Listening to Indians

JIMMY WILLOW FOREST, Blackfoot

September 23, 1976

Brentwood, Missouri

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:
    Today I'm in Brentwood, Missouri, talking with a young man named Jimmy Willow Forest. Willow Forest is two words, isn't it, Jimmy?

Jimmy Willow Forest:
    Yes, it is.

SM: And it isn't hyphenated. It's two words, and that's your last name as it appears on your birth certificate?

JW: Both of the two parts of the last name have two different meanings. Willow meaning, what my interpretation of it is, and why it was presented to me with this name Willow is the willow tree bein' able to bend, and it always returns to the same place, and the forest bein' close to Earth Mother.

SM: Good. Jimmy, you're a Blackfoot or Blackfeet?

JW: I'm a Blackfoot. From the American side.

SM: I want to ask you all about yourself, but you had something you wanted to mention. Do you want to do that now?

JW: I'll do that now. This has no date on it, and the title is, "I Want To Tell You My Heart," it was wrote by Chief Joseph:

Around the council fires tribal affairs were settled without benefit of written words, and young men attended so, and they could hear the speeches and observe their delivery and consider the weight of the reasons. The arguments and the speakers and the trial counsels were men of immense prestige in war or council or both. They were also men of dignity and ability, well-trained in oral translation. The speeches which would do credit to any Athenian orator should dispel for all time the myth of the Indian as ignorant savages. [sic]
And this is borrowed from William R. Cormack, this is one of my more favorite ones.

SM: What is it?

JW: Indian Oratory.

SM: Indian Oratory, by Vanderworth. Do they tell about Chief Joseph? He was quite a man, wasn't he?

JW: He is one of my more favorite figures, you know, because he was a peaceful man.

SM: But when he had to, he became a regular military strategist.

JW: He was, very much. You know, there's stories that I hear about him, you know, that you don't pick up, that I picked up from people, you know that have been handed, hand to hand. And the times whenever they were at the 30-mile point from Canada, when the Cavalry made their last camp, it was snowing at that time of the year, and the night before the morning they captured Chief Joseph, they found moccasin tracks ten feet from where the soldiers were sleeping. I mean, like if they had a fork in the road, they said, "Well, we got 'em captured here in this canyon, and it's impossible for him to take women and children and old men up this one side of this forked canyon," he would take the side there. You know, when you have a driving force behind you, it seems to work, and I think that's in everything, not just our nation alone.

SM: The story's a remarkable one, and now I want to get your story. Can I ask you where you were born, where you grew up?

JW: I was born in Grand Canyon Reservation.
SM: That's near the Grand Canyon in Arizona?

JW: Right. Near Phoenix. Closest town would be Phoenix. And my father was a white; exactly what he consisted of I don't know. My mother, she was a Blackfoot. She was raised on the reservation. My grandfather, he lived on the reservation most of his life until his later years he got off.

SM: Do you mean the Blackfoot Reservation?

JW: Right. My actual blood grandfather. But the grandfather that raised me on the Navajo Reservation, he was quite a remarkable man. He was somewhat of a holy man.

SM: What tribe was he from?

JW: He was Navajo, so I was raised as a Navajo. Now I'm striving to get back with my own people and everything else, because I feel that I owe myself that. I was gonna return back to Montana, but I've had a spiritual thing; the Great Spirit has guided me and told me that my work ain't done out here yet.

SM: Here in the St. Louis area?

JW: Well, maybe here, or Chicago or Arizona or anywhere, but it's not time for my own self-indulgence to go back and learn my own culture, because I have things to learn out here, and I have things maybe to help people with.

SM: Things you learn here might help there more?

JW: Plus there's work I have to do too, you know, with people that's comin' up. Me and a good friend of mine, a mutual friend, we was
talkin' about there's somebody in between, you know. Here you have the people on the reservation. To them, this world don't exist down here, as you may very well know. And then you have your white society. Now somewhere in between there's gotta be somebody that's gotta help. When he comes off here, I mean. I think it's a day when a kid off the reservation gets a scholarship or somethin', is goin' to college, and he don't know nothin' about this world out here, how it works or anything else, is the day that we can take him into our homes, or any way that we can help him, show him how it works out here. Because, even on the reservation where I come from, if you told 'em about things like running water, I mean, this is 1976, and they wouldn't know how to explain it. You could maybe explain it in a simpler term, you know, that water runs free into your house; not that it runs through a pipe, because they don't know what a pipe is, not because of ignorance, it's just that they never seen nothin' like this. And some children, well the schools have somethin' to be desired, and they are improving every day, missionary schools. It was very pitiful whenever I went. This was quite a few years ago.

SM: Did you go to school there?

JW: Missionary, in eighth grade. And then I had to get out and work for my family.

SM: Did you go to school any more after that?

JW: No, I haven't been to school since.

SM: So then you're making up for some of that now, aren't you?

JW: I'm self-educated. I literally mean that. I actually say that for the simple reason is when I stepped off the reservation I couldn't speak a word of English. I had to use children's books to learn how to read.
SM: You spoke Navajo then?

