're mounted on the wall there, and then they're just there now to be enjoyed by people who come in and they're not for sale. You can buy other medallions that have been made since, can't you?

NS: Yes. Medallions are quite high now, since the craft material has gone up. These medallions are made with seed bead, which most people now wants cut beads. You can get any size of seed bead, such as 13's, 12's, 11's and 10's, different sizes of beads, to work with. But your cut bead is a size 13 bead, and that's your eye killer. It's the little tiny bead that I was working with. It has facets, they tell us it has six or eight facets on.

SM: The seed bead is round and the cut bead has facets like a diamond?

NS: Yes. It shines and makes a better product. It's harder to work with, especially if you work on it at night. You have to have a bright light, and, well, it just glistens.

SM: Yesterday you were sewing the beads on cloth, but oftentimes the medallions are put on leather of some kind, aren't they?

NS: Yes, if they cannot get buckskin or chamois they use felt. Well, felt doesn't hold up as good as buckskin. You can edgework it and all, but it doesn't hold up as good, so if you want something nice, you use buckskin.

SM: Do you have any rivalry between the different tribes about who makes the best medallion?

NS: We have a lot of good medallion makers. Some of them are real outstanding. They use different things as a challenge, but I think
that Anadarko area has about the best beadwork. It's about the best beadwork in this area.

SM: Well, it was encouraged a great deal, I imagine, by that World's Fair. That would tend to put the emphasis on the value internationally, of this work.

NS: Well, a lot of people come in, and they look around in the shop, and they think when they come in that it's wallpaper. But when they come down looking in the counters, and they get to the wall, then they kinda get amazed. They step back and they say, "Oh, it's beads." And it's a wonder they're not wore out, they touch them, and actually see how it's on there.

SM: Do you wish you could stop them from touching them?

NS: No. When they get too worn, then we take them off and put another one on. But they've been up five years. As of today I don't think we've had any stolen. We've had some attempts, but they're pretty well cemented on.

SM: Do you glue them to the wall?

NS: Yes, they have little dials on the back, so they're not flat on the wall.

SM: Now this co-op store here. It's a co-op involving many of these tribes. Do all of them belong to it?

NS: We've been organized since 1955, but with just 10 members.

SM: Do you mean ten tribal members?
NS: Well, at that time they didn't have that many tribes, they just represented maybe five. And after that, why they're pretty picky about who they use as members.

SM: Anyone wanting to get in has to meet certain qualifications?

NS: Yes. They have to do top quality work.

SM: Does the BIA back you in any way?

NS: No, it's strictly on our own. We have never been funded, we've never had any funding of any kind. I was one of the organizers. When we first organized, our agreement we signed that if we produced the best craftwork that they would house us here with free rent. They pay the utilities and all, and that's our agreement.

SM: And you are an attraction to bring people to the museum?

NS: Yes, but we do work with the museum on shows. Now we started shows, say about 11 years ago on different craftworkers. We have exhibitions, one-man shows.

SM: Here and other places too?

NS: No, always here. Most of them are craft workers from this area. We promote their work, such as German silver, such as art work, such as beadwork, feather work, and sewing, and we've sponsored quite a few craft workers.

SM: Some people are not familiar with the fact that there was a good deal of silverwork in the eastern part of the country as well as the Southwest, and much of it was German silver. What is German silver?
NS: German silver has zinc and copper, and it has different silver alloys in it. I'm pretty sure that it's.

SM: It has nickel in it too, so it's not pure silver.

NS: I think it's harder to work with. Now I don't know. And at one time I thought I would take that up, since I just about conquered everything. I experiment a lot. When I first started, I did beadwork, 'course I took art at Santa Fe. Then I started sewin'. Then when we reorganized I let the sewing go, and I went into flat beadwork, and I have designed bags; I think I'm the only one that ever produced a beaded shawl in this area.

SM: Are these shawls practical to wear for warmth, or are they for ceremonial purposes?

NS: For warmth too, but my purpose is mainly I was fixin' a shawl.

SM: Do you have a finished one here?

NS: No, I just took one down to the photographer.

SM: How about the one you were working on yesterday?

