DELPHINE YAZZIE, Navajo
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Ganado, 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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Sam Myers:

Today I'm talking to a young lady in Ganado, Arizona. She's a student here at the College of Ganado, and her name is Delphine Yazzie.

Delphine Yazzie:

It's Yah'-zie.

SM: Good. You corrected me. Please correct me if I mispronounce anything. Are you related to some of these famous artists? I've seen that name on art work.

DY: I don't know, I might be, but Yazzie around here is like Smith or Jones.

SM: I have seen several times on beautiful art work in museums all over the country, as far east as Oklahoma, the name Yazzie. Also Begay.

DY: Yes, Begay is like that too.

SM: But back to you now, Delphine. Where were you born?

DY: O.K. I was born here in Ganado. Sage Memorial Hospital.

SM: Oh, that's the hospital right here that adjoins the campus.

DY: Right, uh huh.

SM: It all used to be part of one installation, but now it's separate?

DY: Yes it is.

SM: Then did you grow up in Ganado?
DY: No, I didn’t grow up here. We have a home down in Greasewood. It’s about 25 miles south of here. And we have a home down there.

SM: That’s Greasewood, Arizona?

DY: Yes, and we have cattle and horses. We don’t have any sheep, like, you know, most people do.

SM: Are your folks still down there?

DY: Yes they are. My parents are divorced. They still get together sometimes, just for us, I guess.

SM: You have brothers and sisters?

DY: Yes. Well, I have an older sister, she’s nine years older than I am, and a younger brother, who is just two years younger than me.

SM: And then, so you grew up down there at Greasewood. Is there a school down there that you went to?

DY: I went to school there. It was a boarding school just for two years, and then after that I went to St. Michael’s.

SM: A boarding school, for any students who aren’t familiar with them, is where you go and live at the school, isn’t it?

DY: Yes. My mother worked for the boarding school there, so I could walk back and forth to school. I didn’t stay in the dorm.

SM: So it was a boarding school, but you weren’t boarding there? Well, that’s a good twist on the boarding school idea, because usually the students have to come from home and stay there, don’t they?
DY: The boarding schools are usually for the kids who live far away, and you know, a bus can't go out there for them, so they have to come to school and stay in the dorm and go to school from there every day and go home on the week-end.

SM: And so you started out at that school. That was elementary, wasn't it?

DY: Um hm. That was third, fourth and fifth grades.

SM: And then you came up here to St. Francis?

DY: Um hm. St. Michael's.

SM: Where is that?

DY: It's over in Window Rock, about 30 miles down east of here.

SM: And that was an elementary and high school. Was that a Catholic school?

DY: Yes it is.

SM: And then you graduated from there?


SM: And then you came here?

DY: Um hm.

SM: You've hardly had time to do much of anything else between now and then.
DY: (laughter) Yes.

SM: So then you have been here at Ganado, now this is your second year?

DY: Yes, it is.

SM: You're one of the old timers.

DY: Well, not yet. (laughter)

SM: At any rate, you're not one of the brand new freshmen this fall?

DY: No, I'm not.

SM: And at the college elections for student senate, you were elected here just recently as one of the councilmen, or councilwomen, or councilpersons, or what do you call it?

DY: No. They have the board of regents here at the college. I represent the students.

SM: What is your title?

DY: Representative to the board of regents for students . . . I don't know.

SM: Oh, student representative to the board of regents?

DY: Yes, that's fine.

SM: So you are the students' voice then to the board of regents?

DY: Yes.

SM: That's kind of a heavy job, isn't it?
DY: Yes it is. I just realized that. Our first meeting is going to be November 1st.

SM: And you have to go over and talk to the board of regents?

DY: Um hm.

SM: Does that scare you a little bit?

DY: (laughter) Well, not right now, but when I really start thinking about what I'm going to say when I get there . . . .

SM: You get some input from the students about what they want you to say too, don't you?

DY: Um hm. I do.

SM: And carry their message as their representative?

DY: Um hm. They elected two, one on campus and one off campus, because we have some students commuting to school.

SM: So then you have one from each group.

DY: Um hm. The board of regents asked for two students.

SM: Does the board of regents meet here on campus?

DY: Yes they do.

SM: So at least you don't have to travel to someplace else.

DY: Right.
SM: You can get all prepared, make your notes about whatever you're going to do, and then beard the lion in his den, as it were.

DY: (laughter)

SM: They're not like that, are they?

DY: No, no they're not.

SM: It's not difficult?

DY: I think it has to consist of Indian, you know, Indian people. I think 51% have to be Indian.

SM: They are in sympathy with you kids, aren't they?

DY: I hope so.

SM: They're mostly your parents, relatives and so on, acquaintances in the community?

DY: Yes, but none of them are my relatives.

SM: No, but I mean of the student body.

DY: Yes, pretty much.

SM: Like in most small towns, the school board is made up of people who have kids in school, you know, that sort of thing.

DY: Um hm.