JW: Right. And I had to use children's books and such to learn how to read, and what I gathered from people talking, and such as this, and plus, I still, I have a lot of trouble. See, once you've learned Navajo and you spoke Navajo all your life, English becomes very difficult for the simple reason is, you see, I speak what you call the ancient Navajo, which was taught to me by my grandfather. It is like now, more the Navajo kids that come out the words are more broken up, like Lakota, you say La-ko-ta, but with the ancient, the words blend in, they don't break. They don't blend, and there's no stopping between words, you know. So this even made my accent for English even harder, and this is why sometimes I get talking too fast, and it's just like the child, whenever they're first startin' to walk, they kind of walk too fast, and they stumble a little bit. So you have to excuse me.

SM: Well, are some of the sounds in English difficult for you then?

JW: Yeah, they're very, very difficult. I can say the big words. The big words I can say, but they don't always sound right. They ain't right, I know it, but I can say 'em, but they just verbally don't work right with me. You have to understand I've been away since I was 16, so there is some things I have forgotten. You know, I talk to a lot of Indians, and a lot of the Navajo language is somethin' like German because you get that German sound.

SM: It's a German guttural sound. Several of the other Indian languages are like it, and some of them aren't too, I guess. There are several distinctly different language groups. Well, Jimmy, after you finished your days in school at the 8th grade, then did you go away from the reservation?
JW: No, I worked on the reservation. I worked on a cattle ranch.

SM: As a cowboy?

JW: I worked on a cattle ranch until I was 16.

SM: Did you ride and rope and all that sort of thing?

JW: Yeah. I used to ride in rodeos and everything else. I rode in Tucson and Phoenix.

SM: What did you do?

JW: I rode bulls quite a bit. I couldn't rope because I just didn't have the coordination for it, to jump off, you know. I can rope, of course, but for like bull throwin' and such as this, I just couldn't never get the coordination to grab the bull by the horns. There ain't much of me anyway.

SM: It takes a little weight?

JW: There's a lot of leverage to it, but it's mostly weight, there's a lot of weight involved, there ain't quite enough of me to do that.

SM: Mostly you rode bulls?

JW: I rode bulls and horses.

SM: That seems to me the most dangerous thing in the world.

JW: I tell you, it's a two-minute eternity sometimes.

SM: Playing football is gentle by comparison.
JW: Yeah, but this is what we learned. Whenever me and my brothers were raised, we played games involved with horses; everything was involved with horses. Your Indians are raised with horses, were raised with horses like we were. Things are changing. Now they're gettin' dirt bikes.

SM: Do you miss horses now?

JW: Oh, I do. I lost my horse that I had for about 10 years, it's been about two months now.

SM: Did you have the horse here?

JW: I had him in southern Missouri. I had a man takin' care of him. He got into a barn and ate a lot of corn, got into a corn bin that was for hogs and went out and drank a lot of water, and, of course, he swollled up.

SM: That killed him?

JW: Right. He was an Appaloosa, and I had him for quite a while.

SM: The Nez Perce raise them, don't they? They're good, sturdy horses, aren't they?

JW: Oh yeah. They're good work horses. I had him to the point where I could guide him with my knees and my feet.

SM: By a work horse now, you don't mean a plow horse? You mean a horse for working as you ride with cattle?

JW: I could talk to him and tell him, like if I roped cattle by the head, and I needed him to take up some slack, I could say something to him and he would back up a little by himself.
SM: About by 16 you were doing this. And then when did you come back East?

JW: Well, I come up here and I was living under a foster program, a foster-parent program, and I come up here and I was living with some people. They were very good to me.

SM: In St. Louis?

JW: Yeah, in St. Louis. Her name was Bonnie Lane, and she and her husband, Oral Lane, they were very good to me, and I was very pinned in here, and I didn't know exactly what I wanted at that time, being young, I know that I didn't want to go to school at that time, so I went in Service.

SM: You're not very old right now, are you?

JW: I'm 26 right now. I'm still very young.

SM: You look even a young 26.

JW: So I went in the Service until I was 20 years old.

SM: Which branch of the Service?

JW: I was in the Army. I got malaria in Viet Nam, and had to go to Germany to recuperate, mentally, because I was a field soldier; I was involved in mental problems, such as I did have quite a bit of emotional turmoil over there, and they give me a little recuperation in Germany; I was there about a year and a half and I finally got out. Since I've been out I got married to one woman, she was Cherokee; and this was a case where she was pregnant before we was married, and I married her for the reason, and of course the marriage didn't work.
And we lived up in Chicago, we was livin' in the Indian ghetto in Chicago. Somethin' was very upsetting up there that I found out, and I don't understand why the government is doing this, and I don't even know what the program really actually consist of. They're givin' these people on the reservation money; they're givin' them $50.00 and givin' them a train ticket sayin' there's jobs in Chicago, all the jobs you want, all you have to do is just go up there, here's $50.00 and a ticket. People go up there, and you know they don't know how the society works up there or anything else, or how to even go about gettin' a job up there.

