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Faith Traversie

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
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Interviews conducted by
Elizabeth Castle
in 2005

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Interview with Faith Traversie
Interviewed by: Beth Castle
Transcriber: Elizabeth Castle
[Interview #1: February 19, 2005
[Begin Traversie, Faith 01 02-19-05.wav]

1-00:00:04

Castle:

Just to start, can you tell me, Mrs. Traversie, where you were born?

Traversie:

I guess I was born well, at Greenwood, South Dakota, at my grandmother's.

Castle:

Could you tell me about who your family was? Your grandparents and--?

Traversie:

Well, I never really--I knew my mother's aunt, we called her grandma. She was our Grandma. But she's really the only grandparent I knew because the others were all deceased. So, I only knew, her name was Agnes Frederick. And so, she was the grandmother that we grew up knowing and that was more or less our home base because my mother's work—well, World War II time, we moved around so much. But that was our homebase at Greenwood, South Dakota. At Agnes Frederick's.

Castle:

Where did you first go to school?

Traversie:

Well, I went to boarding school, Pipestone Indian School, Pipestone, Minnesota. I was there for seven years. I would come home in the summer time and as I aged, as I got older, I would stay in the summer time to work at the school or work for one of the employees or outside employment, you know. I worked and I earned my own money.

Castle:

What was the experience like for you at Pipestone, what did you learn there? What was positive, what was negative?

Traversie:

Well, I really give Pipestone credit for a lot of things now that I've grown up. You know, I realize how much they really did for me. [begins to cry] We had government rules. Some may have seemed harsh rules at the time but I'm glad I experienced it. As I got older, I spent the summers there. And I remember I worked for—well, it was more like detail work, you know. We cleaned up in our room or our dormitories, we did a little work. We got \$13.50 a month. But that was just, in those days, that was a lot of money, especially for students.

But my mother was home and she had my sister and brother, the rest of the family. One of my older girls, she stayed and helped my mother. So, I used to send that \$13.50—I think it went a

little bit higher than that eventually—but I used to send that home to her. And that was a lot because things were a lot cheaper then. But she used that to help live on.

And then I worked for the employees—I did work at the school and then I hired out to—I used to fix girls' hair. I started fixing hair when I was in grade school. I started fixing hair. At that time we used to do Marcel waves and finally, I learned to pin curl and went into pin curls and then giving permanents.

Then when I went from Pipestone, eighteen miles away was Flandreau, South Dakota, across the Minnesota-South Dakota border. It was just eighteen miles away. I went to school there and I took up beauty culture. I knew how to do everything but of course I had theory, the paperwork to take care of. So I kind of assisted the instructor. I used to help her, help train the other girls. I used to fix hair for the employees. Of course, I got paid, that was my spending money. And I used to send that home to my mother to help.

When I went to Flandreau, I took up beauty culture and then I worked downtown in the shop in a barber beauty shop. I worked there during the school year, like, the busy seasons. Easter and Christmas, all the holidays, I worked downtown in this beauty and barbershop. And then, when I graduated, well, then I went to beauty school there at Flandreau. After I finished high school, I went another year and I worked and studied beauty.

Castle:

So you were in your late teens?

Traversie:

Well, I was around eighteen when I left Flandreau.

Castle:

Okay, okay.

Traversie:

Then, let's see, from there where did I go? School, and then I—what did I do next? Jeez, I drew a blank. Oh! Then my boyfriend was in Detroit, Michigan.

Castle:

Ah, I was going to ask if there was a boyfriend! [laughs] That's usually part of the story.

Traversie:

See, I went to high school with him. And then we both did post-graduate work. And then from there, he spent a year in Minneapolis in his trade, advancing his trade. He took training in Minneapolis and from there, he went to Detroit. I was working at this beauty shop in Flandreau. And then, from Flandreau, I went to Detroit. And we were married at Wayne County in Detroit, Michigan.

Castle:

How old were you when you got married?

Traversie:

I was nineteen.

Castle:

And what was his name?

Traversie:

Charles Phillips.

Castle:

What was his trade that he--?

Traversie:

He was a welder, he was a welder.

Castle:

Oh, okay.

Traversie:

And then I think he did some instructing, as he advanced, he did some instructing. But he was a welder in Detroit. And then, from there we went to Chicago. He transferred to Chicago and he worked in Chicago and then we transferred to Davenport, Iowa. His plant was actually at Bettendorf, that was where the plant was. But it was right on the Detroit River—was that the Detroit River? No, it wasn't. Anyway, it was in Davenport, so we lived in Davenport.

Castle:

Were you working doing hair at this point? Were working in salons or were you--? Because that's a lot of traveling in a short period.

Traversie:

Yes. But I was never permanent because I went where my husband went.

Castle:

Yeah.

Traversie:

So I was with him when we went to Detroit. I went to Detroit, I met him there, we were married in Detroit, in Wayne County, Michigan. And then from there, well, we went to Chicago and then Davenport. And then, eventually, we divorced.

Castle:

Did you two go to California together? At what point—because at this point he was still--?

Traversie:

This was at wartime, see. Well, I happened to be at my sister's—no, my sister that lived in California, pre-war, she went to California before the war. She was married and had a family. She came home to visit. And she said, "Faith, there's a lot of work in the shipyards out"—she lived in Vallejo. And she worked for the Navy, she did office work. So she worked at a Naval

Base in Oakland. She worked for the Navy. But she said, “The Naval Shipyard, Mare Island, is hiring a lot of people.” And she said, “They’ll even educate you if you want to study a trade.” So, I went back with her.

01-00:09:59

I went to Vallejo. And I went over to the shipyard and applied for work We had fill out paper, you know, a questionnaire sort of, and write our history down, our type of work and all our schooling and everything. So they asked me, they said, “Faith, how would you like to go to school? You have a good report.” So I said yes, I’d be willing to go to school. So they asked me what trade I would like, so I said, “Well, I’ve heard about—my brother-in-law is a welder on the base. I would like to try welding.” So, then I attended welding school at Mare Island.

Castle:

What was that like? So, you’ve done—I don’t know if it’s the same—you’re welding hair and now you’re welding metal. [laughter] It’s a little more dangerous but I mean, hot rollers and permanents aren’t exactly safe things, too. So what was it like? Because that’s pretty big jump. It’s a pretty major change, women welding, you know. What was that like?

Traversie:

Well, you know, what they told us on the yard was that women were good at work on Mare Island because they said women were used to doing everything with their hands. Everything they did, everything was with their hands. They were handy with their hands. And they said that’s why we were such good welders because they said, we were good at precision welding, you know.

Castle:

Just real detailed work?

Traversie:

Yeah, like, we picked it up easy. And I know one time, they gave oh, I don’t know how many women, tests at Mare Island to advance and they accepted some men. Out of these thirty women—I think it was still thirty—out of these women, several of us were chosen to advance.

Castle:

So you were one of just a few people.

Traversie:

Yes, so then, I was one of those that was chosen, women. I forget, I should’ve written all of this down. But, I remember, when we passed out tests, the highest scorers, it seems like, there was three women out of the whole group and then I think—I don’t know about the men. But anyway, I was one of those that was chosen and I got high marks.

Castle:

How long did you have to train before they let you loose to work officially?

Traversie:

So, then we had to work out what they called on {Northways?}. It was outdoor welding, on the flats of Northways. That was a section of the island, was called Northways. There, it was all outdoor welding. We worked on fo'c's'le doorage {the section of the upper deck of a ship located at the bow forward of the foremast} you know, for ships and so forth, fo'c's'le doors. We started with flat welding, outside. Then we advanced like that. There was the sub-base and then there was—but they sent us women welders that passed our tests and everything, we went aboard heavy cruisers.

Castle:

Really? Wow.

Traversie:

Yes, we did repair work welding, repair work on heavy cruisers. And I even ended up, I worked up in what they call the bird's nest, you know up where the captain, you know how they sit up, they called it the bird's nest. I even welded shelves down and I did a lot of welding up there.

Castle:

The bird's nest, isn't that pretty high?

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh, it is. It's above the ship. You know how they sit above the ship? And then they use those binoculars on other ships and the ocean and everything. I even welded up there, did some welding up there.

Castle:

So did you have to, like, climb a ladder or something?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! And we all had a sailor appointed to us to be with us. Like, he was to watch out for fire and so forth, like that. I forget what they called them, fire something, preventative, you know, fire. They watched our gear and they helped. Like, we had to carry all our hoses, carry all that up aboard the ship. And then our little sailor, he was behind us with your gear, some of our gear. [laughter] So we each had a sailor. Now, I'll never forget, my little sailor, he was from Chicago, Illinois. Later, after the war was over and everything, I had a sister living in Chicago and I said I might go to Chicago sometime, and here, I called him up on the phone in Chicago. Yeah, I called him. And we made a date for dinner but it never materialized. We couldn't—I was alright, but he couldn't get his act together because of his parents, something about his parents were going someplace or leaving. I don't know what happened. But we never had that dinner together. But we made a dinner-date but we never had it. That was quite an experience working on repair.

Like, these big gun turrets that shoot off the bombs, you know, while they're on the waters. The bases were just as big around as this room, like this. And that's what we welded down.

Castle:

The whole thing?

Traversie:

Yeah, the bases, down onto the ship. That's what we did mostly aboard ship. And repair work, like, I did repair up in the crow's nest they called it.

Castle:

I could use your expertise in this, for example, when you go and you're going to weld something down, describe to me what you do, do you take another piece of metal that you weld down? Tell me how that works because I'm trying to imagine it.

Traversie:

Well, it's—what do they call them now? They're just like a long piece of metal with the coating on it. This metal had a coating on it. Then, of course you, I weld it with the right hand and then you had to—oh! What did they call it? For heavens sakes, I thought I'd never forget. Anyway, I'd hold that, a piece of metal like this [demonstrates] and put that down where I was going to weld and then, I weld it with my right hand. And you just, like this.

Castle:

So you'd hold the fire—tell me, so this is the thing that you're spraying the hot flame with.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh. With my left, then right, and then weld it.

Castle:

Okay. I see. So your right hand is what directs where the flame--?

