Listening to Indians

PLESAH WILSON, Nez Perce
CATHY WILSON, Nez Perce
HEATHER WILSON, Nez Perce

December 30, 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.

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NO. 5

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
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Sam Myers:
Today we're talking to Plesah Wilson in Tempe, Arizona. Plesah, first of all, can I ask you the origin of your name, because it certainly is not an ordinary one.

Plesah Wilson:
Well, I'm named after my grandmother, who was named after her mother's best friend in Nova Scotia. Her mother's friend was from England, and she said it was an old family name from England. So that's all they ever knew about it until recently when they went to England; they asked around at Oxford, and the most they could do to track it down—they never came across the name in England—was that it might have been a mid-eastern name, brought back from the Crusades, and somehow passed down through this family, and they just assumed that it was a family name of some sort. Some day I'd like to find out more about it, but I'd have to advertise in the London Times or something like that, to nab the name down.

SM: Well, that's interesting because I didn't know whether maybe it had some background in Indian legend or lore, but actually in England and then maybe the Crusades, which is kind of a switch.

PW: Right. It might be a Palestinian name. The spelling indicates that.

SM: The "a", "h"?

PW: Yeah.

SM: Plesah, may I ask your age?

PW: Twenty-four.

SM: And you have finished college now?
PW: Right. There's no physical education at all.

SM: Required?

PW: Right. It doesn't exist, they can't afford a gym.

SM: That's a good reason.

PW: They put money into the library instead of stuff like that, although they did put up a back board.

SM: Some people would agree that's good, some not.

PW: Most of the people that go there do agree that it's good.

SM: This school in Prescott, were you familiar with that?

PW: Very vaguely.

SM: I was a little surprised at the physical appearance, because it seemed to be scattered over the hills, but they did collapse just a few weeks ago?

PW: Financially, yeah. They did. Most small colleges like that are collapsing, even the traditional ones, because private schools get funding from tuition, and students just aren't going to college anymore. Can't afford it or they don't want to. But, Franconia has lasted this long—I can't say it'll last too much longer.

SM: Tell me more about this situation at Franconia. You went there as a freshman, did you?

PW: No, I went there after two years. I went to U of A freshman year, and I went to ASU a year, and Mesa Community a semester.
SM: So you went to the University of Arizona and then Arizona State University and Mesa Community College.

PW: Yeah.

SM: So by the time you got to Franconia were you a junior?

PW: I was beginning junior. I took a long time to finish school. There were times, like when I went to Mesa Community, I was working and going part-time. So their program is divided into the first two years and last two years, basically. The first two years are general, you know, liberal arts, and the last two years you specialize, similar to a master's graduate program. You have your advisor, you have a program that you define—hopefully you will go on Out Reach, which is an off-campus study program. I was a counselor for a drug program at Phoenix for my off-campus study program. And then you write a thesis, or do some kind of final work.

SM: For a semester?

PW: It was for two semesters.

SM: You spent two semesters working in drug problems in Phoenix?

PW: Right. I happened to come to Phoenix and I happened to work in drugs.

SM: Were you staying at home then while you were working at that job?

PW: Yeah. My mom was teaching in California, and I stayed here and sort of took care of the house.

SM: I remember when your mother taught over there at Chico. Your younger sister went with her, I believe, but you were here.

PW: Right.
SM: That's another interesting field in itself, your work in the drug program.

PW: Oh, you could talk about it for days, I'm sure.

SM: I imagine you had some rather unusual experiences?

PW: I don't know how unusual they were. I guess I did, yeah.

SM: Perhaps that's a poor choice of words for college students these days.

PW: It is, you're right. I mean, every college has drugs, except for that one in Oklahoma, that Oral Roberts runs. And what I was seeing was extreme cases of what I see around me every day anyway. Also, it was basically two groups--the junkies and the adolescents who maybe weren't even doing drugs, but were having trouble with their parents, basically, and they were, you know, running away from home and stuff, and they come in there--and so it basically filtered out into those two groups.

SM: You had two whole semesters, almost a year in this work?

PW: Yeah. It was more like seven or eight months.

SM: And this is part of your work at Franconia College. You get credit for it?

PW: Right. I get credit for it, and I based part of my final thesis on it.

SM: Are you working in the field of psychology?

PW: Right. That's what I was doing.
SM: So then, do you have a degree in psychology?

PW: A BA, yeah.

