Interview with William Boda

05/21/1999

IN: When did you graduate from Northern?

WB: I graduated in about 1977.

IN: What was your degree in?

WB: I graduated with a major in special education and a minor in psychology.

IN: Did you come here then?

WB: No, actually I didn't. I graduated and I went home and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at that time, so I actually took up a minimum wage job working at a gas station just get some money and ponder what I wanted to do with my next thing. I ended up taking a psychology class at a community college in Petoskey. Between that and the gas station that pretty much occupied my time up until the spring. In the past years I had been working for the Department of Natural Resources as a park ranger, each summer as I was going to college. I was called back again in May to work for them. Up until that point I worked at the gas station and took classes. I worked for them throughout the summer. It carried off into… they had me take trainings for them to be able to write tickets, have a badge, and that stuff to operate on the back capacity. That also progressed to me working for the Fisheries Department on fishing weirs. We were taking the salmon out of the trout stream. They were taking out the trout and changing the ecological system of the stream so… My job was to make sure that nobody tore up the weir. I was more or less a security guard at that point for the weir, myself and a few others. I did that until probably December. Then I decided… well I'd saved enough money… I'd take a trip. Then I went to Florida for a couple months. At that time I was called a couple times a month by the Hannahville School. I had a friend that was working here in social services. He graduated from Northern the year before me. He told them that I was a Native American, I was a teacher, and they were interested in that. But at that time I didn't feel like I wanted… Florida in the winter time… eventually there was another class that was a job opening and that kind of peaked my interest. So I travelled back, applied for the position, and was hired. That happened February 12th, 1979.

IN: What was your fist position?

WB: I was a teacher. I was teaching third, fourth, and fifth grade. We were housed in a small building the shape of an octagon. There were teachers who were in multiple classrooms. One teacher was teaching first and second grade, I had third, fourth, and fifth grade. Another teacher had sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and we also had a teacher teaching kindergarten. She was outside in a trailer. Those were pretty lean times, because at the time they were really limited as to… we were left to our own resources actually. We only had a math series and a reading series to work with. Science and social studies came by whatever we could take off and put together, because we offered science and social studies.

IN: You had just a math series and a…?

WB: We had a math series and a reading series.

IN: Why would that be that it would just be those two?

WB: That's all the school had at the time. That was basically because of money.

IN: This school was pretty new then? The school started in '75?

WB: '75, yeah.

IN: And the tribe started the school on their own?

WB: Yes they did.

IN: So there was no outside funding?

WB: Not from… well they initially started… they eventually received funding through a grant. I can't remember the name of that one off the top of my head. I'm sure somebody remembers better than I do, but that's how they initially started. The influence of a couple community members, McCullough and Eichorn, influenced the coming of the school system.

IN: Can you spell those names for me?

WB: McCullough, M-C-C-U-L-L-O-U-G-H. And Sally's name when she first started… when she passed away it was Eichorn, E-I-C-H-O-R-N.

IN: So this tribe was very dynamic? That's a big undertaking without any external support.

WB: Oh yeah, sure. Like a lot of the things that do get done… it's usually the women that push those things through, whether it's behind the scenes or up front. There were really strong women and they were able to get that accomplished as a result of their strength to carry this out and follow through.

IN: How did you know when you were at Northern that you wanted to be a teacher?

WB: I think it was… actually I didn't know when I first started, because I wasn't sure what major to take. At the urging of a teacher that I went to high school with… he just told me, "Try special ed., you'll be good at it." And I liked working with the kids. I was in a teacher program and I worked mostly with the p.e. teacher, and I worked with kids with who were in the first five grades. So at that time I kind of wanted to keep on working with kids. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed it even more while I was at Northern, because they put them into practical programs where we could further our knowledge by working with students. At that time I was put with special ed. students a lot of the times, because that was my focus. We were learning programs, testing programs, they'd have us learn things in order to work with the students better.

IN: So what did you bring them from Northern's education program?