SM: Is that this relocation program?

JW: Yeah. And the poor people are up there, they don't know what to do, they don't know where to go; they step off the train, they don't even know where they're at, and there's nobody from the government there to show 'em or anybody from HUD to help 'em with housing. I mean, they're there. I mean, do they know to call HUD? I mean, who's HUD?

SM: It must be quite a shock.

JW: It is, and a lot of the people, after they get into the Indian ghetto, they finally found out where the Indian ghetto is.

SM: You were living there?

JW: Yeah, I was living there.

SM: What part of Chicago is that?

JW: It's what they call the South Side, but, of course, there is no south side to Chicago, really, but it's a 5-block square area, and
it's your typical ghetto. I was makin' enough money where I coulda got out if I wanted to. I was makin' good money. I was workin' for Republic Steel, and USS. I'm a welder. I was makin' about $9.50 an hour, but I was stayin' there to help the people out. I was workin' for some months as a counselor.

SM: Where did you learn to be a welder?

JW: I have an ability. I'll work for $1.50 to learn something for a couple of years, and I did. I worked a small job learnin' how to weld for $1.50, $2.50, somethin' like that, until I learned good enough to where I thought I was worth the money, then I went to the big guys.

SM: After you came back from the Army?

JW: Right. The only training I got from the Service was they taught me how to kill people. That's true and I know that, but that is actually all they did teach me how to do.

SM: Have you any idea how many Indian people there are in Chicago?

JW: I would say you would have a good 5,000 or 6,000.

SM: Well, someone said Chicago probably is one of the bigger Indian centers in the cities. Phoenix is another, Minneapolis is another.

JW: Like when I mentioned Indian ghetto. That's exactly what it is. It's exactly like Harlem in New York.

SM: Have you ever been there?

JW: No, I haven't been to New York, I'm just usin' that as reference.
I've heard so much about it.

SM: How long were you at Chicago then?

JW: I was there for about three years. We saved money and everything, and got money together and everything else, and then I moved down to southern Missouri around the Popular Bluff area.

SM: Before we leave Chicago now, you said something about working as sort of a counselor to the people arriving. Can you describe a case or two of those people coming from some reservation some place, and how it struck them when they came to the city?

JW: There is like older people especially. The younger kids adjusted a little easier. But you get your people who are not old, but, like 35 for example. There was one man, John Bowll, and he come up, never been off the reservation in his life.

SM: Do you know which one?

JW: He was a Ute. And he came off the reservation, the only school that he had was missionary school, but he had the whole, you know, high school equivalent, and he got up here and just simply couldn't adjust, he become an alcoholic. He had emotional turmoil; he was doin' things that were not necessary, such as bringin' up old tribal grievances between one tribe and another, which wasn't necessary, and things like that. He just couldn't adjust, and then one day he opened up the window, and he smelled the pines, and he was gone the same day.

SM: He went back to Utah?

JW: Um hm. For the simple reason he couldn't adjust.
SM: Can you think of another one from some other area?

JW: There was one. A woman and her child had come up here. Now they had sponsored themselves. Her husband had left her, or something, I'm not sure exactly, I didn't never get quite clear on that, and she come up and she was workin' for a while in a small place makin' pretty good salary and everything. What she was doin' was tryin' to keep the baby alive. She was havin' trouble gettin' the commodities and such as this, when they had the commodity program, and she was havin' trouble gettin' commodities also, and she come up here to work, and eventually she had a little trouble adjusting at first. Then she started to get into the system, but then it's like a invisible force was there--I've seen in several people the problem actually occurs in--you know, they say, "They do it this way, so it must be worth it," so she turned to prostitution, because she wanted to make more money. She makes more money, and right now she don't even know where her own heart is. She don't know what she believes in. She has no people of her own. I'm not condemning her because she turned to prostitution.

SM: She followed the example that she thought looked like it would work. Which creates more problems.

JW: Now she's lost, and to this day, as far as I know, she's still doing the same thing.

SM: And the child?

JW: Who knows.

SM: You don't know. Yes, well, these experiences are hard for people who haven't ever been close to them or been involved in to understand. Then you came down to Missouri after your years in Chicago?
JW: Yeah, and I had a little nest egg put away. I built me a house down there, and I was workin' as a police officer down there in my spare time. It wasn't like a part-time job, it was a full-time job. I put an eight hour shift in, but you know, somethin' to make a little extra money, plus what money I had saved while we were buildin' my house. So I built my house, and I built that one and led to another one and led to another one, so I built another one for somebody else. I've lived a very good life down there, and I was very happy, because I was doin' things I wanted to, and I was doin' all my crafts such as this, you know. The work I was doing I didn't even feel like I was doing, it wasn't like a police officer's job like up here, it wasn't half the hassles that they have up here. And I was very happy down there until we started havin' marital problems, and she wanted more, you know. A certain amount of greed had set into her. We were livin' what you call a middle-class life, and the money was just comin' in, you know. I mean, we was livin' off the money that I had in the bank, we was livin' off the interest.

SM: And your income as a policeman?