SM: Are you going on?

PW: I don't know. I got a job in New York that I'd like to follow up. Graduate school just doesn't seem that profitable to me. Are you in graduate school?

SM: No, I'm teaching in junior college, a community college.

PW: So, I don't know... it's hard to explain. That's a whole 'nother issue about college education. There's millions of psychology people looking for work at the moment, plus, I'd like to go to Europe for a while.

SM: The job in New York. Does it have any connection with the work in the field of drugs?

PW: Phoenix? No. I was working in New Hampshire at a music festival they started--similar to Tanglewood, but a lot smaller. They started it two years ago, and I worked for them both years that they had it, and I met some people through there that offered me a job in the city working for a concert program, a concert series.

SM: Are you a musician too?

PW: No, I'm not a musician at all. No. It's an administrative kind of thing.

SM: Maybe we should go back to Franconia for a minute. How big a school is it?
PW: It's very small, about 500, including the faculty, basically.

SM: Five hundred people?

PW: The community is about 500 people.

SM: And where is it again?


SM: Up in the hills?

PW: Um hm. It's right in the mountains really; it's a state park.

SM: Good skiing around there?

PW: Yeah, skiing. It's a small town, really beautiful little town, about 500 people, and it's a resort town really, that's what it boils down to. The shoe factory towns are off to the side. New Hampshire's a weird place.

SM: Would you recommend it to other people, or to only certain kinds of people?

PW: I would recommend it to certain kinds of people, and I'm glad I went there, but I would hesitate to recommend college . . . to anybody.

SM: Any college, or that college?

PW: Any college as a blanket generalization, "You should go to college." I think it's an individual thing. But this particular college, yeah, it would be individual people.

SM: Are you saying there are people, maybe, who shouldn't bother to go
to college?

PW: Right. Unless they feel they're going to get personal gain out of it, you know, and not necessarily monetary gain. But you can grow in college, but a lot of people are there wondering why they're there, you know, and worrying and wondering why they're alive, and you shouldn't have to go through that just 'cause there's a feeling in this country that college education is important.

SM: Is there a pretty big drop-out rate at the school?

PW: Oh yeah. There's a large turn-over rate. When I came there, the college itself had almost no students that had started there. Most of them had transferred from other schools.

SM: As you had?

PW: Right. And it was a very stimulating atmosphere for a while, because people had experienced traditional education and traditional student government, and they were going into something where they had some ideas and some . . . you know, things they wanted to do that they could get done. Now the school is changed a lot, and most of the students there came right out of high school, which gives them a certain amount of inexperience as far as . . . I don't know, maybe I'm just getting old, I know that's part of the problem.

SM: At twenty-four?

PW: Right. Well, when those seventeen-year-olds are running around you start thinking. . . .

SM: Imagine when you get to be ninety, what are you going to feel like!

PW: I don't think the world's gonna last that long, but . . .(laughter)
SM: Well, we've got to keep hoping.

PW: I guess there's nothing else you can do.

SM: Do you think that this particular kind of approach to college education is a good thing?

PW: It can be good for some people. It's good in different ways. The social situation has helped some people who were going through--say they were going through suicidal tendencies. Sometimes just going up there, being in the woods, you know, talking to people, getting to know people in the small town can help. There's no pressure to achieve academically because of the grades, so a lot of people who've been working under that system sort of fall by the wayside, or just slack off.

SM: Do you feel, then, it takes a sort of self-starter, someone who has lots of self-discipline, to succeed in a thing like this?

PW: Right. To get the complete benefit of the college. The faculty there is excellent because there's so many young people with PhD's, or working on them --the really bright people coming out that can't find jobs, and the college pays reasonably well--say ten thou a year and up, and the faculty is the most stimulating group right now. I think it used to be that the students were more active and involved in the whole community environment--now the faculty has, I think, definitely taken that over, and the students are a lot of kids out of high school who are working hard--some of them are, but it changes the atmosphere quite a bit.

SM: Would it be a fair summary to say that it's a fine schooling experience for some people, but they have to have a definite amount of self-discipline?
PW: Self-motivation.

SM: Self-motivation to get the most out of it?

PW: Right, although they can gain that there. I mean, they have a program; also the Off-Campus Study Program is encouraged, which is basically getting experience in whatever field you want to go into.

SM: Like your work in Phoenix?

