

C. Oglesby: Okay, it is Saturday morning, February 25th. I am at the home of Mrs. Vivian Lawson, and we're going to get started as she tells me about her life. Vivian is a little younger than most of the subjects that are being interviewed for this project, but she has a very, if not unique, special heritage so that will set her apart in some ways from other subjects, so I will ask Vivian to just say her name, and then to tell us what is her first memory as a child.

Vivian Lawson: My name is Vivian Lawson. Gosh, my grandmother, I guess, would have to be my first memory. I was raised mostly by my grandmother. She was Cherokee. She was born within forty miles of the birth place of Sequoia, and the original Cherokee capital at Echota, Tennessee. She was fortunate in that both parents had native blood, and while she wasn't a full blood she was still, if you take half and half from her parents, she was about three quarters Cherokee.

CO: And what, did you say her name Vivian?

VL: Her name was Margaret Nola Lawrence.

CO: L A W R E N C E?

VL: Yes ma'am.

CO: Okay.

VL: And she married my grandfather, who also had a small amount of Cherokee: Henry Rines. R I N E S.

CO: Not "Rh..." ?

VL: No, that got changed when my dad went into the military.

CO: Oh, okay.

VL: They mess his records up. Spelled his name wrong but he just left it.

CO: It happens. I know plenty of those stories actually. Doesn't matter what the birth certificate says. If some government agency says it's not....if it's something else then it becomes something else.

VL: Right.

CO: So, you remember your grandmother. Can you, do you recall something specific about her that stands out?

VL: Her favorite thing was to pick black berries in the summer time to make jams and jellies out of it. She loved going black berry picking. And always drug me along with her, made me help.

CO: Did you run up on snakes?

VL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. She preserved foods every year. I, unfortunately , have a lazy streak and it was too much work after I became an adult. So I would rather buy it in a can. But, she was really in to preserving foods to last through the winter. She stood 4'8" and weighed about 130 pounds, and on a 4'8" frame makes you a little chubby. She had hair to the floor.

CO: Oh my.

VL: And every day I would braid it for her, on the side and then crisscross across the top of her head. She had jet black hair. The only thing that would make you wonder if she had Cherokee blood was the fact that she had blue eyes. Most Native Americans have green or brown, but she was blue eyed because six generations ago, her grandmother married an Irishman, and that's where the blue eyes came from.

CO: Okay.

VL: She got up at 4 a.m. every morning, went to water, which was her bath, and said her prayers, and then started breakfast. My grandpa got up at 6, and then she got us kids up at 7 every morning.

CO: Now, what did you call her?

VL: Uh, Granny.

Daughter: Tell her what she taught you about picking black berries. That's my favorite story.

CO: Okay.

Daughter: That you pick in the middle when you're picking the berries.

VL: Oh, yeah yeah, you always had to pick in the middle, the middle of the bush because the berries were always ripest there.

Daughter: And you had to save the top ones for the birds, and the bottom ones for the animals that were lower to the ground.....

CO: Oh, truly Native American.

VL: Right.

CO: What a story. So, you said that she said her prayers, that she got up early to say her prayers. Can you, I have a whole section on religion and so you can talk specifically about it then, but since you brought it up, was her religion uh....

VL: Native American.

CO: Okay.

VL: My grandfather was Baptist.

CO: Okay.

VL: But my grandmother was...she strictly adhered to her native upbringing so...

CO: And so at no point did she try to integrate that with a Christian faith?

VL: Uh uh.

CO: No, oh okay. That's interesting and I'd like to come back to that, but could you describe yourself as a child?

VL: Oh, precocious.

CO: Okay.

VL: Into everything.

CO: Okay.

VL: Wanted to know about everything. When I was a child there were no gray areas. It was either black or white, as far as everything was concerned. I had to have proof, you know. You tell me something...I got to...you know show me something. I guess that's all I can say about myself.

CO: Okay, were you small in frame? Or...as a child?

VL: Um, about normal.

CO: Now, you have two...three siblings?

VL: Yes.

CO: And you fit...let's see. You're the first born?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay, so you're the oldest. And did you know your mother?

VL: Yes.

CO: You knew your mother. Okay. Did she live with you?

VL: Yes, what happened is my parents separated when I was twelve.

CO: Okay.

VL: And then they were divorced when I was fifteen.

CO: Okay.

VL: But my grandmother and grandfather, my dad's parents, always lived either within earshot or with us. They had it rough. Papaw became disabled when he was in his late forties, and at that time they didn't have what you call social security. They had pension thing, and my grandparents only got fifty dollars a month. Course, back then fifty dollars would go a lot farther than it will today, but they were always on hard times, and so they lived with us most of the time.

CO: Your father's parents?

VL: Uh huh.

CO: Okay.

VL: Yes. My mother's father was deceased and her mother lived in North Carolina, so...

CO: So, it's your paternal grandmother who has all the Cherokee blood...most of the Cherokee blood.

VL: Uh, no my mother's mother was Cherokee and she's descended from the Joneses at Qualla Boundry, Cherokee, North Carolina.

CO: Okay, but which grandmother raised you?

VL: The...my paternal grandmother.

CO: Your paternal, your father's mother.

VL: My father's mother.

CO: So she's the person who taught you into her custom and culture.

VL: Yes.

CO: Cherokee culture, okay. Alright, and this is the one...this is Margaret?

VL: Margaret.

CO: Nola Lawrence, alright. Well, I want to ask you to describe your parents. Do you consider your mother your maternal influence in your life? You say that your grandmother raised you. Which person do you, I guess, consider most influential as a mother?

VL: My grandmother.

CO: The grandmother. Okay.

VL: Yeah. My mother was a young, beautiful, free spirit. She couldn't handle having a baby, one right behind the other. My dad was cool, laid back, he had no aspirations to be other than what he was. He had no aspirations for money, a big house...we rented all our life. My daddy never bought a place to live in until he married for the third time. And all he was interested in doing was watching T.V. or reading. He wasn't in to getting out and going anywhere. My mother would have to raise all kinds of cane just to get him to take us and her on a picnic. I mean he was just dull, and my mother couldn't handle it so she left.

CO: Okay.

VL: Left him and us.

CO: With your paternal grandparents?

VL: Uh, well with daddy.

CO: Okay.

VL: But my grandparents were living with us at the time she left.

CO: Okay, alright. So you just described your father and you called your mother a free spirit, how did that influence you? How did each parent influence you...your mother and your father? Let's take your father first since you described him first.

VL: Uh, my main goal was...we had nothing. You know? We didn't have a pot or a window to throw it out of.

CO: Yeah, okay.

VL: Nothing. Uh, my mother...I guess the two of them together made me want to make a decent life for whatever kids I had. Make sure they had what they needed. Not always what they wanted, but what they always needed. And, keep the family together. My biggest problem was the fact that they were separate and they weren't there at different times when we really needed them growing up. My youngest brother was born blind.

CO: Thomas Richard?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay. Did you all stay together? The siblings?

VL: Yeah, my dad refused to separate us kids. He said, "even if we only had the bean in the pot and a roof over our head, we're staying together because"....one of my grandmothers had suggested that he put us in a home, and he absolutely refused. That I give him credit for. So, we were kept together as kids, but if there's no mother there's still a loss. And, so basically it taught me to make a decent home for my kids and make sure I kept them together, and give them what they need. You know?

CO: Now, to what extent to do you believe the legacy of the Cherokee oppression had to...anything to do with your father's just feeling lack of ambition? Lack of aspirations as you said? Do you think that that...did that having anything to do....did he value his native heritage?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: Not even up to the day he died. It didn't matter to him one way or the other. His life was what it was and whether he had native blood or not didn't matter.

CO: But they...so he didn't appreciate your grandmothers...loyalty to it?

VL: Uh, I don't know if that's what it was or it just didn't matter.

CO: Okay.

VL: My dad was uneducated. He only went to the sixth grade, and he could barely read and write. He didn't comprehend the majority of what he read. You've got to remember we were in the mountains of Tennessee.

CO: Okay.

VL: And uh..

CO: Yeah, let me just say that. Even though I've got this in writing , that you in fact were born in Knoxville, Tennessee.

VL: Knox County.

CO: Knox County. Okay, well...and your other siblings, were they also born in Tennessee?

VL: Yes.

CO: So you actually lived in Tennessee until...

VL: Until I married my husband.

CO: And that was in...

VL: In 1960.

CO: 1960, okay. So you've been here, though, effectively most of your life.

VL: Right.

CO: You've been in Georgia most of your life.

VL: Right. Mmhmm.

CO: I recall we had established that.

VL: Actually we've been right here most of my life.

CO: Okay, alright. So you think that your parents really influenced you more in showing you what you didn't want?

VL: Yes.

CO: Then perhaps..uh. Okay. Well, then because your grandmother was such a big influence on your life, can you say how and why she had a stronger influence on you?

VL: I guess it would have to be her...her dedication to being Native American. She was raised...her mother was Cherokee, and she was raised in those mountains and there were things you did and things you were loyal to. One of which was your Native...I mean your...your religion. And, Granny's religion was her Native American heritage.

The traditions and ceremonies, because she did ceremonies but on her own in private, at bed time there were no... Well, let me say this. In the forties, when I was growing up, it was still federal law that if it was known in the neighborhood that you were Native American, and reported such, the federal government could come in and take everything you owned. That's the way it was. That law didn't change until the early seventies...before you felt free to do your ceremonies and whatever. So, my grandmother did her ceremonies every morning and every night, and then on ceremonial...it went by the moon of the month. The ceremonies were conducted after the first full moon of the month. When she made you a promise, that promise was kept no matter what kind of hardship it put on her, she kept her promise. We rarely got spanked, because instead of telling us you can't do that, she'd say this is what you can do instead. It wasn't a matter of telling you not what to do, but what you should do. She was stern but, at the same time, she could enjoy a joke as well as anybody else. It's just that there were things that you did that were right, and you didn't do otherwise.

CO: So she was...did she have a job outside the home?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: Uh uh, never. She couldn't read or write.

CO: What about your grandfather?

VL: My grandfather worked up until his late forties and then he got injured and was disabled. He was a dairyman and farmer.

CO: Okay, so then what was their livelihood? What did they live off of?

VL: After he got injured they lived off the fifty dollars a month that the federal government gave them, but before that he had different odd jobs between...well between the time he first got injured and first started drawing it...he did odd jobs, but prior to that he was a dairyman.

CO: So your grandmother just made the dollar stretch?

VL: Yes.

CO: Found a way to make the...and did she...did you all grow your own food?

VL: For a while, but then after mom left and her and Papaw moved in with us...Daddy always rented in town, and there was no place to grow anything. But they always

bought their veggies at the farmer's market, by the bushel, and Granny put them up in mason jars.

CO: Okay, and let's see now. What did your father do? I know you said he wasn't ambitious, but uh...

VL: He was an auto mechanic all his whole.

CO: Okay, alright. And your mother waited tables?

VL: Yes, she was a waitress.

CO: Did you lose...completely lose contact with her when she left?

VL: Yes.

CO: So you don't know...

VL: She left, didn't say she was going, she just went to work one day and we never saw her again for three years. And...

CO: And you were twelve when that happened?

VL: I was twelve when she left.

CO: And then did they get a divorce...officially divorced?

VL: Daddy divorced her three years later, because he found another woman he wanted to marry. Up until that point...he was devastated when my mother first left because, like I say, she was a beautiful woman, a free spirit, fun to be around....but she just couldn't take the being tied down, with four kids, one of whom was blind...you know? Not a whole lot of money. A husband who didn't have the ambition to make a name for himself. I mean, you know, he was happy. My kids tease me all the time, because I'm a lot like Daddy, in that I'm satisfied with a bean and a blanket. You know? And she's turned out to be the same way. I'm satisfied with a bean and a blanket, and I just...now that my kids are all grown, the reason I had ambition, I suppose, while they were growing up is because I wanted better for them. Now they're own their own, and so it doesn't take all of these smart phones and that stuff to make me happy. The only reason I have a computer is because I have to have it for the tribe, because of the tribe.

CO: Did you give me an email address or you didn't want to give me that?

VL: I can give it to you

CO: Do you use it?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay, would you mind?

VL: No ma'am.

CO: Okay.

VL: Vivian Curtis, all small letters and no gaps.

CO: Vivian Curtis..C U R I T

VL: C U R T I S

CO: Okay.

VL: viviancurtis@windstream.net

CO: Okay, alright. So, your grandmother...well I know that we'll come back to all of this when we talk about religion, because it sounds like that was central part of her life, when you were growing up, did you have a regard for it then, as child and as an adolescent? No?

VL: No, that's like my grandmother sang all the time. She sang or whistled. And I thought it was gibberish, until I became an adult and then realized she was singing in Cherokee, it wasn't gibberish. Most of my education from her came through observation, not so much [her] teaching as watching her. Apparently we were the only ones, of all my cousins, who even knew we had Cherokee blood. I have talked to several of my cousins, now, and they don't remember Granny ever talking about it. But she sat us down and, we had a fireplace, and she sat us down in front that fireplace, just before bedtime, and told us stories. My cousins missed out on so much because she didn't live with them, and wasn't there day by day to be an influence on them.

CO: Now, how many children did she have, your grandmother?

VL: Fourteen.

CO: Oh gosh, so that's a lot of cousins.

VL: Yes.

CO: Oh my, she had 14 kids?

VL: She had 14 kids. Two sets of twins.

CO: Oh man.

VL: And they're all gone now except for my Uncle John that lives in Alabama. He's the only one left.

CO: Oh my gosh.

VL: Of the kids.

CO: So, alright, that is a large family.

VL: Yes it is.

CO: So did they come home or visit much? Did you know them?

VL: They all lived around.

CO: They lived around.

VL: Yeah, they all lived within that area, except for my Aunt Sarah. When she married Uncle Boogie, she moved to Alabama cause that's where he was from. And she had, well, she had gone to Alabama to work in a mill. She was a supervisor, floor supervisor in a big cotton mill. So, she went to Alabama when she got a promotion. And that's where she met Uncle Boogie and married him.

CO: So, none of those children tried at any time to exploit their Native heritage once that became possible? Where you ever able to benefit from...like education. Educationally.

VL: No. Most descendants that you talk to, who were raised in the Native way, have no desire for benefits.

CO: That's understandable.

VL: The ones who seek benefits are those who have just recently discovered they have Native blood and they think there's something out there for them. This world has gotten so greedy, it's unreal. I grew up in a time when making enough to feed your family and keep a roof over your head was the important thing, and that's mostly all the anybody had.

CO: So, just being able to sustain oneself, and subsistence is what you believed in.

VL: Yes.

CO: I have to watch this thing so the battery doesn't go on me. Okay, so...we'll come back to that. Because that is important to me, to understand that. But I'll try to get through your childhood. There's so many pig trails to go down.

VL: Oh I know Honey.

CO: What about your mother's relationship with her mother? Did you know your maternal grandparents?

VL: Yes, I knew my grandmother. I don't remember my grandfather, because he died in '39..'38. He died in 1938 and I was born in 1940, so I never knew him. He didn't have Native blood. He was a Howard. He was descended from the grandfather of Catherine Howard, fifth wife of Henry the VIII. That was his lineage.

CO: So was he proud of that?

VL: He didn't know.

CO: Oh, okay.

VL: I've discovered all of this since...I've been researching both my husband's and my genealogy, for 40 years.

CO: Wow, so you're a historian. You're a family historian.

VL: Yes. More or less.

CO: Okay, and it's addictive, isn't it?

VL: Oh, yes it is. It is, and when you get a hit, you just can't shut it down and get off of it. You've got to keep going and going and going. A lot of times I would get off the computer just in time to get my shower and go to work. I just...so addicted to it.

CO: Right, right. It beats some addictions you can have. But it's still addictive.

VL: Oh yes.

CO: I hear that. So, but your mother's relationship with her mother...did she...

VL: Strained. My grandmother, when my grandpa died, when my Grandpa Howard died, she went back to Gastonia, North Carolina. That's where she was born. She was

also a cotton mill worker, as was my Grandpa Howard. He was a cotton mill worker. My grandmother was very religious. Christian religious.

CO: Baptist?