WB: Well, I mentioned the fact that we only had two series. I think I brought a lot of what they taught me in how to be innovative. Back then we were limited in what we had. We didn't have any art programs or p.e. programs. Actually, the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teacher taught p.e., and we had to have our own art program. I had to figure out how to provide them with science and social studies, so I think that's what Northern actually gave me, was how to develop some of those things from scratch. Once we were able to collaborate… and have more money… we were able to come up with a curriculum that was more within an acceptable state guidelines, where were at right now. That's one of

the main things that Northern gave me. I had a pretty good… A lot of the stuff was just they gave you ideas… but figuring it out in the field… I think it helped me to work some of these things out and come up with ideas. It taught you to fend on your own. We were from a situation where a lot of people aren't put into that type of situation where they have to develop things on their own. It also helped that a lot of the people I did work with were Northern graduates.

IN: A lot of the people here?

WB: Mhmm, a high percentage of our people that work here are Native American.

IN: That was one of the things I was going to ask you. What do you think, 80 percent or something?

WB: I would venture that that's pretty close.

IN: How did you decide to go to Northern? You're from Traverse City?

WB: No I'm from Pellston. P-E-L-L-S-T-O-N. My friends in high school, we didn't talk about… actually I had friends going to U of M, but some friends of mine thought to go to Northern. It was a smaller school, you could be outside in the woods, and you were not in the city. So we had all kind of agreed together that we'd go to Northern. As it came time to go to school two of us ended up going out of the four of us. One guy didn't go at all and the other guy moved away to live in LA. I was the only one that actually finished out. The other guy that did make it to Northern dropped out after a year, decided that wasn't for him, and moved on to other things.

IN: Remind me again where Pellston is.

WB: Pellston is about 18 miles south of the Mackinaw Bridge.

IN: Did you always plan on going to college?

WB: Oh yes. I had a pretty good background. My mother had gone to college. She was a RN, and she pretty much took care of that on her own. She had some people that were able to guide her, but my mother was pretty self-sufficient and was able to work her way through school. My mom is pretty much my hero, because she raised nine kids by herself after my father passed away when I was 12-years-old. I guess that's where I get my ability to [inaudible: trailing off]. She raised nine kids by herself. She gave up her nursing so she could be with us all the time. That was something very big of her, and something that shows a lot of selflessness on her part.

IN: What number are you in the family?

WB: I'm the oldest.

IN: So you're second generation college?

WB: As I was working on this I realized I'm the first generation of my family to go to college obviously, but then I'm the first generation to go to town for elementary school instead of a one room schoolhouse.

WB: Oh.

IN: Isn't that funny? What about your students? Are a lot of your students first generation college?

WB: My students will be. Really our numbers of college students are really low. That's something we're hoping to change. Now we're focused on how to get students into more vocational types of training. A lot of our kids being really not willing to go through a career in college, but still have a lot of other skills that will allow them to take care of themselves in their adult life and provide something for the community. Between us and them it's just putting them in the right direction, giving them something to do, something that would benefit them.

IN: So you see all of your students as gifted?

WB: Oh yes. I see that because it's what I've been taught while I've been here also. I've learned a lot about myself after coming to Hannahville, attending ceremonies, and talking to more traditional people about the Native American way of life. It's their feeling that everybody is put on this earth for a reason, everybody has a purpose, and it's up to everyone to figure out what that reason is. It should be your life's goal to figure out that reason and to use that to share with everyone around you. I feel like everyone should get to share.

IN: I think that's a wonderful philosophy. Instead of looking at… you know… five percent of the students in this class are getting…

WB: Sure, that's what I think. I'm not focused on the fact that all these kids are going to go to college, but these kids do have other areas that they excel in. We've got kids who are now working in their vocational programs and are now on the fringe of moving up. As were getting those kids involved… we've got a case where we've got a small company in Hermansville that does a lot of welding for Caterpillar, and John Deere tractors and so on. Kids have been welding just as well as some of those gentlemen who have been doing it for ten years, better in some cases. Like I said, all these kids have certain skills about them, and a lot of them have hands-on types of skills. So I think that we can identify those skills and make those kids excel in those.