PW: Yeah, and I think if I'd gone to ASU and been a psych major, I could have become involved in actual field work, but it would've happened more in my graduate years--if I'd gone to graduate school--than the BA, and a lot of my time would've been wasted on things I really didn't want to do.

SM: Well, I guess each person will have to make up his own mind about that particular kind of experience?

PW: Yes.

SM: Some people do seem to need the discipline of a more structured kind of thing, even though, as you said, others did benefit from their experience there?

PW: Ye..ah.

SM: They grew then.

PW: Just a matter of a lot of people from the city--New York mainly--and just being in New Hampshire did things to 'em, or being some place different. This isn't really in your subject matter, talking about Indians, is it?
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SM: Well, you've anticipated my next comment. We haven't said anything about Indians, and that's what we want to talk about. Did you find any problems—advantages, disadvantages or whatever—in that connection up there in Franconia?

PW: I can't really say that it was ever an issue.

SM: A lot of people wouldn't recognize that you are Indian at all.

PW: Right. Most people don't. They just ask me, "What nationality are you," and I like to make them guess, 'cause it's fun, 'cause that's the last thing they ever guess.

SM: French, Italian?

PW: They start out with Greek, French, Italian, Israeli, you know, a lot of that . . . just, you know, any country. You can name a country that has dark hair and dark skin and they named it. Oriental—I didn't get much of that.

SM: So there were no problems particularly?

PW: No, no. It wasn't . . . no. It was the kind of thing where everybody knew everybody else, and I was just "Plesah." The fact that I was Indian was just sort of a . . .

SM: There was no native American's association or anything like that?

PW: No. In fact, I was the only one there, I think, until Penney came, that was part Indian.

SM: Was it your sister, Penney, who joined you there?

PW: Right. She graduated from there too. There was a guy there who said
SM: I have a friend—I showed you his picture—who has a little four-year-old boy who is a gourd dancer, and gets all the costume on and everything. He has blue eyes and flaxen hair—he looks a little different than the other group, but he's just as Indian as a lot of them.

PW: Um hm, sure. Oh, I'm not casting aspersions, it's just . . . it seemed odd to me, but he was a nice guy. He adopted a little Indian boy too. Oh, he adopted two.

SM: Now there's a point that you might have an opinion on. One of the Indian publications—this one from South Dakota—reported that about 25% of the Indian children were living in non-Indian homes, and that a lot of Indian people don't like this at all. Do you think that is something that should not happen—non-Indians adopting Indian children?

PW: It's really hard to say. Then basically what you're dealing with is prejudice. It's the same as with a black family, I suppose. I mean, it's better for them to have a home that wants them than no home at all, I think. That's one issue, and the other issue is culturally, if they're going to go through some hard times . . . they might, because of the way they look, but if they're raised in the right way, I don't see why that has to happen. They might end up not being able to relate to their cousins on the reservation very well, but as human beings they might be better off.

SM: Like everything else there's no simple answer, right?

PW: Yeah. There is no answer to that issue, there really isn't. Unless the people on the reservation who object are willing to take these kids, give them the equal opportunities they could've gotten off the reservation, then they have no right to object.

SM: Your work off campus from Franconia—here in Phoenix—can you tell us
any more about that? For example, I read that 50% of the women in Phoenix arrested on alcohol-related charges are Indian, and only 1% of the population in Phoenix is Indian. Is that fair, or is that an exaggeration?

PW: I have no idea. Let's take it that it's true, for instance. Then you'd have to look into the reasons why. Indian women are more noticeable if there's any kind of persecution per se going on. Then that would be a factor. Maybe they're singled out for arrest more. I don't know, I really don't.

SM: Did you run into any of this sort of thing in your work here?

PW: No. We didn't deal with alcohol much at all. There were alcoholics that were involved in drugs also, but alcohol counseling as a whole, it's different--it's a lot different from drug counseling. It's a different kind of problem in a lot of ways. I never had any Indians in the program. I don't know if they don't do drugs that much. I don't know the situation at the Phoenix Indian School.

SM: What you just said is interesting--you had practically no Indians in the drug program that you were working in.

PW: Right. I don't know what that means, really. Well, there's less Indians in this city than there are Mexicans and blacks. That has something to do with it.

SM: Well, the statistics I quoted were from the Civil Rights Commission; supposedly a very carefully-documentied sort of thing. They said 1% of the population was Indian. 50%--that's a staggering thing!