NS: It's here, I'm not quite through with it. I've been on it all week, and I'm tryin' to get through with it, because I have several more to make. In this area they've been putting out vests for men, with the patterns. So a year ago I decided, since I'm widowed, I don't have a husband, I decided to make vests for women. So instead of puttin' felt on mine, I drew designs. Since I took art, I can draw, and I draw designs. I drew designs on these vests, and I made six.

SM: What did you make them of?
NS: Well, the first one I made with wool. Then I wanted something that could be washed, and I didn't know whether the beadwork would stand up if you threw it in the washer. So I made five more. Then I gave three of them to my daughters, two to my friends, and I told them to wash them, but they haven't washed them. So in the meantime I decided to make me a suit, a pantsuit. I put the beadwork down on the cuffs, and I put it on the vest. So I decided to try it myself. So I took it to the laundry, and I threw it in the wash; I shut my eyes, and it came out beautiful. And it was on double-knit. So I have three suits, I have washed them about eight, ten times. I've got a white suit that has dark blue on it, and it's really outstanding.

SM: A white suit with dark blue beadwork, that must be striking.

NS: Yes. And you know white doesn't stay clean, so I've washed that several times. The beadwork has stayed up on it real good.

SM: Would you explain the chant we hear in the background?

NS: It's a social dance. They do the round dance, they wear the shawls.

SM: They're playing this out in the gift shop. Now those suits you made, those vests, do you have any here?

NS: No. I'm going out to L.A. I take quite a few crafts out there. They have a show that's called the Great Western, and I get to meet a lot of craft workers. I'll be leaving Thursday evening. I take quite a few things, and then things that I've made myself.

SM: Do you sell them out there?

NS: Yes.
SM: Do you go other places like this?

NS: We used to go out to trade fairs, but since most of the trade fairs are for individual craft workers, we discontinued going. The Great Western is the only show that I go to. They have all kinds of traders there.

SM: Is it all Indian things?

NS: All Indian things, but they have a lot of traders there that come to sell.

SM: Would they be Indian traders or white traders?

NS: White. They have more white traders than they do Indians. They have a place they call the Indian village, but it's really not a village. It's located right in the center of that building there. It's located right off the Santa Ana Freeway. It's a huge building—it houses I'd say maybe 800 to 1,000 different traders.

SM: Then you have people like you coming from all over the country bringing the various things that have been produced, but you also have the traders, some white, some Indian, come there to sell their work that they have gotten from Indians. Traders selling to dealers?

NS: Individuals. And then traders buy from different... .

SM: That must be quite a thing to see.

NS: It is. I've been going there for several years now.

SM: About how many people come to it?

NS: Oh, there's so many people. They pay to go in. They pay to go in, and it's a huge place.
SM: I've heard of the potterers from the Pueblos going there.

NS: They have pottery there. I get to visit with a lot of the Indians and the craft workers, most of them are craft workers that do their own work. There isn't that many stores. Most generally I take things from just my family alone.

SM: Do you pay your own expenses?

NS: Yes. I lose money quite a few times.

SM: On the other hand, sometimes you make something?

NS: I look at it this way. Sometimes you go out there, you don't make even $1,000. But sometimes I have some of the shop's work. But mainly they buy things that they don't see anywhere else, and when I go, I take things that nobody else makes. I know how to compete against them, because there's a lot of things that they have that people don't go for anymore 'cause there's so much of it. You know, there's so many, like chokers. Maybe there's about ten different Indian salespeople and most of them has chokers, some kind or another, and I think people are just about chokered out. So when I go out there I take things that are unusual. That's why I made the vests. But the only point about the vests was I didn't have a display area. I had to put them in a case, and people didn't know what they were. If I had a place to hang them up, I probably would have sold them, but people didn't know what they were.

SM: Did you have a booth?

NS: Well, I'm the only one that buys a case. I have a glass case, where people won't handle and I won't lose anything. Most of the Indians, they have a table. They just spread their things out on the table,
and I rent a case.

SM: How many Indians would you say are there displaying things?

NS: Last year, last February, I would say there was over 50 or 60. They sell all kinds of things, but most generally they look for me, because I have my chant going, and they know when I'm there. I take a little tape recorder and I have my chant going, so they know when I'm there.

SM: You're getting to be a pretty good merchandiser.