JW: And that too, which was a very reasonable income, but she wanted more and more and more. So this was one of our downfalls why I come to a divorce, is because she was tryin' to make me something that I'm not. My values are somewhat different than a lot of other people's, pertaining to money especially. I mean, it's a working thing, I know it's necessary, because we cannot live like the old people did, you cannot live off the land any more. In St. Louis you can't. But it does work, and I like to make a decent salary. Right now I'm not workin', I'm laid off.

SM: Did you come up to the St. Louis area then? Did you go to work as a welder again?
JW: Um hm. I was workin' for E. J. Transfer over here, and I've been laid off here recently, and I'm waitin' to go back to work now. He says I might be able to go back to work in about two weeks. I called him the other day. I'm workin' on trailers and such as this.

SM: Do you build them?

JW: No, I just work on them, repair them. Like they crack a frame or somethin' like that, I have to reinforce the tensile strength of the frame.

SM: You have to understand steel, the stresses and strains.

JW: I'm your blacksmith type of welder. I mean you got guys now who are welding, they can tell you about the alloys, and such as this, which is important. I have an understanding of the alloys; I know you don't put a stainless steel on aluminum, I know that, but I just got common sense of blacksmithin', that's what I call it.

SM: That's a good way to describe it. You can also build things if you want to with metal then, another way a blacksmith approaches things. They used to be very important people, you know, some years back when they created just about everything in metal that we used. Not just horseshoes, but even spoons, forks, knives and teakettles, and all kinds of things.

JW: There's somethin' I thought I'd enjoy very much. I'd like to get into that ornamental ironwork, you know, for windows, stuff. I think I would enjoy that.

SM: I can understand that, I like that sort of thing too.

JW: Anything I can do with my hands that's creative, I'm kinda partial to.
SM: Do you work in crafts too? I see you have some things here in the house.

JW: I'm sorry I don't have nothin' completed, you know, but I've been puttin' me some tail feathers together, and I'll be startin' to put my ceremonial costume back together. My father-in-law is a Cherokee, and he managed to get a lot of my artifacts and dancing things.

SM: Oh, when the break-up came. Those feathers, those are pheasant feathers, aren't they?

JW: Yes, the wing is there. Those are pheasant feathers down there too. Now this here, those are small eagles from not the tail, but the under part. Those were give to me many years ago.

SM: This current regulation that's come out about feathers has caused a lot of problems, hasn't it?

JW: No, we want it. I'm gonna be makin' me a full headdress pretty soon, and I'm gonna use all imitation eagle feathers. I do not want real ones.

SM: Can you buy imitation feathers? They look just like the real ones. Who in the world makes them?

JW: There's a place, supplier, he's in New Jersey. I'm gonna pick up the catalog this afternoon from Mr. Lees, it's called "Gray Owl," and that's all they do. Like, for example, I can show you.

SM: Oh, these are the feathers and they're synthetics? They're beautiful. I'd swear they were real. And that's a manufactured feather?

JW: They're chicken feathers.
SM: You've got a whole box of bright red and some pure white feathers.

JW: I got blues and blacks.

SM: I've seen these in craft shops where you make an ojo and put them at the ends, for example.

JW: Like, how many eagles do we have in this world left, you know? Not very many. They're going down in population, and I would rather use a synthetic feather than jeopardize the . . . you know.

SM: Now, this is a chicken feather?

JW: Yeah, just chicken feathers.

SM: But you call them synthetics because they're not the real eagle or hawk feathers. Do they manufacture feathers out of plastics?

JW: Yeah, they sure do. Like these here. At one time . . . these here are elk teeth.

SM: Real ones?

JW: Yeah. These are real elk teeth. See, at one time this would be bone, it would be from a rib of anything from a deer to an elk or something such as this, you know. This would be used as bone at one time, but this is fibre. Now the breastplate that I will be making very soon, it will be all made of bone.

SM: Can you still get real bone?

JW: The same supplier, he does have some supplies where he is able to get--do things like that. I mean, for example, like you're talking
about tryin' to get all the way back usin' the same thing, one example is this choker. On necklaces, medicine necklaces and all that stuff, they used fingers, from the forefingers. You just don't do that no more.

SM: There are things like the wing bones and the leg bones of birds--they're hollow to start with, aren't they? And then some of these can be drilled.

JW: Right. Like those elk teeth. Those are drilled.

SM: Do you do quite a bit of this sort of craft work?

JW: I'm doin' it now. I'm gettin' all my supplies back, I'm goin' up to pick up some late this afternoon. Once somebody finds out you're doin' it, they start sayin', "Well, would you make this for me?" And I love to make things for people.

SM: Do you do it for nothing, or do you have a charge for it?

JW: When I do charge people, this is what I do. Say I do a piece that's worth $20.00. Now when I'm sayin' $20.00, $5.00 for materials, $5.00 for my labor and $5.00 of it's gonna go to the American Indian Society. I'm gathering old clothes and such as this, you know, and everything, and me and Mr. Lees are storin' 'em up and everything else, and we're gonna figure out some way. I know a lot of truckers and everything from workin' at E. J., and I'm gonna see if I can get 'em while they're empty by the reservation and deliver 'em up there for me for nothin'.