IN: How is your curriculum different than the public school?

WB: I think our curriculum is pretty much the same, because we're at the point of being a public school. That and we have to follow the state guidelines and the state standards. It's different in the respect that we have culture classes which are not offered in public school systems. We have culture and language classes. I think that's probably what's different. Something else that's different about our classes is we have the luxury of having small classes, unlike a lot of other types of school systems. They might be anywhere from five students up to 16 or 18 students. It's a good ratio to work with. I think the other thing that we have curriculum wise is our technology. We have a technology base with computers right now that these students are introduced to where… a lot of these students are probably better than a lot of adults at this point.

IN: They learn so much faster.

WB: They're like sponges. They just absorb that and they're so quick. That's the time to learn right now. A lot of the older people right now... when you think about computers you think about a machine built around a room of this size. Whereas now they're so mini, and compact, and so sophisticated. It's just interesting how things have progressed over the years. But we've got an elementary computer lab and a high school computer lab, which I think is a luxury compared to other schools which may be lucky to have one computer lab as it is. I think that's another major plus for us, introducing these kids to that

type of technology training. We're in the process of working towards… there's a group of our kids that are going to New York to work with a museum project and the developing of virtual reality type demonstrations for art work and such. I think it's just amazing where we've come starting off with just a math series and a reading series to the point where we're at the cutting edge of a lot of things. We just had a superintendent meeting here not too long ago where I took the superintendent through a tour of the building and they were pretty amazed at what we've introduced here. Something else that I think is different from other schools is we're pretty much serving students from zero to elders at this point. We have a family childcare center in which the adults come and take their classes during the day and their kids are taken care of the daycare center. A lot of problems are occurring between kids and parents and we're trying to overcome that by offering that to them. We also have traditional adult ed. programs here. But I think the childcare center also helps some of our other students, young kids that are teenage parents, they have some place where their kids are able to go and are taken care of so that they can take classes and fulfill their responsibilities for high school requirements.

IN: What is the program called, Keepers of the Future?

WB: Yes, that's just a super program.

IN: At Northern in the Center for Native American Studies, they want eventually to have a language institute, but right now the Ojibwa that's taught is at the elementary level. Is Potawatomi taught a lot?

WB: Well actually, up until the last couple of years we were also receiving training in Ojibwa language. It wasn't until the last couple of years that we were able to acquire a gentleman who is very, very educated in not only Potawatomi, but he has other skills and other languages. He's a very remarkable man. But he's been teaching Potawatomi to students and now with the information technology we also have it available on tapes so a lot of our students with learning problems… it's easier for them to… if they have reading problems… it's easier for them to follow along and learn the language by having these tapes available to them. There's also videos that we have that have been made with the language on it. I think we're working towards total education as much as possible. We'd like to have the language retained. I'm looking forward to the day that graduate from this school that are proficient in the language. That's kind of my goal for these kids. In a lot of respects it's harder for the older people, including myself [laughs], to learn this language. You get stuck in your ways and your ways of learning and how you absorb certain types of knowledge. But these kids are like sponges. You just give them stuff like this and they soak it right in. We're trying to find anything possible that we can to continue the hope of them learning this language now.

IN: So it's just been the last couple of years that you've been teaching Potawatomi?

WB: That's correct.

IN: Is your language instructor from this area?

WB: No he's not. He's originally from the Kansas area. He's also been around Wisconsin. I believe he's originally from Wisconsin, but he's been down in Kansas with the Potawatomi tribe down there.

IN: What kind of culture classes do you have? I assume they start right at the elementary level?