VL: Uh, yeah yeah. Baptist.

CO: So many people were.

VL: Oh yeah, I know. And she was strict.

CO: Because of her religion?

VL: Yeah.

CO: So you think your mother rebelled against that?

VL: Yeah she did. Big time.

CO: Your mother was born...

VL: In Greenville, South Carolina.

CO: In 1920?

VL: Mother was born in '23.

CO: Oh, '23. Okay, I kept not seeing right. '23, okay.

VL: Um, when my grandmother was fourteen years old, my mother's mother, she got pregnant because her cousin raped her. Now, this is back in, oh God, the late twenties...early thirties. And because getting pregnant was such a shame, at that time, and my grandmother...my mother's mother was not raised Native American. She was raised by a strict Christian people, and it was a disgrace. So they sent her to the old Salvation Army home, in Greenville, South Carolina, during her pregnancy. And while she was there, she met my Grandpa Howard, and married so that she never went back to Gastonia, until after he died. They both moved to Knoxville, oh I don't know, about 1935...

CO: But this was your mother's mother? Okay. And where was your mother all this time?

VL: She was with her mother after she was born, until she married my dad. Mom was born in Greenville, South Carolina. Then, after...my mother was the baby. They had three girls, Sarah, Hazel, and Vivian... Ethel Vivian, my mother.

CO: Your mother's name was Vivian?

VL: Uh huh, Ethel Vivian.

CO: Okay.

VL: Uh, they moved to Knoxville about 1935 so that Grandpa Howard and Granny, both, could go to work in the cotton mill there. Knoxville, at the time, was a big cotton mill town.

CO: Yeah.

VL: That's where my mom met my dad...was in Knoxville.

CO: Okay, alright. But you were talking about there was...there were strained relations between...

VL: They were because my grandmother was so strict and my mom was such a free spirit. Her being the baby and like I say she was a beautiful woman, and my grandmother favored her over the other two, which added to the problem because...my mother loved both her sisters, very much, and it wasn't fair for Granny to do more for my mother than her sisters. That caused a problem and the fact that my mother was such a free spirit and wouldn't do anything she was told, according to my grandmother.

CO: It sounds almost like you...you really admire that about your mother. You sound like you appreciate something about a free spirit.

VL: I don't know if I appreciate it, I just...

CO: Do you think that some of us envy the freedom of a free spirit that we kind of envy that?

VL: We get kind of tied down in the day to day things that we have to do. My mom didn't have to do nothing if she didn't want to. She just did what she wanted to do...in anything. She just did what...I appreciate that.

CO: So you don't admire her lack of discipline, but you can appreciate that force that drove her....

VL: Right.

CO: To sort of be free.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay, alright. What do you...what would you consider the...your most significant struggles as a child? What was hardest for you as a child?

VL: You know, I've never really thought about that because I don't recall...life was what it was. I was a happy child. I mean, you know, I wasn't unhappy. I've always been able to accept what happens to you.

CO: Now where does that come from?

VL: I don't know, unless it's from my grandmother. Stuff happens. You can't get away from it, and you either accept it, or you drive yourself crazy worrying about it. And I just say, now that's not to say that I don't get upset, and cuss and fume and fuss.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But I do that for two or three days and then I say, "Okay, girlfriend. You gotta let it go. This is the way it is."

CO: But it sounds like you're recalling that you were even that way as a child.

VL: Yeah. Yeah.

CO: Okay.

VL: Uh, there was nothing I could do about Mom leaving. There was nothing I could do about Dad marrying his second wife, who was so cruel to us kids. I couldn't do anything to change any of that, and so you just accept it. You know? If you can't improve on it, then let it go. And, I've always been that way.

CO: Wow. Would you say...what was the most significant event in your life up to the...as a child? Up to the age of twelve? And for you twelve was a turning point because your mother left.

VL: Right.

CO: But, up to then what was the most significant event?

VL: I can't think of one. That...

CO: That was it?

VL: That was it. Her leaving.

CO: Okay. Her leaving. Yeah, sure. Well, do you...okay, that, I mean, 12 is a sort of a defining point for a lot of people. You move from being a child, you become an adolescent, and for you so many things. I mean that was, whether that had been a traditional turning point for anybody, to lose your mother, to be abandoned by your mother would be traumatic.

VL: Right.

CO: In any case, but do you...did that slow down your maturity? Or do you think it sort of catalyzed it?

VL: It catalyzed it.

CO: Okay.

VL: Because at that point...my grandmother and grandfather were still living with us, but my grandmother's getting up in years. I'm 12, I'm young, I had to pick up, at that point, to see that my siblings were dressed for school, were fed, their laundry done. My grandmother was a stickler in that from a very early age you had certain chores that you had to do. There wasn't any argument. You had to do them. And my workload increased, because I had to take care of the three siblings.

CO: You really became a young mother.

VL: Mmhmm, and on top of that, since money was so slack, with mom leaving that took part of the income, and so I contracted with two or three neighbors to do housework for them...single ones, you know, I mean the elderly that didn't have a wife to take care of them, and once a week I cleaned their house for a couple of dollars.

CO: And what about your baby brother that was blind? How was he taken care of?

VL: His blindness consisted of shadows. He could see shadows.

CO: Okay.

VL: He could see light around the shadows. With super thick glasses he learned to read. He went to regular school, and by the way, he's the only one of us four siblings who graduated high school and got a diploma.

CO: Oh, wow.

VL: I went back and got a GED and got my training for accounting. My sister was a domestic all her life. Now, in later years, my brother, David, went to seminary and became a Baptist preacher. But, Ricky was the only one that actually graduated high school after twelve years and got a diploma. And I've always been so proud of him for that.

CO: I'm sure.

VL: Today, he's totally blind. He has to have a stick and everything. And he's very bitter. He blames our mother for his blindness. She didn't want another baby and she took quinine and it caused him to be born early. He was born at six months. They almost lost him. And the doctors said because of it, his nerves in his eyes didn't develop like they were supposed to. So...

CO: So he's still living and...

VL: Oh yeah, he lives in South Carolina, in Easley.

CO: Do you see him very much?

VL: I managed to see him about once a year until my husband crossed over, and I can't drive long distances like that and my kids have their own lives. You know how that goes.

CO: That's right.

VL: I haven't seen Ricky in five years. No, I haven't seen Ricky since my dad crossed over, because he went to Knoxville for Dad's funeral.

CO: Now, when did your husband die?

VL: My husband died in 2002.

CO: Okay. Alright.

VL: December 29th.

CO: Okay. Well, you really....I have a question about when did...was it...was becoming a teenager a notable point in your life? And it certainly was for you because you took on the responsibilities of an adult at the age of twelve by having to care for siblings. But there is something about becoming a teenager, what we call a teenager, becoming an adolescent that even if you have an ideal life, there's some hormonal things going on, so people...was it an identifiable turning point for you to become a

teenager. I mean did you, was there some relationship between the fact that you're actually growing, becoming a young woman, in body as well as in responsibility? Because you're taking care of all these people. Do you recall that? Because some young girls begin to think then about what they're going to do when they get grown and have all these romantic images. Did you have...did..

VL: I don't have any romantic fantasies.

CO: Okay, and you didn't, even as a young girl?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: My...when Dad divorced my mother, I was 15, and he remarried a young woman that I went to school with. She was four years...three years ahead of me in high school. I knew her. I went to school with her every day. I did not like her. But he married her, and I begged him not to. That didn't go anywhere. Shortly after they got married, my sister Linda was not my daddy's daughter. My mom, during the Second World War, went to California to work in an airplane factory. Her cousin was there, her first cousin, who she adored, and they produced my sister Linda.

CO: Hmm, okay.

VL: When she come back, and Daddy come back from overseas, Daddy had written Mother a letter. And he told her, he said, "She'll never know that she's not mine. I'll never tell her. Just don't leave me."

CO: So your parents were married when your mother went to California?

VL: Mmhmm.

CO: Ok, and so....

VL: She went to California, right after I was born, Daddy was overseas and her sister, Sarah, took care of me and then Mother come back from Sacramento pregnant.

CO: Hmm, okay.

VL: With my sister Linda.

CO: Okay. And so your....your daddy...

VL: This was somewhere around '42.

CO: Your daddy was willing to forgive that?

VL: Yeah, because he adored my mother.

CO: It sounds like it.

VL: He adored my mother, like I say she was a beautiful free spirit. Fun to be around, but Daddy just didn't have the energy my mother had.

CO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, so...

VL: But...

CO: If you were going somewhere with that please...

VL: Yeah.

CO: You're going to explain to me her relationship with your stepmother?

VL: Right. When I found the letter, I locked it in my jewelry box and Dad's new wife broke into my jewelry box and read the letter. So she insisted Daddy send Linda away, because she wasn't his. I begged and pleaded, begged and pleaded. Didn't work. So he sent Linda to Corryton, Tennessee to live with his Uncle and his wife. His second wife and I stayed into it all the time. I hate, I literally hated the woman and I will not give her the time of day even today. She's a terrible one. Terrible human being. And, I married at the age of 15 to get away from it, to a young man I had gone to school with. I didn't really know him, didn't really care for him, but I sincerely tried to make an effort. But, when he...my stepmother beat me a lot, and I told my first husband when I married him, "You've got one time to hit me. That's it." So, he did. And I immediately packed my clothes and left and didn't go back...

CO: So now if you...you married him at fifteen. It wasn't long after your father married his...

VL: It was about six months.

CO: Yeah. Okay.

VL: Yeah.

CO: And you, and so he obviously was not Raymond Lawson.

VL: No, his name was John Burchfield.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: Him and I went to school together. And he had gone into the military.

CO: So now after you left, you married, you married, and you all lived together, how long were you married before he hit you?

VL: Before, oh uh almost four years.

CO: Oh okay. Alright. So you had a life with him.

VL: Right, yeah. Yeah. He worked. I worked.

CO: What did ya'll do?

VL: He worked with a tire company, where they changed....where you get new tires.

CO: Uh huh.

VL: And I worked for Doll (???) Manufacturing...which was fishing lures. I tied fishing lures. I made the fishing lures is what I was doing.

CO: Okay.

VL: But I had to sign my check and hand it to him. This one particular Friday, I didn't do that. I got it cashed and I went to Walgreens, and I bought a roll of tinfoil and a 100 bottle count of aspirin. And when I got back to the house he threw a fit because I cashed that check and didn't give him the money. So it escalated from there. I didn't do a thing except go across the street to my neighbors and call a girl that I worked with. Because she had...he'd been doing some fussing prior to that, and she said, "Don't put up with it, call me." And so I called her and she came and got me.

CO: Did you have any children at the time?

VL: No.

CO: No, okay.

VL: No, I lost a total...I had a total of eight miscarriages before I ever had a baby.

CO: Oh, were they his.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay. So...In your household, either while your mother was there or afterwards, was there...were boys treated differently from girls? Did your brothers have a different treatment by your either your mother, father, grandparents? Was there...were they privileged by being boys? Were they allowed to be out later or was that even...

VL: No, I don't recall any..

CO: So did your, did they do any household chores? Sounds like you did all the chores.

VL: Boys, boys had to carry out the garbage.

CO: Okay.

VL: The girls had to do the housework and the dish washing. My grandmother did all the cooking.

CO: Okay.

VL: We had to help in the summer time. Help her put up...we had to wash all the jars for her to put all them green beans and tomatoes and stuff in. But, that didn't bother me, you know? It was a part of life. You had things you had to do, and you did them. Now my sister and I used to fight a lot over whose turn it was to wash and dry. But by the time I married, the boys were still so young, you know they....

CO: Okay, so whatever differences there were in treatment or privileges had more to do with age than it did gender, at least in your mind.

VL: Right, right.

CO: Okay, alright. Do you recall, at any point, questioning the family's beliefs or values? I know that when you're poor, you don't think a whole lot about values, possibly, but you know...obviously your grandmothers religious values---that's who she was.

VL: Right..

CO: And so did you question any of that? The Baptist heritage, the native heritage? Did you question it at any point in your life as you grew?

VL: Not until I became an adult, and it was a bad experience...for 15 years, my husband and I were members of Dawson Street Methodist church, down town. We served on every committee. We were there every Sunday.

CO: This is Thomasville.

VL: Thomasville. This is when I started questioning Christianity .

CO: Christianity.

VL: I've always had questions, why was it like this? According to...things in the Bible I've always questioned. But I didn't really have a big problem until my grandson Jacob, when he was two years old, passed away from brain cancer...

CO: Whose child was he?

VL: Robin.

CO: Okay. Do you mind just inserting there...Robin was born when?

VL: Robin was born in 1962...no '60...no '60 to 1962. Dewey was born in '65 and Mary Lyn was born in '68.

CO: Okay. So he was Robin's

VL: He was Robin's oldest.

CO: First born.

VL: He's first born.

CO: First grandchild.

VL: The type of cancer he had was Neuroblastoma, and it causes tumors to come up outside and it distorts the face. He had one behind his eye, which made his eye... anyhow. It was gross. And I understand that. But, to deal with it, you need to be in a place where you can connect with God. Several of the members of Dawson Street had asked the pastor to talk to us and ask us not to bring Jacob back to church anymore. I took him because he loved the choir. He loved the music. Instead, I got a note from this same bunch of "good people," asking us to put his brother, Adam, in the nursery. I never put my kids in no nursery. They sat on that pew with me, all those fifteen years. The kids that are put into the nursery, just watch them on the back end of the church, how they misbehave. So, I called the pastor and read the note to him. And it was sent on a 3x5 card, wasn't even in an envelope, and it wasn't signed. So, I called the pastor and I read it to him. What I wanted him to say was, "Come on over to the church, we will pray about it." That's what you do. Instead, his statement was, "Well, it might be a

good idea to put him in the nursery.” I said, “Does he disturb you?” “Well, no, but I’m sure he probably...” because he always sang with the choir.

CO: Now, is this the baby?

VL: This is the...Jacob’s little brother.

CO: Okay.

VL: I mean he’s just, he’s less than a year old and he loves the music, and they’re wanting me to put him in the nursery, and I told him, I said, “I did not raise my kids in the nursery, and I will not raise my grandkids in the nursery. They will sit on this second pew with me.” I said, “Look at the, how many times do you have to call the kids down at the back of the church? Those are the kids that were raised in that nursery. Mine ain’t going in that nursery. So you can forget it, and I will never darken your door again.” That’s when my husband and I both decided it was time to go back to our native roots, and start practicing our Native American religion.

CO: So that was roughly....in the eighties?

VL: That was...Jacob was born in ’82. It was around ’84.

CO: Okay.

VL: Around 1984 ’85.

CO: And was it after that that you became this sort of rabid genealogist?

VL: No, I started doing genealogy when she was 12.

CO: Okay.

VL: She had heard me and her daddy discussing...my husband was Croatan and Saponi, and I was Cherokee, and she had heard us discussing our tribes and our native blood...so she just asked me one day, she said, “Well, just where do I come from?”

Daughter: And I always got upset and cried at Cowboy and Indian movies...always upset me because my brothers would cheer for the cowboys of course, because they were boys, and I would get real upset with them and start crying and I would tell them, “don’t you know that’s our relatives they’re killing? Don’t you know you’re Cherokee?”

VL: So that's when I started the genealogy. I wanted to answer her question right down to how far it went back and how many of them there were. I worked on mine and my husbands.

CO: So that would've been before the baby died, before your grandson died.

VL: Oh yeah, yeah.

CO: Okay.

VL: But, I guess, with all of my relatives, other than my Cherokee grandmother, being a part of the religious community and being young and not really being into the Native American blood, yet, I mean I knew it. My grandmother told us stories and my...you know. I wasn't really into it until later on in life. I pretty much went the white way until she questioned me about it. And that's when I started doing to genealogy research, that's when we got involved with Mr. Jackson up here in Albany, and joined his group. And then my Husband and I formed the SECCI later. But, the incident with my grandson is what drove me to seek the religious aspect, I already was getting the information.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But it caused us to...

CO: Yes.

VL: Seek a religious...

CO: I see. And what prompted that was I asked you about questioning your family's beliefs or values. And so, you didn't do that as a child, but you began to question those *Christian* beliefs when you encountered a very unchristian group of Christians.