SM: 'Cause those are the only people usually who have the interest.
DY: But we do have members. I was just looking at the list the other day, and we do have members from Phoenix, Flagstaff, Roswell. I think there is one from Roswell, New Mexico.

SM: Isn't that unusual?

DY: I don't know. I thought it was.

SM: In other words, it isn't a little group of people in the neighborhood.

DY: No. But we do have some people, you know, from here.

SM: That's unusual. How many regents are there?

DY: Wow, I don't remember.

SM: Nine or ten or so?

DY: Twenty something.

SM: It started out as a mission school way back, didn't it?

DY: Yes it did.

SM: And then it's been gradually changed over until now it's a junior college?

DY: It is. It used to be, I think, a junior high school, and then a high school.

SM: And then a high school, and then gradually dropped these as the public school was built on the other side of town over there, and now it's a junior college. What's your major, do you know yet?
DY: My major? O.K., I want to go into consumerism. You know, consumer education, because I don't think there are very many people here on the reservation that know how to go about buying things, and I'd kind of like to set up a consumer education program for the reservation. But, you know, something like that. And I want to go into business law where I'll be into reading contracts and things like that, and I want to go into education.

SM: Now business law would be going past the consumer education thing, wouldn't it?

DY: Right.

SM: So then you are going to work at the one for a while before you go on?

DY: I hope to do that. Yes.

SM: Well, that would be the practical way to do it. Besides, you'd be older and more sure if you want to spend the time in law school, because that's another, what, two or three years after your B.A.?

DY: Yes.

SM: Several of the students I've known who have gone to law school have had a hard time getting admitted, so you should start early, because there seem to be more applicants than there are places in the law schools in the country.

DY: Well, I was going to go down . . . from here I was going to go to the University of Arizona, or Grand Canyon College in Phoenix.

SM: So then, the consumerism thing. Let's look at that a little bit
more. Is there a degree in that?

DY: You mean here at the college?

SM: Here or wherever you'd go?

DY: Well, I really haven't looked into it that much.

SM: Right now you're just taking general liberal arts courses?

DY: Um hm. I took a class this summer which was Consumer Economics, and I really learned a lot in there.

SM: Where are you going to go next?

DY: Probably University of Arizona or Grand Canyon College in Phoenix.

SM: This is for the consumerism?

DY: Um hm.

SM: Grand Canyon College in Phoenix?

DY: I think that's a Baptist College.

SM: It's on the north side of the city, and the one down in Tucson, that's the university, that's an old one. There's ASU too, at Tempe, that's another good one.

DY: I think ASU is too big for me.

SM: Strangely enough, it's bigger than the university.

DY: Yes it is.
SM: But then, there are lots of Indian students there, if that would help, but you're pretty self-sufficient, aren't you?

DY: Yes I am.

SM: You don't seem to be the kind of person who would be crushed simply by being different than half of the other people.

DY: Yes, I'm not like that.

SM: It does bother some students, though.

DY: Yes it does.

SM: And you could help them, too. Well, so you could go down there and get a degree in consumer education. In other words, you'd have a BA or BS in Education, in Consumerism.

DY: Yes.

SM: And then you plan to go out and work on the reservation for a while to help the people to manage their purchases better and all this sort of thing?

DY: Yes I would, 'cause 'bout, I think it was in the spring, early spring somewhere around there....

SM: This last spring?

DY: Yes. I was looking at a contract. You know, they have, like us looking at a contract between a car dealer and the purchaser, you know.

SM: When you are going to buy a car?
DY: Yes. You know how they have the annual 12% interest rate? That's supposed to be deducted, and it never was. And it, you know, just kind of made me . . . oh. . . .

SM: All these little things that you can run into in making purchases that a lot of people don't know about?

DY: Yes. And especially in Gallup. I think that's the biggest ripoff place. Like I found out . . . our teacher was telling us that Gallup makes the fourth largest profit in the world for Ford Motor Company.

SM: Really?

DY: Yes, and it's just off of the reservation. All the border towns are like that.

SM: Do you mean because they make so much profit on the sales they make? They can't possibly make as many sales as are made in Chicago, for example.

DY: Yes, um hm.

SM: That's an interesting statistic. You got this out of your last class?

DY: Yes I did.

SM: The fourth largest. . . .

DY: Um hm.

SM: Profit of any city in the country?

DY: In the world!
SM: In the world! That's staggering!

DY: It is!

SM: These staggering statistics shock people into thinking.

DY: Um hm.

SM: Well then, because so many people ... pickups are very popular here, aren't they?

DY: Yes they are, because, you know, lots of people here, like haul things, haul stock.

SM: And they're rugged, and then they're not the most expensive car either.

DY: Right. I mean, you know how they can reclaim a car or something if you don't make payments? They're supposed to have a court order from the tribe, and you know, they have come out here and just taken, you know, just towed the pickup away without a court order. And a lot of times, they'll just, you know, just take one without even asking or inquiring about it. And, you know, people come home and maybe their car will be there during the day, they'll come home and their vehicle will be gone!