Traversie:

Yeah, and you had to—they said, you couldn't be nervous. You had to have a steady hand. That was one of the most important things because you could only flux—the flux—this caused put the flux on there while you're welding. And then, you had to hold your—God, I can't even remember the things we used to hold! Anyway, you held that when you weld, you just—just like that, as you go like that.

Castle:

Wow.

Traversie:

It was really, oh it was meticulous. I don't know what you'd call the work, you know. We really earned my money. But we were trained for it. If you weren't well trained, the people that had a hard time were those that just didn't learn the trade good. Their work was just—they took tests, like maybe the third time before they ever passed their tests and everything. But I passed mine the very first time I took it. I enjoyed my work.

So it was mostly ship repair on heavy cruisers is what I did.

Castle:

That means you really have to—it's one thing to go in and do something from scratch. But ship repair means that you have to think about what needs to be done. That takes a lot of experience.

Traversie:

And then they go out on a ten-day--after all your repair on the ships, they went out for a ten-day cruise to test everything. And if any of your welds cracked or broke, they came in and you had to go back aboard ship. And I never was called, I never had to go back for anything.

Castle:

That's awesome. Wow.

Traversie:

But mostly what I worked on was gun turrets. That's where all those big bombs, they let those big bombs off the ships, you know. That's where I worked. Oh, I loved my work.

1-00:20:00

Castle:

Wow, that's so impressive because it's—what do you think, you're young, you're really young, and where do you—how did you get such confidence to have that unwavering hand?

Traversie:

Well, like my instructor said, he said, "Women had a natural expertise in using their hands." He said they were always either crocheting or knitting or doing things with their hands. And he said, women were just adapted to it or something.

Castle:

You had done hair, and I know it's kind of like, a woman not happy with her hair is also a lot of stress. [laughter] So, you know.

Traversie:

But to go from beauty operator to a welder, I understand what you mean. But I really enjoyed my welding. And of course, those days, of course we didn't make a lot of money, but we were the highest paid women on the yard. We even got more than the office workers. The office workers were the lowest paid women on the yard. So we were like--

Castle:

Did you get a lot of respect with that also?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Castle:

Because it's a major change. A lot of people look at World War II and they talk about how impactful, what a big deal it was in World War II, that women took all these new roles. And here, it's your supervisor explaining, "Well, women are very well adapted to these roles." And that helps make it more acceptable that you are doing something that's really usually men's work, but you're doing it so well.

Traversie:

Uh-huh. And they really commented that women made good welders, were good welders.

Castle:

Do you remember any—did you ever have a weld that was just really hard to do or did you ever have any close calls in terms of danger or fires or accidents?

Traversie:

Not that I can remember. I don't know, like I said, he said it came easy to women, welding came easy to me. I don't know. I just passed my test the first time. I just did it. Like I was adapted to it. It became easy to me.

Castle:

We can come back to talking more about the work but tell me what else is going on? It's wartime, you're in California, where are you living at this time?

Traversie:

I was living in Vallejo with my sister.

Castle:

And your sister is Theodora?

Traversie:

Theodora Means. And her husband worked on the yard. And we never saw each other.

Castle:

Really?

Traversie:

Yeah. Because, like, when I was at work, he was at home. I never saw my brother-in-law and we worked on the same yard!

Castle:

What shift did you work?

Traversie:

I worked a day shift.

Castle:

Did he work a night shift or was he just not--?

Traversie:

Well, sometimes. Sometimes he worked a day shift and sometimes he worked night. But--

Castle:

What did he do in the yard?

Traversie:

He was a welder. But I never saw him, never.

Castle:

So, Theodora was working in Oakland, still, at that time? You said she [cross talk; unintelligible] was in an office?

Traversie:

No, she worked out at Travis Airforce Base, is where she worked.

Castle:

Oh, okay. And so at this time, do you have any kids with you or--?

Traversie:

Yes, my husband was in the service. And I had Mabel Ann, the one that's here. She was the baby. And I had her with me. And my oldest girl, Marilyn—my sister was working at the Indian Office at I guess Cheyenne River. Anyway, she kept my oldest girl. She worked in the office there and she kept my oldest girl. And then Donna went to Denver where my mother was. My mother and my stepfather went to Denver because of work. He got work there because he was a veteran so he had a chance of getting a good job. So, she took Donna with her so that I wouldn't have them in California, you know, all three of them worry me. But I had Mabel, I kept Mabel Ann with me.

Castle:

Mabel Ann was just a little one, a little baby.

Traversie:

A little baby, she was a baby. She was in a highchair yet. [chuckles]

Castle:

Oh, wow. So you're a mama with a highchair baby and two other children and a welder. [laughs]

Traversie:

Uh-huh, yeah.

Castle:

So how long did you work in the shipyard?

Traversie:

Well, I worked I'd say two years, well, a little over two years. But they started laying off the wartime workers. Those that worked on Mare Island before the war, they got to stay on the yard. And although they didn't lay me off, I quit before I got to that point. Because I wanted to make plans, I wanted to know what I was going to do. And there was very little chance that I would get to stay on the yard because of the endurance of my work. So, I didn't wait to see if I would stay on the yard. Because I wanted to go home and get my kids together. And then my husband was coming back from the service, too. That had something to do with it.

Castle:

So that whole time he was gone?

Traversie:

Oh yeah.

Castle:

Was he in the Navy?

Traversie:

Navy, uh-huh.

Castle:

So, when you say the people who worked in Mare Island got to stay, was that mostly men at that time?

Traversie:

There were some women but oh wartime, they really hired on the women. But it was mostly men. But it was longevity in employment of whether you got to stay or not but I didn't wait for that. Now, my brother-in-law, he stayed on.

Castle:

Was he brought in as a wartime worker, too?

Traversie:

No. He was out there before the war. So they were more or less settled in before.

Castle:

I've heard--I've done some interviewing and some women were forced out and they really didn't want to leave their jobs. Did you know any women who were frustrated by having to leave?

Traversie:

No, I didn't stay for that. I didn't wait for that. I just chose to leave because my husband was coming back from the service and my children, I wanted to get my children together, you know.

Castle:

So the experience was—how would you describe it? Was it positive? Was it empowering for you having worked?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

Castle:

Because I mean, Jeez, what more—if you can weld gun ships, I'm trying to think of what tougher job you could possibly do. They would have to give you real—you might have to start some American Indian movement, that's your next challenge. [laughter] Well, I have a few more questions about the California area because we are really interested in what California was like. You had lived in a lot of different places where I think some people who came maybe were born and raised on a reservation and some came out to work. You've kind of been a bit of a globetrotter.

Traversie:

Uh-huh, yeah.

Castle:

What was California like for you? What was similar? What did you miss about home? What did you like about home?

Traversie:

Oh, I didn't miss anything about home because I could adjust anywhere, wherever I went. And then, I really did not have to work. You see, my husband had made good wages, and he had a trade and he made good wages. So it wasn't a thing that I had to work. And then I chose to leave my job, leave the area of California. I chose to leave there.

Castle:

I remember reading an article and I wanted to ask you about one of the stories that was in there. When you first started and you filled out paper work, you were describing to me a little bit about that. Was there an incident where they were trying to like, choose your nationality or origin or race classification?

Traversie:

No, there was nothing like that. You put that all down, of course, you've got to put down "Indian" and so forth. But, you mean, like prejudice or--?

Castle:

Well, no, actually, I did want to ask you about that also, but I read a little story where it said that there wasn't an option for you to check, to say that you were American Indian, so you put down "Other?"

Traversie:

Oh! Yes! [laughs] That was an incident with me. Yeah. They had all the two rows on a big page, regular sized sheet of paper, two long rows named every nationality you could think of! But Native American it didn't. It had other on the bottom, so I checked other.

1-00:30:00

So, [laughs] I handed my paper in, and oh my God! This Navy officer said, "Sit down, lady. Just a minute. Sit there on the chair." So, he goes and he calls another guy, another officer, so they read it! "Oh my God!" Whatever they—then, they called the third guy, they finally had to go up to, mind you, the captain, the highest on the base. [laughs] How to rate me!? Here they had to name me, and name me as an American citizen. Let's see, were we rated as white?

And then of course, it had American Indian, you know, Native American Indian. But, no, they had to—they couldn't say Native American because see, there are Native Americans that came over here, that were born here and they claim to be natives, see. Native Americans.

Castle:

So that word wasn't used to describe Indian people.

Traversie:

Uh-uh, no. So, they called us American Indian, I guess, Native American Indian. Anyway, anyway.

Castle:

But it really messed up their system. They had all these—because at that time, from what I understood, to be called just like you said, “Native,” meant you were American, and to be American for most people meant to be white.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

Right, so it sounds like you fell into that category rather than being Lakota or--.

Traversie:

But they finally got it straightened it out.

Castle:

Were there other Indian people working?

Traversie:

Oh yeah, oh yeah. All Oklahoma, there were a lot of people from the South, all over.

Castle:

Really? In the shipyards?

Traversie:

In fact, I welded with an Oklahoma Indian girl, young woman. She wasn't married yet and she was a welder from—but we all had to go to welding school because such jobs weren't open to women before the war, so--

Castle:

Right, so you had to get the training.

Traversie:

So, I think that they treated women fairly, I thought we were treated fairly.

Castle:

And you were saying, when I first started to ask you the question, that you didn't experience a lot of prejudice or racism.

Traversie:

No. I never did. Because there was every kind of—[laughs]—you know? Some of foreign descent. [cross talk]

Castle:

It was really different races and different nationalities. [cross-talk]

Traversie:

Yes, so many different races. In fact, they became very interested when I'd say [chuckles], "Oh! I was welding down, one of these big, what did I tell you welding down these gun turrets. There were several of us of welders and we were several spaces apart, you know. We were doing our welding and here, there were some men gathering. [in hushed suspenseful tones] They were on board the ship working, too, and pretty soon all of them are gathering over there. And they were looking at me! I was welding on a gun turret down on the floor of the ship, the main deck, I mean, welding on this gun turret. And I looked and those men were all looking at me and I thought, 'I wonder what--? Is it the job? Wonder what they're planning?' I wondered why! But I snapped down my hood again and I was welding again. And pretty soon I start getting my gear together, and my watchman, he was right beside me and he was helping gather up my gear. And here, this man came over. He was a Navy man and here he came over, and he said, "Lady, I'd like to ask you a personal question, would you mind?" I said, "Well, no. What is it? Go ahead," you know. He said, "Well, you know, we're having a big argument up there, that group of men," he said, "They are trying to decide what nationality you are," because I spoke such good English, see, I had no language, accent. He said, "You speak such good English. In fact, you speak better English than some of our other workers." [laughter] So, I looked up at him and I said, "Well, what do you think?" And he said, "Oh my God, lady, I don't--I don't know!" He said, "It's hard to guess because you speak such good English." [chuckles] I said, "Well, I'm an American Indian," I said, "I'm a Sioux Indian from South Dakota. I belong to the Yankton? Sioux tribe." [shouts] Why, he worked at writing that stuff down! He took off! He said, "You're all wrong! You're all wrong!" [uproarious laughter]

So, I kind of got a lot of attention there for a while because there were—you know.