PW: It is. There's something wrong there. I don't know exactly what it might be.
SM: Either the figures are wrong or the situation is very bad.

PW: Well, the situation, yeah. It needs looking into.

SM: Lots of prejudice and lots of pressures that bring on alcoholism, I suppose?

PW: You'd have to compare it also with . . . say a similar study on blacks in this city, and on Mexicans in the city, to see if the statistics are at all similar, right? It might be that they are more prone to alcohol, or it could be that their persecution . . . it could be anything.

SM: The pressures bring it on, and then the prejudice would result in arrest.

PW: Right.

SM: In other places too, near reservations, people say it happened. Like they used to say in the old days, you know, the sympathy for the Indian on the frontier increased with the distance from the frontier.

PW: Oh yeah. That's still true.

SM: Do you remember back in school anyone saying that?

PW: I'm sure.

SM: And I think there was some truth in that sort of thing.

PW: Sure. The people in New York City love Indians. They'd love to see one someplace. But in some ways New York should clean up their own race problem than deal with somebody's 3,000 miles away. But it certainly could, I mean, they could always do something to help, if
their intentions were good.

SM: You are going to work at a job in New York? Have you been working at this job?

PW: No, I start when I get there in January.

SM: That's going to be a new thing.

PW: Right.

SM: Your other experience back in the East has been at Franconia in New Hampshire, so New York you're going to figure out when you get there?

PW: Right.

SM: You said you'd rather see New York solve its own racial problems before they start worrying about the problems of the American Indian out in Arizona.

PW: Uh huh.\n
SM: What did you mean by that?

PW: Blacks, the Jewish people pretty much. It seems to me, in New York--there's prejudice there--but they have it easy, I mean they've got...

SM: There are more there, somebody said, than in all of Israel.

PW: Oh . . . yeah. But they're running things there, you know. I mean, they're in charge. Like . . . prejudice is there but I don't think it's . . . and they're together . . . it's not like, certainly not the kind of things the blacks or the American Indian are experiencing, yeah, and Puerto Ricans, the main problem. Maybe, I don't
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It's just a government office, the bureaucracy, it's unbelievable. Paper is just flying everywhere, and people spending hours to do something that's really pointless. Just from talking to my father about what goes on at his job seemed like, you know.

SM: Your father works for the BIA?

PW: He works for Public Health Service.

SM: He used to work for the BIA?

PW: Yeah. It seems like it's just another government mismanagement, but human lives are at stake, a little more than they are.

SM: Your younger sister, Heather, is here and wants to say something.

PW: O.K., Heather.

Heather Wilson:
I was going to say that a lot of the people I've talked to that have problems, you know, and that feel restless, and feel violent action should be taken to make the problem better, seemed to feel that the root of their problem is the red tape of the bureaucracy—they don't want to have to wait for the big long line of papers and documents and court hearings and things—and I can see, even though I don't agree, that violent action should be taken; I can see how you can get impatient by waiting for months, you know, for a case to come up, and then, if it's not decided right away or if you have to have more evidence, it can stretch into years, and that's just one of the problems.

PW: It can be made to stretch into years by the people who are in charge, too, just to avoid the issue. Instead of saying, "No, you can't have what you want," just let 'em take 20 years to get what they want, you know. It's an easy way of doing it.
SM: In other words, dragging it out instead of coming to some kind of decision?

PW: Yeah, I think that's a fairly common practice in a lot of areas.

SM: And this works in other government bureaus too, I suppose.

PW: Yeah, I wouldn't want to . . . this is my very biased opinion, but it seems like a logical state of affairs.

SM: Well, then, about the BIA a little more. Have they accomplished anything worthwhile?

PW: I really don't know. That's such an issue. I mean, first you take this bunch of people and shove 'em on reservations, which seems to me pretty inhuman in the first place, and then you have the whole problem of whether or not this culture can be absorbed into the larger culture, and apparently the larger culture doesn't want it absorbed, the same way they don't want to absorb the black culture, so what are you going to do? Are you going to try . . . like my dad worked for a long time in relocation, which is taking people off the reservation, giving them jobs in the city, and helping them, you know, get started in the city? It's so hard to tell, for me anyway, whether that's doing the right thing, because once they're out, they aren't accepted, I mean, obviously, if they're still living on reservations, and if they aren't allowed to drink, if they're being arrested more than white people, they obviously are not being accepted into the civilization. You can't legislate integration basically, which is something that most people know already. So, then, what're you gonna do? The BIA is there to take care of them; they're like children, being taken care of by their mother. That's kind of a sick relationship in a lot of ways.