SM: That must be quite a jolt. And they think it's stolen, I suppose, at first.

DY: And then, somehow, they find out about it.

SM: It's been repossessed because they didn't keep the payments up?

DY: Yes. Right. But they're supposed to have a court order.
SM: Before they take it?

DY: Um hm.

SM: And so you would work in this area, helping people to understand what they're doing, what they're really buying.

DY: Right.

SM: Can you think of any other instances you might help people with?

DY: Oh, let's see. Like I mentioned earlier, the trading post. You know, how, like in a supermarket, they'll have prices marked on, maybe like a can of peaches or something. In the trading post you'll notice that they're not marked. And they're supposed to be marked. And, as a result, you know, I think people really get ripped off.

SM: In other words, if somebody comes in and they figure they can charge more they will?

DY: Um hm.

SM: Hey, now, you nodded your head, and I can't hear that. (laughter)

DY: Yes, well, like maybe a can of peaches will be like ... what is a can of peaches in the supermarket?

SM: A can of peaches, like 40¢?

DY: They might sell it for like about 80¢.

SM: Really?

DY: Yes. No price on it.
SM: So the customer comes in, picks up the can of peaches, and then they'll charge them 80¢ for it?

DY: Yes. Um hm. It's mostly like this in the really remote areas of the reservation though.

SM: I've heard this. One man said, "Go to a reservation, that's where the prices are high." Because the people are sort of at the mercy of the merchant. And they have to drive 40 or 50 miles if they don't want to buy his things, so they pay the price.

DY: Um hm.

SM: Is it in the larger cities where there is lots more competition that prices tend to be lower?

DY: Yes. Um hm.

SM: Well, so you could help people with that, try to get something done about that. What would you do? Maybe get some laws passed?

DY: Probably.

SM: Maybe the tribal council can require that sort of thing to be corrected?

DY: I think they could if, you know, people really started raising a fuss about it.

SM: I wonder why they don't now?

DY: Ignorance maybe.

SM: Do you mean they think there's nothing they can do about it, or haven't
thought about it?

DY: I think they really haven't thought about it. I think that a lot of times the problem is people will, you know, make a fuss about a lot of things and just not do anything about it. That really irks me. Some say, "I don't care, I'll just leave that up to the next person."

SM: But you're going to change that?

DY: I hope so.

SM: Well, that's good. That's where improvement comes, when people get an idea like that and are willing to pay the price, and work. Have you heard of Ada Deer?


SM: She's a famous Menominee Indian woman up in Wisconsin.

DY: Yes, it does sound familiar now.

SM: She is well known throughout the United States. She led the Menominee's fight for restoration of their reservation because it had been terminated. And she said if there is anything she wanted to get across to young people it is that one person can make a difference. She said you have to pay the price--whatever it may be--that is, you have to spend the time and do the work and make the effort. But you can do it. And you sound like you are getting ready to do the same thing. What else would you work on in consumer education?

DY: Let's see. I can't think of anything right now.

SM: Is there a need for education on the reservation--helping mothers, for example, to know what to buy for their children?
DY: Yes they have, Like everyday they have a broadcast on the radio where a woman, who is speaking Navajo, she tells it, like, you know, a lot of the families who cannot afford to buy plenty of food for their family, they get commodity foods, you know. Big hunks of cheese. Oh! That cheese is good! And she'll come on the radio and tell them how to prepare the food so that it will last longer. I've heard that one.

SM: Would you do something like that too?

DY: I don't think so. I'm more into...

SM: You're not thinking so much of the problems of diet, or buying the right foods for the kids as you are the contractual obligations and the pricing?

DY: Right.

SM: Because the people aren't aware that they can shop around and maybe do better?

DY: Right.

SM: And you would encourage correcting this kind of thing... making people aware of it?

DY: Yes I would.

SM: It's a worthy purpose, a worthy cause. I hope you're successful.

DY: I want to be.

SM: And then you're thinking of going from there on to law school?
DY: Yes, so that . . . so that I know what I'm doing, really.

SM: In other words, you will use the law school training back in this other work.

DY: Right, I could.

SM: Or go on into something else, couldn't you?

DY: Right. That's the way I want to work it, if I can.

SM: Does the tribal government have lawyers on its staff, on retainer, or anything like that?

DY: I really don't know, but they have in Window Rock this thing called DNA - a group of lawyers and, you know, there are people on the reservation will go there and the lawyers will help them out. I don't know if they have any Indian lawyers or Navajo lawyers. I don't know that.

SM: I've talked to one Indian girl, she's a Nez Perce girl. Do you know any Nez Perces?

DY: No. I thought it was pronounced Nez Per-say.

SM: Well, it's pronounced many ways, and that's one of them. Nez Per-say, but they call themselves Nez Perce. I've heard it pronounced Ney Persay, too, but that's French, I guess, and it is a French word.

DY: Yes it is.

