HEATHER WILSON, Nez Perce
December 26, 1974
Tempe, Arizona

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

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

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

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

Copyright © S.I. Myers 1978
LISTENING TO INDIANS

NO. 2

HEATHER WILSON, Nez Perce
December 26, 1974
Tempe, Arizona

Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:
    Today I'm at the home of the Wilson's, talking to Heather Wilson.
    Are you the youngest in the family, Heather?

Heather Wilson:
    Yes, I'm the youngest.

SM: And you're already going to Dartmouth College?

HW: Yeah, I'm a freshman at Dartmouth. I started this last term.

SM: And your older sister goes there too?

HW: Yes, Cathy, my older sister.

SM: Does that help a little?

HW: Oh, it helped me a lot because I really am a lot younger than most of the other students, and it was my first away-from-the-home type of experience.

SM: May I ask how old you are?

HW: I turned seventeen last Saturday.

SM: And you're in Dartmouth as a freshman?

HW: Yeah.

SM: That's a good record. Well, now let's go back to the beginning though. Were you born here in Tempe?

HW: No, I was born in Casa Grande, in the hospital at Casa Grande, Arizona.
SM: That's south of here?

HW: Yes, it's near Sacaton. Sacaton was where we lived. It's just a little place. I have very vague memories of my early childhood.

SM: Do you remember going to school the first time?

HW: Yes, there was a little pink schoolhouse, and my brother and I went together and we used to come home for lunch every day, and it was all Indian children but the teacher wasn't Indian.

SM: She was an Anglo?

HW: Yes.

SM: Is that the right term?

HW: Anglo ... I dunno.

SM: Just white?

HW: I guess. I don't call people Anglo, I don't usually call them anything. They're just people to me.

SM: That's good. A man I talked to the other day said he prefers to call everyone else non-Indian. Is that acceptable?

HW: Yes. Like my grandmother would be at the table and my dad would be discussing someone and she would say in Nez Perce, "Indian or non-Indian?" And if it was Indian she'd sit up and pay attention, and if it was non-Indian she'd say "oh" and just go back to whatever she was doing. It seems to make a difference, but Indian and non-Indian is a good way to say it.
SM: Do you remember anything special about that first school you went to? Good, bad or indifferent?

HW: Well, I remember that my brother and I used to have a lot of good times. It wasn't a really remarkable school by any means. It was just two rooms, and first and second grade. I was there before I was old enough to start first grade really, because there was no kindergarten, and so when we finally went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, I was still too young to go to school but they let me start anyway.

SM: And at Aberdeen? How did it go there?

HW: Well, I was too young to start school when I first got there because of the age law of children starting the first grade, but the teachers at the school where I was going, they let me start.

SM: And was that in the town of Aberdeen?

HW: Yes, it was right in the town of Aberdeen. We lived on Seventeenth Avenue in Aberdeen, and the school was a few blocks away.

SM: Heather, one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is because of your parental background. Your father?

HW: He's a Nez Perce.

SM: And your mother?

HW: And my mother is non-Indian.

SM: O.K. But you have a unique insight into two cultures as it were then. Is that right?
HW: Yes, that's true. On my mother's side they're historians basically, and they do a lot of work with Indians, like my grandfather, Francis Haines, is a western historian. He's written lots of books, and I think that my interest in Indians comes from both sides of the family rather than just one.

SM: Yes, you would have ample interest just from your mother's point of view, wouldn't you?

HW: Yeah.

SM: O.K., great. Now, let's go back to Aberdeen. How did things go when you moved up there?

HW: Well, I didn't seem to feel that I was Indian and everyone else was, that I was living in a white world. It wasn't that way at all, because there just wasn't that much difference, and people finding out I was Indian would say, "Oh, you are" and they didn't you know, realize from looking at me, where the difference is here in Arizona that if you say that you're Indian, people say, "Oh, I thought you were Mexican or Spanish rather than Indian.

SM: I suppose some people find it difficult to distinguish between Mexicans, Indians, Spanish or simply a dark Norwegian?

HW: Unless you talk in Spanish all the time.

SM: Were you in school a long time at Aberdeen then?

HW: Yes, it seemed a long time to me, but it always seems a long time when you're little, but I suppose we weren't there too long, but we had a really nice neighborhood and it was pretty close-knit, but I can't remember ever, you know, feeling different.
SM: Well, was the neighborhood of mixed groups of people, or was it all Indian or all white?