Castle:

A lot of people just didn't—it didn't even occur to them.

Traversie:

Yeah. They said, "We thought you were Mexican, but there's no way. She don't talk or act like a Mexican." Then they thought I was Oriental. They thought I was either some kind of like, Chinese or Hawaiian or—they had me Hawaiian for a while. They said, "Oh, she's got to be from Hawaii."

They were all wrong. They never guessed American Indian. So.

Castle:

Wow.

Traversie:

[laughs]

Castle:

What was your social life like? Did you have one? It doesn't sound like you had a whole lot of time for it. But I'm wondering about—there was a space where there was a big group of Indians

in the Santa Fe Indian Village in Richmond California. Did you ever visit with anyone from Richmond or go over to Richmond?

Traversie:

No, I met people from Richmond that worked in the yard. But no I never—and of course, we went through Richmond to go to Oakland and San Francisco. We passed Richmond but I never did attend anything at Richmond.

Castle:

Okay. I was trying to get a sense of if there were any social gatherings over there.

Traversie:

Oh, they Indian organizations all over the West Coast. Indian—I was going to say clubs, but Indian organizations. They had, but gee, you were so busy working, you were working during the war at that time. I never—and then there was a big Indian Center, like, in Oakland, a big Indian Center in San Francisco and Los Angeles. There were big Indian Centers where Indians go to in the cities and meet each other and there was nothing—they really—oh, because they shipped a lot of Indian people in to work because they came in experienced, you know. They had had schooling. A lot of them, they had schooling in different trades. So they were just grabbed up like that, American Indians, yeah.

Castle:

Why would you say they had the trade schooling? Did that come from boarding school?

Traversie:

Boarding school, yeah! Back from the reservations. Because they went to boarding schools. Like, a lot of welders, a lot of—oh, they were just--

Castle:

So that was a trade that mostly men probably could take in boarding schools.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

Whereas women had certain other options.

Traversie:

But mostly it was wartime welding. Yeah, it's a welding school, it's for women.

Castle:

Wow. So did you ever attend any functions at—was it the Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland? Or San Francisco at the Indian Centers?

Traversie:

Once in a while we did, once in a while. But, jeez, we—what is that famous island off San Francisco for prisoners?

Castle:
Alcatraz?

Traversie:
Alcatraz! Yeah. We went over on a tour of Alcatraz.

Castle:
Oh, you did? Together as a group of--?

Traversie:
But that was after it was closed. No, no, it was the first time we went. There were prisoners on there. But just one section of it. They were taking them off of there now and deciding about what to do with the island and so forth. But we did go over. I remember. They took us over on boats. We went up there. We saw some of the land and they showed like, it became kind of more for tourists anyway. Like, we saw where the famous convicts were, you know?

Castle:
Yeah they love to do that, don't they?

Traversie:
Yeah, we saw where—who was it? The most famous one that was on Alcatraz?

Castle:
Was it Al Capone?

Traversie:
Yeah, Al Capone and all them.

Castle:
The Bird Man.

Traversie:
Yeah, they showed us his cell.

01-00:40:05

Castle:
Oh, yeah.

Traversie:
We saw the individual cell.

Castle:
Jeez. Wow. Well, you know, I bet the Bay Area was very similar back then as to now, where it's not all that easy—at the end of your day, you don't necessarily want to drive all the way across maybe to Oakland from Vallejo.

Traversie:
Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

You can only do so much. But, wow, social life—

Traversie:

And her dad carrying—I remember she had a little red coat on, a nice, bright, little red coat on, her hair was just black and bangs and she was small, you know what I mean? She was walking and everything, but she must have been like two or--

Mabel Ann Eagler Hunter [Daughter]:

[Maybe I wasn't a baby?], maybe it had to be three or four.

Traversie:

Yeah. Three or four. Anyway. And here, her dad picked her up in his arms, and he took her aboard ship.

Mabel Ann Eagler Hunter:

Aboard that car.

Traversie:

Yeah, aboard, yeah. And here, the sailor just took her—they took her! We could just see that little red coat going all the way down the--[laughs]—because I was running along the side.

Mabel Ann Eagler Hunter :

I remember that, being up in the air, and all these hands, and I looked down and all I could see was the sailor caps when they were all passing me down.

Traversie:

Yeah! [laughs]

Castle:

So tell me how this came about? This was her coming into town or--? How did this--?

Traversie:

No, no! Her father, your father was shipping out for where?

Mabel Ann Eagler Hunter :

I don't know, but remember, do you, they were loading the train cars right out to the ships?

Traversie:

Yeah. They were shipping. They were going some place. No! In those days, they didn't tell you! That's why I don't know. Because, in those days, you didn't know where—in fact, you were lucky to do that, to see them off. But evidently, it was no secret where they were going. Because, they--.

Of course, I didn't get to go on. But he took her. He carried her.

Castle:

So she was getting passed back by the sailors so she could be given back to you--

Traversie:
Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:
--Because she could go to war. [laughter]

Mabel Ann Eagler Hunter :
I was saying, "I'll go! Take me! Take me!"

Castle:
Is this at a rail-station?

Traversie:
It was Oakland, wasn't it?

Thunder HawkMadonna Thunder Hawk:
Yeah, Oakland Depot.

Traversie:
Yeah, Oakland.

Castle:
Okay, so you say that you can adjust wherever you end up living, huh? So, California was pretty good for you. And you lived with your sister in Vallejo.

Traversie:
Yeah, I lived with my sister.

Castle:
[pause] So, overall, when you're describing your role, you said, you made a decision to quit, to leave and move on for your family and to decide what you wanted to do next, yeah?

Traversie:
Uh-huh.

Castle:
Overall, though, the experience—what do remember the most? I mean, what was most powerful about the experience? Was it just—I guess I keep thinking about the confidence that you get from doing something like this. But it sounds like you went in with a lot of confidence also. Is there something about it you learned about yourself that you hadn't known before or--?

Traversie:
[laughs] I guess you could say I was self-confident because I never let anything worry me or bother me. I always felt just as good as the next person. I mean, like, in my work, I didn't feel inferior to anyone. Let's put it that way. I never had a feeling of being inferior in anything. In my work, because I went to school for it. And I went to school before I went out there. I mean, I raised in education all my life, it seems like. Even when we were real little before school-age, my

grandmother and mother, they just taught us everything. We were well raised. I just accepted school when I went away.

I went to Pipestone, Minnesota for seven years straight. Of course, I came home and then when I got older, I had my choice of going home and working or staying there all summer and working at the school or working on the outside. In fact, I did both. I did some just light work at the school and then I went out, I went downtown, I worked in a news shop, helping in busy times and weekends. Well, no, I stayed down there. In fact, I got a room, I lived downtown. I lived there and weekends, I'd go to the school.

Castle:

So, back in California, in your position there, were you at a stage where you were affected by the rationing in the War? When did that--? I don't know much about when that came about but--?

Traversie:

Would you believe that it took a lot of food stamps to get ketchup? Ketchup was one of the—honestly, because it all went to the war, to our servicemen. So, ketchup was really hard to find. And that's one thing that stands out in my mind [laughs] is ketchup.

Castle:

Now, you go to a fast food restaurant and everybody gives you this huge pile, do you just think of like--? [laughs]

Traversie:

Yes! I think about wartime when I had stamps and oh! you had to—I forget now how many stamps it took for a bottle of ketchup. And oh, gosh, shoes! Oh, gosh, it was hard to get shoes! And here I went and left my best pair of shoes! I was carrying them—of course, I had my work shoes on—I left them in the cab!

Castle:

You're never going to see those again.

Traversie:

No, I couldn't and gee, it was hard to get. It depended on how many coupons you had, according to the type of shoe you bought. Oh.

Castle:

So you needed coupons for any different type, like, dress shoes, or--?

Traversie:

And nylons. There was no such thing and we were wearing rayon then. And stockings were hard to get. And people were just, they'd get these tickets to buy and they'd sell 'em, you know. Boy, you really had to pay for them if you sold something. That was a racket, too. Selling food stamps and clothing stamps and—.

Castle:

So describe it for me, did you just need stamps for just about everything?

Traversie:

Yeah, just about everything, food and clothing. Uh-huh, yeah,

Castle:

I'm really interested in this, too. What did you wear when you were welding? Describe that to me.

Traversie:

Oh, I had to—I wore jeans and any kind of a shirt or blouse, but Lee jackets. I wore a Lee jacket over my jeans and I had boots, heavy, heavy boots, heavy wartime boots. Then, over that, see, when we got on the job, we had to wear leathers. Leather pants and leather jackets. And then we had to wear, like, a facemask. I didn't wear glasses. In fact, I don't have to wear glasses all the time but I do sometimes. But, we had to wear a mask over our face, then put a helmet over that. A helmet over that. So, you were looking through two kinds of glass, that you were looking, the helmet and the mask you had on. And then, you had one on your helmet.

Castle:

Was it like an all steel helmet that had place for your eyes.

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah, uh-huh, a place across for your eyes like that. You were looking through two lenses.

Castle:

[gasps] Did anyone ever take a picture of you?

Traversie:

Yeah, I guess they did.

Castle:

I'm just thinking, that's one cool outfit. [laughs] I mean, nobody's going to mess with you.

Traversie:

Yeah. You didn't know what it was to dress up, you know. You were just always in your work clothes, it seemed like, during the war. Because sometimes, these asked us to work overtime, you know, and of course, you made more money overtime, so you were lucky if you were asked, if you wanted to do that. I didn't a lot, though, because of my kids. But, I did some overtime.