SM: Referring to a cut nose, or a ring in the nose. But she said she was going to finish her BA at Dartmouth and then take law at Arizona State University, because she said that they had one of the best
slants toward Indian law, of the law that would help Indians, in their law school.

DY: ASU? I really haven't checked into that yet.

SM: Well, it's a little early, but then, I imagine when you do get along, what, maybe in your junior year, it would be time to start putting out feelers for admittance, and finding out where the great pressure is, and where the room might be and space, and so on.

DY: I really don't know how to do it, too.

SM: If you ask a lot of questions, you'll get a lot of answers.

DY: Um hm. The thing is, I haven't started asking questions yet.

SM: Well, law school, then. Would you practice as a private lawyer?

DY: No, I don't think so. I mean, I would probably advise and things like that.

SM: You are coming back here to work with your people?

DY: Yes.

SM: Is that correct to say "your people?" Some say are you going to use your education to help "your people?" Does that sound kind of ... patronizing?

DY: Not to me. You know, it never does to me. You know, things like that just don't bother me.

SM: Some people are super-sensitive about these things.
DY: Yes I know. Um hm, they are. I don't know if I should say it... Timothy is. I always argued with him. I constantly argued with him.

SM: Yes. Well, he's an interesting young man. He's very concerned about people.

DY: Yes he is. We're just concerned in different ways.

SM: All three of the students I've talked to today are, and this is really quite remarkable. Three young college students here, and every one of you is planning to dedicate his or her life to helping other people. Great! It really is.

DY: I don't know, I think maybe I'm like that because it seems to me, like where I am right now is really, you know, kind of good luck too. My schooling at St. Michael's... I was, you know, Catholic, and my parents always told me I should do this, you know.

SM: Are they Catholic too?

DY: Yes they are. And I really don't know much about my own ways.

SM: You mean the Navajo religion and so on?

DY: Right. I know some things, but not really that deep. I don't know.

SM: Some of the people talk about the old way, or the religion of "my people," and some of them are very serious about it. A young college student up in Kansas at the university was in the Native American Church, and it was a fascinating experience to hear him explain how he felt.

DY: I'm not into that.
SM: The use of peyote and so on?

DY: Yes.

SM: Which is perfectly legal.

DY: Right.

SM: The Navajo people were one of the last governmental subdivisions to make it legal.

DY: Yes, I think that's right, yes.

SM: Because the tribal government had ruled it out, and the state of Arizona had also declared it illegal, but their own Supreme Court overturned the decision, so it's legal here now too.

DY: Right. A lot of people use it?

SM: In the church, mostly, don't they?

DY: Um hm. But there are some families who don't use it, like my family. We don't.

SM: I guess you can be both in the Christian church and in the Native American Church at the same time, some people have said.

DY: Yes.

SM: Do you know any people who are in the Native American Church?

DY: Ah, yes, yes I do.

SM: Now they're quite normal, sober, law-abiding people, aren't they?
DY: Yes they are.

SM: In fact, usually more so than the average, wouldn't you say?

DY: I don't know. I really don't know about that.

SM: Well, according to the figures I have read they are supposed to be.

DY: Um. I didn't know that.

SM: Yes, don't drink, many of them do smoke, because they use some smoking in the process, sometimes, although all of them don't. Very sober, hard-working, serious-minded people. Part of the teachings of the religion itself.

DY: Um hm.

SM: Your folks have been Catholic for quite a while now?

DY: Right, but we still have our ceremonies.

SM: Oh, do you?

DY: Like I had a ceremony about two months ago.

SM: Would you explain that?

DY: O.K. I got really sick. It wasn't like, you know, it wasn't sick with a temperature or anything, it was the kind of sickness you get where you just, you just think awful thoughts, like I thought I was going to die, and what if I would die the next second! I would just sit there and just . . . I'd be terrified!

SM: What do you suppose brought that on?
DY: Well, my parents got worried. Are you familiar with the Hand Shakers?

SM: No.

DY: O.K. The Navajo people, it either can be a man or a woman, some kind of power they have. I don't know . . . but they . . . I guess they get messages or something through their hands, and their hands just start shaking like that, and it just kind of like roams over your body.

SM: The shaking?

DY: Yes . . . and, yes, the shaking. I guess they pray or something, and you know, they get messages back, and whoever tells them why this person is sick. It's just like a . . . I guess like extra-sensory perception or something like that. And, well, this woman did that on me, and she said my heart was kind of trembling, my heart wouldn't be still. Because, you know, I would be clutching my heart like this, you know, and I thought it was going to stop any minute. I was just really thinking awful thoughts, you know. I was thinking . . . it wasn't like a heart attack, it just, I just felt so . . . I wanted to cry a lot of times.

SM: Depression?

DY: I was so depressed, I think. And I just . . . it seems to me that what I thought was evil, you know . . . I think, my dad's going to die tonight, and . . . oh . . . ! Just like two weeks before that we had my uncle's funeral, you know. He died of a heart attack.

SM: Oh, well, maybe that's what brought it on.