HW: I think it was basically all white, um hm.

SM: And you didn't feel any... .

HW: No, I didn't feel... . except that people coming to our house would see our house which was, you know, which is full of baskets and pottery and things, and say, "Oh, that's really wonderful", and they'd walk around and look at everything. I never in my early life or even afterwards to any great extent, felt prejudice against me for being Indian, or even difference of treatment.

SM: How long were you at Aberdeen then?

HW: I guess four years, about. Four school years.

SM: And then where did you go?

HW: From Aberdeen we moved to Tempe, and that was in 1967, in the summer of 1967.

SM: And then you went to school here in Tempe?

HW: Yes, I started fifth grade at a new school that they have near here, and there wasn't much difference except that people in Arizona aren't as interested about Indians as people in South Dakota, because I remember one thing about South Dakota was that in fifth grade when they studied American history my mom would take all our Indian things and go down to the school where, you know, whoever was in fifth grade at the time, and show 'em to the class, and it was nice, and you felt proud about it, but here there wasn't that much interest. And in my freshman year in high school for the first time I noticed a lot of
antipathy.

SM: Was that at Tempe High School?

HW: At McClintock High School. I did a debate, I organized a debate on the treatment of the American Indian, and I frankly didn't know as much about it as I do now, but I knew basically the, you know, the general principles, but the children, or the kids in my class, just didn't look at it that way. They were very defensive, and to a point of shouting.

SM: The Indian kids or the non-Indian kids?

HW: Oh, I was the only Indian in the class, and so I guess they thought I was, you know, trying to hold up a badge and say, "Feel sorry for me" or something, but there was like one or two supporters on my side, and I got a low grade on the debate because I didn't stand up to defend myself; the only reason was that I had fifteen minutes, and everyone was shouting, and I couldn't get anyone to calm down long enough to say anything.

SM: Very few people on your side in that debate?

HW: Um hm.

SM: Now you must have graduated at a very tender age.

HW: Well, I was sixteen.

SM: Sixteen and you've graduated from high school, and you're a freshman at Dartmouth already.

HW: Yes. I had been planning to start college that summer, but the preparations necessary for going to Dartmouth, it just wasn't possible,
so I had to wait for the fall.

SM: Thinking in terms of all the other students who are going to high schools around the country, can you offer any comments?

HW: Advice on acceptance?

SM: Yes, a little comment on how they might treat each other better.

HW: Well, one thing is not to let your natural feelings get in the way of what you know to be the truth, like I would tend to feel sorrier for the Nez Perce than other tribes.

SM: Why was that?

HW: Well, because I'd know the history better.

SM: Because of the history of Chief Joseph and his experiences, for example?

HW: Yes. Yes, it moves me more than for other tribes, I guess, because of the self-centeredness that all tribes have, whether they admit it or not, that they are the people, which is natural.

SM: Why do you say that--"the people?"

HW: Well, like take for example the Navajos who are trying to start their own country. And another instance of the way each tribe feels itself is first is the creation story, like in the Nez Perce story. There's a monster who eats up everything and then the coyote cuts him up and the first thing that happens is that the head is used for one tribe and the feet are used for another tribe, but the heart is squeezed and each drop of blood becomes a Nez Perce brave, which is symbolic of their being the heart of civilization.
SM: But do you blame each group, because don't all peoples tend to do that same thing?

HW: Oh yes, definitely. Like I said, it's only natural to say that we know the most about ourselves. We are the people.

SM: Good point. And then we also recognize that all other groups of people, regardless of being Indian or non-Indian, have the same tendencies.

HW: Um hum. Certainly. Yes.

SM: You were just beginning to be aware of this in high school then when you ran into that debate problem?

HW: I was always aware that people, you know, have hated Indians in the past, just because of the history of . . . Westerns. You can't watch a Western without hearing John Wayne say, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." And I was always aware of that, but I never realized that some of the people that I walk around with every day hold these feelings inside and sometimes don't, you know, when they can't suppress them, let these things out. Like, I guess, my debate just triggered something inside, because it was an amazing effect; I was just overwhelmed, and these were people that I had known for years and years.

SM: And all of a sudden it came out in almost irrational shouting in the debate situation.