WB: Sure. Actually, we have a couple classes even for the preschool program. A lot of it has to do with working with [inaudible]. Some of it focuses on a lot of the craftwork. [Inaudible]. We also talk about

having our ceremonies and have discussions explaining why these ceremonies occurred and when they occurred. It's giving them even… we're giving them a history as they get older of the tribe. We try to get people in from the tribe, the elders, to talk to them. Some of the elders have been in for a couple of classes because everything is kept orally. There isn't a lot of written documentation about the tribe here. This tribe here isn't originating from this area. These people from what I understand came here from people that had jumped a train during the trail of tears. Originally they were living off at the mouth of the river on Lake Michigan, the Cedar River. This land came as a gift from Methodist minister and they named this site after his wife Hannah. I think it's very miraculous all the steps this tribe has had. Before I came here and after I've been here since '79 they've made remarkable gains. Some of it is due of course to the casino, which has helped make them financially secure. A lot of it has changed though because of the people themselves and what they want for their kids. The tribe here is very much for their kids. They really think that this is a great place, school. I think that's just a general parent thing. You always want your kids to have better than what you had, or be able to do more than what you were able to do. They're still fostering that also. They did a lot of things probably, but a lot of the parents don't have all the money and availability.

IN: What year did the casino go up?

WB: Good question [laughs]. I don't know exactly. It would have to be probably in the '80s.

IN: So the school was already established?

WB: Oh yeah, the school was. We received federal funding through the BIA for the school.

IN: You're an Indian school, which means you still get some funding from the BIA?

WB: Oh yes. We are funded right now through the federal government, the BIA, and through the state right now.

IN: The school's name was changed in '96?

WB: Well, it was pretty close to that. It was probably '95 actually. April of '95 is when we actually received our charter.

IN: What does that mean to become a charter school?

WB: Well, not so much for us, but I think a lot of schools are fearful of losing schools. We haven't have a lot of animosity really. I think a lot the public school systems fear that we're maybe in contest with other schools that are losing staff, but not you [laughs]. I think they fear for them taking some of their students away, but that hasn't really occurred. To be a charter school though it just makes it more accepted. Now we're becoming more of a state system which has made us more acceptable in their eyes, even though a lot of the things that we we're doing, as I mentioned before, is actually put us on the cutting edge ahead of them. The additional funding has allowed us to make that progress.

IN: So do you get funding from the state too?

WB: Oh yes. We get state funding according to our school population, just like all the other public school systems.

IN: What is your student population?

WB: Presently, if you're talking about just K-12, we're looking at about 135 students. If you're looking at our adult ed program and our other programs it's close to 160 students at least.

IN: Would it be safe to say that this is one of the premier native schools of the state?

WB: I would say so. I would say it's one of the first schools in the state.

IN: Sault Ste. Marie is the only one that has a… theirs is K-8?

WB: Mhmm.

IN: So you would be the only K-12 in the Upper Peninsula? Is there one downstate?

WB: At one time I thought there was in Mount Pleasant. They may have a school down there. But other than that I'm not familiar with too many other schools. Besides the one in Sault Ste. Marie, that's the only other charter school that I know of.

IN: So they're a charter school up there too?

WB: Oh yes.

IN: [Inaudible]?

WB: I think a lot of things are changing with reference to education where a lot of schools are developing at this point. Unfortunately a lot of the other schools are still operating on only federal funds and don't have the luxury of having the state funding also. There are charter schools that are being developed on lands in other…

IN: That are Native schools?

WB: Mhmm. They have been bringing much of the charter schools out in recent years. If they're lucky enough to have a tribe that has monetary means… but you know, we are one of the premier schools as far as that goes. The stuff that we are teaching, a lot of schools don't have that. The technology that we have… we also have ITB classes that we've started within the last two years. Matter of fact, last year we sent an ITB class out into the intermediate school district… we had a Native American literature class that we offered last year. Last year we also had some students taking a class from Rapid River that was a learning class.

IN: What is ITB?