Castle:

So, a shift, if it's okay with you, we could just do about seven more minutes and that would be plenty, because this is just fantastic. Tell me about—just take me through day, like when you get up, going to work, for all that you can remember. You know, did you report to a certain area, did you bring your lunch, who did you talk to? Just as you remember it, what was your feelings and description?

01-00:50:00

Traversie:

Okay, this is crazy. My sister lives in Vallejo, right along the Bay. To go across to Mare Island, you had to cross the water. There was a big bridge. Well, my sister lived in what was Carquinez Heights. It was a hilly part, right along the Bay. And so, I would go run down her back yard and go over railroad tracks or whatever, and I'd get--at the bottom of the—I couldn't cross over on the bridge because of the traffic. So, there were boats. So, I'd get in a little boat and cross the Bay in a boat. In other words, just the length of the bridge, the river, just across that. I'd get off on the other side. And then, I'd catch a bus. And I worked up at Northways, they called it Northways. And, like I said we repaired [folksal doors?] for—we worked on repair of heavy cruisers. So, then I had to catch little bus, from at the end of the bridge over to Northways, to my place of employment.

Castle:

So you avoided the bridge traffic by taking a boat?

Traversie:

Yeah, but, boy, they were so—every time you got in and out of something, you got searched. Oh, they really searched us.

Castle:

What did they think? Was is security?

Traversie:

No, no, no. That was just a rule. For anything. Like, anything you might—oh, you didn't dare take anything on the yard with you. You could take a lunch, but they inspected your lunch. Or else you could buy it over there.

Castle:

Were they worried about sabotage and spying?

Traversie:

Oh yeah, oh yeah! Anything. They took all kinds of precautions. They were forever searching you. But, I never took food. I always bought my food over there, bought my lunch over there.

Castle:

So did you start early in the morning?

Traversie:

Yeah, I always worked the day shift, start early in the morning and came back--

Castle:

So, you'd take the bus in. You just came, you got on the boat dressed, you had your denims on and then, did you keep your leathers--

Traversie:

Yeah, we couldn't bring our leathers back. Our leathers were over there because they were all inspected before we, under inspection. I mean, safekeeping. So we would just go get our, check our leathers out. We had lockers, locked lockers. You didn't dare take anything on the yard then.

Castle:

So you had welding equipment—you each had your own set up probably, did you each work with like, a specific piece of equipment that was like yours?

Traversie:

Oh yeah. Rods. They called these things rods that you welded.

Castle:

A welding rod?

Traversie:

Yeah, welding rod.

Castle:

So, at that point, you would report in and somebody would tell you what you were going to do for that day?

Traversie:

Oh yeah, uh-huh. We'd get our—[pause]

Thunder Hawk:

Details, ma, details. [chuckles]

Traversie:

Well, like, we had a foreman for our group, like our group of welders and wherever we happened to be welding. Like, what ship? Like, I worked on USS Baltimore and the USS Boston. They were sister ships. And they'd come in for repair and we'd repair them and then they'd go on a ten-day test run, a shakedown on the waters. They'd be out for ten days and they'd come back in and then, we'd have to report back to the shipped area. But my—I never had to do any--

Castle:

Did other people have their ships come back and need to make repairs?

Traversie:

Oh yeah, oh yeah. A lot of them had to.

Castle:

So they called them "shakedowns?"

Traversie:

Yeah. Shakedowns, ten-day shakedown cruise, they called it.

Castle:

Ten-day shakedown cruise.

Traversie:

And they looked with an eagle eye boy, they checked them, they just checked everything. Like, if a weld—unless the welding was good, it wasn't passed in the first place, it never went out on the water. But, boy, they were strict. You'd be surprised what little thing they'd just have a check, and boy, if you got one of those checks, he had to go back to port and do it over. I never had to.

But the hardest thing was stainless steel is one of the hardest things. See, when, this other kind of metal you weld with, you ocillate, you move your hand, you ocillate. When you do work with stainless steel, it's just a steady—and you never move your fingers! It's just a weld straight across and you couldn't be shaky. Oh yeah, they were strict with welders. You had to be in good health and you had to—if you shook or were nervous or anything, you couldn't be a welder. No, you couldn't.

Castle:

Well, and a lot of peoples' lives really depend on it, you know, your work has to hold together.

Traversie:

But, of course, like anything else, everybody wanted to be a welder because it the highest paid people in the yard were the—the women were the highest paid on the yard.

Thunder Hawk:

What about the spaces you had to weld in?

Traversie:

Oohhh! Jeez! That was something. The keel of the ship, the bottom, is just like a--

Castle:

Okay, we're going to have to hold.

01-00:56:30

[interview interruption while recording media are exchanged]

2-00:00:01

Castle:

So, tell me about the spaces that you had to weld in.

Traversie:

Well, along the keel, the bottom of a ship, it's just like—there are little squares, that would just maybe hold a slim person. [laughing] A fat person could never, never go down, couldn't be a fat welder. [laughs] But, about my size, you know, I could just fit down. And then, the keel, it's just like a—what did I used to call it?

Thunder Hawk:

Honeycomb.

Traversie:

Honeycomb. Just like a honeycomb in the bottom of the ships. They're squares. Now, I wasn't much smaller than I am now, was I? I mean, during the war.

Man's voice:

During the war?

Traversie:

Maybe, I guess I was more slender, but not exceptionally, not a lot. Anyway, then, see, we had to fit in a square and they let us down, lowered us in kind of a—you sit in it, you know, straps. They let you down like that and you get in this square honeycomb, just big enough for your body. I'd say, it's maybe about like this. [demonstrates]

Castle:

Wow!

Traversie:

Just big enough for a body to go down.

Castle:

Just a slim little body like yours.

Traversie:

Yeah, and then you had to have room to take your welding gear down there. But the hoses, they went down over to the corners. You didn't have to carry those. Your firewatch carried those for you. But you carried your tools down. And you had to be able to kneel down, and you have to weld up this corner like that, then you wait for that corner to cool off. And then you scrape the flux off of it from the welding rod. You scrape that flux off after it cools off. Then you turn the opposite direction and take the opposite corner, and you weld up that corner. Then, you wait for that to cool and then you clean off the flux until you do all four corners.

Castle:

And that whole time you're in this tiny space.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh. But of course, you had to—they had hoses coming in, suckers they called 'em. Those suckers just carried out the fumes, the smoke and all that from the welding. The suckers just sucked it out.

Castle:

So you couldn't be faint of heart.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

You couldn't be fat or claustrophobic. [laughter]

Traversie:

Well, believe me, if you were fat, you sure got slim, working. I didn't lose a whole lot of weight but I lost some weight. My weight went down but then--

Thunder Hawk:

There's pictures of her.

Castle:

Did you sweat a lot? I mean, was it like really—it sounds like it was a lot of labor, physical--.

Traversie:

I don't remember sweating much. It wasn't a problem. Because, welding, it's what it is. Like, you have times when you stop, you have to stop, you have to do something. There's a lot of time that you don't weld. You're busy doing other things with your—it isn't just continuous welding, unless you're in a factory on a line, you know.

Castle:

Right. But you really have a lot of—almost like an artisan. You had to go in and if you were doing repair work, you had to assess it.

Traversie:

Oh yeah, we had to go over to our lockers and of course, they inspected our lockers and we had to get on our leathers. Of course, I went in my jeans and my Lee jacket and work clothes and my boots, but then my leathers were in locker, so we had to go over to our lockers and then get out gear out.

Castle:

Did people know you were a welder? I mean, did women wear jeans and jackets like that normally out on the street?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! That's practically all you saw because, you know, then, they just get on the island and put on our leathers, you know, or whatever type of work they did. Of course, office workers, it depended on what offices they worked in and where and how they dressed. They didn't all dress the same. Like, there were some jobs where you couldn't wear just jeans or anything you wanted to. You had to dress up. You had to—there were all kinds of different degrees of--

Castle:

At some point I think I've heard somebody describe it, you know there was Rosie the Riveter. What were you all called?

Traversie:

Winnie the Welder! [laughter] Winnie the Welder.

Castle:

Where did that come from, do you know? It just rhymed?

Traversie:

Yeah, just Rosie the Riveter and Winnie the Welder.

Castle:

Were there riveters on the shipyard?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! Well, yeah, on the shipyard. Well, see all the ships were docked right on the outside of the island, right along the edges of the island. That's where all those ships were docked. And then you had to go aboard ship to do your work.

Castle:

That was my question. I wondered if they ever tried to dry dock—did they ever pull some of the ships out of the water.

Traversie:

Yeah, if they were under repair, they were pulled out of the water. Yeah, oh, yeah. They were pulled out of the water if we were going to do a lot of work on them. But if it was just light repair, well, you could go aboard ship.

Castle:

So you did actually repair some ships that were on the water.

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

Was that harder to do when the ships--[cross-talk; unintelligible]

Traversie:

No, because they took care of that. They had docks where a ship would come in, a dock made for ships that come in. So that was all taken care of, there was never any where they were out just loose in the water, and having any repair of any kind.

Castle:

Was there any competition between the Rosies and the Winnies?

Traversie:

I never knew of it because our work wasn't together. See, like, riveting was what welding our separate things, you know. So, I didn't have any experience working with riveters.

Castle:

I just wondered because you know, now, when people think about World War II, it's that Rosie the Riveter, and you saw all the pictures and there was a lot of advertisements about--

Traversie:

Well, that came out before Winnie the Welder.

Castle:

But with welders it was a—were you higher paid then than the riveters?

Traversie:

I don't know about that so I doubt if we were. I mean, it depended on how much you did, what type of job you did, see. So, I don't know what all the riveters did. Welding and riveting are two different ways of putting—you know, welding is different than riveting. So, there are some things you can rivet but there are other things that you have to weld. It had to be a weld. I didn't know anything about—I didn't work with riveters or have that experience.

Castle:

Let me stop for just a second.

[interview interruption]

Castle:

So, if you could tell me about—you made the decision to leave and where did you go from there?

Traversie:

I came back to South Dakota.

Castle:

You got all your kids together?

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Castle:

And where did you live then?