DY: Maybe, I don't know. I just . . . you see, he was riding his horse
and we were going to get together that week-end and they were going to brand cattle or something, I don't remember. He rode out on his horse and then my brother and my dad followed him. Then about 15 minutes later my brother comes, you know, riding to the house so fast, and he says, "Del, hurry, get the pickup started. Something's wrong with my uncle." So, guess he didn't know, you know, 'cause he turned around right before they got to my uncle. And so we left, and I got to my uncle, and I said, "What's wrong with you?" I turned him over and he... he was cold, and he was blue already, and I think it really shocked me.

SM: A real shock for you, wasn't it?

DY: I think it did that to me. And, you know, the medicine men will say if you've gone through some kind of shock like that you'll get sick. And I think... .

SM: Maybe that's what started this whole series?

DY: Probably.

SM: Because it was a shocking experience.

DY: And then the lady said what has happened, you know, earlier, caused me to do that, feel so depressed and everything like that, so then I had a prayer done for me, which was to kind of guard off evil like.

SM: You had a prayer by whom?

DY: O.K. She said that I would need a prayer to guard off this evil, and we asked her who could do that, and usually they will recommend a medicine man.
SM: You called a medicine man?

DY: Yes. We called a medicine man, and he came and he did that prayer for me, and I also stood for the rest of my family. Like, you know, I also prayed for my family. And during, you know, when I was praying, I started to cry! You know, I cried so bad that I had to stop, and my mother would finish praying for me.

SM: Now this is praying in the Navajo ceremony?

DY: Right.

SM: And did they do a sand painting?

DY: Not in this one, not in this one. All they did was bring in some dirt, put a basket there, I think it was a Navajo wedding basket there, and he had me wash myself, start from my head, you know, and down that way. And afterwards, after the ceremony, I felt a whole lot better. And now my mom says I'm going to need a good luck prayer.

SM: How long did this take?

DY: The ceremony?

SM: Yes.

DY: See . . . about two days.

SM: So you had quite a bit of time to make an adjustment.

DY: What do you mean, adjustment?

SM: Well, from the depression you had been feeling to a better-adjusted feeling.
DY: Right. Yes.

SM: So isn't that what it is largely, a sort of psychosomatic healing?

DY: Um hm. And I felt a lot better since then.

SM: The Indian medicine man, and I don't like that term, really, because it isn't quite exactly accurate, but it's as close as we can get in a translation, I guess.

DY: That doesn't bother me.

SM: No, I know, but I wish I knew a better way to say it. Healer, or doctor, or something would probably be as good or better. But they did perform some remarkable things, and had a high record of healings in the old days.

DY: Yes, the one medicine man was telling us that there was this woman in the hospital. She couldn't get well. Her doctors, they couldn't do anything, so they brought him, and he did a prayer, I don't know, some kind of a ceremony on her, and she got well, and she left the hospital. And he said he had done that several times and people have gotten well. The doctors do want them to come and help.

SM: I have heard of medical doctors who said, "Well, that's all I can do. From here on it's faith that is going to have to work," and sometimes it does.

DY: Um hm. This one lady was telling me, she said the doctors told her she had gall-bladder stones. She went to this medicine man. I never understood this, too. Some medicine men will take out things off of your body. Like one time I had a bone taken out from my head, the top of my forehead.
SM: Actually, or...?

DY: Yes, he cut me. And he sucked it out, you know, with his mouth, and he spit it out, there was blood on it. He said it was a bone.

SM: Do you have a scar?

DY: No, I don't have a scar.

SM: Healed up without a scar?

DY: Right.

SM: That's amazing too, isn't it?

DY: And he'd tell me that it was the bone of a dead body. And I used to have terrible headaches. I'd just, you know, want to bang at things, and I had another headache, and while he was there--he was at our house to perform on someone else and I was there at the same time my headache came on--and my mom got worried and she asked him. So then, as soon as he took that thing out, my headache went away, and I've... since then I haven't had a headache, which was about four years ago.

SM: That's remarkable. That's a testimonial, an actual fact, and the headaches were real, weren't they?

DY: Yes, they were. I used to cry!

SM: You were what? Fifteen or sixteen then?

DY: Um hm.

SM: And you've never had one since?
DY: I never have.

SM: He actually cut your forehead and took a piece of bone out?

DY: Yes. He cut my forehead with a spearhead or something.

SM: Pointed . . . an obsidian blade, or something?

DY: Yes, something, one of those things. And to this day . . . well, I'll have a slight headache, like maybe from the heat, or from too much reading or something, but not like the kind of headaches I had.

SM: That's amazing.

DY: I was just saying, this woman, too, she was going to the doctor's, and they told her she had gall-bladder stones. And this man, I don't know if it's the same man or not, he took stones out from her . . . I don't know, where's the gall bladder? Somewhere.

SM: Down near the middle below the stomach?

DY: And she said he took out things from there, and she went back to the hospital and the doctor told her she had no more gall-bladder stones. I was even amazed at that.