HW: Yeah. They tried to rationalize things that had happened to the Indians and say, "They deserved this" or "they deserved that" or "we give them this and that and the other thing and they should be happy with that instead of asking for anything unreasonable," and,
wherever you have people there're going to be these problems, because each person is a mass of family training and outside influence that makes him what he is, you know, a person of biases and beliefs that aren't easily swayed.

SM: It's also true then that all of us are the result of our own backgrounds, and whether we like it or not we are, aren't we?

HW: Exactly. So that's one thing, you can't blame people for their beliefs, but you can try to change them, but don't try to force your beliefs on other people, unless it is an important belief. I mean, like don't try to force little idiosyncracies but the more important beliefs, like, you know, getting along and co-existing peacefully.

SM: You found some people that were understanding, though?

HW: Oh yes. Then there's always the people who fall over backwards and say, you know, needlessly, "I've always loved the Indian, I hope you never think that I'm biased or prejudiced against the Indians, because I just love 'em, I always have since I was little," and things like that--just go overboard to prove to you that they aren't.

SM: Your experiences trigger a reminder of my little grandson who is nine now, and instead of wanting to be the cowboy as kids play cowboys and Indians, he always wants to be the Indian. The trend has changed somehow.

HW: Yes, it certainly has.

SM: Well, that was sort of a shock, was it, a rude awakening, that debate situation at McClintock?

HW: I was fuming mad at the time. I mean, needless to say, it upset me, and the bad grade that I got on the debate, because I didn't, you
know, shout back at 'em, upset and also . . . the whole thing was just a really bad experience. But I don't think that I should gauge that as, you know, against the world, because I know that not everyone's like that. It just surprised me, and I thought that maybe being in Arizona where you're more in contact with Indians might have something to do with it. I'm still not sure but, if you have to co-exist with people, with Indians, and not just live, you know, in Beverly Hills and read about 'em in books, and wear the Indian jewelry and say, "Oh these are really nice things, sure would be nice if those people could get together with us." It's a different thing from living with them, living near the Indians and having problems with them and arguments, and I just thought that that might be a reason.

SM: So now, where you were living in South Dakota and Arizona where there are quite a few Indians, were your experiences on the whole pretty good until this one incident that kind of jolted you?

HW: Oh yes. And even afterwards.

SM: And then after that you became more aware of this sort of thing?

HW: Yes.

SM: And you were older too.

HW: Um hum.

SM: But then, you did graduate from McClintock, and things went better after that one experience?

HW: Oh yes, that was just something that stuck in my mind because they were so close-minded to anything else.
SM: It was very revealing, wasn't it?

HW: Yes.

SM: You've expressed it well too, I think. But, now you're going to Dartmouth, and that's a different world, isn't it?

HW: Um hm. Yes!

SM: Because it's clear across the country, way up in the Northeast.

HW: And I come in contact with people from tribes that I've never heard of or experienced before.

SM: Do you see very many Indian people there?

HW: Well, on the whole, even though Dartmouth was chartered as an Indian school, research reveals that the only reason it was appointed for an Indian school was so that the man who was building it could go over to England and take a few savages and say, "Look at these poor, poor Indians. We've got to train them and teach them to be holy Christians," and get more money for his school, but actually, it's just a minute proportion of Indians ever graduated from Dartmouth, and the whole atmosphere is not very conducive to helping Indians, because what they want at Dartmouth is not poor Indians that they can help and understand and give an education, but Indians who are ready-made students, who have got the will to fight through classes and do their homework with a minimum of assistance and, in fact, just, you know, melt right into the crowd and not be any bother.

SM: In other words, you feel now that if you went there as a, let's say, student who had some weaknesses, say you read very poorly, or you didn't do well with English grammar, that you'd have a severe handicap?
HW: Oh, it's proved that way in cases where Indians who couldn't buckle
down and, you know, couldn't get themselves together, would flunk
out or transfer. Cathy could tell you so much more.

SM: Cathy's your older sister?

HW: Yes, Cathy, my older sister.

SM: And she's been at Dartmouth for . . .

HW: Several years, and she's president of the native American group at
Dartmouth.

SM: I want to clarify this situation at Dartmouth. It, like you said,
originated with the idea of being a school for Indian children, and
never really materialized in the fullest sense of that sort of thing,
but, is it a popular school for young Indians now, or any more than
Harvard or Yale or Brown University or some other place?

HW: No, as a matter of fact, I don't think so because the amount of
Indians who go there is dwindling every year. And we have problems
with the administration and the fact is that Dartmouth is just not a
very good place for the Indians because there are other schools who
are more helpful and who care about their Indian programs instead of
just, you know, shoving them under the rug, so to speak.