VL: Right, right.

CO: And that was in the...you would've been then in your forties?

VL: Yes.

CO: You would've been in your forties. Okay. Alright. Was your family conscious at all of what went on outside the household? Like politics? News? World Affairs? Local Affairs? No, okay. It was really about survival?

VL: Yeah, mainly.

CO: Sure. Do you remember...I've already asked you this kind of in one way, but having aspirations or ambitions as a child? Did you like want to do something in particular?

VL: I always wanted to be a book keeper. Ever since I was very young I loved numbers.

CO: Okay.

VL: And so...

CO: And that's what you're doing.

VL: And that's what I chose to do.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Did your parents do...vacation at all? Do anything...what'd they do for fun?

VL: My mom drank a lot. My mother was an alcoholic.

CO: This free spirited mother.

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay.

VL: Out of desperation because of, you know, having such a dull husband. I loved my daddy. Don't get me wrong. I love him, but he was dull as hell.

Daughter: He was a nerd.

CO: A nerd. Okay.

Daughter: That must be where I get it from.

VL: No education, no ambition.

Daughter: He wasn't a social butterfly. He was an introvert.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Once in a great, great while we'd go on a picnic down on Third Creek. Once in a while, when we had money, we'd go to the drive-in movie.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: But other than that, we had no social life.

CO: Books, music, films, did you all read?

VL: Oh yeah, I've always been an avid reader. I read...

CO: What did you like? What sorts of things did you like?

VL: History.

CO: You loved history? Okay.

VL: Uh, English history and Egyptian history. Love both of those. Crazy about them. I don't miss anything on History Channel about the Egyptians or the English.

CO: But you didn't get interested in Native History until...

VL: Until...

CO: You started doing this...

VL: Doing the genealogy.

CO: Okay, let me just distinguish. You started doing genealogy before you got disillusioned with...

VL: With the church.

CO: With the white culture and became....so can I separate those two in terms of years. So, you start doing genealogy roughly when? How old were you when you asked that question?

VL: She was twelve.

CO: So twelve, so that would've been about...1980. So early '80s. And then you leave the church in the mid '80s?

VL: Uh, yeah.

CO: Okay, alright. So, that's kind of understandable. Early '80s you begin to question these values and then mid-80's you leave. You've sort of seen it in your rearview mirror.

VL: Because..

CO: I may got outside because of the smoke.

VL: Oh I'll put it out.

CO: No don't put it out...can we just...

VL: I had no idea. I should've asked. Mary Lyn, open the door.

CO: I don't want you to...

VL: Well I'm supposed to be quitting anyway.

CO: Well, so. Alright. That five year lag will be interesting actually, because things are taking place between the time that you begin to do this research on the family, and I'm sure in your mind you're begging to ask what does this mean, and then...it becomes a venue for an alternative.

VL: Right.

CO: And then when the time's right, you embrace it.

VL: Well that's like, I was brought up you take care of your fellow man. If there is a problem...that's like one time one of our neighbor's houses burned down. And my Cherokee grandmother, as little as we had, went through us kids' clothes, her Pawpa's clothes, Daddy's clothes. Went through the pantry and packed canned foods. Did all this and carried it to the neighbors. That's the way it was. That's what you did. You believed in one God. You didn't say bad things about your neighbor. You didn't mess around with your neighbor's wife. All of that was...

CO: And that's really Christian Principals. That's every religion's Principals.

VL: Yes. Including the Native American. And, to know that those people sitting in that church didn't like us bringing the baby to church...

END OF PART 1 of 4

CO: And so...

VL: It just blew my mind...

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know. I know Christians make mistakes like everybody else, but I had been noticing for a long time that they would pretty much do what they wanted to do all

through the week, not look out for each other. They were only religious one a day a week...Sunday. That's not the way it is. Either you are full into it or you're not into it at all. I live my life the same, seven days a week, twelve months a year. It's always the same, because that's the way it's supposed to be. The majority of the people out there have no clue about how you're supposed to live. And...

CO: So you don't believe, [I'll close that...]

VL: Okay.

CO: You don't believe that the Native religion provided an alternative for you because there was something about it that made living it, not just talking it, or you know going to some Sunday ritual, that there was something in the Native religion that made the practice of it and the belief of it more real for you?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay.

VL: The Native belief is all things, right down to that rock on the ground, all things have a soul. And we're to take care of each other, you know? Every day, not just once a week.

CO: Yeah. So, and you call that animism?

VL: Uh huh.

CO: Okay, alright. How's that different, well I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me talk about your education, because you said you.....quit school really and got married?

VL: Yeah.

CO: And then you went and got your GED.

VL: I quit my senior year, four months short of graduation to get away from a bad situation at home.

CO: Right right.

VL: When I married my second husband and we had our first child, he said---my husband in the first place was seventeen years older than me--"It's more than likely that I will cross over before you do."

CO: Uh huh.

VL: "In case it happens while you got the kids small, you need to go back to school."

CO: So your husband was Native?

VL: Yes Ma'am, he was Croatin and Saponi.

CO: Yes, you...okay I'm sorry. You did say that, so it sounds like he was even aware before you all embraced this as a way of life.

VL: Right, we both always knew.

CO: So he used that term "pass over?"

VL: Cross over.

CO: Cross over, Cross over, I'm sorry.

VL: Uh huh.

CO: So, he used that even before you...so he encouraged you to get your degree, I mean your diploma?

VL: He encouraged me to go back to school. I had taken accounting in high school for two years, and I went back to school...at this time there was night school.

CO: Um hmm.

VL: Because I had the kids it would have to be done at night. So I went back to night school, got my credits in accounting. And then I didn't work until we moved down here and my daughter was starting kindergarten, and that's when I went to work. And, by this time my husband had bought the business and I was his bookkeeper for the business. But, it...I had almost twelve years of high school and then I went back to night school for several months.

CO: And you say your...he's retired military?

VL: He was retired military.

CO: Which branch?

VL: Army.

CO: Army. So, um...

VL: The strange thing is, he and my Daddy were best friends.

CO: Wow.

VL: He used to babysit with me so Mom and Dad could go to the movies.

CO: Oh my goodness.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Wow.

VL: I used to call him Uncle Raymond.

CO: Oh my goodness. No that, alright, and my next...my next category of questions is about marriage and romance and motherhood and children, so tell me about that. What was...when did you go from calling him Uncle Raymond to being in love with him?

VL: I always loved him. He was a great guy. I always loved him. He was a good man, loved his mother. And you can judge a guy by how he feels about his mother.

CO: How he talks about her? How he treats her?

VL: Yeah. How he treats her when he's with her. I had divorced...let me put it this way. He went into the military and the last time I had seen him was when I was six years old, and I had stepped on a nail out in the yard, and in those days the doctor come to the house. So, my mom called the doctor and he come out there to get the nail out of my foot. Well, Raymond just happened to be home on leave, after his basic training. I was six, and he sat...I sat on his lap and he held me while the doctor pulled the nail out of my foot and dressed it and all the whole nine yards. And, I told him I was going to marry him one day. And he just laughed of course.

CO: How sweet.

VL: I didn't see him again until I had married and divorced, and I was living back at home with my dad, my brothers are teenagers, and my sister was back home by then. And so we had all gone swimming. And when we got back Daddy said, "You'll never guess in a million years who called me today." And I said, "No, I wouldn't." And he said, "How about Raymond." "You're kidding." "Yep, and he wants to see you kids." And, I said, "Oh well great, maybe...you got a number? I can call him." And he said, "Now listen, I done told him that you're not the Vivian he last saw. That you've been married and divorced and he better watch out." So when I called, him and his mother come

over to visit for a little bit. And, it just kind of, you know, over the next couple of months...because he had a 30 day furlough. And, we went to dinner and everything.

CO: Now this would've been in the...

VL: 1960.

CO: Now you married in '60, so but you...

VL: December of '60.

CO: That's right, December 6th, and so, but you and he kind of came back together earlier in the year.

VL: Right, that was in...had to be august of 1960.

CO: But you knew him. You already knew him, he already knew you.

VL: Yeah.

CO: So you didn't have to worry about his background or any of that. You knew...

VL: Knew exactly.

CO: So then he came home in December for ya'll to get married? Or how long did you court? How long did you date?

VL: Uh, from August until December.

CO: Okay.

VL: And, because he was stationed at Ft. Benning, and it was just a six hour drive to Knoxville. So, he drove back and forth on weekends that he had leave. So, we dated until December.

CO: Now did...when did he get out of the military?

VL: 1966.

CO: So did he go at all to Vietnam?

VL: He didn't go to Vietnam. He was in the middle of filing his retirement papers when he got orders to go to Vietnam, and I wrote our Congressman and explained to him my husband has already served through two wars. He is in the middle of filling out his paperwork to retire, and now they want to send him to Nam? And he said, "I'll take care

of it.” And the next day when my husband went to finish up his paperwork, the sergeant behind the desk said, “Boy it must be nice to know somebody in Washington.” And my husband said, “What are you talking about?” And he said, “Well, they just canceled your orders for Nam. You’re gonna...they’re gonna go ahead and let you retire.” And I’m thinking, “God, he’s served through two wars, actual fighting through two wars, World War Two and Korea.” He lost his brother in Korea. His brother was killed.

CO: So what...what did he do in the Army? What was his....

VL: He was over the motor pool...

CO: Uh huh uh huh.

VL: the tanks and jeeps and all of that.

CO: Was he a sergeant by the time...

VL: He was...yeah, Sergeant...SFC...Sergeant First Class.

CO: Whoa. So that provided him at least some retirement income.

VL: Right, it wasn't a lot at the time. They get paid more now than they did then. But it was sufficient, you know. He also worked. After he retired he went to work as an auto mechanic. That's all he's ever done really is...

CO: So, alright, you didn't have a whole lot of romantic notions, you said, as a child because you had...

VL: Well life didn't allow for it.

CO: That's right, that's right.

VL: You know?

CO: So you didn't... you didn't...your watching movies or reading books didn't really override the experience you had with your parents, your mother leaving, your father marrying somebody you didn't like, you didn't have anything in the back of your mind to offset that?

VL: No.

CO: No, okay.

VL: I knew how life was, you know?

CO: Okay. So, but it sounds like you had a good experience once you and Raymond got together...

VL: Oh yeah, he was a great guy. We were married for 42 years. Good provider, good husband, good father.

CO: So you didn't have any reservations about marrying him?

VL: No, uh uh.

CO: Had he been married before?

VL: Yes.

CO: He had been married before.

VL: And he had three daughters by his first wife, and I get along fine with them. They're beautiful girls. I love them.

CO: Are they nearby or...

VL: No, they live in South Carolina and North Carolina.

CO: Ok, alright. Um, did...when you were growing up you were taking care of these siblings or when you were a teenage, did you think about having children of your own?

VL: Oh yeah. Yeah.

CO: How many kids did you want?

VL: Three, which is what I got.

CO: Which is what you had.

VL: Yeah.

CO: You had two girls and a boy. Is that what you wanted? Or did that matter?

VL: I had two boys and a girl. Robin and Dewey.

CO: Robin. Robin is a boy. Okay.

VL: Robin is a boy.

CO: Robin is a boy, okay. So, did you have preferences for...in terms of...

VL: No.

CO: Boys or girls.

VL: No, I just wanted three kids. It didn't matter whether they were boys or girls, but I was lucky and I got at least one of each.

CO: Yeah, Mary Lyn, the girl, was the baby. Did you have different notions of how you would treat girls or boys? I mean do you have any...

VL: No, where I grow up...when I grew up it was...there wasn't any special treatment for anybody, you know? You had things you had to do. You were fed and you were taken care of, but there was no privilege, you know? No privileges. And, I pretty much raised mine the way my grandmother raised me. I was bound and determined that nothing would separate my family, at least until the children were grown. But then it wouldn't have occurred anyway because Ray was such a good guy.

CO: Okay. Was there a time in your life when you didn't work outside the home? When you stayed at home?

VL: Uh, until Mary Lyn was old enough for kindergarten I stayed at home.

CO: Alright. What was that like?

VL: Any typical day of...you know...house cleaning.

CO: Right, but did you...did you ever want to do that? Did you ever want to just be quote a "homemaker?"

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: No. I'm also an artist.

CO: Oh.

VL: I do pastel portraits. That's a couple of them up there.

CO: Wow.

VL: I've always enjoyed that. But it's like my Indian bead work, I don't want to do it for profit. I just want to do it and give it away. You know?

CO: Uh huh.

VL: It's just something I do.

CO: And now when did you learn that?

VL: Oh, I was born artistic.

CO: But, the beading. Did you ...

VL: Oh, the beading I've learned since...

CO: You got interested in your...

VL: Right.

CO: Native culture? Okay.

VL: Right.

CO: But the art is...the pastels, did you know that as younger woman?

VL: It just...I just did it.

CO: You just started doing it.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay.

VL: I bought books along to help, you know, with shapes of faces and all that kind of thing, but I've always drawn.

CO: Now is that you and your husband?

VL: Yes.

CO: Right there? Would you mind if I get a copy of that picture? I've got a scanner, a portable scanner. I would like...

VL: No...

CO: I forgot to ask you, I would like some pictures to scan if we can get them.

VL: Right.

CO: Okay. So, Mary Lyn went to school, or kindergarten, and then you went back. Did you then go back working with your husband? Bookkeeping?

VL: That's when I started working as his bookkeeper.

CO: Oh okay, alright. What was it like having to do everything you had done at home before you went to work, and then you're working 40 or more hours a week and then you're having to do the, you know, the quote "double burden," how did you handle that?

VL: I just did.

CO: Yeah. Was your husband...

VL: There were things you had to do, and you do them.

CO: But did you have...were the children helpful? Did your husband do domestic stuff?

VL: My husband took care of all the outside.

CO: Okay.

VL: And I took care of the inside. The kids, we made sure that they had every opportunity like band in school, drill team in school, sports, little league, high school...

Mary Lyn: We also did dance, choir...

VL: Yeah.

Mary Lyn: It was relentless.

VL: We kept them occupied. My kids were all very well-behaved. They knew what the rules were and they followed the rules. You know?

Mary Lyn: There was a very big subtle undertone, in our raising, of you don't hurt other people's feelings. That had a lot to do with it. You just do not hurt other people's feelings. You think before you speak.

CO: Did you go to school around here?

Mary Lyn: Yes, ma'am.

CO: Okay, so you just handled it.

VL: Yeah, it's just a part of life.

CO: You didn't have domestic help I assume?

VL: No.

CO: No. Okay.

VL: No.

CO: Alright, so what...sounds like you had a good relationship with your children.

VL: Oh yeah. Still do.

CO: Okay.

VL: Still do.

CO: Alright, did um...and how many grandchildren do you have?

VL: Oh golly, let me see.

Mary Lyn: Count 'em up!

VL: Robin had a total of five, Dewey had two, Mary Lyn had two. That's with my three.

CO: Uh huh, so that's nine.

VL: Yeah, but then Ray had, also, let me see... Barbara had three, Shirley had two, and Jean had two. How many is that? Three...

CO: Seven. Okay

VL: Seven. Okay, that's the grandkids.

CO: Okay, now do any...are there any times when all of ya'll get together?

VL: Yes, we did a couple of times a year, when Ray was alive.

CO: Okay, now where are these grandchildren? Are they close by?

VL: No, they're in... part of them are. Mary Lyn and Dewey's kids are here, four of them. Robin's...two of Robin's boys are. Well Jacob of course died, and then Robin's two boys by his second wife, one's in Orlando, Florida and the other one's in Arkansas.

CO: So, Robin...I'm sorry, Mary Lyn, you live here?

Mary Lyn: Yes, ma'am, I live here.

CO: Okay, and where are your children?

Mary Lyn: I have one son who's in Crawfordville, Florida and then my daughter is here. I babysit my grandkids.

CO: Oh, okay. Alright. Are you going to need to leave? Are you going to drive? I don't know if my car...

Mary Lyn: You're not blocking me. You're fine.