SM: Now, when he took those out, did he cut her too?

DY: Yes. Each medicine man has a different way of doing it. Some will cut, some will pick it out with their hands, you know, with their fingers, and oh, that . . . my heart, the medicine men told me that there was something in there, so then we took me to . . . my mom took me to a man that takes out things off of the body too. And he cut me right here (motioning to a line along the base of her neck). The scar is blue, a tiny bit. You can't . . .
SM: You can't see it from here, it isn't light enough.

DY: Right about here, he cut me, and he just pulled. And to me it kind of hurt.

SM: I would imagine.

DY: And it just felt like everything was being pulled from here (up from my heart toward the incision near my neck). And he just, it just came out with a jerk like, and you know, I just felt really light all of a sudden. I kind of felt happy, and I was just gay and everything after that. I even had a cigarette after that. (laughter)

SM: Did he give you anything?

DY: Give me anything?

SM: Like any kind of anesthetic or anything?

DY: No. I could feel, it felt like my muscles were being pulled up this way, and then when he jerked it out I just felt really different.

SM: And you haven't had this difficulty with your heart since then?

DY: Right.

SM: And the headaches have been gone since then, since that other experience?

DY: Yes.

SM: You have got some amazing records there. Have you ever talked to a medical doctor about this?
DY: No.

SM: Do you ever talk to the priest in your church about it?

DY: No. I haven't. I haven't gone to Mass in a long time.

SM: Do you think they would disapprove of what you did?

DY: No. Like when I was at St. Michael's, you know, they never, you know... like if my parents came and said we were going to have a ceremony, we want you to come home, they let me go home, because they didn't keep us from things like that.

SM: In other words, they respected your interest and desire to be part of the ceremony.

DY: They did.

SM: And so they went along with it.

DY: Um hm. Even here at the college, suppose an employee or a student has to go for a ceremony, they'll let him. They have to. Because it is many times they'll have a medicine man sign a piece of paper saying that this person needs a ceremony or something, and it's just like a written statement from the regular doctor.

SM: That's fascinating.

DY: What else do you want to know?

SM: Have you had any other experiences like that, or do you know other people who have?

DY: Like star-gazing. You familiar with star-gazing?
SM: No.

DY: That medicine man, he uses a prism, and he uses certain stars. He'll hold the prism up to, you know, I don't know which. He'll hold the prism to the star and he'll see things. He said, I've asked him, "How do you see things," and he said it's like watching the T.V. you know?

SM: He looks at this prism and looks at a star through it?

DY: Right, and lights will start flashing. During the time I was sick, we had that done for us too. And I was sitting inside the hogan, and he had me holding these two things, one in the left and one in the right . . . and I just started shaking; I was really shaking like this, and somehow, I don't know, but I just kind of turned around like this to the window, to the west; I turned around, and I saw someone standing there. I don't . . . I don't know . . .

SM: You can't explain it, but you saw it?

DY: It was a person; it was all in white, you know, just like a white person standing there. I turned around and we started before my sister and my brother came home, see, my brother goes to school in Snowflake, and my sister had gone down to get him. And they were coming home, and we started before they got home. So when their lights came up over the hill, it just kind of like completely shut everything off, because the star-gazing is done in the dark . . . it has to be completely dark, and everything just went off, and that thing standing at the window was just gone. So then we had to wait for my brother and my sister to get inside the hogan and he started again, and I started shaking again, just, you know, really hard. And lights would come in from the window.
SM: You could see these too?

DY: Yes, I could, and I think it depends on how deeply spiritual you are. 'Cause, like my dad really doesn't believe in this stuff, and, you know, he won't see things. He'll say, "I can't see things, what are you seeing?" But I'm just, I think, well, I can see things when the medicine man does things like this, you know.

SM: And your mother too?

DY: Yes, my mother does too. And I could see these lights, you know, it would come in, and I'd just be shaking, and then, you know, he found out things that, . . . that people have done, like . . . how should I say it . . . like witchcraft, I think, is really done a lot around here. And it scares me!

SM: That's a belief of the old Navajo people, isn't it?

DY: Yes, and I think it's still done.

SM: There are books about Navajo witchcraft.

DY: Um hm. And the medicine man told us that lightning had been sent to us to strike us this summer. Twice it had almost happened--one had come down on the west side of the house where, you know, several yards away, and one had been on the east side of the hogan, and that really scared me, and he said there was something under, on the south side of the house, buried under there. And he told me to go out there and look at it. And I wouldn't go out there by myself, I was scared. I went out there with everybody and he started digging up, and he was just shaking like that, and he dug up this arrowhead again, and on it was drawn, you know, a zigzag line like that. . . .

SM: Like lightning?
DY: Yes, like lightning. And that . . . it was terrible! This is the first time I've really ever had any experience like that.

SM: And you called them Star-Gazers?

DY: Yes. There are Star-Gazers, and Hand-Tremblers, that's what you call them, you know, the medicine men that will take things out of your body and, you know, also your regular ceremonies.