SM: At our school we have all kinds of remedial classes--people don't
like to use that term, but that's what they are. And that's what
you're referring to--they don't tend in this direction very much at
Dartmouth?

HW: Oh no, heavens.
SM: And we don't want to pick on Dartmouth either, but how did you decide to go there?

HW: Well, I felt like going out of state somewhere and, being so young, my mom wouldn't let me go anywhere but where Cathy was, and I thought that would help too.

SM: It does help to make the adjustment to go leaving home the first time to have somebody you know there.

HW: It certainly did; it was wonderful having her there.

SM: And your sister, Cathy, is a senior there now?

HW: Right. But she's through at Dartmouth for now. She's gonna be here working in Sacaton where I was born, for this term, and then the term after that she's gonna be going for foreign study abroad to Germany, so she won't be going back to Dartmouth.

SM: But then, in the process of this, she will graduate?

HW: Yes, she will graduate.

SM: Have you decided on a major yet?

HW: Yes, I'm planning to be a music major.

SM: That is music education, or performing music?

HW: I haven't decided what the goal will be, but I'm sure that I will take into consideration music education and the jobs available and performing, because I hope to get a job in performing, but if that realization doesn't come I would like to have, you know, teaching
to fall back upon.

SM: May I ask what branch of music--vocal or instrumental?

HW: Vocal.

SM: What do you sing?

HW: I can sing alto or mezzo. I have a relatively broad range.

SM: You're always, I suppose, getting called on to help out with school functions too then?

HW: Well, I'm in the Glee Club, and we practice for six hours every week, in addition to my twenty-one hour a week class load, and so things have been pretty hectic at Dartmouth this past term.

SM: Twenty-seven hours a week?

HW: Yeah, six hours for Glee Club and twenty-one hours for classes.

SM: What other subjects are you taking?

HW: I'm taking Italian One, for my music, to help me with my music, and I'm also planning to go to Florence on the foreign study program, and I took Music Theory, and I was exempted from the English Five program which all freshmen must take. I was put directly into the Freshman Seminar and given credit for Freshman English Five.

SM: That's pretty good, because that's one of the places we notice where we have the greatest amount of deficiency and have to overcome it with non-credit classes for people who need work in this area. That doesn't mean everyone does by any means, but it means that we have large numbers of people who do. And you were not only able to by-pass that, but by-passed the freshmen requirements in English.
HW: Yeah.

SM: That's great. I can see why you're already a freshman at Dartmouth. Did you say you are sixteen or seventeen?

HW: I turned seventeen last Saturday.

SM: So you actually entered when you were sixteen. That's quite a record in itself, you know. Do you feel younger and out of it with the other freshmen because of your age?

HW: No, but most people, most of the freshmen really, they ask, you know, if they find out that I'm sixteen, they're just flabbergasted. They just look at me like "What in the world are you doing here?" But then there are some who it annoys. Like I had a roommate who was part Chippewa, Ojibway, and I think after she found out that I was sixteen, it turned her off a little bit.

SM: 'Cause she was older than you?

HW: Yeah, I had some problems.

SM: Now how did it happen you got an Ojibway Indian girl as a roommate?

HW: Well, what they did was the Indian council decided to try an experiment with putting all the freshmen in one complex, and we all had, you know, either singles or else we had an Indian roommate; but in some cases, like between me and my roommate, it didn't work out, and I was moved into a single thing. I was really happy about that.

SM: Well, then, they actually had this counseling service which tried to match up roommates for various reasons, good or bad. And in your case, it was a good intention that didn't work out. Is that it?
HW: Yeah. Well, I didn't think that it was necessary to put us all together, because I think even if we meet, you know, at the Indian house and things, that is a lot. You know, it's not necessary to put us all together in one little complex, but sometimes, in some cases, it has worked out really nice to have some of our friends, you know, right around there.

SM: Isn't there some way you can choose your own roommates in the dorms?

HW: Ah, no. Housing takes care of all final decisions.

SM: They assign you space?

HW: Um hm, because we're freshmen and we don't have any priority.

SM: You would have had your sister there and you could have asked advice, but they still assigned you and decided it would be for two girls.

HW: We told them what we wanted but it was housing that decided at last what we should get.