Traversie:

Well, eventually, I lived on the Cheyenne River Reservation. That's up—it's between Mobridge and Pier. I think it's 90 miles from Mobridge and then it's 90 miles from Pierre. They're on opposite sides. I don't know the directions exactly but like, I'd say, one's on the south, one's on the north.

Castle:

Okay. And your first husband, is he still with you?

Traversie:

No, no, they're both deceased. See, I married Whitney Traversie and he's deceased.

Castle:

And at this time, it's after the war, you've moved back to South Dakota, did you say Charlie?

Traversie:

Charles.

Castle:

Charles, had he moved with you or were you still together then when you came back down to South Dakota?

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

Castle:

So you all came back, your family together and you're living in Cheyenne River. What did you do at this stage then? Were you raising your kids?

Traversie:

Yes.

Castle:

And where did you live on Cheyenne River? Were you in--?

Traversie:

Cheyenne Agency.

Castle:

The Agency. Because this is before the dam was built.

Traversie:

Yeah, that's gone now. There's no longer a Cheyenne Agency. It's all under water. Do you remember when that happened and what that was like? No, I don't remember the year, I don't remember the dates.

Castle:

That's fine, I was just thinking in your life, if you remember, were still living there when it was flooded and then you moved?

2-00:10:00

Traversie:

We moved before it flooded.

Castle:

And did you move elsewhere on the reservation? Or did you move to--?

Traversie:

Went back to Huron, my mother owned a home there. We went back there and stayed a while and then we went to Eagle Butte. Donna, are you listening? Is she here?

Castle:

Looks like she stepped out.

Traversie:

No, I guess we went, yeah, we went up to Eagle Butte. Spent most of my adult up at the Eagle Butte area, Cheyenne River Reservation

Castle:

Did you start working again at some point?

Traversie:

Yes, uh-huh.

Castle:

What kind of job did you take?

Traversie:

Well, I worked mostly with the youth. But I did a lot of—I worked in the dormitory system, the school system, in education. But mostly dormitory. I was a supervisor at one time. And then at one time—you don't have to mention this, I'm just telling you—but like, I was supervisor over, I think it was six women and three men, or something like that. I wouldn't want to be quoted on that because I can't remember if it was six or eight women. Might have been eight women. I worked with supervisors, you know. And was in charge of a whole dormitory system.

Castle:

So this the late forties maybe? This is late forties and the 1950's.

Traversie:

No, that's into—yeah. It was after World War II.

Castle:

Well, I wonder if maybe you could talk a little bit about when—you've mentioned so far that you never felt inferior, which is a really important thing for anyone but especially if you're Indian in this country, there's a lot of factors that tried to tell you throughout the years with assimilation that you weren't. When do you remember the movement or how would you describe that changes that began to come about in Indian country? In terms of—let me think of a better way to ask this.

Traversie:

Well, Donna!

Madonna Thunder Hawk [daughter]:

What?

Traversie:

What did you say? What effect do you think AIM had on the reservations, especially where they were really active? Like they weren't so active—they were down on the Yankton reservation, but it's a small reservation, but like AIM on the Cheyenne River or Pine Ridge or Rosebud?

Thunder Hawk:

Well, I just think basically, all over Indian country, reservation and off, was the whole treaty rights, mainly, and inherent rights as indigenous people.

Traversie:

That part you could get from her. Because, you know, like I said, I'm older now and I'm forgetful and I have to accept stop and think and I don't remember dates and all that. I wish I had written something like this sooner, before I got so forgetful. But she should know a lot, especially what you asked just now.

Castle:

Right, okay. Let me just turn this off for a second.

Traversie:

Do you want my grandmother, the way I was brought up? More so with my mother.

Castle:

Is it still on?

Thunder Hawk:

I'm just going to jog your memory, mom.

[interview interruption - it is now the next day]

Traversie:

--Didn't occur, you know, when we were growing up. We were in it. We were it, you see. [dry laugh] And so like after, oh, especially after the American Indian movement, oh! Some things in some places drastically changed, you know. We have to give the American Indian movement credit. And then there were other places where it wasn't so strong, you know. But where the real Indians, the Indian Indians were concerned, that's where it was the most effective I think. I mean, you could see the effectiveness.

Castle:

And that's probably no—you know, the fact that it was a lot of spaces in Lakota country that AIM really took hold, because people, because of your traditions and history.

Yesterday you were describing your work as a welder and one of the things I'm wondering if you could explain to me a little bit more, is how, in fixing a ship—and I don't know how much of this might even be part of what you did—but how did your work as a welder fit into the whole task, the whole project of a ship. If there were riveters and other people, did everybody go on the ship at once or were you just very focused?

Traversie:

No, whenever you were needed for anything. Like, I don't think we worked with the riveters. I don't remember of it. They probably went ahead of us, you know, to prepare something. I never worked right with them.

Castle:

You said you repaired ships. Did you ever build any from the ground up? Or was it more--

Traversie:

No, it was mostly repair,

Castle:

Okay, okay. You were describing to me yesterday kind of like how you go to work and what a day was like weldworking. Do you remember if—I guess it would be hard to have a lot of time for talking, but was there a lot of humor or joking while working alongside other people. Was there?

Traversie:

No, not so much. I don't remember--.

Castle:

I guess it'd be hard to be cracking jokes with welding equipment. [laughs] That would be a bit dangerous.

One of the things that Madonna mentioned yesterday and you told me, she was describing what you looked like when you were all geared up. I understand the flame and the rod. What's the thing that went around your shoulder? Did you have like tubing or—that you hooked onto your shoulder? If you had like a little backpack or--?

Traversie:

I don't remember anything like that.

Madonna Thunder Hawk:

Remember mom, you were telling me and I saw a picture of you where you had all your hoses, you were carrying hoses.

Traversie:

Oh! Oh! Oh, yeah. Just wrapped them around like that, you know, around our arm.

Castle:

Was that heavy? Was all that equipment heavy?

Traversie:

Well, it was heavy but not—you know it wasn't cumbersome or anything. We were able to carry it.

Castle:

You said that there were a lot of other Indian people working in the shipyard, just people from all over, kind of really representing America in a lot of different ways, and from other countries even. Did you socialize much with any of your co-workers?

Traversie:

Not outside of our job. Like I said, I worked with a young—she was a teacher, a young girl or lady from Oklahoma. And I was friendly with her, I mean, on the job. We spoke and like that but we didn't ever visit outside of the yard.

Castle:

So you were saying that ketchup was one of the hardest things to get with the rationing coupons.

Traversie:

[laughs]

Castle:

Give me a sense of what the other—what did you cook and eat? Were there some things that were particularly hard to find? Was there one thing that was much easier to get with rationing coupons than other things? Do you remember any of it?

Traversie:

Well, anything that went into the food of the servicemen, that was hard to get. Yeah, there things that—there was shortage. We had to have tickets, you know, to buy. There was a lot of shortages. Like, some things I can't remember exactly what they were but like, if you were able to buy what you wanted, you were lucky, because you had to wait 'til they had it for sale. There were shortages, a lot of things.

3-00:20:06

Thunder Hawk:

Mom, did you guys eat like a lot of soup or--? Was your meat mostly canned? That you bought?

Traversie:

[laughs] Well, not--see all the canned stuff, that went into for the army and—a lot of food was hard to get, that's all I remember.

Castle:

Do you remember having enough to eat? I mean, it was hard to get but you just couldn't get what you wanted necessarily.

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! Yeah. But we had enough. I don't remember ever being hungry.

Castle:

One of the things you mentioned yesterday and actually Madonna mentioned it to me at one point that because you really had really good schooling coming in, where a lot of other people, white or black from the South, for example, struggled to read or maybe couldn't. What did you find when you came in with the other women, the level of schooling? Did you indeed have an advantage or just knew more?

Traversie:

Well, we just had a better chance, like, we just went right into the work. These others, they had to have coaching and schooling, and they were detained. I mean, they weren't right up with us. We just went ahead with the work and we progressed faster.

Castle:

Because you went to school and got training for welding and then you took tests and you obviously excelled at that you said.

Traversie:

Some of them never made it. Especially, even some of the men. Some of them just didn't make it.

Castle:

Were you aware or did you experience at that time Japanese Americans were being interned or put into these concentration camps—well, concentration camps is one strong word for it—and a lot of prejudice against Japanese Americans. What did you witness or experience involving that?

Traversie:

Well, because they put them into these camps and so forth, we didn't experience a lot with the Japanese. We didn't really associate with them because they were confined. But I don't remember any hatred or anything like that. I didn't experience anything like that.

Castle:

Do you remember feeling—when they were put into these camps, was there any discussion about whether that was something that was right or wrong?

Traversie:

Yeah, there was a lot, there was a lot of discussion about it. But at that time, that was something they had to do. They were always looking for something better to do. There was a lot of discussion about it. I thought it was kind of sad in a way. But you didn't have time for those things. You were so busy and everybody was doing their own thing. I don't remember anything that stands out in my mind.

Castle:

I've heard mention of him often, I was wondering when you met your second husband and where that was and when that came to be. Well, I guess that was at Eagle Butte.

Thunder Hawk:

No, no, no.

Traversie:

Where was it?

Thunder Hawk:

It was at Old Cheyenne Agency where {Matron?}, remember? That happened a long time ago.

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. Old Cheyenne Agency, yeah.

Castle:

So you met and married him. What was his name?

Traversie:

Whitney Traversie.

Castle:

Whitney.

Traversie:

Well! [laughing] How we got, we were such good friends that that was really funny, huh! In high school, I chummed with his girlfriend. So I got to know him real well. I chummed with his girlfriend. And that's how we got together because I just kind of—he worked at the same school I did and so like, if I had to go into town sometime, I didn't have a car, so, I'd say, "Now be sure and take—I want to go into Gettysburg. I have to go into Gettysburg." Oh, when he took his day off or took time off, when he was going into town, and then pretty soon I told him—I had just Mabel Ann with me at the time and then pretty soon I had all three—I'd tell him, I would take my little girl along. And at first, he thought I had just one daughter. And he said, "Pretty soon, here it came, you brought one, and pretty soon, you brought another one." [laughs] We always joked about that.