SM: How about the sand paintings? Is that still being done?

DY: Yes, the sand paintings are still being done. My dad had a Yeibichai Dance—a nine-day ceremony for blindness or, you know, loss of hearing, or, I can't think of anything else, but my dad, he couldn't hear, so we had that Yeibichai Dance for him, and I was with him most of the time, and I'm really closer to my dad than I am to my mother. So I was with my dad most of the time, and the sand paintings were very big, I don't know how big, they were about the size of . . .

SM: A small room?

DY: Yes. Maybe about . . . oh, I don't know, a small room. And it took a long time to do one sand painting, and I helped with part of the sand painting.

SM: Now the one who makes the sand painting, is he a medicine man or a doctor?

DY: He's a medicine man.

SM: Does he have help?

DY: Yes, he does.
SM: And then you helped also. He told you what to do?

DY: Yes, he told us what to do, because I wouldn't know what to do.

SM: And you made this then, you and the others, for your father?

DY: Yes. And it's a nine-day ceremony. Nine days and nine nights, and the Yeibichais [Yay-b chays] dance. The Yeibichai Dance. All the men do is just put on the mask, and you have to be intiiated before you can dance in the dances, and I danced with my dad several times.

SM: In the Yeibichai Dances?

DY: Yes.

SM: I heard there was going to be one tonight over here north of the town.

DY: Yes. Right.

SM: Are you going out there?

DY: No, I don't think so. I... I'm not the kind of person that, well, that goes into another thing. A lot of the kids around here drink, smoke, smoke pot, and I just never found any interest in doing that. You know, a lot of them will go to the Yeibichai Dances, to Squaw Dances just to get drunk.

SM: Use that as sort of an excuse? Or rather an occasion?

DY: Um hm. I never... when I go to the Squaw Dance I don't do things like that.

SM: Would you explain those? Now a Squaw Dance, that's just a social gathering, isn't it? That doesn't have any religious significance, or
healing significance or anything like that, does it?

DY: Yes, healing. It does.

SM: Oh, it does? I thought it was a social affair.

DY: Well, it's becoming more social now, than it is, you know, in being a healing ceremony.

SM: But it has always been, partly at least, a healing ceremony too?

DY: It's healing and social, I think.

SM: You call it Squaw Dance—you think then of all the women dancing, is that right?

DY: Yes, they dance. The women and the men dance.

SM: It's hard to explain to somebody who doesn't know?

DY: Yes. I've been constantly doing that since I don't know when—trying to explain something to somebody that doesn't know about, you know, our ways.

SM: Anyway, at least one point, the Squaw Dance is not just a social affair. It has a serious purpose as well. And then, the Yeibichai, that is more religious, isn't it?

DY: Yes, it's more religious.

SM: And the Yeibichai Dancers, they're people who have been initiated into an order or society?

DY: They've been initiated into that ceremony to perform in that
ceremony, because, you know, you need performers, you need the dancers.

SM: And what is the purpose of the Yeibichai Dance ceremony?

DY: For blindness.

SM: Other things too?

DY: Or loss of hearing. Suppose that you used to dance in the Yeibichai Dances... see, I think, the way I understand it is, you have a limit to dancing. If you dance so much, it starts affecting you too.

SM: If you dance too much?

DY: Yes. I can never understand that. And... because the same time my dad had it, his sister joined in, because she used to dance a lot in the Yeibichai Dances, and somehow it affected her. I think, I think it affects you when you abuse it too much. I think that's what she did.

SM: Too much exertion maybe?

DY: Um hm.

SM: O.K. So that your dad had a Yeibichai Dance done for him. Now this one that's going to be here north of the area tonight, up here, where is it?

DY: Up at the lake someplace.

SM: And anyone can go to that if they want to?

DY: Yes. Anyone can.
SM: You don't have to be a member of the group? Or you don't have to even be an Indian, do you?

DY: No.

SM: I could go for example?

DY: Yes, you could go, but, I think, if you probably started to take pictures, they'd probably tell you to.

SM: Well, yes, I understand, you can't take pictures. But you can go, and no one would mind.

DY: No one would.

SM: And then the sand paintings are still being done. What other ceremonies like this do you have, or do you know about?

DY: Let's see ... Fire Dance. That's a nine-day ceremony too.

SM: And it takes eight or nine days to do a sand painting healing ceremony?

DY: No, you must have misunderstood me. I don't know how many sand paintings they do for that ceremony. I just worked on one big one, and that took us like all day to do it. You know, it took us all day to do it, and they used that sand painting that night. And then the patient sits on the sand painting, and then the medicine man will sing, or whatever, over that person, then it'll just be, you know, just taken out in a bag or something and put someplace.

SM: And then they make another one?
DY: Yes. You don't keep using the same sand.

SM: You make one after the other the whole nine days, so that you might have nine different sand paintings?

DY: You might, yes. I don't remember how many sand paintings they used.