SM: But here you are now, and you're accepted, you're thriving in this
other culture, aren't you?

PW: Right, but it takes generations to do that. I'm talking about the people out there that were raised on the reservation. What are you gonna do about 'em? Sure. O.K., there would be a period of hard times. O.K., see, my dad is half and half, and his mother was half and half, and his father was half and half, so it just sort of filtered down to what I am now, which is a quarter. And that could be done with everybody, I guess, but then you're destroying a race, if you have any feelings to keeping it, I guess.

SM: Diluting it?

PW: Yeah.

SM: I thought your father was more than half Nez Perce.

PW: No. Yeah, it comes down to some weird fraction, it comes out a little more.

SM: It's just a state of mind more than it is a... 

PW: Right. Exactly, what we are talking about is a state of mind, and Cathy and I were talking about it the other night, about the state of mind.

SM: So being an Indian is more a state of mind than it is how much blood one has from what parent?

PW: Right. O.K., there's a lot of angles to that state of mind too. Like, remember, we were talking about the Indian children who were being raised in non-Indian homes? This kid, I mean, if they were full-blooded or almost, they would look Indian, and be treated differently, but their... inside, like Jackie was talking about her
father. They can't relate, and it's like being caught in the wrong body or something; so you're talking about that as a state of mind, and then talking about people who don't look Indian enough to be prejudiced against; who may have been raised, you know, like my grandmother. Her father was white and her mother was Indian, but she was raised Indian, and she always kept that state of mind.

SM: She thought of herself as an Indian?

PW: Yeah. Sure she did.

SM: She's the one that made these remarkable things for you, these . . . do I say cradleboard?

PW: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. Cradleboard, I guess.

SM: They're really remarkable pieces of work--skin and beads and dolls.

PW: They're pretty, aren't they? Have you seen her picture?

SM: Your grandmother's picture? No, I haven't.

PW: Cathy will go get it for you. Let me tell that little story about it. Cathy was asking a friend of hers--she was going to go to Dartmouth, and was going to get involved in the Native American Program--and she asked a friend of hers, "I wonder what the Indian students will be like there?" She said, "I guess they'll all be like me," and when I heard she was going to go to Dartmouth and go into this all-Indian thing--see, we lived on the reservation 'til I was about 12, and she was just a little kid when we left--so I remember a whole different . . . my concept of a reservation Indian was there where hers wasn't. And I thought, "Gosh, how's she gonna be able to relate; she thinks she's gonna dive right in and be one of the gang, where they're gonna have a hard time accepting her."
SM: As an Indian?

PW: Right. Because they would see and they did. They did get on her back constantly about, you know, being "too white" and all that kind of stuff. Which, you know, well that just opened the whole issue. Where do you draw the line?

SM: On being too white in appearance?

PW: Attitude, both, I guess.

Cathy Wilson:
Before they got to know me, they were on my back, both ways.

SM: Well, you can't help your appearance.

PW: Right. Well, that's what prejudice is all about, I guess. So, who knows.

SM: You don't get credit for it either, just because you're attractive.

PW: Right. That's right. I met some of the people. Franconia is an hour away from Hanover, so we saw each other a lot, but the people down there being just so-called "professional Indian" just kind of turned me off. They say, "Oh, here's a bandwagon I'll jump on," you know, even if they are part Indian, sometimes it seems like they're doing it just to be doing it. But, who am I to judge?

CW: The thing was, there were other students like me, then there were students off the reservations.

PW: Oh, that's another thing . . . the end of that story about Cathy thinking they'd be like her was--I never conceived that there would be any that were like her. I had never met any people that were
just like—white culture-part Indian. I had never met anybody except us and my cousin, and I just never . . . it was stupid not to think that they didn't exist, but it hadn't occurred to me, so . . .

SM: Well, that was the kind of problem many people have—they don't realize some of these other things exist, or other problems exist, and if we want to be forgiving we can recognize that a lot of them are innocent in their reactions, having been brought up on movies and that sort of thing. To go on from here, what problems do you see? What are your pet peeves or gripes about the whole situation, if any?

PW: The Indian situation?

SM: The Indian situation is what I mean, yes.