NS: This last year when I went, I took beaded suspenders.

SM: Do they still have stretch in them, even though they're beaded?

NS: Yes, they have stretch in them. I have a pair in the car that I'm taking. They were white suspenders done in baby blue cut beads, and I made them mainly for a girl. The girls came and they were lookin' at them, and this lady came and she just took them practically out of the girls' hands, and she bought them for her son. She said he has a rock group, and she wanted him to have the suspenders. It just happened to be his birthday, and so she bought the suspenders for him. And that was the unusual thing that I took.

SM: Actually they would wear them mostly for their decorative effect, rather than to hold the pants up.

NS: Yes, but they can be washed, and they stretch.

SM: They are sturdy?

NS: They're the wide ones, they're about two inches wide, and then they have the beadwork.
SM: Well, you're actually creating new things at the same time that you're using the ancient techniques and designs of the Kiowa people?

NS: Yes, I do a lot of experimenting. I try to conquer different things. At one time when I first became manager here, my feather worker was working at the peanut mill, and he was working nights, sleeping in the day. So when I started getting feather orders, I couldn't fill my feather orders, so I decided to conquer the feathers. So it took me two weeks to put together a bustle set, which is the two-pieced deal, one that hangs from the back of the neck, and the other one from the belt with belt draggers. And at the same time we got an order for majorettes—they wanted 30 headdresses, so my children and I did an assembly line on them.

SM: What kind of cost did that involve?

NS: Well, at that time that we made them, I think they sold for around $25.00 a piece.

SM: That was pretty reasonable.

NS: Yes, but at that time the craft material was not that high. See, we buy our craft material in bulk form, so that when we run them on assembly line, they just pay us the time out of the shop. Now we did it at home. We sat around the table, and some of them glued the feathers on, and some of them wrapped the bases, and some of them strung the bottom and some fixed the crown part, and we got through with them, I think it took us two weeks to make the 30 bonnets.

SM: What would they cost now?

NS: The bonnets now are $65.00, so I have conquered the feather work. I have done sewing, I've done beadwork.
SM: What kind of feathers are these?

NS: Since eagle feathers are illegal, we use turkey feathers. They use white turkey feathers. Of course we order our supplies. Either you can use a plain white turkey feather, or you can buy the imitation eagle feather, which is a white turkey feather dipped in black or brown dye.

SM: Is it the BIA which has issued that ruling about feathers?

NS: No, it's not the BIA.

SM: Is it Congress?

NS: Yes.

SM: Is it that you couldn't sell the feathers, but you could still use them in religious ceremonies?

NS: Well, I imagine, Indian to Indian you can trade. Now I'm not sure.

SM: But you are selling yours?

NS: What we have here is all imitation, they're all turkey feathers.

SM: Now these colors here, are they white-dyed?

NS: Yes, they're all white rooster hackles, and they're dyed different colors.

SM: You have such a uniformity of color there in the purple and the yellow, that they must be white and then dyed. There should be a substantial supply of white turkey feathers, because white turkeys are raised by the millions.
NS: Yes, but at the time when we organized, things like that was plentiful, that was 20 years ago. But now there is so many craft workers, and so many craft shops, that are ordering so many different things, and so many Boy Scout troops playing Indians, and there's some supplies that we can't get at all. For instance, the hackles. They didn't use the hackles at one time, they just used the fluffies. But now they use the hackles to make them prettier. Hackles are the ones that's on the tip there. It comes off the breast of the rooster.

SM: Is there any jewelry made here?

NS: Our jewelry is German silver which is made locally. We have four silversmiths, and we carry very little turquoise. I've been thinking about it pretty strongly, because most stores carry turquoise, and it's getting to be quite a thing with most of the stores. And I, as the manager, am thinking about eliminating it, because I do not know whether it is really Indian made.

SM: Can't you get it from sources where you know that it is? For example, let's say you got it from some Indian workers over at Zuni, New Mexico.

NS: Yes, but some of the Indians are even ripping themselves off by using imitation turquoise. See, I don't know that much about it. Well, I do know turquoise, but not that much. See, I buy from two or three traders that say, "The products that I buy are Indian made." But I think that this turquoise is something else. If an Indian's gonna make it good, I think that he should put a stamp on it, either a date or some sort of a stamp to determine who made the product.