But he lived—he had an apartment right near to the building where I lived so I used to go up to his apartment and I'd take the kids with me. Sometimes he'd babysit for me, like the hours that he didn't have to work or something. Especially Mabel Ann, I'd leave Mabel Ann with him.
[falls silent]

Castle:

When you two got together married then, eventually you got married, did you move out somewhere—did you move to Eagle Butte together or--?

Traversie:

Where did we move, Donna? [laughs]

Thunder Hawk:

Well, we didn't actually move. We moved from the dormitories to the pump house.

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! That's right.

Thunder Hawk:

Old Agency, Old Cheyenne Agency.

Traversie:

Yeah, at the Old Cheyenne Agency.

Thunder Hawk:

That's where we had this huge garden that mom put in. Oh! That was the best, one of the best gardens that I've ever seen.

Castle:

The garden?

Traversie:

Vegetable garden.

Castle:

How did you learn how to do that?

Traversie:

Oh, we always did that when we were growing up. We always had a big garden at our grandma's and she had a big cornfield.

Castle:

I'm going to jump ahead a bit. Madonna has said to me that you and your husband were really supportive of all the things that they did during the movement. And I wanted to get a sense of who he was and how you two came together. And one of the things that I--

Traversie:

[interrupting] Oh, it isn't such a big thing. We just both worked at the same school and that's how we got together.

Castle:

So Madonna is one of the first people arrested for Wounded Knee. How did you and Whitney get involved in terms of helping her out.

Traversie:

Well, she would probably remember more than I do about that.

Thunder Hawk:

Remember, you and gramps came to Rapid City and bailed me out?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah! [laughs] How did that happen? I don't remember that.

Thunder Hawk:

I think you must have [laughing] seen my picture in the paper or it must have been in the news because they were busting a lot of people and Lorelei and Mary D. [De Cora] and a couple others and I were arrested and they were holding us in Rapid. Lorelei [De Cora Means], just came and got them out. Old Swan got her out, her and Mary D.. So I was kind of the last one of our crew that was in there but the rest, then there was other people. And then they called my name and I went to the magistrate and there was Mama {Jockey?}

3-00:30:15

Traversie:

[laughs] Yeah, I kind of don't remember.

Thunder Hawk:

You don't remember after that? Remember, you took me to eat and then I had all that money? You don't remember that?

Traversie:

Yeah!

Thunder Hawk:

And you guys parked down the street, remember?

Traversie:

Yeah, I kind of remember that! And what was that about?

Daughter:

Remember the magistrate told you that you were bonding me out and that you were to take me straight to Cheyenne River and I wasn't to go anywhere near Pine Ridge Reservation. So we said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." And then when we got out, you took me to eat and then I told you I had all this money and I needed to buy ammo?

Traversie:

Oh yeah!

Castle:

So what did you think of that? She needed to get some ammunition and--?

Traversie:

Why, I didn't think anything of it. We did what we had to do, you know. [chuckles]

Thunder Hawk:

You don't remember details, mom?

Traversie:

No, I don't remember details.

Thunder Hawk:

Well, I'll just keep kind of feeding you. Maybe you'll remember. But after we ate and everything, I told you what I needed to do. So you and gramps parked off of Main Street a few blocks down.

Traversie:

Yeah, I can even remember the building! There was a big sign on the side of the building? That's what I'm picturing. And we parked someplace back there. Then you got the money, wasn't it?

Thunder Hawk:

No, I had the money.

Traversie:

Oh, you had the money.

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah. It was in my stuff in the jail and they gave it back to me. And then, remember, we parked there and I went down the street and I saw all of the street guys, all the Indians?

Traversie:

Uh-huh?

Thunder Hawk:

And I told them what I needed and I gave them all the money and they took off and I told them where to meet me. And then you guys parked there so grandpa just opened the trunk and then threw everything in there and off we went. Then you took me down to Porcupine. And we got off at Horse's place.

Traversie:

Yeah? See she remembers a bit more than I do. I remember it now that she mentioned it but exactly what we did, step by step, I don't even remember that.

Thunder Hawk:

Well, first of all, we broke the law. [laughter] So this fugitive raced back down to Wounded Knee.

Traversie:

There was something about that ammo that we had. Didn't we have to watch so no one was following us?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah. We had to kind of drive all over town and look like we were shopping and then we headed out, headed South.

Castle:

I mean, it's a pretty big thing. Not every mother would bail out her daughter and then aid and abet in getting her ammunition, go directly against what the magistrate said and take her right back down to the scene of the crime. [laughter] So it takes a lot of--you know.

Thunder Hawk:

I just told them what I needed to do and they said okay.

Traversie:

We did what we had to do, you know? [with emphasis] Like, we didn't have any choice. Our daughter was involved and we had to more or less do things to protect her and protect ourselves. We were thinking of ourselves also, you know.

Castle:

You bailed her out that first time. Did you find over the years that you provided a lot of support? Because that's one of the ugly things is everything costs money, you know, and there's all this political stuff that goes on but at the end of the day you gotta bail people out, you gotta buy them food. Did you find yourself contributing a lot to the movement?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. We did.

Thunder Hawk:

Details, mom, details.

Traversie:

Well, like what?

Thunder Hawk:

You know people were always coming to your house in Eagle Butte? It was kind of like a safe house? They always needed gas and food..

Traversie:

Yeah, and they'd come to our place and we'd have to get them—what was it, when they brought them up to us and then we had to get 'em up North? Did we take some up to Fort Yates?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah.

Traversie:

We took four men, wasn't it?

Daughter:

Uh-huh.

Traversie:

Four men, and they were really wanted [by the FBI]. So, we really had to be careful. And so we took them up to Fort Yates. And where did we take them to up to Fort Yates?

Thunder Hawk:

White Lightning's place or—I forget. I'm forgetful, too.

Traversie:

It was way out in the country, anyway. It was on the way to—[whispers] oh, gee! I can't remember--

Castle:

Was it like an AIM safe house?

[knock at the door]

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah. Oh, this was all pre-planned ahead. They came to us and we took them North and we got them out of Cheyenne River and--

Thunder Hawk:

Nobody told anybody details.

Traversie:

Yeah, nobody told but I remember there were four men. [to Madonna] Do you remember who they were?

Thunder Hawk:

No.

Traversie:

I kind of remember, I remember, it seems like they were from Minnesota. Minnesota or Wisconsin. Gee, I can't remember.

Castle:

But the police or the FBI really were after them?

Traversie:

Yeah, oh yeah. We had to hide them. I mean, we had to be very careful. We took 'em and then we took 'em across state lines, too. See, we took 'em into North Dakota. And who did we take up there, too? Gosh. [pause] What did we—we got 'em up to Fort Yates. Then we took them North. No, we passed them on to somebody.

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah.

Traversie:

[triumphant in remembering] We hid them at Fort Yates! And then somebody came and picked them up. They seemed like they were from Minnesota. Anyway, they picked them up and they took them North I think. Because they were wanted in Minnesota. Oh, gosh, I can't remember.

Castle:

But crossing the state line is a big risk. How did you feel doing this kind of stuff?

Traversie:

Oh, shoot, we just did what—like I said, we did what we had to do. We couldn't think of state lines or--.

Thunder Hawk:

They just did it.

Traversie:

We just did it.

Thunder Hawk:

Who else, mom, on Cheyenne River. Remember the other families?

Traversie:

Aaah! Well, remember—oh, it's just on the tip of my tongue—Garrows, was it?

Thunder Hawk:

Garrow, yeah, Melvin.

Traversie:

Melvin Garrow? Oh, yeah, Melvin was one of the main ones. Yeah, we had certain people, contacts. Like we had—we gave them to Melvin, I think. I think Melvin got these men out of Cheyenne River.

Thunder Hawk:

Well, there were several times. It wasn't just one time.

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah.

Thunder Hawk:

I think they kind of like, took turns, because--

Castle:

So, would you say you are parents of active movement people?

Traversie:

Yeah, mm-hmm, activists.

Castle:

I mean, there's a whole spectrum. A lot of parents would be like freaked out if their kids were doing this kind of stuff all the way down to what you're doing, which is actively being a support network on the reservation. Did all parents do this or was this something that--?

Traversie:

There were certain families that we could depend on. But, even, there were some things we weren't told. You know, so that if they ever arrested us and questioned us, we would have no idea. We did that, too.

Castle:

Did you ever come close to getting caught anything that you can remember?

Traversie:

Yes, I remember the FBI—[whispers] let's see, I got a terrible memory—it seems like we—[pause]—I don't remember if the FBI ever came to our place in Eagle Butte. Do you, Donna?

Thunder Hawk:

Hey, my memory's shot, too. But, no, I don't think they ever did.

Traversie:

Because, boy, our headquarters was in where, Minneapolis, was it? Where was it where everybody was?

Thunder Hawk:

During that time.

Traversie:

And then I remember they sneaked some of us into Minneapolis one time from South Dakota. [excitedly] But when was this time when we were—was it you that was carrying all that money? How many thousand dollars?

Thunder Hawk:

Well, that was right at the beginning of the occupation. That's what I brought for—[cross talk; unintelligible]

3-00:40:00

Traversie:

And you remember, we met somebody at a corner? Did you two change cars or what was that?

Thunder Hawk:

You mean in Rapid at that time? What time are you talking about.

Traversie:

No, no. This was where?

Thunder Hawk:

Well, this was some other time, mom, because I was either on the run or--

Traversie:

Yeah, you were on the run! You came from out West and you were carrying so many thousand dollars on you, cash?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah. Probably. But I didn't remember that. That was me and {Lyle?}, we headed North, too. But I think we had bond money and we were trying to get it to Minneapolis.

Traversie:

Yeah, you were trying to get bond money to Minneapolis. You had the money.

Thunder Hawk:

I had the money and then I handed it off when we got to Fort Yates. You're right, that happened.

Traversie:

Yeah, I remember that. And there was something about some men. We got them up to Yates. I can't remember where they went from there or who they were.

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, it's hard to remember. I don't know.

Traversie:

See, there was stuff we didn't know either, see. Because, like, in case were arrested and questioned, you know how—we just couldn't give information, see. So, there was a lot of things we didn't know about that was happening that we were involved in but we didn't know all the statistics, you know.

Castle:

But you were willing to put yourself in danger.