PW: It's the injustice of the situation. I get annoyed by the fact that the government is mismanaging the problem. I get annoyed by the fact that they are forced to live on reservations and that their situation is pretty much hopeless, except for that sheltered few that happen to get out. It's similar to the black problem in this country. It's just like . . . it seems insoluble.

SM: Quite a few individuals have seemed to solve it.

PW: Right. It has to be done on an individual basis, I think. I'd have to understand the problem more to be able to say what solutions I thought were needed.

SM: In other words, I can't ask you for the solution?

PW: No, sorry. (laughter)

SM: I don't mean to be facetious entirely, but partly.
PW: But it seems to me that complete revamping of the government services to the Indians is one place to start anyway.

SM: Putting the decisions in the hands of the Indians themselves?

PW: No, see, that's a hard issue to answer. Putting them in the hands of the most capable people. But, how do you choose the most capable person? You'd have to sit down and decide what you wanted to accomplish, and the fastest, easiest way to accomplish it. See, you're dealing with tribal governments which, as far as I can ascertain, are pretty emotional, non-logical organizations. And I don't know, don't you have that impression, Cathy?

CW: Not entirely, but kind of. I think that the tribal governments should be allowed to decide for themselves what they want to use that money for and how they want to manage it. Even if maybe it turns out to be all wrong, I think it's up to them, and I think they should be left to do it their own way.

SM: Has she got the point there that even if they make their own mistakes let them make their own mistakes?

PW: O.K. Say they're given a bunch of money. There are people who'd go in and just rob them blind if given the opportunity. And it has been done—they've been robbed blind for two hundred years, so then you get into the whole issue—when are you gonna call it protection, and when are you gonna call it coercion, you know—and it's an area that can't be defined in black and white.

SM: Was this the situation up there in South Dakota in '73 when two different Indian groups were disputing the control of the Sioux Tribal Council?

PW: Cathy might know more about it than I do.
SM: Well, you know up at Wounded Knee here, early '73, February, when AIM moved in, and disapproved, let us say, of this man Wilson who was the head of the tribal council. Was that an argument between AIM and the BIA, the government, or was it an argument between AIM and Wilson and his group?

CW: O.K., I don't know the exact whole story, but from what I can tell from talking to different Sioux people and other things, it was an argument between AIM and its followers, kind of, and then the man, the tribal chairman there. I know not all the Sioux people were behind AIM in that, but there were a lot of people who really didn't like Wilson, and therefore followed AIM in trying to oust him.

SM: They had an election here not too long ago, and Wilson did win again, and then AIM claimed it had been a fraudulent election. Did you hear about that?

CW: Yeah, I heard about that. I also heard in that election that somebody told us, some Sioux person told me, that more older people, more people got out to vote in that election than had ever come out in a previous election. Now whether or not they came out and voted for Wilson or Banks, I think it was Dennis Banks, I don't know. Russell Means, maybe it was, that was running against him. But more people supposedly came out in that election to vote than before.

SM: Do you have any attitude on that sort of thing, Plesah, about the problem of the Indian groups quarrelling between themselves? If funds were made available from the government, would it be dissipated because of this kind of thing, or would it just be an opportunity to make some of their own mistakes and then get on with some progress?

PW: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, maybe they should be given the
opportunity to dissipate, say, two million dollars down the drain, just, and if anybody could learn by their mistakes they should be allowed to make the mistakes. Some people just look at the two million dollars and say—but we throw away more money than that every day on bombs, so why not, you know.

SM: The bombs part, that was a little bit past history, or did you mean the current defense budget?

PW: Well, they spend quite a bit on . . . they're cutting down, but sort of a general attitude.

SM: Our foreign aid, for example, is much larger than any aid to Indians, I imagine.

PW: Oh, sure it is, although I really don't know. But foreign aid is a political measure and they have nothing to gain from . . .

SM: Is that one of the Indians' problems—no political clout?

PW: Sure. They had everything taken away from them, and they have nothing to offer.

SM: There aren't enough of them to elect very many senators?

PW: Right. And there's very few senators that are sympathetic to their problems. The problem itself has never been really dealt with. The political groups like AIM are . . . there's a need for some political action, and political activism I think has a definite place in this country. But, from what I've seen of these people, they're just running around with no real direction or concept of what they want to accomplish, although maybe that's not true.

SM: Publicity, maybe?
PW: The publicity they've gotten seems to be pretty good. They get good press.