CO: Okay, alright. Okay, so...I do have questions about mothering because before I started this research project, that was one of my primary interests is...was mothering at the turn of the century, and so I'm just interested in how that, how the experience of mothering shapes women's lives. A lot of us just do it without thinking about it. We don't think about how mothering shapes our lives, but do you think that your experience of being a mother has anything to do with who you are today? The person you are today?

VL: That's a good question. I don't know.

CO: Well how...what would you...

VL: I suppose it has to.

CO: How would describe a good mother? What is a good mother?

VL: One who loves her children, number one, because you would be surprised at the mothers out there that don't love their kids.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: You want to give them, you want to teach them how to interact with other people.

CO: Okay.

VL: How to behave. Values, moral values. At least, that's what I feel.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Because all of those things were taught to me by my grandmother and my mother did everything totally opposite to that, you know?

CO: Did your grandmother have issues with your mother?

VL: Oh, yes. Afraid so.

CO: Did she say things that....

VL: Yes. She was very straightforward and outspoken. She didn't...

Mary Lyn: That's where you get that from!

VL: Yes, I'm sure.

CO: Okay.

VL: My grandpa, every time my grandmother would start on my mother, my grandpa would say, "now Mag, she's these kids' mother. You've got to lay off of that stuff and stop telling that stuff." And she'd be alright until the next time she got T'd, and then she'd start again.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But I understood all that, and in the beginning I was a little angry with my mother too. In fact it caused me psychological issues later.

CO: Sure.

VL: That I had to be treated for.

CO: But sounds like you worked through them. I don't hear any anger there. I mean...

VL: Uh, I learned that being angry at her is not going to change anything that happened, and it'll only make me sick. And I don't want to be sick.

CO: Right.

VL: So, I just forgave her and went on. You know?

CO: And that somehow shaped the way *you* mother.

VL: Mmhmm.

CO: If you could go back and do that again, your own mothering, would you do anything differently from what you...the way you've?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: No.

CO: Okay, so would you say that that is a benefit of having had the childhood you had? That you can be at this point in your life and say...

VL: Definitely.

CO: . . . that you don't have regrets about your mothering?

VL: Definitely.

CO: Okay. Alright. Now, about mothering? Would you say mothering today is different from what it was like when your mother left you all? I mean mothering's a different thing now.

VL: Oh yeah, totally.

CO: Do you think it's harder or do you think it's easier now to mother?

VL: To do it the way I do it...well I don't know. Let me see. I've got to gather my thoughts here. The problem today is that [pointing at the television...]

CO: Television? More than the computer, you think?

VL: Oh yeah. Well, I equate it with the T.V. simply because I've only had a computer about ten years. Prior to that I didn't have. It's the type of programming. Society has gotten so lax in what is appropriate and inappropriate.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: Children now-a-days are not raised with morals, they're not raised with respect, or *to* respect. They're not raised *to* respect.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: It's all about fun and games and you know. They're not taught life anymore.

CO: Mmhmm. You attribute that to television?

VL: The biggest majority of it because my kids were allowed two hours of television a night, on school nights. They got a little bit more on the weekends, but we were busy, we were involved. We didn't sit in front of that idiot box.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: And, because... It kills me. You can't watch any type of program anymore without sex being interjected in the thing.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: Or bad language, or disrespect for the law, disrespect for fellow humans. And society allows it to happen. They should be out there screaming, "stop this stuff...get it

off of there.” That’s not what I want T.V. for. Everybody is so passive. They’re not getting out there and fighting for the things and it’s going to turn us into a really bad country before it’s over with.

CO: So would you say then, if that’s the case, that mothering is actually harder today because it’s...than it was?

VL: It’s not any harder, it’s just that parents today, for the majority, there’s... there’s too much of putting the kid in front of the T.V. and not spending time raising those kids right. The parents are no longer putting an effort into being a good parent, because they’ve got other things they want to do.

CO: Yeah.

VL: It’s not about...it’s not a family issue anymore, you know? People are no longer a family. They may live in the same house, but they don’t connect with one another.

CO: Okay, alright. Could ask you a couple things about your work? You said that as a child you always wanted to be a bookkeeper...

VL: Uh huh.

CO: Which is what you wound up doing. Before you became a bookkeeper did you have some jobs, did you do other kinds of jobs? Did you...

VL: The only other job I had was building fishing flies.

CO: Okay.

VL: Uh, making fishing flies.

CO: So you don’t really have a whole lot of....

VL: Work experience.

CO: Diversity of experience.

VL: Right.

CO: Okay, so if you could go back and train for anything else, would you? What else would you possibly want to do? Nothing? No?

VL: No.

CO: Alright.

VL: I pretty much do what I've always wanted to do.

CO: Well, okay. What about your children? Did you encourage them one way or the other about what they might do for their livelihoods?

VL: No. Just get an education. You've got to have an education now-a-days.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But we pretty much allowed them to be who they want to be, you know?

CO: Okay.

VL: My son, I mean my husband had hopes that our two sons, together, would go in the business when he left it to them. But my oldest son is a bit of a stickler. No dirt under the fingernails, no grease. Shirt, pants, shoes and socks match.

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: Uh, always a fussy kid about the way he dressed. Kept his room immaculate, while his brother, on the other side of the room, was a slob. You know? He couldn't stand getting greasy, and there's a lot of grease in that shop up there. So he chose to go into the military.

CO: Oh.

VL: Yeah. The youngest son inherited the shop when my husband crossed over.

CO: Dewey.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay. So Robin, is he still in the military?

VL: He's retired.

CO: Retired, okay.

VL: He is Second-in-Command of the Thomas County Fire Department.

CO: Okay.

VL: He's assistant chief. Chief of Operations.

CO: Still allows him to be...keep his fingernails a little cleaner than the...

VL: Well he's in a boss position, so he don't have to fight the fire anymore.

CO: Guess he keeps his fingernails clean.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay. Alright. But for your, you just really encouraged them to do whatever they wanted to do.

VL: What would make them happy, you know?

Mary Lyn: Daddy would say, "You can be a hobo if you want to, but I want you to be a good hobo."

CO: Okay. Alright. And so you're not retired?

VL: No, I don't draw enough social security to retire.

CO: Okay. Are you looking forward to that? To retirement?

VL: Not particularly.

CO: No?

VL: Because I can't...by the time Monday rolls around again, I'm just climbing the wall to do something, and with her being here I don't have to do housework anymore. She keeps everything clean. All I have to do is cook, so I'm at a loss for something to do.

CO: Yeah.

VL: I've always been that way. I just, you know...

CO: So you don't really *want* to retire?

VL: Not particularly.

CO: Okay, alright. So how long have you been back here?

Mary Lyn: Six months.

CO: Okay. So, I can't imagine what it would be like have somebody that.... Do you cook?

Mary Lyn: I don't like to, I let her do the cooking, and I do the cleaning.

CO: The cooking is the part that I would so appreciate. Okay, are you better off financially than your parents were?

VL: Oh, absolutely.

CO: Okay.

VL: Absolutely. I own my own home. It's paid for.

CO: Did you, growing up, did you have an awareness of what class your family came from?

Mary Lyn: Did you know you were poor and on the bottom?

CO: That's right.

VL: No, no I had no idea.

CO: Yeah, that's what most people say.

VL: There was always a pot of beans on the stove and I didn't have to live out in the weather, and we can get some cold winters in Knoxville. Snows up there where I was from.

CO: So as long as you were warm and fed you felt like you were...you weren't aware there was another world out there where people...

VL: Right, we didn't have T.V. I was 15 and gone from home before my daddy ever bought a T.V. We had the radio, but you know... I didn't...my clothes were always clean, I was always fed, and I always slept good. I...you know? I wasn't aware that I was poor.

CO: Yeah, so has your adult life been...have you felt like you've had enough in your adult life, enough money? Has money been a struggle for you?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: No.

CO: Okay.

VL: If I needed something, wanted something, I'd go out and work long enough to get money to get it. I'd, you know, you just... I don't understand the thinking of people today...the greed, more and more and more and more. I'm perfectly satisfied if my needs are taken care of, you know?

CO: Okay. Let's see. Okay, we're back on. Next subject to talk about is what...how you have handled loss, and particularly loss through death, but also separation, divorce, illness, you know ill health, anything like that. But to start with death. What's, what is the most significant death...loss through death that you've experienced?

VL: I, well, I don't know. You're not supposed to outlive your grandchildren.

CO: Yeah.

VL: And I've lost two. Dewey's son, the twins' dad, was killed in an automobile accident. Six years, Mary, ago?

Mary Lyn: Yeah.

CO: Oh my goodness.

VL: That was hard, because Dewey and his mother divorced when he was four, and we had, I, hadn't had a lot of contact with him. She always had an excuse why I couldn't get him. And then of course, the weekends that his dad had him I didn't want to, you know, interfere with that. But then my grandson Adam, who is Robin's son, he came and lived with me and Ray for a while, and picking him up from school...him and Allan are within a year of one another, and picking him up at school I got to see Allan every afternoon and interact with him, you know, through the week. And we got really close. That has to be the worst. I adored that kid. But, there's nothing you can do about it, you know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: I enjoyed the time I had with him, and I try to concentrate on that.

CO: How old was he?

VL: 20. 21. He had just had his twenty first birthday the day before, and...but he was a sweet kid, he was a good kid. So excited about the coming birth of his twins.

CO: Oh.

VL: He had, they had just gotten married.

CO: Those are his children?

VL: Allan's, uh huh. So, what we tried to do was stay connected with them. You know? Holidays and birthdays and make sure we're a part of their life.

CO: So they didn't know their daddy.

VL: Uh uh, no. They were born...he was killed in September, and they were born in November.

CO: Oh my goodness.

VL: But, one thing about his...their mother. They know their daddy. They know all about him, and she allows, cause see they're part native too, and she allows them to be taught, you know? And I just love her to death for that. Because so many young women now-a-days, you know, wouldn't.

CO: Yeah, yeah.

VL: But the hardest part...stay connected to the ones closest to them.

CO: Uh huh.

VL: Helps.

CO: So that was six years ago, and then you lost...you suffered the loss of the baby...

VL: Huh?

CO: The baby...oh ok your husband.

VL: The baby died first.

CO: Right, that was in the eighties.

VL: Uh huh.

CO: The mid-eighties.

VL: Right.

CO: Now what was his relation to Allan, the young boy that?

Mary Lyn: Cousins.

CO: Cousins, okay.

VL: Right. They were cousins.

CO: Alright. So Allan was Dewey's...

VL: Dewey's son.

CO: The middle child's son. Okay, alright. So, that's still fresh.

VL: Yeah.

CO: Alright. So your husband was already gone?

VL: Right, he died in 2002, and Allan died in Two Thousand and...I wanna say Six.

CO: Alright. Other than death, what are some other significant, some other losses that you've experienced that have been significant? Divorce of close family members, or just separation from people that moved away or whatever...

VL: No, my kids are still here, and all three of them have been divorced. Mary Lyn's been married five times, Robin's been married four, Dewey was married twice and he says he'll never marry again. Divorce don't upset me.

Mary Lyn: Because unless you actually commit a crime against the family, do something wrong, you get adopted into this family. There's no adoption out.

CO: Oh okay. You can't divorce the family.

Mary Lyn: Right, sister-in-laws are kept, brother-in-laws are kept, daughter-in-law, son-in-law are kept when there's a divorce and the new wife or husband has to accept the fact that the ex will be at Thanksgiving or Christmas or....

CO: And that all works out?

VL: Has so far.

CO: Okay.

VL: There's been a couple of spouses that I have to explain, every one of those son-in-laws or daughter-in-laws are the parents of my grandchildren. I'm going to have a relationship with my grandchildren. You either accept that her picture is hanging up there or his picture is hanging up there, or you don't, but that's the way it's going to be. Family, that's what it's all about is family.

CO: Yeah. Okay.

VL: And like she said, unless you do something major against the family core, you remain a part of it.

CO: So you have got a lot of daughter-in-laws and son-in-laws.

VL: Yeah, and I love every one of them. You know...

Mary Lyn: And on top of that, adopted friends of mine and my brothers.

CO: Oh.

Mary Lyn: That are considered family.

CO: So do they come visit much?

VL: Oh yeah.

CO: So do you ever have more than one ex-husband here at the time?

Mary Lyn: So far I haven't had more than one, Pistol's been here with Neddy.

VL: Mark's always here...

Mary Lyn: Mark don't count.

VL: Her first husband, Mark, is always here. For everything like deaths, births, everything, he comes up here. He lives in Florida.

CO: Now, were ya'll friends before you married? Is that why he stays close to the family?

Mary Lyn: Um, no, I think it's just that we were so young when we got married. I was seventeen and he was sixteen.

CO: Oh.

Mary Lyn: So, we managed to remain friends after the divorce. We got closer after we went through a marriage so young and having kids and playing house and...

CO: So he's the father of your girls?

Mary Lyn: My girl, uh huh.

CO: Okay, you've got two?

Mary Lyn: My son has a different biological father, but he was raised by Mark.

CO: Oh, okay. Even though Mark was the first...?

VL: Husband.

CO: Husband, so he helped raise your son?

Mary Lyn: Right, because my son and daughter were so close.

CO: Okay, alright.

Mary Lyn: We had tried to get back together when I was pregnant with Michael, and he wanted his family back, and he said it didn't matter that he wasn't the biological father. He would still raise him as his own, and he's kept that word to this day.

CO: Mmm

VL: Yeah.

Mary Lyn: Michael lives with him now.

CO: How old are your children?

Mary Lyn: Michael's twenty-one, Victoria's twenty-four. She'll turn twenty-five this year.

CO: But it didn't work out when ya'll tried to get back together?

Mary Lyn: No.

CO: No.

VL: No, and she's had four husbands since...

Mary Lyn: Shhhh.

VL: She's a little bit of a free spirit like my mother.

Mary Lyn: Yes, well...it's in the blood.

CO: Okay. What about aging? You're really not that old. I mean, I interviewed a hundred and six year old recently...

VL: Oh my word.

CO: You're not old, but obviously at 72 you have some different, you've experienced some, you've experienced aging to some extent, but do you remember when you were

younger and what you thought was old? Like when you were a child and somebody at thirty was old.

VL: Oh, I about died on my thirtieth birthday.

CO: Did you?

VL: Yes, I did. That was the worst birthday I ever had. I just couldn't believe I was that old.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But in the years since, I don't have a problem with it.

CO: What's old now?

VL: Yeah, well not only that, as long as I don't look in the mirror or catch my reflection somewhere, I'm still 16 up here.

CO: That's what...that was going to be my next question. How old do you feel in your heart and your mind?

VL: 16.

CO: Yeah.

VL: 16. And physically I can pretty well keep up with it unless I have to walk for a long distance.

CO: But that's so telling though, it's one thing I've learned in the past months working on this is that people are not old in their hearts and their minds. And, it's hard sometimes to reconcile what you see in the mirror with who you are inside.

VL: Well I can still do just about everything I used to, I'm just slower at it.

CO: Well, yeah. Right, right. But there's got to be...so what has been the most difficult part of aging?

VL: There hasn't been any difficulty other than, you know, physical. I was very disappointed three weeks ago to learn I had Type Two Diabetes. I was feeling great. Had no idea. I had a little fender-binder in front of the post office. Because I am 70, there's a new law in Georgia, I didn't know about, because I was 70 or older and had an accident, I had to go to a doctor and have him examine me and fill out this long form to send back to the DMV. I couldn't send it back. The doctor had to fill it to make sure I

was not impaired to keep me from driving. That's when I learned I've got high blood pressure, hypertension, Type 2 Diabetes, enlarged heart, COPD, and sometime recently I've had a mild heart attack.

CO: Oh my goodness. Wow.

VL: All of that. Okay, there's no spots on my lungs. I haven't had any trouble breathing. I don't know why, but he said, "Your lungs sound like crap." And I said, "Well, I guess that's a sign of COPD," cause I said, "I'm fine. I feel fine."

CO: So what'd he do to you?

VL: Oh God, he's got me on all kinds of medication.

CO: Oh my goodness.

VL: Yeah, but within a week's time my blood pressure was brought down to normal; my blood sugar was brought down to normal; and I just kind of keep a cap on my temper to keep the hypertension down.