Traversie:

But they knew who they could depend on. Like, when it got to us, well then, we depended on the Garrows, the man—they were our relations. I remember the only one we ever talked to or gave any information to or any information was given to us was my nephew, Melvin Garrow. And then, he had to be kind of secretive with us, too. There was always this chance of you being arrested by the FBI and questioned and you know how they can force things out of you. There were things that we didn't know either because we didn't want to know. So, they would never tell. We had to keep our mouths shut. We just couldn't—you had to be careful who you talked to. You couldn't trust anybody, Indian or white. You never knew. Because we had some—oh, white people that were just gung-ho and they were for us but, boy, they could've been dumb. You know, someone could have invaded there, too. Oh jeepers, it was a matter of trusting people, you know, you had to know your people. But, I don't know--

Thunder Hawk:

But mom, too, a little background about gramps. He was just your average straight-laced guy. You wouldn't suspect, you know. [chuckles]

Traversie:

Yeah. And he was very quiet. He knew about everything, didn't he, Donna? There wasn't anything--I mean, like, electrical work, anything. He could fix anything and if he didn't have a part for it, he made one. He was one of those men, you could depend on him for anything. But he was a quiet man and he was very close mouthed. If they ever questioned him, they'd never get a thing out of him. He was--

Castle:

He was ideal.

Traversie:

Yes!

Castle:

For all the secret-keeping.

Traversie:

Yes.

Thunder Hawk:

Tell about your savings for your house, for your retirement. You remember that.

Traversie:

We didn't save.

Castle:

You spent it on--?

Traversie:

We were going to buy a home. We didn't. It just all went into the movement. We never did—well, eventually, we got a trailer home but we didn't buy that home. I forgot all about that, Donna.

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah.

Traversie:

Yeah, we were saving.

Thunder Hawk:

Besides his retirement, that was living expenses, he had saved. [cross talk]

Traversie:

We had money in the bank but it all went into the movement. And it didn't go real fast, you know, we spent it where we had to spend it. But it mostly went, like, for gas money and gosh, we were always transporting and seeing that, you know. Men got away from the FBI and stayed away from them. It took money. You were always—me! —I was always driving men someplace. Because my husband had to work and he had a very good—he was responsible for work on the whole reservation and so I had to do all the driving. I was the one that had to sneak all these guys everywhere and see that they—but I could always depend on my nephew, Melvin Garrow. As soon as any men would come in, like they usually came in at night, well, I'd contact Melvin right away and he'd help me and we'd make arrangements. Oh, we had to be careful not to get caught. Especially crossing state lines. But, the North Dakota state line was right—about nine miles away from us.

Or we had to go pick them up at a certain place. But we had families that were working with the movement. And of course, we had to keep that secret, you know, we couldn't let--. Of course the movement people knew, but there were certain things that we couldn't know either at the time like, where headquarters was, Minneapolis and--. We had a AIM office in Rapid City, wasn't it?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, that was the WKLDO/C [pronounced "Winkle-doc" for Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee]

Traversie:

Yeah, WKLDO/C, that was in Rapid City.

Thunder Hawk:

Just to give some background, what they did--there were so many dependents that, like, for example, what happened with us, they gave us a few bucks and brought us this old clunker (I think it was a \$200 car) and there was about five of us that were—you know. All these people that were indicted—they didn't have the bond money, they didn't have—you know. So, they said, "Get on the Moccasin Trail and stay hidden until your time comes up and then we'll get word to you to come into Rapid. Then, we can go down and you can turn yourself in and then get you right out." So that's why everybody was--

Castle:

So, you were wanted until it came the time that they had the money to bail you out. You turn yourself in, you get bailed out and then you'd stand trial {____?}.

Traversie:

And, who are you--

Thunder Hawk:

It wasn't the legal community that made that decision. It was us. Because we just didn't have the money. And all our people sitting in jail.

Traversie:

At that time, you were carrying that bunch of money, \$2000.00 or something. And you remember, we—where did we meet you? At a cross-section east of Cheyenne River or—do you remember that? You came from out West, where did you come from?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, that's when we were on the run. And remember outside where the Four Mile is.

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah. The Four Mile.

Thunder Hawk:

The Four Mile Junction.

Traversie:

And then what, you gave that money to somebody else?

Thunder Hawk:

No. Then, remember, you took us North? You took us North to one of those little, way past Timberlake that way? And then someone met us there and we went on to Fort Yates. But I don't remember who it was. All I remember is being on the run. I don't remember exactly.

Traversie:

I know Melvin got that ride, Melvin. You see, I didn't even know, you know. Well, at the time, I knew who we were going to meet but--

Thunder Hawk:

When people picked you up, you didn't ask who they were.

Traversie:

Yeah, you didn't ask, they just took you, you know?

Thunder Hawk:

You just got in and {closed your mouth?} and tried to sleep.

Traversie:

[talking over each other] Like, "In several hours, I'll be there and I'll pick you up and we'll head North," You know, like that. Because you never knew when the FBI—you couldn't trust people. You never knew when the FBI would nab you. You know how they can get information out of you, finally.

Castle:

So you'd pick up these guys.

Traversie:

Gee! One time my brother Buddy was down in the Southwest someplace, I don't remember where exactly. Remember? The police nabbed him and remember, they put strong lights on him he wouldn't talk. And here finally, they took him off in the room, they took him and they put him in a room by himself and they just turned lights on him. Just so hot that he had to come—I guess they got something out of him but he didn't tell all.

3-00:49:59

It wasn't connected with the movement, what he knew, this was something else. Buddy said, "Oh! The FBI, they've really got some tactics that you wouldn't believe." Oh, he said, that light, that light they put on him, he wouldn't talk. They put that light on him, he said it was so darn hot that he said he had to talk, had to tell them something. And they knew he knew. He couldn't lie to them. But see they had to have proof. They had to have a statement. That was a terrible experience he had. But it wasn't anything to do with the movement.

Castle:

How did you come to work at the WKLDO/C office?

Traversie:

Well, how did that come about, Donna? Did they just—I was in charge of that office, wasn't I? I was the first one--

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah. I heard Russ--

Traversie:

Oh! Russ came and got me.

Castle:

Russell Means.

Traversie:

Yeah, Russell Means, he's my nephew. That's my sister's son. He came and got me and he put me into that office. It was just a cottage, a home.

Castle:

Where is this?

Traversie:

In Rapid City, along the river. It was just a home. You wouldn't suspect. It was just a little old white house, remember that?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, by Rapid Creek.

Traversie:

Yeah, Rapid Creek. So, he just put me in there and put the phone in. And the FBI came, at first they tried to make it sound like they were traveling. They came there and they said they were *traveling* and they heard that the AIM office was there and that we'd be given a place to stay over night, that they didn't have any place to go, but we knew! [laughing] They were FBI, yeah.

Castle:

Trying to stay overnight at the—[laughs]

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh. I remember the phone rang and here this woman just jumped up and went to that phone. That's what gave away. Well, we knew, we knew who they were. But she jumped up, the phone, and here it was somebody who wanted to know where to send money to Russell Means. They were going to send money, it was from the West Coast. Somebody called and here she said, "No! Don't you send Russell Means any money here!" Boy, I jumped up and I grabbed her. When she was coming back from the phone, I grabbed her and I said, "Don't you--!" I don't remember what I said. "What do you mean turning money away from Russell Means? [claps hands] Boy, you could tell that they were FBI. Boy, that man jumped up, boy, and they just got out of there as fast as they could. Because they thought, you know—before I had a chance to tell anybody. But see, they came! They wanted to work in our office. "We want to help."

Castle:

Volunteer.

Traversie:

Volunteer. They'd answer the phone. But suspicioned them. So, boy, when she said that on the phone, I just went up and I—she wasn't supposed to—the phone was on this wall over here and the desk was over there and I was sitting over there in the chair. And she wasn't supposed to answer that phone. Boy, she gave herself away. She jumped up and answered that phone, said, "No, don't send Russell Means any money here!" And boy, her husband grabbed her, they left all their clothing and everything.

Castle:

That's how much of a hurry they were in.

Traversie:

Yeah, they got out of there fast. And all that time, they had an F—well, we knew this, but the FBI had corner stores up and down in Rapid City, so they beat it to headquarters and they got ‘em out of town as fast as they could.

NEW TRANSCRIBER:

Transcriber: Brittney Shepherd
[Begin Traversie, Tape Three.wav]
3-00:00:00

Castle:

...About your nephew asking you to come and run the WKLDO/C office. Do you remember why he asked you. Obviously you have been doing work for the movement for a while, were you there to try and help relations? Was there a particular reason that he asked you to come work the office?

Traversie:

Well I just had to run the office and meet people who were coming in. You see, people that were coming into Rapid City and we had to know them. Whether they were outsiders or strangers, we had to find out everything about them. But that wasn't in my hands. We had an organization just like the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation].

We had to be real careful. We had to immediately get on them and find out who they were—where they came from.

Castle:

So he needed family or someone he could trust in that position. Obviously with you in that position, he is going to trust your judgment.

Traversie:

Uh-huh.

Castle:

What was the office set up for? What does WKLDO/C stand for?

Traversie:

Wounded Knee—What was it Donna?

Thunder Hawk:

Wounded Knee Legal Defense Offense Committee

Castle:

And you were to help with the trials after Wounded Knee?

Traversie:

Yeah.

Castle:

Was there another office in Rapid City? Was that it for AIM? [American Indian Movement]

Traversie:

Well, up on the hill. Up on Star Village.

Thunder Hawk:

Well, it moved around a lot.

Traversie:

Yeah, but what were they called now? We referred things to them, do you remember? I mean, we worked with them. Up on Star Village, that's where all the lawyers were.

Thunder Hawk:

This is early on, you see. The legal people were all up in Star Village. That's where they kept their files and all. And then down in that house that she's talking about, it was kind of like the—

Traversie:

--Receiving station.

Thunder Hawk:

--for receiving, yeah.

Castle:

Okay.

Traversie:

You see, if anybody came into Rapid [City] looking for the AIM office, they came to us. They didn't go up to Star Village where the lawyers were.

Castle:

So you kind of vetted or determined whether they got to—

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah. We screened them out down there.

Castle:

That's the word for it.

Traversie:

There were legal people there in the office, but if they happened to be out, we knew how to reach them by phone. We had a pretty good set up in Rapid City. And the FBI never really got to us.