SM: By the way to identify Mr. Lees. What's the correct name of the organization of which Mr. Lees is the president or chairman?
JW: He's more or less, just kinda holds everything together. We don't actually have what you call a council.

SM: It's the Association of American Indian People, isn't it?

JW: It's all of us pullin' together, all of us tryin' to work together. You don't have to be an Indian to be in the society.

SM: It's an organization to bridge the gap between all the peoples, isn't it? It would be an obvious question then, since you're used to working in metals, are you going to get into silverwork, silversmithing?

JW: Eventually.

SM: I've seen in some of the schools this winter, I think at McCluer High School, they're having a class in silversmithing. That would be a good way to get started, I suppose. I want to ask you more about the Blackfoot Reservation in Montana. You've been thinking about it a lot, and I guess you've decided not to go out there right away?

JW: Well, like I said, you know, they may take me tomorrow, but I may never be able to grasp it, but I have been pre-trained, if that's the terms you want to use, and I do have the ability to interpret when the Great Spirit speaks to me. Not always.

SM: Sometimes you feel Him giving you messages that you should carry out?

JW: He's always with me. My grandfather's always with me. I have literally been in trances where he has come out and spoke.

SM: That's a remarkable experience.
JW: I'd like to tell you a little about this. It's very, very hard for me to explain, but I'll try to get it across as best as I can. Like I said, I do stumble sometimes, and I get about two sentences ahead of myself. But I gained a lot from it. I said, "Well, I've done a lot out here, and it's time for me, I want to get back to my own people." I want to get my own culture together; I want to learn more such as this, and in my belief, I believe that all your life is planned. You have a purpose for every time--picking up this ashtray, such as this is all prearranged. There's a reason for everything you do. So here I am, and I'm in the frame of mind where I said, "Well, it's time for Jimmy Willow Forest to live for Jimmy Willow Forest, and not everybody else," and you can start to grasp now what I am sayin'. He was showing me. I was rolling in self-indulgence--nobody but me, you know--and this is not my purpose in life. And it took me about three days of turmoil--somebody would mention to me something about the reservation, or such as this, "What are you gonna do up there" and it would literally just give me a gut feeling inside. Something wasn't right, but I knew something was coming, and it was gonna be a few days. This is why I gave no answer to some people, you know, and some think I'm very rude to people too. I get that way whenever I do get like that, and it finally come to me in the morning. I can't really explain to you, I can't say it's like a vision or a voice talking to me. It just happens, and I says, "Joane, it was cut and dried, we're not gonna go to the reservation, because there's some more work for me to do out here, the time is not right." There's no way that if He ain't ready for me to return yet, if He ever does want me to return, that I can stand in front of council and speak from my heart, and them accept me. There's no way. I mean, the holy men and the medicine men, and the people of the council, they would know this instantly, that I was defeating my purpose. They wouldn't be holdin' it against me that I was a half breed, or it wouldn't matter if I was a white man, green, or anything else, but if I'm speakin' from my heart, and it's part of the Great Spirit's plan, I'll be
accepted, and it finally come to me that I knew that. Now what it is exactly I have to do, I can't even honestly tell you yet. I don't know.

SM: So you don't know whether you're going out there. You're going to stay here for the present at least, until you determine what you should do?

JW: I'll know when it's time. He'll let me know when it's time, even if I should live the rest of my days here in St. Louis, and just working with the American Indian Society, talking to people such as you, talkin' to somebody on the street and sayin' "How are you today? Fine, I hope," and maybe getting a little point across to 'em. I'll say, "Do you have any old clothes?" That may be it. That may be it. Dancing, maybe just dancing at the shopping centers or school, and lettin' people know we are still around, such as this. This may be it here. Or me praying to my God. Now I'm very selfish with my God, because I feel that He is mine. I don't condemn anybody else's religion, I believe that we have been denied some of our religious ceremonies, such as Sun Dance.

SM: It's back again though.

JW: Naw, they won't let us use it, it's against the law. The Bureau of Indian Affairs went in and they says it's mutiliation of the body or so, and they won't let us do it.

SM: I think it's being carried on in some places, though.

JW: Of course it is. We know this only too well, but I mean as far as it is legal. Legally you can't do it. It's against the law, and the sweat lodge, with the peyote for vision and such as this, all of this is against the law.
SM: Well, peyote now is O.K. They've changed the laws on that. In fact, federal laws never outlawed it as a narcotic, but some of the states did. Even the Navajos did, you know. Then they changed their law, and the Arizona law was changed, so now it's legal in the Native American Church.

JW: There's some things that are hard for me to comprehend. Like I said, I've been out here since I've been 16, but there is some things that I still have trouble understanding. To me that has the same preference as a lady sittin' here with the rosary on, you know, and me wantin' to do a Sun Dance, for spiritual reasons, and somebody from government or whoever, comin' up and sayin', "Well, you can't wear your rosary, and you can't do your Sun Dance or hanging ceremony or such as this. And this is the way it works in my mind, this is the way I comprehend it. Now I may be wrong, and if I am wrong I wish somebody would tell me, but this is the only way that I can see it.