CO: Does she do that Mary Lyn?

Mary Lyn: **except for the television people???**

VL: Yeah well, that kind of ticked me off. There was no call for that.

CO: What was that? No call for?

VL: My girlfriend that lives over here on the tribal ground on the other side of the pond over there, she came over here and bundled my telephone, internet, and Dish Network satellite all in one thing to get my phone bill cut down.

CO: Right.

VL: And in the process of Dish correcting everything on the T.V., they got rid of all my programs I watched, so I called them last night.

CO: Oh.

VL: What set me off was the fact that you cannot get a human voice on the phone anymore.

CO: It is so frustrating.

VL: I hate automation.

CO: I know it.

VL: And I just...by the time I finally got ahold of the voice I was livid.

CO: Right, right. Yeah.

VL: So, and she keeps saying, "Hang on, Mother. Just calm down, just calm down. You'll get it squared away. Just calm down."

CO: Give the phone to her.

VL: "You've got hypertension, calm down."

CO: Oh, I know it's...

VL: Well I did finally, when the guy got on there and you had to do a bunch of stuff with your remote, she did that.

CO: Yeah, it is very frustrating. But, what has been the most rewarding part of aging? Or the benefits of aging? Have you reached a place where you can say whatever you want to and get away with it?

Mary Lyn: Oh yeah, Oh, she's always been able to say what she wanted to, and get away with it.

CO: Alright.

VL: I can't see any difference, you know? I just...I take whatever life throws at me, and deal with it.

CO: Well is there a time that you look back to nostalgically? A time in life...

VL: All the time.

CO: Mmm, so what time would that be?

VL: My childhood.

CO: Your childhood.

VL: My childhood. Growing up. It was so laid back. Yeah, but...it's all about family, you know? And my dad's family were all super close, still are, what are left. You don't have that today, you know? Everybody's going their separate way, and...

CO: So, is that...do you think part of that is because of your grandmother? You look at it nostalgically because of her?

VL: Oh yes, because she held our family together. She sure did.

CO: So, if you could remain, you might think about this differently with it asked this way, if you could remain an age that you've experienced, what would that be?

VL: Probably my preteens.

CO: Okay.

VL: You know? Up to the point that Mama left. People...kids had imaginations back then, you know? They weren't sitting in front of an idiot box, and you played together and all was well with the world in the forties. I'm telling you that's the time I'm going back to is the 1940s, because they're coming out of the depression now, and...

CO: The economies picking up.

VL: The economies picking up, and people are laid back, and there wasn't all that crime that there is now-a-days...

CO: Of course the War was, you know, raging elsewhere...

VL: Right.

CO: so, but you didn't experience that directly?

VL: Other than the fact that my dad was gone for two years, while he was in the army. But I was so young then. That was four. I was four.

CO: Yeah, so you stayed with your aunt for...how long was your mother in California?

VL: Long enough to get pregnant.

CO: You stayed with your aunt...

VL: She got fired by the airplane factory because she got pregnant, so she had to come back.

CO: So was she able to make enough money to make a difference when she was working in the factory? No?

VL: I don't know, because we never saw any of it. I mean she paid Aunt Sarah a little dab for babysitting, but the rest of it we didn't see. She was partying.

CO: Mmm, mmm. Okay. Well, my next questions, then we'll take a break after this, have to do with...I know it sounds like for you, now, your strongest identity is being identified with you Native ancestry, but before that, you know, before that became so central to your life, did you and your family...did you have a sense of being Southern? Or did you have a sense that being Southern was different from being...well your mother went to California. Did she talk about people there being different than they were...

VL: I don't recall any of that. I was four.

CO: Yeah.

VL: At the time, so...

CO: You, yourself, do you...have you traveled much?

VL: On the eastern seaboard. Yeah.

CO: Okay.

VL: I, we've only been as far as Oklahoma.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: Across the Mississippi.

CO Alright, but culturally that's somewhat Southern, even though it's not... Do you have a sense of what it means to be Southern?...as opposed to being...

VL: Not particularly.

Mary Lyn: You mean like Confederate Southern? Redneck Southern?

CO: Well...yeah. Yeah.

Mary Lyn: I always knew...well I won't say I always knew. I always got a sense that we were just different.

VL: And it didn't have to do with South or North.

CO: No...but when you say "we" who are you talking about?

Mary Lyn: Our family.

CO: Oh, the family. Okay, but you...so you don't really think of yourself as Southern?

Mary Lyn: No.

CO: Alright.

Mary Lyn: I mean my friends do, you know? And I might, you know, make comments or whatever...you know to them on that level...like going mud bogging or something like that, but not the waving the rebel flag, redneck girl, uh uh.

CO: So the rebel flag has no meaning for you?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: Other than the fact that a lot of men died for a cause, but we're not particularly Southern or Northern.

Mary Lyn: It's a recognizable war flag from the past, but it's not something that's tied to us individually that we would pick a side on. It's always been more like we're watching the North and the South and their differences.

CO: Okay. Now that's...do you feel like that Vivian?

VL: Yes.

CO: You're watching something. It's not...you're not really associated with it or a part of it. You're watching. Well what are you watching? That's what I'd like to know? When you say you're observing this...whatever contrast/conflict, what are you observing? What's it about?

VL: It's just watching others...

Mary Lyn: Little things like where their boundaries are, where their Pro Quos and limitations are, where is the line for respect to others? How they treat their parents, their grandparents, strangers...

CO: And, what's the difference in the way people from outside this region do all those things? Mary Lyn just said, respect parents, treat strangers, etc.?

VL: It depends on what era you're talking about. Today there's no respect anywhere for others.

CO: And it hasn't got anything to do with Southern, Northern, whatever?

VL: No, uh uh.

CO: Okay.

VL: Respect is respect, regardless.

Mary Lyn: I have one thing that keeps coming to mind. I know some people that have two friends. They refer to one as "Black Joe" and one was as "White Joe." And I said, "well do Black Joe and White Joe have the same last name?" "Well, no. Of course not." I said, "Well then what's wrong with Mr. Such-and-such and Mr. Such-and-such? Why do you have to point out or distinguish that fact that one is black and one is white? We're not blind." Why is that? It's little things like that, that our family would never do, that seemed to be the norm, and so that boundary of respect and Pro Quos and limitations is different from what we were raised.

CO: Okay, this is, she's hit on precisely what I'm trying to get at.

VL: Good. She learned all that from me.

CO: Really, chiefly, what scholars are trying to understand is when do we become aware that there is...there's consequence to the color of your skin.

VL: Uh huh.

CO: You might...you might know that it's disrespectful to distinguish Black Joe from White Joe, using that terminology, but how...when is it that we become aware, in this region that is so identified with race conflict...with troubled race relations, now of course it's all over the country, but presumably...

VL: But it's worse here.

CO: Yes. It has a history of um...

VL: Right.

CO: So, when do we, as children, become conscious of the fact that it makes a difference what color the skin is?

Mary Lyn: When you're very little. Uh, befriend somebody that the majority doesn't like because of their color or their culture, and you get that look from across the playground. You get that scowl. You get that cause it's all subtle, it's all undertones. You have to be shaken as a human being to be made aware that the way you treat people, in general, is important regardless of color. They're taught prejudice.

VL: Yeah.

Mary Lyn: They're taught that it is Black Joe because he is black and White Joe because he is white, not Mr. Such-and-such and Mr. Such-and-such.

CO: That's right.

Mary Lyn: And it's from very young. I remember being very young and realizing that, well that's not right, that didn't feel right, something's different about our family than these other people.

CO: Well, where does that come from? When, Vivian, did you come to the awareness that Mary Lyn just expressed? She said it happened as a child. Do you remember how old?

Mary Lyn: Kindergarten.

CO: Okay.

Mary Lyn: When you start socializing with other...

CO: That's my experience is the age of five. I recall the experience vividly. Do you recall an experience....you lived in the mountains so it's possible that you didn't have a lot of interaction with...

VL: Just other Native Americans and Whites.

CO: Okay, so your experience may have been different, but at some point when you move into a populated area that's populated with Black and White, and in the South it's a lot of just Black and White.

VL: Right.

CO: You know there's not a lot...I mean there's a lot more diversity now, but in the forties there was not the kind of diversity.

VL: No.

CO: So when did you experience that, that awareness that it matters that I've got white skin, no matter how poor you are, that my white skin protects me in some ways?

VL: I don't know, because I was taught, all my life, to respect people. It was never about color, or religion, or none of that was even considered. It's how you treat your fellow human.

CO: But you understand that in the South, for some people, Blacks were not human? Not fellow humans, they weren't the same category of humans.

VL: Right. But that was in school. Being Native, we were in the same position.

Mary Lyn: They were equal to us.

CO: But you don't identify as Native. Maybe you did by the time...

VL: Well, she did because...

CO: She got that awareness much younger than you did.

VL: Right

CO: But you don't think of yourself as Native when you're five, six, seven, even though your grandmother... You did think of yourself as Native?

Mary Lyn: I did, I've always known.

VL: I've always known, but...oh, I don't know how to say it.

Mary Lyn: Some of it is so inbred and so subtle that you can't say that you actually got a lesson on it, or that there was a point where you were aware. It's something you were always aware of. Like Mother made the statement she learned a lot from Grandmother by listening and observing. Native Americans are taught not only to speak, but to listen. And I think a lot of children are not taught to sit and listen and observe and learn that your mouth doesn't have to be going all the time. Whereas other cultures, once you learn how to speak it's all about getting out what you feel, what you want, there's never any stillness, and that's something we've always had. It's just always been a feeling of "Wait, listen".

VL: The only bad experience I've ever had was trying to get my husband recognized. My husband had more Native blood than I did. So I filled out all of his genealogy, with the proof and everything else, and sent it to Oklahoma, first, to the Cherokee Nation. And I got this real nice letter back, and it said, "We're not saying that your husband is not Native American; we're just saying he's not descended from someone who signed the treaty."

Mary Lyn: We escaped!

VL: And I'm thinking, "Wait a minute, the signing of a treaty determines whether I am Native American or not?" I don't think so. So I turned around, and I sent all his

paperwork to Cherokee, North Carolina, and I got a letter back from them saying, "Oh we're not saying he's not Native American; we're just saying he has no ancestors that lived on the tribal grounds as of 1957." What has that go to do with whether we're Native American or not? You know?

CO: Right, right.

VL: That's the only bad experience I've had. Friends didn't have a clue that I was Native American growing up as a kid, you know? So...but I do know...I wear this in protest.

CO: [Reading] "I'm part white, but I can't prove it."

VL: The Native American is the only race in the United States that have to prove they're Native American. Now you tell me how fair that is.

CO: Well, well nothing that's ever happened to them has been fair.

VL: Yeah.

CO: So, um...what in trying to ascertain his ancestry...

VL: Right.

CO: What was the benefit of having the...you already knew from DNA what percentage Native he was?

VL: Yes.

CO: So, you wanted recognition of it? Is that it?

VL: No.

CO: No, tell me...okay.

VL: We didn't want anything the government had.

CO: Okay.

VL: No benefits, no nothing. But we needed, for our own self-satisfaction, we needed for the Federal Indian to admit that we were Native, because they deny us.

CO: Oh.

VL: You know you have to go through one of the reservations through application and it goes to the BIA before you can be “legalized” as a Native American. We want the Federal Indians to recognize there is a group of ancestors out here who are Native American, whether they get benefits or not. That’s neither here nor there. Just recognize that we are here.

CO: And so what would be wrong with getting benefits, if you could get benefits without having to go through that bureaucracy.

VL: Well I’m going to anger a lot of people. My question is this: how long are the whites going to be penalized for something their ancestors did and they had no part in? The Native American has been paid for his land. Why are they continuing to send them checks every year?

CO: So you think that the monetary contribution has compensated for the pain and suffering?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: But nothing will.

CO: Right.

VL: Nothing will ever bring back those ancestors. Nothing will ever correct the situation as it was. But how many people are you going to penalize that had no part in it?

CO: And how are they being penalized?

VL: Descendants are continuing to pay for the actions of their ancestors.

CO: In what way?

VL: Money.

CO: Okay.

VL: The taxpayer.

CO: Okay.

VL: None of these people today had anything to do with what happened to the Native American.

CO: Okay.

VL: The Cherokee always made their own way. They didn't take from anybody else. They grew their own crops. They built their own cabins, you know? So, the Europeans did...and I'm upset about it because I'm also part European. You know? I'm Irish, as well as Native American.

CO: So you don't think the injustice done over a period of however many years warrants compensation?

VL: No, I didn't say that. But at this point there is nothing....

Mary Lyn: Money's not going to compensate for anything.

VL: For harm, and death, and murder.

Mary Lyn: Politics are not going to fix it. It's going to have to be individuals saying we shouldn't have done that. We should never act like that. Let's never act like that again. And then live like that. But it has to be an individual choice for everybody, and if the whole group gets it, well great, but...

CO: So you don't think money is an issue at all?

VL: Oh it's an issue, but I don't think it's important.

CO: Okay.

VL: It's not going to change a thing. And when you go to the reservations, the people are not getting that money. The ones that run the reservation get all the money. Those people don't get it. Go to the backwoods out there and see how hard they're living in mobile homes.

CO: Right. Right. Right. But if the money, if it were possible for the money to be properly distributed, would you have a problem with that? If those people suffering with alcoholism, and all other sorts of...

VL: They're suffering from alcoholism because a white man gave it to them.

CO: Right, right. And, the fact that their lives are so circumscribed by...

VL: It's a welfare state.

CO: Yeah, yeah. And you don't attribute that to the white policy?

VL: Of course.

CO: Yeah, and so is there no way that they can be compensated, and have their standard of living raised, and that wouldn't in some way compensate the generations of...

Mary Lyn: I think it would have to be one on one. It would have to be that Native American man being able to walk off that reservation and say to a white man or a black man or whoever's out there, "this is what I need in my life to make it better, will you help me?" And that person going "yes, brother. Come here and I will help you."

CO: But what if that white or black man doesn't have enough himself, because, you know, it's being concentrated way up here, so...it turns out

Mary Lyn: Well there's such a stigmatism of the people that are on the reservations now that it's like, "Oh well he's Native American." He may have come in and just applied for a job, may be a good worker, he may be praying you know every day for just that one break, that one person who believes in him, but, "Oh no, he's a Native American from the reservation. Don't go there."

CO: Because the reservation has such a stigma.

VL: Right.

CO: Is that it?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay.

End of Part 2 of 4

CO: So, have you all visited reservations?

VL: Oh, yes ma'am.

CO: Where have you gone?

VL: Cherokee, North Carolina and the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, several times.

CO: Mmhmm. So, how does that affect you when you go?

VL: There's a lot of resentment on my part because if you mention that you are Cherokee you get the look, "Yeah right, and your mother was a princess." There's no respect between the Federal Indian towards the non-Federal.

CO: So, the Federal Indian is the one who has been acknowledged at...because he's got this lineage and has been...lived his or her life on the reservation.

VL: On the rez, yes.

Mary Lyn: He gets government recognition because he was branded by the government. To me that's not being able to be a Native American.

CO: Right, right.

Mary Lyn: I don't need government recognition. I knew from the time I gathered understanding from the Creator that I was Cherokee, I was Native American. I don't need the White Man giving me an official piece of paper saying that I am.

CO: But your Mother gave you the official...she made it legitimate by doing her research, so you didn't need...that validated it for her. You didn't need...so how many people...how many Native peoples in this country do you think there are that are in...that are like you all?

VL: Thousands. Hundreds of thousands.

CO: And so, is there a network whereby you are connected in some kind of...is there a centralized...because there are so many tribes. It's not like....

VL: It's not centralized though.

CO: Ok.

VL: There are groups like ours scattered all over the United States.

CO: So, and do you all stay connected in some way?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: Not particularly, just within our group.

CO: So is there an effort...a movement among those of you...

VL: There was at one time, but I'm old now and I don't have the energy or the money to go out and...

CO: So Mary Lyn has to pick that up and.... Do you have an interest in doing that?

Mary Lyn: At some point, yes.

VL: Not right now, but at some point.

CO: But because...I mean those are....somebody, somewhere, has also got that same impulse, but if that...that can die out. I mean you know that....