SM: Do you think that that's a good idea to have the Indian students who come assigned to live with other Indian students, or would it be better to have them live with non-Indian students?

HW: I thought that it was a bad idea for them to do it without consulting the freshmen. I wouldn't even have known, if it wasn't for Cathy, that that's what they did, and I'm sure a lot of the freshmen didn't know. Most of the freshmen Indians didn't know; they just did it without asking us, or even, you know, even mentioning it to us that this is what was being done.

SM: That's a kind of way of singling you out as a member of a group,
which isn't necessary, is it?

HW: No, I didn't think so, but I think the main intentions were good, because they thought that if we were more together we wouldn't feel so alone in our new sphere.

SM: You've been to several schools now, about four, isn't it?

HW: Well, let's see. No, it was actually five, because my sophomore year, which was my second to the last in high school, my mom was given a teaching job in Chico, California, on sabbatical for two professors, Professor Hutchinson and Professor McIntosh, at Chico State University, who were going on sabbatical in two semesters that were right next to each other, and so she taught for the whole year, and I went with her for a new experience, and I went to school there in Chico.

SM: How was that, did you like that?

HW: Oh yes, I really enjoyed it! I made a lot of really close friends, and it was a nice experience.

SM: That was still in high school?

HW: Um hm, yeah. It was in my sophomore year.

SM: Chico is a nice town, a nice place?

HW: Oh yes. Yes.

SM: As a result of this--five schools then and all that other living everyone does--have you any overall opinions you'd like to offer for other students about the situation that Indian students find themselves in?
HW: Well, I feel that even though I've had these five different schools, basically I've lived a pretty sheltered life. I haven't been attacked, you know, like I'm sure some Indian students are.

SM: You haven't been subjected to a lot of abuse or ridicule or anything?

HW: To ridicule or abuse. And if I had, because of, you know, my background and my knowledge of what I am and how, you know, what happened to make me what I am, I could withstand it very easily, you know, I could just laugh in their faces and say, "You don't know what you're talking about." But I'm sure that there are some Indians, and I have found that there are some, like at Dartmouth I've met some, who don't take any ridicule at all, or if they get any, they just, you know, they allow themselves to be carried away.

SM: Very sensitive?

HW: Oh yes. Incredibly sensitive about their culture or about any remarks pertaining to their tribe or anything.

SM: Let's say you had been a German girl growing up in a town which was largely German; you probably would have been comparatively unaware of any culture or cultural differences, that is consciously aware. Have you seen any advantages in the fact that you have been exposed to two different cultures?

HW: Oh I feel certainly very fortunate to have lived, you know, as I have lived, with a house that's practically a museum in its culture and in its baskets and pottery and its books, and two encyclopedias for parents if I need any information. And basically on the whole, through my school life, people I have met have been impressed, you know, favorably impressed rather than disgusted or upset or biased against me when they find that I am Indian.
SM: In other words then, you have been actually more aware of yourself as a unique person than many young people are.

HW: Um hm. Oh yes, I would say that I know a lot more about the people in my family and my family background than most people, and care a lot more than most people, I think, because it's an important thing to people in my family, being historians, knowing about the people that I came from, so to speak. I think the time that I was most aware about my tribe, the Nez Perce, was when I read my book, The Nez Perce, that was given to me by my grandfather.

SM: The one he wrote?

HW: Yes, who wrote it.

SM: Do you know your grandfather pretty well?

HW: Oh, pretty well, fairly well.

SM: Do you see him quite often?

HW: Yes, he lives very near here, and comes down all the time.

SM: Where does he live now?

HW: He lives in Sun City, which is a sort of a retirement city for, you know, retired people. It's pretty far—about forty, forty-two miles north of here.

SM: I've read his books and some of my students have too, and they have gotten much good information. One girl, in fact, just doing some work on the Comanches, is using his book on the buffalo right now.

HW: Oh.
SM: Well, anything else you can add before we let you go?

HW: What else would you like me to add?

SM: Any impression or comment you'd like to about the whole overall situation in the United States; the way people are making it and having troubles and problems.