SM: And then, these have been very effective in healing too, haven't they?

DY: Yes they have. My dad's hearing came back.

SM: It was O.K. after that?

DY: See, he had been in the hospital too, and they told them that his eardrum was, I guess, it's supposed to hang a certain way and not straight down, but it had been pushed backwards, and something in his ear had eaten at the little tiny bones in there, you know? And they had to give him four shots in the ear, you know, to look in there and see, and he had an operation that the back of his ear was cut and just laid over like that and that dried up back there, and he can hear now, my dad.

SM: But it was the ceremony that did it?

DY: Um hm. My dad's like that. Like some things he won't believe in, but, you know, he'll go along with us.

SM: But that one he does?

DY: Yes. He'll believe certain things. That was done for him, and, you know, he got well from it.

SM: Are there any other ceremonies like this?
DY: I don't know very many ceremonies. I just know the big ones like the Yeibichai Dance, the Squaw Dance. I don't know the little ceremonies.

SM: There are many little ones?

DY: Right. They even have ceremonies like for ants.

SM: For the ants that crawl on the ground?

DY: Right. Suppose, suppose you abuse the ants, you know, kick up their mounds and things like that. They say it can affect you too.

SM: Sort of upsetting the balance of nature and the cosmos?

DY: Right.

SM: This is basic in the Navajo world view, isn't it?

DY: Right.

SM: That everything should stay in balance?

DY: Yes, really, it should be like that.

SM: You learn of these things as a child, don't you?

DY: Yes.

SM: As you are growing up, among your families?

DY: Yes, I do . . . I did. Like even if you mistreat a snake that'll make you sick.

SM: Now if you shoot a deer and kill it for food and do it properly, it's O.K.?
DY: Right.

SM: And you have a ceremony, or you offer thanks or something to the animal?

DY: Right. We eat a lot of prairie dog, I love prairie dog. My dad, he shot one, and he said a prayer; he said this is not to abuse the animal, this is for us to eat and to enjoy. I heard him say that prayer, and, you know, it made me feel differently about it.

SM: You became concerned all of a sudden?

DY: Because I used to have a BB gun, and shoot lizards, you know, right in the head, turn them over like this... 

SM: But then after you heard your dad say the prayer over the prairie dog, you remembered.

DY: Right.

SM: Did that bother you?

DY: Yes, it bothered me, and I thought, Oh, gosh!

SM: But you were sort of innocent of any understanding that you were doing wrong.

DY: Yes.

SM: Things that you have learned, and were taught from your folks and the people, have been mighty healthy things to learn... like not to abuse animals, or anything else.

DY: Um hm. Yes. A lot of times I get confused... like in our own
way, and then the Anglo way.

SM: You don't seem the kind of person who would be confused.

DY: I think I... oh, wow... I don't know.

SM: Because you are kind of pulled between the old ways and the Anglo ways?

DY: Yes, but... I'm more adjusted to it now. Like, you know, when I go home, Oh, I'll just blabber away in Navajo, you know, talk in Navajo. And you know, I understand things like that. Then when I come back, like maybe to school, I have to start thinking in English again; I forget about other things at home. No, I wouldn't say it was really a problem.

SM: Not a real problem, because you're a happy, well-adjusted young lady.

DY: Yes, I'm very well-adjusted, I think. But some people aren't.

SM: Oh yes, some people aren't. Some are sick, in fact.

DY: Yes. I know several students on campus that have a hard time in school because they're not, I guess they weren't brought up the way I was, like I learned English and Navajo at the same time while I was growing up.

SM: You speak both without an accent, I imagine.

DY: Yes.

SM: I don't detect any in English... do you have one in Navajo?

DY: No. I can speak both without an accent.
SM: Because you just grew up speaking them?

DY: There is probably slightly, maybe.

SM: Well, maybe there's a word once in a while. But now this problem of frustration, or being pulled by two cultures. Some of the kids do have a problem with that?

DY: Yes. I think it's mostly where some of the kids don't speak English very well. Like I know of a student here on campus. He used to be constantly coming to me, asking me to help him with his, you know, especially in English, you know, English 110 or maybe English 111, one of the courses here. He'd have a hard time in there, and he was always coming to me to help him write his compositions, and I helped him because I just felt bad about it, and I didn't want him to feel uncomfortable.

SM: Is there any solution for that kind of problem?

DY: I don't know.

SM: Just living and kind of outgrowing it, maybe?

DY: I think so.

SM: Some people say that the suicide rate among young Indian people is higher than the population as a whole because of this. Do you think that's true?

DY: I don't know. I've heard that, but I just never really....

SM: You can't quite see why that should be, can you?

DY: Right.
SM: So it doesn't seem to be that serious a problem to you?

DY: No, it doesn't to me.

SM: And these other people you observed--it hasn't done that to you?

DY: No.

SM: Well, this has been a remarkable conversation, Delphine. It's a new addition that we're very grateful for. So, again, thank you very much.

DY: O.K.