VL: Oh yes.

CO: To remain or revive that identity can just simply, you know, die out, and so...

VL: Well, that's just like when the...let's see '97 is when we reincorporated, wasn't it?

Mary Lyn: Mmhmm.

VL: Right after that, the movie *Dances with Wolves* came out. We have a webpage, and we have a newspaper. So with the advent of *Dances with Wolves* you would not believe the phone calls and the letters and the emails and... As soon as the popularity for that movie waned, and people saw that in order for it to survive you have to stay connected, and in order to stay connected you must come here.

CO: Yeah, yeah. So, you got calls and letters and emails and so forth from people who are claiming their heritage? Their Native heritage?

VL: And the first question out of their mouth was, "Well, what kind of benefits do I get?" You're not joining this group for any benefits. We're an educational organization.

Mary Lyn: Teaching tribe.

VL: We teach.

CO: And what do you use as, pardon the phrase, a curriculum. I mean what do you use to educate?

VL: We have six thousand members in the SECCI. Each band or clan has a member of that band or clan who go to the schools, civic organizations, churches, and teach our tradition, culture, the whole nine yards on a regular basis.

CO: And you bring those traditions and culture from your grandmother? Is that part of what you'd share?

VL: Well, from my grandmother and others, because not everybody does the ceremony the same way. I mean, you know, there are subtle differences.

CO: Mmhmm. And where did you learn it? The ceremony and the rituals?

VL: From my grandmother. But most people aren't that fortunate.

CO: Right.

VL: See, I was very fortunate in that I was raised by a Cherokee grandmother who was into her culture absolute. Most people out here learned yesterday they have a little Cherokee blood and they want to be a part of it, so they read. The only problem with reading is that there are books out there with false information, and you have to know how to separate the false from the true.

CO: Do you...have you ever met or did you know Wilma Mankiller?

VL: I've met Wilma Mankiller.

CO: What did you think about her?

VL: She's not one of my favorite people.

CO: Oh, okay. Alright.

VL: And I'll tell you why. Her book, that she wrote, and I have a copy, makes it look like she was born and raised on that reservation. Didn't happen. She was born in Berkley, California.

CO: Oh, I thought that's what she said in the book. I used the book one...a couple of..

VL: Her dad was a shoe salesman in Berkley, California. She went to college at Berkley. She went back to Oklahoma to visit her grandparents.

Mary Lyn: She went white, then she come back and took over.

VL: And also, her blood quantum is not what she said it was. Her blood quantum is one eighth.

Mary Lyn: Just like tens of hundreds of thousands of us who don't have a number from the government.

CO: How many people do you think actually know their... you call it quantum? Is that what you call it?

VL: Blood quantum

CO: Blood quantum.

VL: Or degree of blood.

CO: Mmhmm, so...

VL: Very few.

CO: Very few.

VL: Yeah. I can't tell you exactly how much I have because my DNA was tested on my mother's side. Myocardial testing. It doesn't include any of the blood from my father.

CO: Who was...

VL: Who was three eighths.

CO: Mmm, so what does your quantum say?

VL: Mine's around half breed between my mother and my father. Between both sides then I'm about not quite half.

CO: Half Native and half...

VL: Half Native and half Irish.

CO: So, what in this association or what do you call SEC....

VL: South Eastern Cherokee Council Incorporated.

CO: Okay, and so what do you...does it have qualifications for membership?

VL: Sure.

CO: In terms of blood. I mean so...

VL: No, no. Since there is no way to tell in this day and time how much the blood quantum is, we don't deal with the degree. John Ross, who was Principal Chief of the Cherokees at the time of the Removal made the statement, "if you have so much as a drop of blood that is Cherokee, you are Cherokee."

CO: Okay, that's a lot of people.

VL: Yeah.

CO: That's a lot of people.

VL: Yeah it is.

CO: So, does someone simply have to claim that they are Cherokee for you to accept them?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: We have to have a genealogy.

CO: Oh, okay.

VL: We have to have a genealogy. At least three generations, preferably four or five.

CO: Okay.

VL: But at least three.

CO: And so, when someone joins the organization, does that...are those credentials mainly for the purposes of making them legitimate to do this...what you're suggesting be actively involved in educating the community? Is that primarily what it's for?

VL: Yes, that's primarily what we do.

CO: Okay.

VL: Is educate the community.

CO: And do you participate with other tribal groups? Who's the biggest tribal group...nonfederal tribal group like yours, in the country? Which tribe?

VL: I...I wouldn't know because there are bunches of them. So many of them it would be hard to say.

CO: But you're, so you're mainly connected with just the Cherokee?

VL: Our sole...no we're Intertribal, our sole reason is to, well our main reason, is to bring people together who are in mine and my husband's place. You know you are, but you can't prove it and the Federal Indians want nothing to do with you.

Mary Lyn: If you're Cherokee you'll feel it.

VL: Yeah. You bring them together and there is a place here for them to do ceremonies and to pray together and to be a community together, even if it is only twice a year.

Mary Lyn: And the main part of the teaching isn't to teach to stand a certain way or to burn a certain herb or to, it's to teach the heart of the matter behind it.

CO: Okay, but if that's the case, why can't someone convert to become a Cherokee? What if...

VL: We have associate members.

Mary Lyn: Yeah, we have associate members.

CO: But if somebody comes to the ritual and feels a conversion, as a result of it, do you believe in that? I mean do you believe that a person can be transformed?

VL: Yes.

CO: As a result of that experience?

Mary Lyn: They can be made aware. We are all connected to this earth already. We all have the fire of the Creator burning in core of us. Most of us are just unaware of that, and providing this place down here for people to gather makes people more aware of that.

CO: Mmhmm, so if someone who absolutely knows they are not Cherokee...

VL: Right, we have several.

CO: They come and the experience is just...I mean it's a spiritual experience. It has nothing to do with the blood in the veins, and so you'll accept them?

Mary Lyn: Yes.

CO: As um...

VL: Yes.

CO: Because they're spiritual Cherokee?

VL: Right.

CO: Would consider that?

VL: Yes.

CO: So you've got some people like that.

VL: We've have some.

Mary Lyn: You can get adopted in and it takes a whole lot more to get adopted out.

CO: So you can't divorce the Cherokee.

Mary Lyn: No.

CO: Once you become a Cherokee, you're a Cherokee.

Mary Lyn: Once you have Cherokee that likes you, you're pretty much stuck like when a cat chooses you.

CO: Right, okay, alright. So, you've got members that you know of that are not blood Cherokee?

VL: Yes.

CO: They don't have the DNA test.

VL: Yes.

Mary Lyn: But they have the heart of the Cherokee. They want to learn...

CO: Yeah, and so how do you teach...do you have a library of books? I mean certainly somebody...

VL: We have a library/museum right up here on the hill.

CO: Okay, and you gonna let me visit that?

VL: Yeah, James said he'd be glad to take you on tour.

CO: Okay.

VL: When we're finished.

CO: Okay. I tell you what we'll do. We'll stop here, but I still want to come back to talk about those, the actual values of the Cherokee, and then ask you a few questions about history.

VL: Okay.

CO: Just the political movement and that kind of thing, but you want to take a break now?

VL: That'd be fine.

CO: Okay, alright. Okay, we took a little break and we're back now and Vivian is going to, before we start going over some of her experience of the decades of the forties, fifties, and sixties and so forth, she's going to say a little bit about the history of the association that she and her husband helped form. So can you just talk about that for a few minutes? Say something about...is it written up yet? The history of the SECC...?

VL: Yeah.

CO: It is?

VL: Oh yeah.

CO: On the website?

VL: Uh, no, I have a...we have what's called a Founder's Day, every year, and it's the history.

CO: Okay.

VL: I'll try to find a copy of it and mail it to you.

CO: Okay, good.

VL: In 1989, my husband and I joined a group out of Albany. I won't name the person who was in charge.

CO: Okay.

VL: But we became members of that group.

CO: Was this a group of Native Americans?

VL: Yes.

CO: Local Cherokee? Was it Cherokee?

VL: Cherokee. Although, I suspect that the chief was Cajun and not Cherokee. That's neither here nor there. But we became members of this organization because we

needed to be with other Native American descendants. And I use the term descendant because we're not recognized state or federal, we are descendants, however. And they gathered twice a year in Albany, at Cheehaw Park, to learn, you know, stuff that we didn't already know about the Cherokee. And, we were members with that two years, when an event occurred. My husband and I had gone over to Tifton, to the agricultural...

CO: Expo?

VL: No, they're there all the time. I can't think of the name of it, pardon my old age.

CO: The ABAC...is it associated with ABAC?

VL: No, no. This is a state. But this one particular weekend they were having Native American's exhibits and all of that, so my husband and I went over there just to see. While we were there we got to talking to the curator and he wanted, because we were Native Americans, he wanted us to put together a program that we could bring over there and put on at...it'sgosh I wish I could think of the name of it. Doesn't have anything to do with the college, I think it has to do with the state, but it's a park type thing.

CO: Yeah.

VL: I can't think of the name of it. Anyway he wanted us to put together a group to come over and do dancing and exhibits and crafts, that type of thing. Ray and I were so excited. So didn't even come home. We went straight to Albany to see the head of the SECCI. It was the SECCI too.

CO: S E C C I.

VL: Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy Incorporated, is what it was called at the time.

CO: Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy Incorporated.

VL: Uh huh, and when we won the litigation, we changed it.

CO: Okay.

VL: Uh, because of the connotation to the word confederacy.

CO: Right, okay. And so what is it now? Southeastern...

VL: Southeastern Cherokee Council. He had to change his to American Cherokee Confederacy.

CO: Okay.

VL: Anyway, we come back here. We were so excited. Went to his house and was trying to discuss it with him, and he said, "How much they gone pay you?" "They're not gonna pay us anything. This is something to do to let the people know we're here, you know, that they can be a part of it." "If they ain't gone pay you nothing, you ain't gone do it." I said, "Whoa."

CO: Yeah.

VL: Don't tell me I can't do it. This is my organization. I started this organization to take care of me in my old age and you'll do what I say. Okay, we'll see about that. Then we started a campaign to remove him as chief and elect another chief. We spent several months sending out, well in the first place we had to get a lawyer just to get the membership list, and there were 245 people on the list. And so we started a campaign through mail, because that was back before I got a computer, asking the people what it was that they wanted from this organization. What did they think it was supposed to mean?

CO: Yeah.

VL: Then we had an election. We met at Cheehaw Park and had an election, removed him as Chief and elected Red Bear Smith as Chief. Well he took us to court. We, in turn, cross filed. It took five years of court litigation for us to win our case. We had all kinds of canceled checks, where he had cashed them at a bar.

CO: Oh my goodness.

VL: We threw the IRS in there to question his bookkeeping on expenses and money brought in and because he was getting a lot of money under the table and wasn't declaring it. And, he wasn't a 501c3, he was just a 501 nonprofit, but he was pocketing all kinds of money. So, anyhow, we won, and when we won in 1996 it was adjudged that we could keep the Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy, and he had to change the name of his organization. But like I say, because of the connotations to the word confederacy, we changed it to Council. Then we applied for 501c3, which is nonprofit educational to teach. In 19...I guess it was '95, Red Bear served one term and then half of another.

CO: Now, where is he from?

VL: Sarasota. He was from Sarasota, Florida.

CO: Okay.

VL: He's in California now. Him and his wife are living with their son, because they both have Alzheimer's. But because of illnesses and the fact that it took so many hours to get from Sarasota and to go back, he was getting up in age and everything, and because I'd been doing all the leg work for him, I guess, Ray and I had made I don't know how many trips to Washington, D.C. I can't count the number of times we went to Atlanta, to the Senate and Congress and... on behalf of the tribe. We went out to Oklahoma on behalf of the tribe.

CO: Now was this to get 501c3 status or?

VL: No, this was to...I don't have a problem with not being state recognized, but a lot of the members want to be at least state recognized. So, that's what we were working on. It never came through. The state of Georgia told us they were afraid we'd throw up a casino. I said, "On three and a half acres of land? That doesn't even make a parking lot. You've got to be kidding me."

CO: Yeah.

VL: But it's because Georgia just does not want to recognize the Natives in this state. But in '95 Red Bear appointed me to fill out his term. There was two years left to go, and then they voted me in every election since, so I'm still here. But it's a teaching tribe. We're not out for any benefits. We're not out for anything except to make people aware that we are here. That we've always been here. And that we're gonna always be here.

CO: Now, your title is Principal Chief.

VL: That's what the people call me, on the corporation papers, I am the CEO.

CO: Okay.

VL: President.

CO: Okay, but are there other chiefs? I mean...

VL: Yes. Each band or clan elects its own chief, and they, in turn, carry from their band or clan what the Council should hear. We also have a Council of 12 officers.

CO: Now how many bands or clans are...

VL: Last count we had 43.

CO: All over the country?

VL: Uh huh, all over the country. We have just a little over 6,000 total members.

CO: And how many of that membership make it to the annual...

VL: Very few. In the beginning you could count, at least, on a couple of hundred being out here, but like I say once the interest in *Dances with Wolves* subsided, then...life gets in the way. Okay?

CO: Sure.

VL: It's not 2000 years ago, this 2012. Life just gets in peoples' way. If they're not dedicated enough or loyal enough to their blood...Native blood that they have, they tend to pull away. Not to mention the economy. Many people are out of work, gas is so high, it's hard...we haven't had any of our members from west of the Mississippi show up. Most of them are on this...

CO: Yeah.

VL: Eastern Seaboard, and no one from farther away than New York.

CO: But as Principal Chief that means that you are...

VL: I'm the head of the Council, I'm the head of the tribe. However, I'm not like most of them. I don't make the decisions for the people. It is brought to me, and if I wanted to exercise my position, I could make the decision but I don't want it that way. It's got to be by majority consensus of the people. They know what they want. They have to decide what they want.

CO: And so where does the structure of the organization come from? I mean what is it historically based on?

VL: The old way.

CO: Right, but who...how do we know what the old way is? Who does that come from?

VL: Historical records tells you.

CO: Okay.

VL: The Cherokee have always had a Council.

CO: Right.

VL: The Council, along with the chief, have always decided what is to occur and what ain't. The women were the ones who decided whether to go to war or not. They met with the war Council, and the war Council did the bidding of the females. It's always been a matriarchal society.

CO: Right.

VL: With the Cherokee. When a man married a woman, he went to live with her people. Not vice versa.

CO: Right, right. Women who study history love Native history for that reason.

VL: Yeah. The female children were raised by the grandmother. The male children were raised by uncles and grandfathers.

CO: It really did take a village, didn't it?

VL: Oh yeah. And it was a community thing and it was a family thing. The clans and bands, originally--it's not that way anymore because nobody knows who their ancestor...what clan they were in---but it has always been family related. Today, we can't do it that way because the members are so scattered. Now I'm fortunate that I knew that my grandmother was from the Deer Clan. But most people don't know that, you know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: And so the bands and clans are made up now of just individual people who wish to become a member of that band, but it is led by a Principal chief, it has a vice chief, it has a secretary and a treasurer. All records are kept for everything that occurs.

CO: Where are the records?

VL: Here.

CO: Okay. Now this was 1996 that is was actually incorporated?

VL: Yes, that it was incorporated as a 501c3.

CO: Okay.

VL: It was already incorporated as a 501, but when we changed the name and reincorporated as a 501c3, that was in '96.

CO: So, do you have any associations at all with the other? The American Cherokee...whatever that is?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: No. Simply because it's a scam, on his part. It didn't take us but two years to discover that it was a scam and it was set up by him to take care of him in his retirement.

CO: Did...have some of those members come over and joined your...?

VL: 220 out of the 245 members came with us. I think that's the main reason why we were able to win the litigation is because it was what the members wanted, you know?

CO: So, and are there membership dues?

VL: No ma'am.

CO: No. No dues.

VL: There's a one...

CO: How do you cover costs?