WB: It's interactive television where one side would be a receiving side and one side would be a transmitting side. For instance, we were transmitting our class out to whatever schools wanted to take that class at a particular time. We're part of the intermediate school district which has also helped make us more acceptable in the public systems eyes, because now they're more aware of what we're doing and vice versa. There's more of a cooperative effort between schools. We're all in the same business; we're all trying to educate the kids. I think that we have an idea that we're all in this together no matter who has what students. In some cases we do get some students from other schools that have transferred here or vice versa. We do have certain things that other schools don't have. In my mind we have one of the most premier special education programs built in the UP, which also makes us open for a higher population of special ed. students. We attend to special ed. students. All of our students are

tested to see if they are eligible for our special education program. We have a really excellent special ed. staff. Our coordinator is really on top of things.

IN: What's unique about your special education program?

WB: I think the way that they work with the kids. They're helping the kids so that they are solving their own problems. They're showing them how to develop skills and work with things, how to deal with issues. I think that's probably one of the bigger things I see with what our special ed. programs… our kids aren't in there full-time, they're in other classes depending on when they can get them. A lot of times they might start out full-time in a special ed. room and then retire from it little by little as they're able to work within the classroom. I'd say that's important. They're not going to be in a protective system all their life and we have to introduce them to how to work in society and work with other people. I think that's what we're offering them right now, those type of skills.

IN: Most parents would kill to have their kids in classrooms with only 6-15 students. There's a lot of public schools that have 30 kids to a classroom. I know sitting in the fifth grade with 30 students it makes me exhausted to see the teacher trying to teach to all those 30 different levels. I feel like it would also be a psychic disadvantage to grow up in a school as a native person in a school and be the only person.

WB: Well, I grew up in the same kind of system. Fortunately, I had a strong mother who made us believe we could do anything we wanted to; we just had to work at it. So yeah, I wanted to prove I could be just as good, if not better, than those around me. It also helped that I had an educated mother that bought us books. We had TV but it was mostly black and white, and you were lucky if you had two channels to pick from [laughs]. A lot of things you did didn't involve Nintendo, and computers, and other types of possible distractions. She was… you know… our education made us able to excel in school. Of course you always grow up with the idea… at least I had… you know… being a little unsure of yourself and being your own person. You'll have a lot of sharing between persons that are like you and if you wanted to be independent you'll have problems. There were other students that went to schools that didn't have the strength behind them like my mother gave me. That probably helped a lot, being helped out.

IN: Because this would be quite a different experience for the students who are here than the public school experience that you had.

WB: Oh yeah.

IN: If they don't have the support from home they have it when they get here.

WB: Well, that's any student. If you don't have the support at home… it depends on the kid too. A lot of times some kids will excel on their own because they're independent, but the support is a big, big thing for kids to do well. Whether the parent has to push the kid because they're not making enough effort, or just the fact that they can let them know when they're doing well so that they can appreciate… well both the parent and the student can appreciate things done well will make them want to do more. A lot of times students don't get that little bit of a stroke or a little bit of praise to let your self-esteem develop. If you're given encouragement it will make you want to push yourself more. That's important too. I think most of those kids who are higher excelling students are the ones that get a lot of parent support. Parents that buy them books, or attend their athletic events, or whether they're in other

programs like our spelling bees or our quiz bowls, the parents that come to these programs. Usually kids you see winning all of these awards are because they have that parental backing.

IN: But at this school you notice that a lot of kids have that support at home.

WB: I see it happening more and more. I think what's bringing that on is a lot of parents didn't have a lot of confidence in themselves because their experiences at schools weren't that great. So they're a little… afraid is not the word… not self-confident enough to come to the school and tell them what they wanted for their kids. Whereas all the parents we're having now… younger parents who that have through this school, have ideas of what they want for their kids, I think that's helping our kids right now. I see that percentage getting higher right now. Whereas it was lower before because we were just the teachers and we should know what to do. But that's an incomplete thought because it takes more than just the teacher. It's got to be the effort of the teacher, the parents, and the community at large that will make the final product. That old adage that it takes a village to raise a child is very true.