SM: I don't think you are.

JW: You know, even back whenever the white man first came to the country, the Great Spirit between us was mutual. I mean, there was always respect for theirs, and there was very little respect for ours, but if you ever noticed, I think up here at Jefferson Memorial, they have some pieces, if you ever look at the beadwork, they considered things like rosaries and such as this that was from a white man's God considered very holy, because it was some kind of link between them and the white man, and they would take the rosaries apart and use the beadwork on the clothes and medicine moccasins and such as this, for the simple reason they considered them holy, and this is something that a lot of people haven't interpreted about the religion. Of course you know, in my religion, and I use that term "my" because that's the only way I can say it to you, because I'm not a Christian.
SM: That's what you learned from your grandfather, the Navajo?

JW: I only believe in one person, and that's the Great Spirit.

SM: Do you have any other name for Him besides the Great Spirit? Like somebody said the Great Mystery, or the Sioux say Wakan Tanka.

JW: I mostly use that term there, but if I was speaking to my grandfather, we would call Him Lakota, Man of the Earth.

SM: Is that in Navajo?

JW: Um hm. Mostly when we refer to Him of His family, we call Earth Mother. And this is the only way that I learned to call Him. I don't think a name for Him is really important, as long as you know He is there.

SM: That's interesting.

JW: He speaks to me. My grandfather speaks to me, very loud.

SM: Is he still living?

JW: No, he died when I was 15.

SM: Just before you left out there.

JW: And he told me that I should be cast out in the world and find out what's goin' on.

SM: Did he make sand paintings and do healings and that sort of things too?
JW: Um hm.

SM: One interesting tape that you'd like, in our library, is by a young Navajo girl named Delphine Yazzi, and she describes three or four different instances like this where she was healed of different ailments, and her father also.

JW: He will come upon me and He will literally just take over, and guide me.

SM: That piece of log there. That's an interesting cut. Are you going to use that for a bench?

JW: I'm gonna use it for a footstool. I'll put my loom on my lap and I'll sit there like that. When you sit over a table like this all day I get this pain right through my shoulders. When you got a piece of beadwork that's yea-wide, I mean, you're talkin' about six hours for two or three inches, I mean consistently.

SM: Speaking of things like that, and the craftwork you're doing in the room, I saw someone who had made a centerpiece. They took a bunch of bottles and cut them off with one of these glass cutters; then they took five or six three-inch diameter chunks off a tree limb, sawed them off at different heights, and fastened them in a group and set these bottle bottoms up on those and put sand in those and candles in them, and it was a strikingly attractive centerpiece.

JW: I have more values for things such as this, you know. What I would like to do, I'm gonna try to find me a No Trespassing, No Hunting sign, because every tree I see has one on.

SM: So anyway, here you are now, and you're going to stay in this area and work and keep on with the association to see what you can do, until you get a calling, I guess you'd say, to do something else?
JW: I'm walkin' hand-in-hand.

SM: You're participating in the Indian dances of the association?

JW: I will as soon as I get my costume together.

SM: Is Richard Lees helping you?

JW: Oh yeah.

SM: He's good at that, isn't he?

JW: He's great. Me and him are very close; we're very, very good friends. I go over there all the time, and we just talk for hours, so we're very good friends, and he's got a hernia now. He's gonna help me put together all my costume. The costume that I'm gonna make may take, I mean if I worked on it eight hours a day, the way I'm gonna make it, it's gonna take me about a year and a half to make it, because all my bells and such as this. I haven't decided on my bells yet if it's gonna be beaded work or quill work.

SM: You can't wear all of these when you do hoop dances, can you?

JW: No.

SM: When you do Hoop Dances you strip down pretty much to the essentials, don't you? Can you tell me about a Hoop Dance? It's really intricate. How do you do that? How do you learn to control those things?

JW: It's really, to be honest with you, it's mostly all just coordination, and I'm the most uncoordinated person in the world. But it's just a matter of learnin' like little things, like if you kick your knee and bend it up, you can take a hoop and put it between here and there, you know, on your ankle there, and if you bend down and can touch
your knee, like this with your chin, you can take the whole hoop over your body, with no problem.

SM: You've gotta keep yourself flexible.

JW: I'm very limber.

SM: You can get too old to do that unless you stay in constant practice, can't you?

JW: Yeah. I attempted to do a little bit the other day at Mr. Lees' house. I haven't hoop danced in about five years. I could only do one hoop right now.

SM: How many did you used to do?

JW: Five. This was when I was in Chicago. We had ceremonies all the time up there—religious ceremonies and such as this.

SM: You kept in touch with the Indian people wherever you've been?

JW: I never lost them, I've always been in touch.

SM: Did you have any Indian people that you knew in Germany when you were in the Army over there?