VL: There's a one, well, the main thing is there is a onetime fee of thirty dollars for each member to cover the cost of the paperwork and the office help.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: If you're, if you lose your ID card we'll replace it one time for free, but if you lose it after that then, it's five dollars a card to...for the cost. But there are no dues. That was one of the problems I had with what's his name, is the fact that you had to pay him twenty five dollars a year, just to keep your card. I don't feel like I should have to pay to be a Native American. You know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: And so we didn't carry that over into this group. We got rid of it. There's no dues. That makes people assume that you're a club, when you have dues to pay. That's a club.

CO: Yeah.

VL: We get donations.

CO: I was gonna say...

VL: Tribal member's donations, subscription for the newsletter, sales of, you know, patches and things like that with the tribal logo...

CO: And who's the secretary...treasurer?

VL: James's wife, tribal marshal's wife.

CO: Okay.

VL: She lives up in the little park model, next to the museum.

CO: Okay. So, what do you expect...are there any provisions for the longevity of the Principal Chief, or do you just remain Principal Chief as long as the people...

VL: As long as the people continue to vote me in, it's a majority vote by the membership. As long as they continue to vote me in until I kick the bucket, I guess. You know?

CO: You'll be it.

VL: But they have the freedom to elect someone else.

CO: Right right, but in the bi-laws or whatever that...as long as they're voting there's no term limit on who can be...

VL: Yes, four years. We have an election every four years.

CO: Right, but every four years, as long as they..

VL: There's no limit to how many times I can serve. Right.

CO: Okay. Alright. Yeah. And how do you feel about where things are now, after 12...14 years?

VL: I'm a little disappointed.

CO: What's the chief disappointment?

VL: The fact that people aren't as dedicated to it as they should be. I mean it's one of those things like, if you can't go out to dinner anymore you just don't go out to dinner. Instead of saving your money up through the month and going at least once a month, you know, that kind of thing. The clans and bands could pool their money and they could send a representative from their band or clan down here for at least the two main meetings. The spring meeting is the Council meeting, where our business for the year is determined. Then, in October is the general membership meeting, where everybody is supposed to come, but like I say, life just gets in the way, and the people are not dedicated enough to want to be here, and I'm disappointed in that.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Because when you look out there and you see 200 tents and RVs, and they're all together, and they're having a great time, and it's wonderful, and then you look out there, and you've got maybe fourteen people who show up...it's a big disappointment, because I know if they put their mind to it there could be more.

CO: Yeah, sure.

VL: You know? And, but it doesn't seem to be as important to them, you know, as it is to me.

CO: Right, right. And do you think that it...at some point some member or member's child or children will be inspired the way you were to perhaps take it over and revive it?

VL: It would be nice, but I don't know that it will happen in my lifetime. You know?

CO: So you don't for see your children...

VL: You'd be surprised at the number of people that don't want to have to be in charge.

CO: Oh yeah.

VL: It's a lot of work. I'm not going to deny it's a lot of work.

CO: Right.

VL: And they just don't, you know, they want to be able to come and have a good time, but they don't want to be responsible for anything that occurs within the tribe, you know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: I found that out four different times I applied to the state of Georgia for state recognition and trips to Atlanta and emails and letters and all of it to no avail. It's very disheartening.

CO: I'm sure. I'm sure.

VL: And so I don't know. I just hope it doesn't...Pam and her husband and a couple members that are in Florida say they're not going to let it happen, but they're not that much younger than me, you know? So...

CO: But you plan to just keep on as long as you...

VL: As long as I can.

CO: Yeah.

VL: As long as I can.

CO: Well we can certainly come back to this. In fact, I'm sure as we close out in a bit, you will come back to it, but for a little bit can we talk about your experience of history?

VL: Okay.

CO: What is, to you, the most important historical event that you've either participated in or lived through or whatever?

VL: I didn't live through it, but the most catastrophic thing was the removal. John Ross petitioned Washington to allow the Cherokees to stay an entity, remain. The state of Georgia wanted the gold that was in Dahlonega, and Chief Ross told them, "You can have the gold. We're not interested in the gold. We just want our land. We'll give you the rights." Well, the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. allowed the Cherokee to retain their entity status, but Andrew Jackson, who was president at the time, said they may rule that way, but let's see them enforce it.

CO: Yeah.

VL: And removed everybody.

CO: Right.

VL: That was catastrophic. Because they could have had the gold and let us stay here too, you know? But they didn't. They chose all, or nothing at all.

CO: Well, doesn't that prove that it didn't matter what they did, and the Cherokee were about as white as a people could get in terms of doing what the white man tried to force them to do.

VL: Right.

CO: So there was really nothing they could do to prevent what happened.

VL: No, probably not.

CO: So, but that's still a living...the memory, not the memory, but the reality of that experience still lives for you?

VL: Yes, it does.

CO: So, for you that *is* history, that experience.

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay, alright. And you were a...you were just a baby in World War Two.

VL: Mmhmm.

CO: You had only just been born.

VL: I was two years old when Daddy went overseas.

CO: Yeah, okay. Do you remember hearing your family talk about either the Depression or...

VL: Oh yeah, yeah. And I remember playing, when I was little, I remember playing with the old ration coins.

CO: Mmm

VL: And the ration chits that my parents had used during the depression. They still had some of them.

CO: Wow.

VL: And my parents sat down and explained what it was. I used it for play money.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: but they explained what it was all about, and I was five, maybe. Four or five.

CO: Did you save any of those?

VL: No I didn't. I should have, but I didn't.

CO: Do you remember your family having strong feelings about any president? I usually ask people about FDR because most of the people I talk to have some recollection of him as president, but did your family ever talk about any high level political figure?

VL: I don't think so because none of my family was political.

CO: Okay.

VL: My grandparents didn't vote.

CO: Yeah.

VL: My daddy voted for a little while. My mom never voted. I mean it just...politics wasn't a thing in our house.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Now, my favorite one was Truman.

CO: You liked Truman?

VL: I liked Truman.

CO: Okay, what did you like about him?

VL: The...well I was a bit young, and I really didn't know anything about politics. I think I just liked the way he talked and looked. I just liked him as a human.

CO: Yeah, okay. Well now...a few minutes ago when I asked you what time you looked back to most nostalgically, you said you loved the forties.

VL: Uh huh.

CO: And of course you were a child in the forties, so what does that represent to you?

VL: The happiest time of my life...ever.

CO: Okay.

VL: My mom and dad were still together, we had plenty to eat, a roof over our head, fun, you know? It was just a happier time.

CO: Okay.

VL: You could leave your door unlocked. You could leave your windows up without screens, without fear of being broken into. Your neighbor helped you, if you needed help. And you helped your neighbor if they need help.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: It was just a more community-minded time.

CO: Okay.

VL: Than it is today.

CO: Do you think...

VL: I have no idea what the people across the street's name is.

CO: Do you think part of it is because your family lived in the mountains and there may have been some more need of community? Although mountain people are typically considered very independent.

VL: Oh yeah, we are.

CO: Yeah yeah.

VL: Well, part of the time when I got older, part of the time was lived in the city, and it was the same experience in the city. You didn't have to lock your doors.

CO: So you think it was really the time.

VL: It was the time.

CO: The time, okay.

VL: It was the time. If a guy down the street was a drunk and his family was going hungry and he was beating his wife and...the law wasn't called in, a bunch of guys showed up and set up a cross on his lawn and burnt it, and it straightened him up. There was such a fear, you know, it straightened the guy up. I had that happen when we lived on May Avenue, and everybody complained about the way the guy treated his wife and everything. Well, the word got out and they burnt a--- I never will forget seeing that----it was horrific, you know? But the guy straightened up.

CO: So you, are you, have you been sympathetic to the Klan because of that?

VL: The original Klan, not since the sixties, because it doesn't stand for what it did when I was growing up.

CO: But did you...was...

VL: It didn't have anything to do with race when I was growing up. That didn't come about until the Civil Rights movement. That's when it became race.

CO: Okay. So the forties you remember nostalgically. What about the fifties, the following decade? What do you remember about...do you remember anything about the Cold War, the fear of nuclear the threat of nuclear...

VL: Oh yeah, yeah. We had classes in school. What to do in case of a nuclear bomb attack. Just like anywhere else, you know?

CO: Did you lose any sleep over that...the fear?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: No.

CO: None of it was real personal for you?

VL: Uh uh.

CO: No, okay. Alright, so otherwise, the fifties do you, let's see you...

VL: It was time of Rock and Roll and Elvis Presley.

CO: Yeah, did you...were you a big Rock and Roll fan?

VL: Elvis Presley all the way, Honey.

CO: Were you really?

VL: Yes, 'fraid so.

CO: So what did your grandmother think of that?

VL: I've got all of his albums, I've got all his...I've got several VCRs.

CO: So you were in '55 you were fifteen.

VL: Mmhmm.

CO: So what did your grandmother think about your...well and you got married before that year was over.

VL: Oh yeah, it was all the devil's work.

CO: Oh, she didn't like that?

VL: No she didn't like it. She hated it when T.V. first, when Daddy first got a T.V. set, he bought it just before I got married, and she raised all kinds of cane with him. Told him that was the devil's box, and was going to corrupt the kids and all this, but every once in a while you'd catch her peeking around the doorframe to see what was on it.

CO: Did she ever get over that fear of the T.V.?

VL: I think she did eventually.

CO: What did she like? Was there anything she finally enjoyed? Any program or..

VL: No. Her and Papaw never had one.

CO: Oh, okay. I see.

VL: It was always with one of the kids that they lived with, so...

CO: I see. What about the sixties? So the fifties was about Rock and Roll, but did you dance?

VL: Oh yes.

CO: What about your husband?

VL: He loved dancing.

CO: He did? Wow.

VL: Yes he did.

CO: Now that's him right there? Is that him?

VL: Yes, that's the best picture that was ever made of him.

CO: That's a wonderful picture.

VL: Yeah.

CO: So is it a photograph made to look...

VL: No the lady...the actual photographer took it and everything. She was really good.

CO: Was your picture made also at the same time?

VL: No, mine was made in Knoxville. That picture of me was made in Knoxville.

CO: Oh, okay. And was there an occasion for that picture of your husband?

VL: Yeah, we had...we had something going on. At the same time we made a family group too. I can't remember what the reason for that was for that. I think other than the fact that I just wanted a good picture of him.

CO: Was it after your children were born?

VL: Oh yeah.

CO: Oh, okay. He really did keep his youthful look, didn't he?

VL: He was fifty, I believe he was 56 in that picture.

CO: Wow, that's amazing.

VL: He was 37 in that one. But when he crossed over, he was ill for a short time...nine months from the time he was diagnosed until he crossed over. He never stopped working. He'd work five days a week at the shop and when he'd come home in the afternoon, after closing down the shop, he worked in the yard. It looks awful now. It looked like a park out here when he was alive, but I can't maintain what he had. He has me a mediation garden out there, but you'd never know that's what it is now. He had beautiful flowers hanging, potted plants hanging everywhere. It was...he never stopped working. He never gained an ounce the 42 years we were married. When he crossed over he weighed the same as he did when we got married. Beautiful muscle tone, beautiful dark skin.

CO: Wow. And he died from what?

VL: Brain cancer. They tried radiation, but it didn't work. Just a brief two weeks or something like that, and then it started growing again. So, he said forget the chemo, it's my time. So...

CO: So, what about the 60s? What do you recall about the 60s? The very tumultuous decade.

VL: Yes it was. The music, mostly, I guess.

CO: Okay, did you like the music? You liked the protest music?

VL: No, no no no no. I'm not in confrontational modes.

CO: Okay, so that brings up...

VL: It was a disgrace. The Civil Rights Movement was a disgrace. They should never have had to have launched it. People should have already been treating each other like they should be treating.

CO: Sure, but they didn't.

VL: I've always had a problem with that.

CO: Sure, but they didn't. So, do you feel like...if you think the movement was a disgrace...do you feel like they should've just waited until...

VL: I don't have an answer. It's a disgrace that it had to happen at all. You know? People. There's something wrong with people. You know?

CO: Did you have any...did you in any way participate in movement?

VL: No.

CO: No. You were just an observer?

VL: I was a housewife.

CO: Uh huh, okay.

VL: Raising kids.

CO: Cause your kids were...

VL: Yeah.

CO: Yeah, all your kids were born in the sixties. What about school desegregation?

VL: I don't have a problem with that.

CO: Right, I assume...not right, but I assume that based on what your daughter was saying. They...did they experience that or were they...by the time they went to school it had already been desegregated?

VL: Right.

CO: So they didn't have to...they didn't go through watching that take place. It was already desegregated by the time they...

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay.

VL: And they were alright with it. We...the only prejudice I have is someone who is too sorry to get up off their behind and work for a living. I have a problem with that.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: Because I've always worked all my life, but as far as religion or race or...I don't have a prejudice. People are people. Period. You know?

CO: Okay, alright. And what about what came after the...you know the movements that were spawned by the Civil Rights movement, which of course included AIM and the Native American rights movement. What did you feel about that? Knowing that you yourself were Native American, how did you feel about it?

VL: I have a problem with AIM.

CO: You've got a problem.

VL: Yeah, I still have a problem with them. It's the way they go about, you know, I don't like violence. I don't believe in violence. I believe things can be settled if you just sit down and listen to one another, you know? I don't go for all that violence, and...

CO: Did you find it overdone or perhaps just too simplistic in that movie *Powwow Highway* of how they juxtaposed you know the two main characters, the one who was all about AIM and all about politics and then there was the other character who was all about the spiritual legacy of the...was it the Lakota?

VL: Yes.

CO: Yeah, so did you think they did a fairly decent job with that? Of illustrating that divide and how um...cause it seems to me that you're all about the spiritual legacy and the spiritual...well yeah...the spiritual culture of the Cherokee.

VL: Right.

CO: So, is that your primary reservation about or opposition to AIM? That it's just mostly political?

VL: Well it's all political.

CO: Yeah, okay.

VL: It's all political and that's not what Native Americans are made up of. It's not just political.

CO: Do you have friends who are strong in the movement or ever were?

VL: Uh, I did have. He's crossed over now. That was Don Cox over in Valdosta. He was very into AIM, as was his wife, Debby Cox. But I didn't agree with him. They were tribal members as well as friends, but I didn't agree with him, as far as that. He had tried to get me to get involved with them because he said they would do wonders for our group. Uh no. No, I don't wish to have any doings with AIM.

CO: Okay.

VL: Although I know a couple of them, and I have talked to them several times on the phone. But, no, I'm not into that. Things can be handled without violence.

CO: Okay, alright. What about...did you have any feelings or thoughts at all about the Women's movement?

VL: Ha, no because I've always been free.

CO: Okay.

VL: I've always...

CO: You never have felt discrimination as a woman? Okay.

VL: No, never.

CO: Never.

VL: Cause I know who I am.

CO: Yeah.

VL: I don't need another human to validate who I am. So, I've always pretty much done what I wanted to. You know? My husband had no restrictions on me. I was free to do whatever I wanted.

CO: And your daughter, where do you think that she got...how do you think that it is that she didn't inherit enough of that from you or develop enough of the strength of will to...

VL: She's got too many of my Mama's genes. She didn't get enough of my dad's, you know. Or enough of my grandmothers. Mom was the same way, my mother.

CO: Would let men run over her?

VL: Right. Yeah. I...you would've thought she would've picked up, you know, on my strength, but she didn't. She's always been. Well her daddy spoiled her rotten for one thing.

CO: Oh okay.

VL: The youngest baby, and it a girl.

CO: Right.

VL: He calls every day and checks on me. If he don't see me that day, he calls me.

CO: That's sweet. So you don't...what do you believe is the legacy of the Women's movement? Do you think it hurt the cause of women's rights or do you think it had any redeeming qualities about it?

VL: I don't think it had any redeeming qualities where men are concerned. And, I think it was bad for the women...

CO: The Women's movement?

VL: Because it...that's part of what's wrong with society, is there's no chivalry and there's no respect, there's no...now I'm not talking about all, I'm talking about the majority. There's no respect for a woman anymore. How many guys do you see open cars for ladies? They lost all that when they started the women's movement.

CO: Okay.

VL: They lost every bit of that.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: I kind of liked having my car door opened for me, and placing me at a table when I went out to eat. I liked all that. I didn't have a problem.

CO: Sounds like your husband probably obliged. Okay.

VL: He was a true gentleman.