IN: Do you have children?

WB: Yes, I do. I have six.

IN: Is that a small family compared to what you grew up in? Six instead of nine.

WB: Oh, it doesn't seem like it. I lost one of my boys. He drown in a swimming accident. But my oldest boy now made me a grandfather with two granddaughters. I have three sons graduating from high school and I have a 12-year-old. We also have two foster kids. My wife and I acquired a foster care license in September and we've had a young boy and a young girl right now. We're in the process of adopting them right now.

IN: They don't go to school here? They go to school in Escanaba?

WB: No they don't go here. The younger one is in a daycare program right now.

IN: Oh, you have little ones?

WB: Oh yes, a one and a two-year-old.

IN: Oh.

WB: Which is a new experience after not having any kids since having my 12-year-old. So it's a lot of relearning.

IN: Yeah, my daughter is two-and-a-half. People said, "Oh, I can't remember how to change a diaper anymore." And I'm thinking, your children are only four, how can that be? But you forget as soon as you're done doing it.

WB: I think everybody gets set in a certain pattern. You wouldn't think so, but it's like anything else, it comes back to you. It's like riding a bicycle. You're a little wobbly at first, but it comes back as you practice it.

IN: I read a report about suicide rates and self-esteem among Native children. I would think that your program would naturally build self-esteem because I remember when I went to high school we were taught things like… we were close to the Saginaw Chippewa Reservation, the Massacre at Wounded

Knee was referred to as the Battle at Wounded Knee. There was no battle; that's a massacre. But everything was upside down, and I'm assuming that you had those same kind of history books. Here you wouldn't have that experience, besides you would also have the cultural programs.

WB: I agree with you. It made it hard for the Indians a long time ago when I was growing up. There wasn't really a lot of role models to identify with. You'd watch your television programs and we were the bad people. John Wayne was always pounding on some Indian. He was a great Indian fighter, and a lot of people you were watching in this weren't even Indian to begin with. A lot of gains are being made in that Indian artists and actors are finally being recognized in films. A lot of films are being more historically correct. I think a lot of kids nowadays self-esteem levels are going up. Our special ed. programs, are counseling programs, unlike a lot of schools… drugs, alcohol, sexual diseases that these kids are hearing about. A lot of these go hand-in-hand in developing somebodies self-image about themselves. A lot of these kids don't have the advantage… they're by themselves in another type of setting. Another issue is that the public schools system… our athletic program, being a small school, we're within a league with other small schools, Paradise, Grand Marais, Beaver Island, Mackinac Island. Recently we just introduced another school, Munising Baptist. But in order to fill the team our varsity team is comprised of 7-12th grade students. Depending on… sometimes seventh grade students are at a big disadvantage with students that are older than them and at a higher skill-level in some cases. It's a challenge for our students in some respect, but it's also good because on the other hand to have to keep playing at that level…

[SIDE A ENDS]

WB: For athletic programs we have soccer in the fall, which is coed. We have volleyball and basketball, the basketball team is coed. We're in the process of initiating a softball team, but at this point it's just intermural, we don't have the games during the weeks. We just have tournaments at two sites during two separate weekends and we play amongst the schools that are in the area.

IN: Do you have volleyball for both girls and boys?

WB: No, it's just girls. There's a Michigan High School Athletic Association requirement that would make us unable to do that.

IN: And you've been a coach?

WB: I started off as coaching… this was before we had entered into the league. We started offering volleyball and basketball to the students, and myself and the principle at that time… we'd go through Escanaba and we arranged times that those facilities in Escanaba could allow us to play volleyball and basketball. We ran drills with them and did a lot of the running and exercises, just to get them indoctrinated into what was required for such a program, but we never actually developed it to the point where we were competing against other schools.

IN: So when did you start competing with other schools?

WB: Oh, I'd say about four years ago.

IN: How long have you been here?