JW: Me and twelve other guys who were in the patrol in Viet Nam, we was all Indians. We was the 101st Airborne Division, was in the Infantry. We were some of the more respected men that were in at that time. We were very proficient at it, and I'm not sayin' that to say, well, we would kill crazy or anythin' else, because we didn't enjoy what we was doing, but we were there, and we did do what we had to, and we are Americans, you know. You see, you know sometimes a lot of
people, I know Mr. Myers you don't, I know this for myself, I know this in my own heart, because I speak to you from my heart, is that there's a lot of people in this world think that we don't want to work with the white men or anything else. It's not that way. We want to work in civilization; we want to walk hand-in-hand with others. I think it's time that we stop callin' each other brother and start actin' like it.

SM: That's a good thought.

JW: It's just that time.

SM: Well, one Indian person in Washington said that the people who have come here, the immigrants, two, three, four generations ago, they don't know any other home than this, any more than the Indians do. Where could they go if they didn't stay here? This is their home too. So that's what you're saying, I think, that this is our home, your home, all of us together.

JW: My door is open all the time.

SM: I think we're making some progress lately too, don't you?

JW: I do too. There's a lot of things going on now that's comin' along real good, I think, you know. I don't ever push my God on our daughter. Now we sit down and we talk, and she asks me questions; she says to me one time--I like to use this as an example because it's one of my more better answers, 'cause you know sometimes they can ask some very difficult questions. She asked me, "Where does God get all the parts of your body?" And I says, "Well, you consist of everything. Now I don't mean your arm is part of a tree, a limb, but everything in this whole world is part of you. That's what made you up." And see, this is where the religions, as I pointed out
before, kinda come together. There is only one God, but it's how
you interpret it. I'm not sayin' mine is right or yours is wrong,
or anybody else's. It's just that there is one, and the interpre-
tation of it varies, you know. But whenever you look at the basics
of it, it's just the same. I mean, that was an appropriate answer,
and I do believe that. And as far as her, I never push it on her.
I never say, "Well, I want you to believe in my religion," for the
simple reason that this is her option.

SM: How old is she now?

JW: She's five years old. This is her option. I mean if she wants to
go to church or anything else, or if she wants to follow her own
religion or such as this, I mean, she's a fairly well bright child,
and it's her option; it's as simple as that. I will not ever
impress my religion upon her. If she asks me something now, if she
says, "Well, I hear you speak of the Great Spirit, could you explain
that to me" and I try my best to give her my interpretation; I will
try to explain why we do these certain dances.

SM: Now growing up with your grandfather, the Navajo man, that won't give
you any problems when or if you ever go up to the Blackfoot people
in Montana?

JW: No.

SM: Because it's only a matter of interpretation?

JW: The culture just changes very little. Between all the nations, I
mean, from Mohawk to Navajo, the lifestyle is different, of course,
but the basics, the bare basics does not change that much. This is
why we're always able to communicate with each other. Even if you're
a Sioux or if you're a Crow or if you're a Canadian Blackfoot, or if
you're an American Blackfoot--well, I call a Canadian a "Blackfeet," and I can an American a "Blackfoot."

SM: An interesting point--do you know which is correct to say--Blackfoot or Blackfeet, or doesn't it matter?

JW: What I've gathered of it is that's my interpretation of it, the way you tell the difference, it's just a matter of tellin' the difference between the two tribes. Because, see, our tribe descended from the Dakotas durin' the Indian Wars.

SM: Do you mean the Blackfoot in the United States and the Blackfeet in Canada?

JW: Um hm. See, durin' the wars, the Dakotas, they went against the whole nation at one time, and besides the Sioux they were some of the more mightiest warriors in the world then. But you're talkin' about a time somethin' like B.C. The dates I don't know. This is what has been handed down to me by word of mouth from one person to another, and we originated from the Dakotas, from which we fled. The Dakotas fled at one time; that's why there's some Dakotas in the Utes, and they're in Apaches; there were a certain amount of Dakotas that fought with Apaches, that descended into them, and they were one of the biggest nations besides the Sioux at one time. That we know of now. Of course, they were known as Lusas then--not too many people know that. I was speakin' to Mr. Lees about that. He said he heard of it, but he never got into it, but at one time the Dakotas as we know 'em now was one of the largest nations there was.

SM: They still are, I think, the second largest in the country now.

JW: And we descended from them, see, and they fled to Canada, part of 'em durin' the wars between the tribes, and some of 'em stayed in Montana,
we know now, and the rest went to Canada, and that's how that happened. That reservation's been there for years and years.

SM: Well, of course, people were there long before the reservation. Well, Jimmy, is there anything else that we should get on this tape?

JW: Yeah, I like to go over this. How I fit in with my woman is, she, at this time of our life, is part of the plan such as I mentioned before, the plan that I met her, because she's very good for me, and I'm very good for her. It's very right between us, because we love each other very much; we love our daughter very much. She's very understanding with me; of course, she's white, but her heart is in the right place, both of her feet are on the ground, and she's havin' a little trouble now; there's times she becomes angered and such as that because of the injustices done. See, this is what we was talkin' about before, about the material that is put out. Sometimes they tend to push, force-feed you that, the great mis-justice has been done. Well, this is somethin' that she gathers, see, and I try to interpret this conception of it, and I know that there's been a great mis-justice. Of course there has, we all know that, but that is in the past, and I think tomorrow is a better day than today, and as long as there's people like me, and as long as there's breath in my lungs, I'm gonna try to see if I can make this society between the white men and me work. I believe AIM should exist.