CO: Okay.

VL: But the women lost all that when they started that Women's Lib stuff.

CO: You remember that?

VL: Yeah, and if you check around, you check the numbers, they didn't gain that much. They're not, still not paid as much as the guys in the same job. Ain't none of that happening. It didn't change anything, except they lost what they had.

CO: So, you...for you there's....if there's a problem, a social problem, it's not going to be solved by protest and activism.

VL: I don't think so.

CO: What do you think solves social problems?

VL: I don't know. I don't know.

CO: Okay.

VL: I don't have the answer. I just don't think protest helps. It doesn't work.

CO: Okay.

VL: Because in the South, and especially in Thomas County, the racial problem still exists. It hasn't changed since the 60s.

CO: You don't think so?

VL: Nope. Lip service.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Got all kinds of lip service, but you get them off, away from everybody else and it's a totally different story. It's all lip service.

CO: Yeah. So you don't think having a black man in the White House has made any difference in people's...

VL: That's not a good idea to go there. I don't like Obama.

CO: Okay. Alright. Well I wasn't talking about...

VL: And no it hasn't made a difference.

CO: Okay.

VL: Talk to any...we deal with blacks on a regular basis, every day because of the business that we're in. Talk to some of them.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Very few of them are in favor of Obama. Very few.

CO: What do you think they have against him?

VL: He hasn't done anything. That's the biggest problem. However he has taken stuff away. The biggest problem is the bailout. That's with everybody. Everybody's having a problem with that bailout.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: Nobody came down from Washington and gave me a pile of money to keep me from going out of business.

CO: Yeah.

VL: Yet our business has continued to decline in sales by ten thousand a year for the last six years. But he ain't offering me a bailout. He'll loan me some money, but he ain't bailing my butt out. He's not interested.

CO: So...

VL: And all of that money that he gave away did not do a thing except stall the inevitable.

CO: Okay. Can we talk about religion?

VL: Sure.

CO: Core values and spiritual values, and basically when I use the term core value, that's what I'm talking about really is spiritual values. So if I ask what was the primary spiritual value that has shaped your life, could you tell me that?

VL: That's a good question. It would have to be taking care of your fellow man.

CO: Okay.

VL: If you compare, you know the Cherokee have a Ten Commandments too. And, they compare almost word for word with the Ten Commandments in the Bible.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: If you live by those, truly live by those Ten Commandments, you're a good guy. You know?

CO: So taking care of...

VL: But the most important thing is taking care of the critters, taking care of mother earth, you know? Taking care of your next door neighbor. Taking care of a family member. Sharing with each other. Greed is the number one problem in this country. Everybody is so out to make that almighty dollar. You know? They never concern themselves...let me give you a good example. My husband had a heart attack in 1960...no '81, 1981. And a fellow that lived, he didn't live, his...he was an auto mechanic, and his shop was across the street from ours. A black man. I love him dearly, because he's always been there for us. Closed up his shop, and for the two weeks that my husband was in the hospital opened that shop for my every morning and helped me handle the customers and everything and would not take a penny.

CO: Wow.

VL: When he heard that my husband had brain cancer, he showed up at the shop and he told Dewey, he says, "Where's my bench." Dewey said, "Jimmy, I ain't got the money to pay for you." "Ain't nobody said nothing about no money. Your daddy's sick, you need help, and I'm here to help. Where's my bench." And Dewey showed him, and he worked for us until his wife got Alzheimer's.

CO: You mean bench as in a place to...

VL: Where the vice and tools and everything are to rebuild starters and alternators.

CO: Yeah, okay.

VL: He rebuilt starters.

CO: Wow. That's a sacrifice.

VL: Yeah, great guy. And he's black. That's the way it's supposed to be, but how many of them do you see out there like Jimmy. Jimmy's one of a kind.

CO: Yeah, yeah. If I asked you to, okay you just said the Cherokee...

VL: Commandments.

CO: Commandments were the same as the Ten Commandments. Are they written somewhere? I mean could write those down?

VL: Yes, they're on the wall of the museum.

CO: Okay, alright. Well could kind of just encapsulate that? What are the Cherokee beliefs? What do you believe in?

VL: It's the same as the Ten Commandments in the Bible. They're basically the same thing. You don't kill anybody. You don't steal from anybody. You don't lie on anybody. You don't bare false witness. You don't take another man's wife. You don't mistreat creatures that the creator has made. You don't mistreat your fellow man. It's basically the same thing that the Christians believe in.

CO: Okay.

VL: You know?

CO: And what is the Cherokee Creator like?

VL: God. He is God. He has created everything. We just call him by a different name. He created all of this.

CO: What do you call him by?

VL: Creator or Grandfather.

CO: Okay. So the Deity is not feminine?

VL: Uh, not last time I looked.

CO: Okay.

VL: But I don't think he's either female or male.

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know?

CO: But a lot of...

VL: James and I were discussing that last night. I don't know that it's a gender.

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know?

CO: Okay. I mean...what I know I read, it's not from experience, but I understood that some of the Native tribes believe that the...some of their deities have feminine attributes, what we would call feminine attributes.

VL: But we only have one Deity.

CO: The Creator.

VL: Yes, and we've never worshipped anything but the one God.

CO: Well, there are creation myths. How they explain the creation of the world, includes a lot of feminine imagery.

VL: But that's other tribes, that's not the Cherokee.

CO: Okay.

VL: The Hopi Indian alone has 250 different gods that they worship.

CO: That right there.

VL: Mmhmm. Kokopelli.

CO: Yeah.

VL: We don't have 250, we have one.

CO: Okay, and you worship that God by...

VL: Daily prayer.

CO: Okay.

VL: I am constantly praying. You know you don't have to be down on your knee in order to pray, and I am constantly praying. The whole time I am awake.

CO: Okay. So you do that.

VL: I go to water, I offer tobacco, and I burn sage.

CO: And this is a morning ritual that you do?

VL: Morning and night ritual, but then I pray and offer tobacco all through the day.

CO: How do you offer tobacco?

VL: You just spread it.

CO: Oh okay.

VL: If I don't have any tobacco with me, I normally carry a bag of tobacco in my car, if I don't have any with me, I tear open a cigarette and use the tobacco. Just the tobacco out of the cigarette.

CO: Okay, alright. So, you worship God by praying and offering sage and tobacco?

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay.

VL: And through ceremony.

CO: Okay.

VL: We have seven different ceremonies.

CO: Okay.

End of Part 3 of 4

VL: Each year, and the seventh year we have seven.

CO: What year is this?

VL: I don't know. I leave that up to the ceremonial team, and I'm not quite sure.

CO: You have a ceremonial team.

VL: Yes, we have three men and four women.

CO: Okay. Are they local or just all over?

VL: No, just all over.

CO: Okay.

VL: Tar's [Drazdowski] one of them.

CO: Alright.

VL: Tar's on our ceremonial team.

CO: That's fitting. What was the most profound spiritual moment of your life?

VL: I don't know because they all have their own special meaning.

CO: Okay. So you have a lot of spiritual moments.

VL: Yeah, I can't pinpoint any particular one.

CO: Alright have there been any, has there ever happened anything to you happened that you would consider a miracle?

VL: Every morning when I get up still breathing.

CO: Alright, okay.

VL: At seventy two you question every day.

CO: So, to renew your strength, if you feel especially drained...well what kind of thing makes you feel drained spiritually?

VL: Everyday life.

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know?

CO: Okay.

VL: Problems that arise at the shop, problems that arise with tribal members, and that's a constant ongoing thing, there's always somebody out there who's got a problem and want me to solve it. When I'm in better health it's not so bad, but it's been really bad the last few months because, I wasn't aware of it, but my health is going down.

CO: Yeah, yeah.

VL: And that's made it worse. But, just life itself, you know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: You have to put up this strong defense.

CO: Right.

VL: And sometimes it gets to be kind of a load.

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know? But I go take a hot bath, I burn candles, and pray the whole time I'm in there.

CO: Yeah.

VL: "Okay, tomorrow's another day. Could you make it just a little better?"

CO: So...

VL: Prayer. Prayer always works.

CO: Okay. Do you believe in an afterlife? Do you think there's life after death?

VL: Yes I do.

CO: You do.

VL: Definitely.

CO: What do you think it'll be like?

VL: I have no idea. My husband and I discussed that a lot, and he told me, he said, "if it is true, there is an afterlife, I will get back to you."

CO: So do you feel...

VL: Count on that. He's here all the time. I feel him...tribal members have even seen his spirit on the grounds. I've not connected enough to see him, but I can feel him, I can smell him, you know? He always wore Old Spice, and when he's around here I can smell him through the Old Spice.

CO: Wow.

VL: But, yeah, there's an afterlife. I don't know what's going to happen.

CO: Yeah.

VL: But I also believe in reincarnation, which most Cherokees do.

CO: Mmhmm.

VL: That if you don't get it right, if you don't do what you were supposed to do when you're here, you will be brought back to redo it.

CO: Okay.

VL: That's what I believe.

CO: Okay.

VL: And most Cherokees believe in reincarnation.

CO: What experience has given you the most joy? What gives you most joy?

VL: My babies being born. That was better than anything.

CO: Your own children?

VL: My own children, yeah.

CO: Yeah, okay.

VL: But then another one is my little great granddaughter Carly, that my daughter babysits with. When she gets out of that car to move over to my car, she looks at me and she smiles and hollers, "Hi GeeGee!" and comes running up to me and gives me...god, ain't nothing beats it. It's great. She is such a pleasure.

CO: Yeah. I can relate to that. Are you certain of anything?

VL: Yeah. I'm certain that my time here is going to be limited. There are things I'm supposed to do before my time runs out. I'm certain of that. Course, we don't always heed, you know, what we're supposed to do. I am certain that something, someone created all of this. It didn't just happen. You know? And I am certain that I will probably come back as a cat.

CO: You like cats?

VL: I like certain cats.

CO: Oh, okay.

VL: Certain cats. Not all of them.

CO: But do you think it would be good to come back as a cat?

VL: As my cat it would.

CO: Have you got cats now?

VL: Yeah, Thomas.

CO: Thomas, I had a cat named Thomas. Ok, alright. We're almost done. Just one more page.

VL: Okay.

CO: In trying to determine cause and effect, you know, you do certain things, certain things happen. You don't always know exactly what the relationship is between cause and effect, but we know that there's a cause and there's an effect. It's just karma or whatever.

VL: Right.

CO: Do you believe that your life has been more the result of choices and decisions you've made or has it been more the result of things beyond your control?

VL: It's a choice I made.

CO: Okay.

VL: And the effect by the choice. I don't believe in coincidence.

CO: Okay.

VL: Everything that you do determines how your life will turn out. You're gonna make choices that are not...they're either going to be positive or negative. And how you make that choice and what choice you make determines whether your life is going to be positive or negative.

CO: So you believe your life is more the result of choices you've made instead of that the Creator has set.

VL: Yes, absolutely. I sure do.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: This is once you get up big enough to make choices.

CO: Yeah, yeah,

VL: Now, there's nothing I could have done, and it wasn't my choice that my mom leave, but that was while I was a child. Once you become an adult, and have to make decisions, your choices effect how your life turns out. I don't blame anybody for anything that's happened to me ever.

CO: Okay. You talk about the happiest time for you was your childhood. What was the unhappiest time?

VL: The only time I've ever been unhappy is when I lost my grandsons. I'm basically a happy person. I woke up breathing this morning now see what you can do with this day to make it better for somebody else. That's the way I get up every morning.

CO: Okay.

VL: I can't let things that have happened bring me down, but it just hurts so bad when you lose your grandbabies.

CO: Right.

VL: You know? I'm supposed to go before them.

CO: Right, okay. So those, and that would also be the saddest time.

VL: Right.

CO: Yeah. What do you think have been the absolute most crucial decisions you've made in your life? Choices...decisions?

VL: I don't know. I guess the hardest thing to deal with was when my husband was diagnosed with brain cancer.

CO: And how did that involve decisions?

VL: The first...it was three years, I guess, before I could ever really deal with it, you know? God, we'd been together so many years, and such a part of my life, that morning cup of coffee he brought me every morning, except when he was overseas in the military or something, he never failed to bring me a cup of coffee before he left for the morning. I had no idea how much that meant until it wasn't there anymore. So, little things like that I had a hard time dealing with. I guess the most crucial...that would be when he got sick and died. That would be the most crucial. Other than that my life's been pretty much, you know, okay.

CO: Okay, so do you have regrets? Any regrets?

VL: Only in that I've never felt that I've done enough for the betterment of mankind, you know? Other than that I have no regrets and I'd probably do everything over the same way.

CO: Same way?

VL: Yeah.

CO: Okay. Is there anybody you would choose to make amends to?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: I've tried to be fair and...my only problem is my first stepmother. I will never forgive her for the way she treated me, and especially the way she treated my blind brother. That was...you know. And I'll probably have to do penance when I get on the other side because of the way I feel about her, but I don't have any regrets.

CO: Okay. What do you think is the most valuable lesson you've learned?

VL: Gosh, that if you don't treat people fairly, it'll come back and bite you in the butt.

CO: Okay. Alright.

VL: Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow. But it will eventually come back to bite you in the behind.

CO: Okay. So what gives your life meaning right now?

VL: Oh gosh, everything. I'm at the age now to where I try not to miss out on anything, even that little bitty lily that's blooming down there next to the pond. I appreciate everything. You know?

CO: So everything gives it meaning.

VL: Everything.

CO: Yeah, alright. What's your biggest worry now?

VL: Paying off my credit cards before I kick the bucket. So my kids don't have to pay them.

CO: So how do you want to be remembered? What do you want your legacy to be?

VL: As a nice human being. You know? That sweet lady who cared for everybody. I don't want to be noted as Principal Chief of the SECCI. I'm just handling this for the others, you know? I don't want...just that god she was a nice lady.

CO: Okay.

VL: That's all I need.

CO: Alright. What has been your greatest source of inspiration? What inspires you in your life? What's been the most inspirational.

VL: People like Tar.

CO: Alright. And what are you proudest of?

VL: Uh, I'm not proud.

CO: Ok.

VL: I'm not a prideful person.

CO: Well I don't mean that in the...

VL: I've done what I needed to do.

CO: Okay.

VL: I guess my kids turning out as good as they have.

CO: Okay.

VL: Their choices that they've made, other than spouses.

CO: Yeah, yeah.

VL: I guess that. I'm the most proud of that. Because you're so doubtful when they're growing up. You're not sure if you're always doing it right. You know?

CO: Yes, yes. I do know. Your hopes and fears for the future? Are they about balanced or...

VL: My fear is what if I'm wrong and the world does end in 2012? You know?

CO: Yeah.

VL: I don't believe it's going to happen. I think what happened with the Aztec calendar is when they were all annihilated there was nobody else to do the next several years. You know? It's not the end of the world's coming, they just run out of anybody to make the calendar. But what if I'm wrong?

CO: Yeah.

VL: You know.

CO: What about your hopes for the future? What are you mainly hopeful for?

VL: Uh, less crime, less war, saner people.

CO: Okay.

VL: You know?

CO: Yeah, alright. Is there anything, your family's pretty open with each other, is there anything about you that your children don't know that you would like them to know?

VL: I don't know of anything...

CO: Don't think so?

VL: No.

CO: Okay, alright.

VL: No, I've pretty much been open with them all these years. I've never, you know, never done anything I'd be ashamed of. I've never tried to hide anything. They know who I am. So, no I don't.

CO: Is there anything we've left out that you would like to add? Anything about your life?

VL: Not that I can think of.

CO: And the last question people usually don't like at all. And it is a challenge. If you had to title your life story, what would it be? If you were writing an autobiography, which you probably ought to do, what would you title it?

VL: I don't know.

CO: I know it's a hard one. *Vivian Rines Lawson*:... it wouldn't...would it be *Vivian Lawson: Principal Chief of the SECCI*?

VL: No.

CO: No.

VL: It would probably be something like: *Diary of a Mad Indian Woman*.

CO: Oh, cute.

VL: That's probably what it would be.

CO: *Diary of a Mad Indian Woman*.

VL: Yes.

CO: Okay, alright. Well that's probably a good one to close on.