WB: I've been here since '79.

IN: Was there a brief period then when you…

WB: There was one year that I didn't work here, back in '88-'89 I worked in Washington DC.

IN: And you worked on Title…?

WB: At that time it was Title Four and it eventually changed to Title Five Programs. I believe it's Title Nine now in education.

IN: Title Nine was originally about…?

WB: Equal opportunities for women.

IN: Right, now that's called Title Nine, okay. It'd be easy if they just kept it the same.

WB: Title's change all the time. The title I was given was education specialist, and we worked with grantees that had received federal funds for offering Indian education programs within a school system. We worked with 26 states east of the Mississippi. I'd have to travel and give presentations throughout the year and offer help with their grants so that they were falling under the federal guidelines for their grants. That helped me a lot because it helped my writing. I was told when I was doing my written word that, "When you write like you talk, it isn't always proper." So I had somebody editing my work which also helped develop my writing skills. That was a good thing for me. It also introduced me to city life. I had never been in a major city for any period of time, and Washington DC was eye-opening in a lot of respects. I learned a lot in that year I was there. I liked a lot of things about Washington DC, but there were a lot of things that made me uncomfortable, which was why I came back to Hannahville again. I loved being a schoolboard grant where I had a year's leave of absence so I had that option just in case things didn't work out. I just had that option for a year. They were doing activities there that made me afraid for my sons, but the school systems were excellent out there. We lived in Virginia and Fairfax County is one of the top ten educational systems in the United States. They're educational system benefited my kids.

IN: What did you miss about Hannahville when you were away?

WB: Well, prior to the casino… a lot of the community used to do things during the holidays as a community. Especially during the summer months, Fourth of July, Memorial Day weekend, everybody would gather at a state park, Wells State Park. If it was warm enough they went swimming, we'd sit on the beach and watch the kids, we played softball together…

Unidentified Voice: I'm sorry, but can I get over here and grab this?

WB: Sure, I didn't realize it would take this long.

Unidentified Voice: It's okay.

WB: We played softball, horseshoes, or whatever and that's how we spent our day. Everybody would get together after eating and we'd go back to the reservation. I missed those kinds of things. Now with the advent of the casino and everything, everybody's being here and there. You don't see that anymore. It's my understanding they're considering making changes, but it hasn't happened yet. I guess it takes a while for those things to find a place. That's what I missed. I also missed a lot of the people that were here. I was in my second marriage, and there was a whole lot of people here from my first marriage, so…

it was different… being a little bit more isolated I think. What was good about it is that I ran into a lot of professional Native Americans, which were in abundance out there.

IN: In Washington DC?

WB: Oh yes, from varied backgrounds and regions throughout the United States. That was a really interesting thing.

IN: I've done research out there and really like it I just…

WB: Oh I like the mall, I liked going to all the Smithsonian had to offer. That was great, and that was free. I took my kids there on a Saturday, we'd just pack a lunch, and hop on the Metro. There was cheap transportation and safe transportation. It was excellent. There were community centers there and all types of offerings were free. If I was by myself I might have stuck it out.

IN: And that was Orbis that you went to?

WB: Yeah, Orbis.

IN: And what is that?

WB: That's Latin for "circle". O-R-B-I-S. Which… the symbol of the circle is sacred to the Native American people. That became a constant.

IN: What is the organization though? What does it do?

WB: Contract work for the Department of Education. That's who they were all working for at that time. They operated a group educational center, which was eventually disbanded because of financing. They were broken down at that time. The government broke them down and they are now affiliated with a group out of New York, which not only serves Native Americans, but it also Hispanic people and Black people.

IN: In the information… in your… it said you were an educational expert.