SM: The American Indian Movement? Do you belong to it?

JW: No. My brother does. I believe it should be there. It has to be there for our nation, for the simple reason it consists of warriors.

SM: Do you mean for our Indian nation?

JW: Yeah. It has to be there. Their opinions are just as valid as mine, I feel. I do not condemn them, but what I do condemn is such a things
as Wounded Knee. Now those poor people up there--I don't approve of this kind of stuff. I think their tactics were a little bit bad. If they can do somethin' by violence, it depends what they're doing too. I'm really goin' into somethin' deep now, especially with Ann, and I believe that they have very much of a purpose, but don't do stuff like they did at Wounded Knee. There's people up there at Wounded Knee that still can't go into town without bein' afraid of bein' shot. Sure, they were up there, and they did their thing, but they didn't leave anybody there to back 'em up. Now those poor people are sittin' up there and they're tryin' to work... they stole from the art museum up there and everything else, and this is all wrong. This I don't approve of, and I cannot condone that, but I do believe there is a purpose for AIM, and they should exist.

SM: An organized movement for the benefit of Indian people without the violence and these other things that took place?

JW: We always need the counter play, because we are a ruthless people, it's just in our nature. It's not that we are unhappy with anybody or anything else, but whenever a wrong is done, it should be corrected regardless, and if you went out and made a loan and somebody charged you 8½% when they should be chargin' you 7%, now you're goin' up there and say, "Hey buddy, that's not right." Well, see, there's certain people in our society that can do this a little bit better. If it takes walkin' up and down the street with signs and everything in front of Washington, D.C., and if it does the work, good. I mean, that's good, that's where AIM belongs. But this stuff, like I said, like Wounded Knee, some of the other small things that they done there, I mean, they're jeopardizin' people's life when they just leave, and after all the trouble is over they don't want to take a responsibility then. This I cannot go along with.

SM: Have you been out there lately?
JW: No, I haven't ever been to Wounded Knee.

SM: I've heard that it's pretty tense out there yet, even though there's a new chairman now, a man named Trimble. Wilson is out, and Russell Means didn't win.

JW: I know Russell Means.

SM: Did you meet him here in the area?

JW: I met him in Chicago.

SM: Is he still active as the AIM leader?

JW: Yeah, and very scared too.

SM: I haven't heard much about him lately.

JW: He's hiding. You'd hide too if you'd been shot at five or six times.

SM: A young Apache was telling me that he was in his apartment when somebody shot at him four times while he was coming and going.

JW: I assume you spoke to him?

SM: No.

JW: He's one man you should meet. He'd be glad to talk to you.

SM: I would like to talk to him.

JW: He's very bitter. He holds a lot of grief in his heart. He does, and he's not a speechmaker.
SM: He makes speeches though.

JW: Yeah, but he's not a speechmaker, he's more a man of action.

SM: One person told me that he is a good person, and he does some of these things, he puts on an act, to make his point.

JW: It's true, because that's what it takes. This is exactly what I meant before. If it takes walkin' in front of Washington with signs or somethin' like that, if he has to walk up on the President's lawn, put his staff into the ground, there's a purpose; I mean, these things are very common nowadays with the American Indian, but if that's what it takes to get attention, I mean, doesn't it work? This is the only way the white people know us.

SM: The publicity at Wounded Knee was constant, every night. And incidentally, at the same time, there was a group of Indian educators in Seattle, some 5,000 of them, didn't get in the news at all. So what you say is pretty well borne out.

JW: Well, see, I was in Service at the time of Wounded Knee, and we didn't hear about it till three months later.

SM: It was on television every night; it was in the papers every day.

JW: We didn't know about it until about two months later.

SM: But you don't like some of those things, but you think the organization does help?

JW: Yes, I want it to exist, because I believe there's a purpose for AIM, and it should be there, but there's a lot of people in there that isn't handling things very well. Mr. Myers, I got an impression of
you over the phone; I don't usually talk to a lot of people like I do you, for the simple reason I know a lot of people don't understand me, or don't want to understand me, or either I get a play, "Well, you should really feel bad because of all the things that happened to your people." See, this is what you're hearin' a lot, and this is turnin' the knife, you know to me. I'm sorry, I know it's wrong, in my own heart I know it's wrong, but I do feel that when people start talkin' to me like that, because that's not what I'm out workin' for. I'm out workin' for, like I said before--I repeat myself a lot--but I'm lookin' for a workin' society, where the white man and the red man can work together.

SM: I hope you can accomplish it too.

JW: Mr. Myers, if more people like you, I think we've got a good chance.

SM: Well, I want to tell you thanks today, Jimmy.