SM: They get a lot of it.

PW: Yeah. Yeah, just getting press at all, just the fact that they brought the word "Indian" in front of people's eyes is accomplishing something, whether they're squabbling amongst themselves or not. But, I don't know, some of the people down at Dartmouth seem kind of pompous and self-centered to me. As far as being political activists, you know, it seems they weren't going at it the way I was used to in the old days, demonstrating against the war in Viet Nam. I don't know, I can't leave much of an opinion on that, because I haven't spoken to them really that much.

SM: Have you participated in any of the Indian movements?

PW: No. When I got to Franconia after being there maybe two semesters--the whole town is apolitical. Most of the news is heard word-of-mouth. You read the paper for enjoyment, but the whole campus itself is pretty much apolitical. It was a conglomeration of people who had been politically active at one time, faculty and students both who were now just sort of. . . .

SM: Putting that aside. . . .?

PW: Yeah, most of the political energy went into prison reform at that particular school, because there was one guy there that was really interested. So there were no Indians in New Hampshire. There were some down by Cathy, but I didn't get down there that much to visit.

SM: Cathy down at Dartmouth?

PW: Yeah. No, I've never gotten involved--I should have just said, "no."
SM: Well, what about your future in this whole situation? You're going to New York, and you've got a job lined up there. May I ask what kind?

PW: Yes, I was working for a music festival in New Hampshire, which was similar to Tanglewood, but smaller, you know, just getting going.

SM: Administratively?

PW: Right. And last summer one of the oboe players was in charge of a program called "Concerts for Young Audiences. They do a concert series during the season at elementary schools. They do a ballet, or they'll do chamber music at different schools. They have offices in Manhattan, and they need administrative help. It's exactly what I had been doing for the last two summers, and it's interesting work. You meet a lot of people--it's not very rigid, structured, office-type work. You can be out running around looking for things or helping get organized or video taping a performance. There's a lot to do, that's why I'm attracted to it.

SM: Sounds interesting.

PW: Yeah. And I know a lot of the people, and I find them agreeable company.

SW: And you don't know whether you're going to go on in psychology or not?

PW: I might. I might.

SM: That's open yet. You can decide that.

PW: Yeah. There's a guy in London that's doing some work with schizophrenics I'd like to check out, but my primary interest really is just going to London and Europe in general. If I went, I don't think
it would be going for a degree per se, because there's a lot of PhD's in psychology working in banks, and, you know, they're thinking of starting a master's program at Franconia--all they have is a BA now, where they would have a sort of half-way house for schizophrenics, and the faculty and the students would all be involved in working with it.

SM: It would have to be a small program, wouldn't it?

PW: Very. It would be like a large house, with maybe at the most 15 people. But the state hospital there lost its accreditation because it was in such terrible condition, so government and state funds would probably be available to help get it going, and school funds would be available; staff would be available through the students in a lot of ways, plus the learning experience would be good.

SM: When you get back to New York . . . are you going after the holidays, in January?

PW: Yes. We're leaving Thursday.

SM: When you get to New York, if you should have any additional thoughts on something you'd like to put on a tape, would you mind doing that, or say, a year from now?

PW: Yeah.

SM: Because your opinions might change.

PW: Oh, I'm sure they will.

SM: Then, maybe prompted to give it some more thought by actually doing this particular tape, you'll say two weeks from now, "I wish I'd said this or that."
PW: Oh yeah, I could talk about it for hours.

SM: I could mail you a tape if you would complete one for me.

PW: I can't make a promise--I don't write letters--I don't even write to my mother when I should.

SM: This is the way to do it--just send her a tape.

PW: That's true.

SM: Get an inexpensive tape recorder, and mail her a tape now and then.

PW: I should, I should. It'd be fun to talk to one another.

SM: And I really hope you would do that. I have several people who I hope will make tapes for me as things occur to them, because I know that we can't think of all the things we'd really like to say on the spur of the moment, and if something should occur that you would like to say, I would like to have it on tape, because your opinion--who knows when it's going to help somebody else--maybe only me, but someone. And maybe just help you by expressing it. That's always possible too.

PW: Yeah, oh sure.

SM: Now you mentioned you might have another thought already. What was that?