Castle:

Tell me some about the—

Traversie:

One time I remember this purse thing. The FBI raided us one time, huh?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, they surrounded the whole place 'cause they were looking for someone who stole or shoplifted a pair of boots or something—some trivial reason.

Castle:

An excuse to search you.

Traversie:

And they just surrounded the whole place. I left my purse on my desk when they came in, but I didn't have anything in there. They came in and they took us all outside. (laughs) Leave it to the Indian people cause word got out quick that the FBI had raided us. Instead of trying to stay out of trouble, they were crawling between the legs of the FBI men. They circled us and of course were standing like this. They were crawling between their legs to get inside with the rest of us. (chuckles)

Castle:

(laughs)

Traversie:

So there was twice or three times as many people. But boy that was funny. Instead of trying to *flee*, or get away from it, everybody was coming and crawling between the legs of the FBI to get inside. That was funny!

Castle:

Bet they didn't expect that.

Traversie:

But nothing came of that. Did it Donna? Nothing came of that.

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah, they just finally pulled out because too many people came. The press was there. The ring of agents found out that there was a ring of Indians around them, so they just gave it up.

Traversie:

They just gave it up. People that weren't even AIM people came in to support us and crawl thru the legs of the FBI; they weren't even AIM members. They were just people in Rapid City supporting us.

They were out numbered so they left.

Castle:

So you screened folks and you answered the phone and liaised with lawyers and other AIM people. Can you give me a sense of other things you did during the day that you can remember? Is that most of what you did?

Traversie:

Oh yeah. That's all we did. We barely took time out to eat.

Castle:

It was just constant—

Traversie:

It was just constant. The phones were just ringing *all* the time. They were just busy.

Castle:

What did people want? You gave me the example of people wanting to donate money. What kinds of things did people ask for or say on the phones?

Traversie:

Oh, they wanted information. But you see we had to be careful of those phone calls for the information we were giving out. You see?

Castle:

Oh, that's right.

Traversie:

We couldn't give out information to just anyone. If we didn't know who was calling, we just referred 'em to a lawyer or whatever the situation called for. But no, we couldn't give information out on the phones.

Castle:

So you really had to know your stuff. You not only had to know the information, but you also had to know *who* got that information. Then you had to judge the phone call.

Traversie:

Yeah, yeah. We knew who our—well, that's what the lawyer's office usually do. They got in contact with the lawyers. But if it was someone not knowing what to do, like for example if it was someone calling and saying, "Where can I send money to Russell Means?" then we never—

Castle:

--got the money.

Traversie:

No, no. We got the money through other sources. But there was nothing I could do about that call.

Castle:

Right.

Traversie:

Boy, I jumped out of that chair. She shocked me. She was with the FBI. Her husband or her co-worker, boy they got out of there fast. You never seen someone move so fast. They went, clothes and everything. They grabbed what they could and they got out of there.

Castle:

(laughs) Did the press call also to your office?

Traversie:

Yeah. But there was always one lawyer around so I didn't have to worry about things like that 'cause the lawyer took care of it.

Castle:

How many of you were there? You keep saying 'we', so were there a handful of people that you were working with?

Traversie:

Well, one lawyer and me and what was his name? Remember that little Indian guy I worked with all the time? That little short guy, what was his name?

Thunder Hawk:

I don't know Ma.

Traversie:

Ah, what was his name! The little short guy, he was funny. He was a full blood Indian and he kinda—

Thunder Hawk:

Oh, I remember! They called him Shorty. Remember they called him Shorty?

Castle:

(laughs)

Traversie:

Yeah, but what was his name? His mother was involved in AIM too. Remember she lived in Old Crick?

Thunder Hawk:

Yankee?

Traversie:

Yankee! Yankee Bad Hand!

Castle:

Or Shorty?

Thunder Hawk:

No, I was thinking of someone else.

Traversie:

{Yankkama—Yank-ka-ma Bad Hand}.

Boy he stuck with us. He never left that office. He and I never left. I went into that house and Yankee and I never left that house. Never. I remember one time I left the house; maybe I had to go to the doctor. Anyway, I left there just once. I went to town just once that I can remember. I never ever left that house. I slept on the floor and made my bed on the floor.

They'd bring guys in at night. They brought them in there at night and it was all we could do was make beds on the floor 'cause we couldn't have everybody around. This old Indian lady owned that house and she let us use it for AIM purposes. We had to put them on the floor. Sometimes, they'd just get to sleep and then another car would come along to pick 'em up and take 'em. They were fleeing the FBI.

3-00:10:20

Castle:

Yeah. Did the woman live in the house; the woman who owned it?

Traversie:

No, no. She didn't live there.

Castle:

But you slept on the floor every night?

Traversie:

Un-huh.

Castle:

Wow. I mean, it's a big deal—

Traversie:

I remember one time there I had a single bed. We didn't have room for furniture. If you had beds, you didn't have room for everybody cause only so many people could sleep in the bed, you know. We needed the floor space. It wasn't that we didn't have people who donated beds.

But we had a single bed until finally we had to take it out because that room was getting awfully crowded. But we could have had it; they donated anything we needed. Food and money and telephone—everything.

Castle:

Just supporters?

Traversie:

Yeah, uh-huh, supporters. Community people. And some people we didn't even know. We didn't even know who we were getting support from, but they couldn't get involved with the FBI. We couldn't answer any questions, you know.

Like sometimes, we just got money. A lot of people helped us. Mostly from the West Coast—California people helped us.

Castle:

I see.

Traversie:

And we had people coming out from California too. We had a lot of volunteers.

Castle:

How did people get along?

Traversie:

(pauses) They got along good.

Castle:

It's just that there's a lot of different styles. You know, California folks coming out to South Dakota. But they got along pretty well. Okay.

Traversie:

But we had to be *very* careful with who we trusted and who we took in. (pauses)

Castle:

Do you remember how long you worked there? Were you there for a while?

Traversie:

Oh gosh! Quite awhile, huh Donna?

Thunder Hawk:

Yeah. Even till after Wounded Knee was over. And then, I remember they sent you off somewhere too. There was some conference in Sweden or some place?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. That's when I went to Europe. That's when I went to the Scandinavian countries.

Castle:

What was that for?

Traversie:

That was just to meet supportive groups.

Gee, I remember when I got into Amsterdam and nobody met me. Somebody was supposed to meet me. Nobody really wanted to go, that's why I went. Nobody wanted to take on that task. I was going alone, going to Europe.

So, I went alone. I had plenty of money. They had supplied me with money. I went to Amsterdam and I picked up cash there, Sweden also.

Castle:

These were Native American support groups?

Traversie:

Support groups, yeah.

Castle:

All over Scandinavia, huh?

Traversie:

Yeah. We had a lot of support.

Castle:

So you were kinda like an ambassador in a way? They wanted to hear about what was going on. Would you address groups?

Traversie:

Yeah, I would address groups, big groups of people.

But darn, I had a bad habit! I'd get to talk about something and then right then, tears would come. I'd cry. That interfered with my speaking. When I would get into it, I would feel like crying. I'd get so mad at that! Geez! So chicken-hearted.

Thunderhawk:

(chuckles)

Castle:

Yeah.

Traversie:

Those were the days. AIM, you know, continued on along time after the movement. But slowly, it dwindled out. But of course we still have AIM in Denver. There's an AIM office in Denver and an AIM office in Minneapolis. But they just come to them for—

Thunderhawk:

--local stuff.

Traversie:

Yeah, but it's not big movement. It's not as active as it was.

Castle:

I can tell you are really thinking about it. What would you say, in your life experience, has been the legacy of the impact of the movement? Especially those days when you can't even make it through a speech without feeling that heart pain.

Traversie:

(pauses) Well, I think—and don't you think so too, Donna—that there was a change with the government?

Thunderhawk:

We're sitting in one of the changes.

Traversie:

Yeah. (pauses) I think it really affected the U.S. government, or the Indian Bureau. They had to make a lot of changes. I think it had an impact on the reservations.

Castle:

How did it affect Indian people?

Traversie:

Well, I think in their rights, in their Indian rights. Education wise.

Like for instance, this reservation, the Yankton reservation, education didn't even matter. It was just about getting money to thrive on, to survive on. There was just no interest in educating our people and I think that it had something to do with it.

I think it encouraged Indian pride. And it did affect the Indian services in the government.

Thunder Hawk:

Pride and identity.

Traversie:

Yeah, I think it really brought our Indian people out. It probably gave them a lot more to think about.

(pause in tape)

Traversie:

I had a needle and thread and I was sewing his jacket while he was walking. He was so busy! I just followed him with my needle and thread. (laughter between women) Everyone talked about when I sewed up—

Castle:

--William Kunstler as he's walking into court.

Traversie:

So there was Faith with a needle and thread, sewing him up. Geez, when I think back to those to days! Kunstler, oh I felt bad when he died.

Castle:

He was a good guy?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. Boy...he was a smart man. He was from New York.

3-00:20:00

Castle:

What other lawyers did you work with?

Traversie:

Gee, I have kind of forgotten their names, but he stands out. And of course, in Minneapolis, our lawyers there. What's his name?

Castle:

Ken Tilsen?

Traversie:

Ken Tilsen, yeah.

Castle:

Were there any women lawyers that worked?

Traversie:

Oh, yeah. A lot of women lawyers. God! Even those women lawyers sleeping on the floor! Some guy came in late at night, so I sent him in there. What was her name—she had long blond hair. Well, anyway, she was laying in one of the offices with another woman. The desk was here and I think they were somewhere over there. I said, "Go in there and sleep—I think I sent two men in. Just find a place on the floor to sleep." The next morning, they woke up and those women were surrounded by men. I forgot that there were women in there!

Castle:

Yeah, go and find yourself a nice place to sleep!

Traversie:

Yeah! So they woke up surrounded by men! (laughter between women) God, I used to know her name.

Castle:

There were two women that I remember, but I don't know if they were the same women. Axelrod, Beverly Axelrod and Fran Olsen. I saw pictures of them at Wounded Knee, but there were other ones that came and volunteered their time too?

Traversie:

Yeah.

Castle:

But, that was a good story about Kunstler. Look at you—

3-00:22:01

[End of interview]