HW: Well, I think that the most important thing to me is that non-Indians and Indians solve their differences without violence and without a lot of, you know, action that's developed just for publicity without a lot of rioting, and so forth, that is designed with catching the eye of the press. Instead, I think that a lot of good could be achieved through the long road ... I know it is. Most of the people who are on the side of the violent methods say that it would take much too long to sit down and peacefully work out your problems; try to get bills through Congress, and when they fail, you know, try again. They say that it would take a lifetime, and I can understand that perfectly. Mine being such a sheltered life, I am horrified by some of the stories that these people tell of the injustices done to their families; murders and murderers, non-Indian murderers who are acquitted because they're ... you know, I don't know that these things are true, because I have no special knowledge of all of these stories, but I can understand how they could wish to try the faster method. Let's rip through it, you know, like a bullet through butter, and not take the time to sit down and talk things out, because the way things are going it would take forever. But I think it's important to get things done the non-violent way, and I think people do achieve things without violence, and I think that that's the most important thing to me--to keep on top of the situation without a lot of needless destruction.

SM: Now Heather, I'd like to get to some other things in your experiences because I know on your father's side the Nez Perce people are there
in the background. Did you know your grandmother?

HW: Oh yes, we were very close, and when I was little I was always her baby, and when she came to Arizona I would mostly be the only one home, like at nights. And I would sleep with her in her bedroom, and she would tell me stories about the coyote, Itz-a-yeh-yeh and Til-eep-aah, the fox, and then there was even times when I would read her some of the old worn-out classics like Snow White, and The Three Bears, because she had never heard of them, of course, and these old fairy stories were all new to her.

SM: Did you ever go with her to any Indian functions?

HW: Oh yes! When she came to Arizona, there's a festival, or just kind of a carnival and Indian gathering. . . .

SM: Here in Arizona?

HW: Yes, down in Casa Grande, where I was born, and we used to go down there every year, and there's always a rodeo out of the limits of Casa Grande where the Bacone Alumni Association, which is for the Bacone Indian College, which my dad was a part of. The association would make pop-overs and beans for scholarships--they would make money for scholarships, and I would always help with the pop-overs and beans and sell Cokes. One year I remember I sold 25 cases of soda, I was just really worn out. But I worked hard there, but then I began each year to stay with my grandmother who was weaving corn-husk bags for an exhibition that they had in Casa Grande every year, where they'd have jewelry sellers and pot makers and basket weavers and a Hopi sand painter--it's always fascinating. I used to go over and talk to him every year, and I would stay with Grandma and I would read a book or talk to her and bring her a Pepsi. It was really a relatively small room, and I used to run around and take coffee to everyone, and I was just generally the little maid--I'd just run around and talk to people and bring them coffee.
SM: How old were you then?

HW: Oh, I guess, junior high, and my first year in high school, things like that.

SM: Is your grandmother still here now?

HW: No, my grandmother died two years ago.

SM: That was your father's mother?

HW: My father's mother.

SM: But she used to live up in Nez Perce country?

HW: Oh yes, we couldn't get her away. She would come down and visit us every year, of course.

SM: Oh, when she was here she was merely visiting? Her home was always up in Idaho, was it?

HW: Oh yes. She would never leave Kamiah, Idaho, where she had her home.

SM: Is that where Chief Joseph used to live?

HW: I don't think so, I'm not real sure. I'm pretty sure it was in the reservation and we used to go up and visit her every summer too when we lived in Aberdeen, and we would go camus digging in the fields.

SM: Camus--would you explain that?

HW: Camus is a root that the Nez Perce used to pull out of the ground and eat, and we have some samples of it in our freezer. And all of us would go out into the fields, and we'd take these little
implements, I don't know, they were kind of spades, but kind of not, they had a little deer-horn handle, and they were long and pointed, and you'd stick it under the plant and you'd go like this, and a big fat camus root would just ... just a fat kind of thing, a bulb like an onion.

SM: Are they eaten raw, or are they cooked?

HW: I think that they were eaten raw and cooked. They used them for a lot of different things, but my mom and dad could tell you more about that. But we'd all go out into the fields and we'd work all day and, of course, we, being her grandchildren, she'd pay us a lot more for it than it was worth.

SM: To dig some?

HW: Oh yes, and then she would trade them to other people, you know, because she was a big trader, and she would trade for baskets and rugs and bags and things, and she made many, many of the corn-husk bags, and it's a very difficult art, and I'm afraid it's quite dying out. She tried to teach me, but it was incredibly difficult. I was rather young at the time, and it phased me out because it's just a very long process, and my mom said she made one once when she was young, but I forget what she did with it, but she said it wasn't fit to print or wasn't good enough.