PW: Oh, I was just thinking about the problems of the Indians in this country, and how they can be solved. I mean, something needs to be done, obviously. I really don't know what it is. If I was going to understand it, I would probably go to the reservation. It seems like it's hard to get the reservation Indians to express how they really
feel. And you've got sort of a cultural, religious background that is hard for people to understand. You've got to understand any person in the context of his whole culture and background. And it seems to me that a lot of the BIA personnel don't really understand that very well. They go in with their western European ideas, and try to inflict them--and it is inflicting when you do it in this way--upon people with a whole completely different cultural background. And then you've got the people, the inbetweeners, like my dad. There's a lot of people like him, that are sort of like middlemen, you know, and they're essential, but it seems like somehow you could reach a greater understanding--I don't know what I'm getting at there. It seems like you could reach a point where the middleman wasn't as necessary as he is today. Greater communication could be....

SM: That's why we're making this tape.

PW: Right. Right. So, I don't know. Have you ever lived on the reservation?

SM: No, but close. Twenty miles.

PW: Yeah, for a long time. See, my concept of the reservation is fairly strong, but my ideas and what I thought about when I was from six to twelve years old are a lot different now. I mean, even a 12-year old doesn't conceive of... I took it for granted, the whole situation. And I sort of saw that the Indian kids were treated poorly at the school that I went to, but I was in a different....

SM: They seemed a little different from you somehow?

PW: Yeah, they were really quiet--kept in the background. And I never thought about them the way I do now. I was very self-centered, in my own little life. I was in to competing for grades, and hanging out with my friends, and playing with my dolls and stuff, and I'd
never looked at it as an issue or a problem that needed solving, or an injustice. I saw injustice once in a while, of course; you couldn't ignore it. But I didn't look at it, I didn't think about it every day. Well, that's how kids are. I mean, the cruelty of the white kids to the Indian kids... is just self-centered... injustice. A lot of those kids that were prejudiced probably were just picking it up from their parents, things their parents had said.

SM: Isn't that where we learn most of our prejudices—from others? Which can be good or bad, that is, if there are good prejudices. Are there any?

PW: Prejudice implies saying, "This is right and this is wrong." And I don't really think you can say that about anything. Black and white don't exist, I mean, right now anyway. I really don't think you can be that rigid in your thinking about any problem at all, especially when human beings are involved.

SM: Because it is complex and we can't escape that. We keep coming back to that all the time, don't we? It's unavoidable, I guess. Any other thoughts on that over-riding problem of what in the world can we do? Try to provide the same options for everybody maybe?

PW: You could. See, you're talking about prejudice in this country. Look what the black people have. They have no culture; they lost it all. But still they build their own, in a way. The black person in American seems to be unique. I mean, Africa has no meaning to them really, except they know they came from there at one time. Whereas with the Indians, they still have—it's changed over the years, but they were never shipped off to another country—and the tie's never been broken. And in hanging on to something, they're hanging on because that's all they have, you know. Yet this outside culture has shoved them into this horrible existence, and is constantly
pressuring them to get out of their way, or to quit bothering them. They live under constant strain, I think. It's even more . . . like the alcohol problem. I mean, alcohol obviously is an escape from reality. Alcoholism itself, they don't know for sure if it's . . . the last I heard was that if you're an alcoholic you're an alcoholic, whether you never take a drink a day in your life. But I don't think they know enough about it. But still he's got this definite problem, and sure, if their existence is miserable why should they want to face it? And yet, so there's somebody gets arrested for being drunk. Right? And of course society comes down on him because he's being anti-social in his behavior--getting drunk, shooting something. Where if you really delved into the personality of the person, they're reacting to an insane society in a very logical and sane manner.

SM: Escapism or attempt at it?

PW: Sure. Why shouldn't they? And suicide also. To them anything would be better, and until it is better, they have a perfect right to act the way that they do. But it seems like a very sad state of affairs. But, what are you going to do about it? I don't know--I don't have the answers, and I'm not a political person any more, really, except verbally, which is nothing. Put your money where your mouth is. So, I don't know.

SM: Well, can I take a rain check then on the idea that when you get some--I don't mean answers, because that's a little fatuous that we're going to come up with answers--but when you get some more opinions, or some more questions, maybe we can record them too.

PW: Sure.

SM: Well, I do appreciate your talking to me, and I hope you have the best of luck with your experience in New York--I'm sure you will, because
I think you will make it about what you want it to be.

PW: Yeah, that's basically how life turns out, usually.

SM: So then, we'll look forward to seeing you again, and thanks again.