WB: Oh, I wouldn't say an expert. That was the title that I had as an educational specialist, but I wasn't an expert by any means. I thought I worked well with… what we were trying to when we did our presentations was to make Indian education programs less craft oriented and more educationally oriented. What we were trying to do was introduce educational ideals into the craft work. We were trying to introduce the math that was involved, or the science that was involved in it… or developing writing skills about these kinds of things, so that it's more of a large case for being promoted. I thought we were successful in doing that. It was kind of fun. I worked with a big group of people. A lot of the things that we developed we'd developed on our own.

IN: What have you learned from your students in being a teacher?

WB: In some cases I think I've learned to have a sense of humor with a lot of things that they do. I've learned in some cases it's acceptable… a lot of the problems were having… a lot of the resources… they are adults. I think that sometimes you've got to let it go, because they're trying to grow up so fast. It's much easier for them now than it was 20-30 years ago. They're able to do so much more sophisticated… they grow up faster. I see that also. I think that's some of the things they teach me. Not taking things so seriously all the time. You look at the way kids view things and a lot of the time they're actually very

serious about some things, but they take some things with a grain of salt too. You start to realize that not everything is as bad as it seems. They have different viewpoints on different things. That helps me to develop more of an understanding about myself through the kids. All these kids have different gifts and different skills, it's kind of neat to see that too.

IN: What's the mission of the school?

WB: I think our mission is pretty much the same as any other school. We develop young adults that are able to meet the demands of whatever is presented to them by society. These kids are important to the job realm and they have to be able to fend for themselves and be successful in whatever they want to do. What we're focusing on right now on doing that, and them going to college, or technical school, or any other type of job. I want them to be survivors. I want them to be somebody that's going to take over my job. My goal is to keep things going. I want to not set the sights so low. That's something that they should not be focusing… or setting their goals so low that they can't progress and expand themselves. A lot of these kids sometimes don't think they can do things and then they just accept whatever they get. A lot of these kids can succeed in whatever they chose to do.

IN: I'm not going to focus on this exclusively, I'm going to talk about all the other things that we're focusing on, but now that Northern has a Center for Native American Studies, does that give a more welcoming place for your students to go?

WB: I think it is. I think Dennis's efforts are moving in that direction. I think a lot of the other directors weren't. He's working up a program right now to get students to come down here to the school, which will make the center and their records more in contact with our students. I think that's going to be a major plus. Sometimes you can't get… well we haven't been able to get kids to go to college. It's usually better for sending our kids in big groups with contact with somebody they know. I think by having these kids come down and then sharing with them their success is more visible in college. I think that Dennis and his people up there have made us more successful in that direction. I also know that when I received this award up there it was really nice to see the list of Native American graduates, when my gosh, I can't recall any Native Americans who were graduating at that time, and now there's 12-15 students graduating. I think that's something else I see happening. There's more and more graduates coming out of the high school who graduate and go to college. I think that's very promising. We need more professional Native Americans. In our school even professional Native Americans are very limited. There's only myself and…

IN: There's only two?

WB: Oh, and Mr. Norris too, our superintendent. There are three.

IN: How many staff do you have?

WB: Total? Over 100. Teaching staff, probably 25-30. We do have Native American aids, but they're not degreed. There are some that are moving… considering that as an option also.

IN: What is your tribal background?

WB: Like I said, I'm of the Odawa Tribe, a Little Traverse Bay Band Tribe.

IN: What else have we not talked about that is important? Oh, I was going to ask you… What kind of ceremonies do you traditionally do here?

WB: We open the week with a tobacco ceremonies. Contingent on what the weather it's usually offered outside and we have tobacco and fire. If not, the tobacco is collected and then offered by whoever is conducting the ceremony. We've had other feast ceremonies for… we've lost a few students here, my son included. Under the requirements for the people that have passed on we have to have a remembrance every year for them, and we've had those here also. We've offered beads to those spirits and those are opportunities for fire also. Things of that nature are what we offer at the school. There are other ceremonies also, but that's mostly…

IN: Is there anything else we need to cover that's important?

WB: Oh, I don't know, and I'm getting really hungry and I know Mr. Grant would like his office back.

[RECORDING ENDS]