SM: Did you ever go to that festival in Pendleton, Oregon, because that isn't too far from there?

HW: No.

SM: I've heard of it and I'd like to go there sometime and see what it's like. But where were some of these other places you went with your grandmother?
HW: Well, one thing we did every year was we would go down, my dad and my grandmother and I, would go down to Nogales, Nogales, Mexico.

SM: Nogales is on the border between here and Mexico?

HW: It's right smack on the border, and half of it is Nogales, Arizona, and half of it is Nogales, Mexico. And down there you can get serapes and all kinds of, you know, crazy things.

SM: Do you mean on the Mexican side?

HW: Um hm, on the Mexican side. And she would take all these things back up--you can get them for relatively cheap--and she would take all these things up and trade them.

SM: Oh, you mean up in Nez Perce country?

HW: Yes, in Idaho. She would take them back to Idaho, and she would buy presents for the family up there, and she would buy big things of serapes and baskets to trade to the people up there for Indian things.

SM: Then what would she do with the Indian things she'd get from them?

HW: Oh, I think she gave a lot of things to us, and I think she kept a lot, and she just got what she wanted.

SM: A kind of collector?

HW: I'm sure she got supplies, corn husk and buckskin to make things--she made each one of us girls in this family, all four of us, each a buckskin dress, all beaded.

SM: You have one now?
HW: Oh yes. I wear it to all the powwows, and there's one powwow in Scottsdale that, during April when Grandma Wilson isn't here—she comes around Christmas time—but in April they have a powwow in Scottsdale every year, which is right north of Tempe, and there's dancing, and I go up there every year in my buckskin dress with Dad, and we'd raffle off tickets to Pendleton blankets, and I would dance in all the dances, and it's always sunny and hot, and I'd have my hair in braids, and that would expose from my dress just this little triangle of neck, and every year I'd just have this, this sunburn, it wasn't even just a little bit. It was just, you know, just red like a lobster, and I'd be in pain for days afterward, but every year it happens.

SM: Well, don't the Indians know about herbs to put on sunburn, like aloe?

HW: Well. . .

SM: I'm teasing a little bit, but I think they do.

HW: I think probably they had their ways.

SM: Many of the herbs we use today are borrowed from Indians' knowledge.

HW: Um hm. But having long hair, that little piece of my neck was never exposed except once a year, and so . . . I had a really good time though. I did dancing and I really got involved in the drum. It was kind of hypnotic. They just sit there and go, "Wham, wham, wham," and at a certain time in the dance I'd learn, not from, you know, knowing the dances very well, but the Indians, the women, just to go around in this one step all the time anyway. At a certain time the beat goes, "Wham, wham, wham," and then you all turn towards the center and just step like this, and the warriors do all sorts of fancy things while the women just stand there, but it's a lot of fun and you don't have to be really super experienced to dance, if you're
female, but if you're male you have to dress up in fancy clothes with the big bonnets and they, except like the things in Scottsdale, it was pretty much if you want to dance and you're Indian, just step in there, and a lot of people would go in without even costume, and they'd just throw a shawl around and just start dancing in the middle, and no one would know the difference, but it's quite a festive thing and they have a parade and dancing contests.

SM: Where was this?

HW: Scottsdale. We're still talking about Scottsdale. There was two years in a row I won a prize for the best individual in the parade, and I had a lot of fun and we just walked.

SM: Which Scottsdale event is this now?

HW: It's called The Scottsdale All Indian Days Powwow, and it's held every April, every year. Run by the Plains Indian Club.

SM: Plains Indian Club, but in Arizona?

HW: Yeah, central plains. In Arizona. Right. Yes, there were always Oklahoma Indians.

SM: This would be a club of non-Arizona Indians who live in Arizona now?

HW: Um hm. Called the Plains Indians Club.

SM: There's a festival out north of Mesa and east of Scottsdale, there's a round building out there. Is that the one, is that part of it?

HW: No, this is held right in Scottsdale in the baseball park, by the hospital. I missed it this last year.
SM: You were back in New England?

HW: No, the year I was in Chico I missed it.

SM: Oh, that's right, because you didn't go to Dartmouth until this fall, did you?

HW: Uh huh.

SM: Well, thank you very much, Heather, for a very interesting conversation. I hope you have the best of luck when you go back to school now this next semester. I'm looking forward to talking with the other members of your family, and next summer or next fall I hope to have an opportunity to talk with you again.