SM: Well, what do you think is the future of this beautiful Indian jewelry that's so popular?

NS: I . . . I don't know. I think it's gonna just wear itself out.
SM: It's been going on for over a hundred years.

NS: Well, in the last I'd say about four years, it's been going pretty strong, and you can buy it even in fillin' stations, and you can buy it in restaurants, and I think the only place that you could really get good jewelry would be at Window Rock at a Indian-owned and operated shop.

SM: At Window Rock they have an Indian-owned and operated shop that sells retail only, doesn't it? So that dealers can't go in there and buy it and take it to their shop and resell it?

NS: Well, I don't know that much about it.

SM: But you could depend on it being Indian made if you bought it at Window Rock from the Navajo people?

NS: Well, at one time we used to buy from the Navajo Guild. It's called the Navajo Guild. We bought from them. But now prices have gone up so high, and I think instead of putting money in turquoise—we have to eat too. Our Indians in our area has to eat just like the Navajos or the Hopis or the Zunis.

SM: You encourage your own native products here?

NS: Yes.

SM: Let's get back to the German silver. Do you know a man named George Silverhorn?

NS: Yes, George was a cousin of mine. He was a real good worker that could conquer different things. He did art work, and, oh, there wasn't anything that he couldn't do. He did feather fans, and, oh, quite a few things. He was quite good. He was one of our members.
He was one of our first silversmith members, and there was another silversmith, he was Kiowa too. His name is Murray Tompaho. Those two were the first silversmith members that we had here. I think they became members in 1963 or '62. George is dead, both of them are dead.

SM: You have a remarkable display out here of German silver in the museum.

NS: Yes, most of that is George's work.

SM: That big cross in there is his?

NS: And most of those are Murray and George's work. They did real tedious work.

SM: How is everything going, then generally, Nettie?

NS: It's kinda slow this time of the year. We're in October now.

SM: So you're going to take advantage of the slow period and take off for Los Angeles and get into that big show?

NS: Yes, I go out twice a year. I have a daughter out there, and I get to visit with my grandchildren, and I don't have to pay for it.

SM: I'll bet they are proud of Grandma and her work?

NS: Yes, but I enjoy myself. I enjoy lookin' at different crafts, and I get ideas how I could do things better, or I pick up something that I see I might could do better myself, and they get a lot of ideas from me too.

SM: The arts and crafts now that you are encouraging here in the area, is this producing a substantial amount of income for local families?
NS: Yes, some of them depend on it. We have several artists that belong to this co-op that depends on it for a livin', and this co-op is set up so that at the end of the year, if you're a member, you will get a certain percentage of what you sold, or what you've purchased that is a finished item.

SM: Do they bring their things in here on consignment?

NS: No, it's bought outright. We buy it, and then we sell it. Now we don't just sell what the craft workers make. We try to handle books on different tribes in the area for school purposes.

SM: You can get books from the University of Oklahoma Press?

NS: Yes, we order some of our books from there, and we order some from the Nebraska Press. And we get quite a few books, little pamphlets from Chicago, Milwaukee. And we get a lot of these little pamphlets on dolls. We try to keep a bunch of books there for college students. Most of them are Indian books on different tribes.

SM: The work you are in, that's a whole facet of Indian life, native American life.

NS: It's been interesting to me. I used to go out to Riverside. I and my daughter would have these closed circuit television shows we would put on for educational purposes, and for a while I couldn't get to the idea of coming out on television, but now I've been on television quite a few times to show my products, the costumes that I make, and explainin', so it doesn't bother me that much any more. It's really good to work with this, because I enjoy doing crafts, and that's all I do at home now that all my children is gone, and I stay home and do a lot of beadwork. But we're getting ready to celebrate our 20th year, the co-op, and I'm very proud of it, 'cause, as I told you,
we've never been funded, but I think we've done a real good job.

SM: Just surviving is good business management, and you're the manager.

NS: I've been the manager for about 15 years. The first two years it was organized in 1955-'57, I managed the shop, and then I took over in '61.

SM: I would say it's a great credit to you. Nettie, I want to thank you very much for a very interesting hour.

NS: It's nice to have met you, and I hope that through the tape they may learn something.