

Warm Valley Historical Project - Part II
Interview with VAL NORMAN (Born February 15[?] no year given)
Interviewed by Sharon Kahin
February 2, 1991

SK: This is February 2, 1991. Talking to Val Norman about the government school. This project is wondering what it was like to go to the government school, "Gravy High."

VN: Oh—I don't know where to start from.

SK: Well, I guess you could start by—How old are you, Val?

VN: When?

SK: Well, when were you born?

VN: I was born this month.

SK: This month?

VN: Yeah.

woman: Oh, that's right.

VN: The middle of this month, so that's where I started from. I was raised on the reservation and then I've lived here all my life—Well, most of my life at the—what they call the old government school. I started at age five.

SK: Age five?

VN: Yeah.

SK: Very young.

VN: [garbled] they made sure they get down there, in those days—If you didn't like it and run away, well, they could still come after you, which I did several times.

SK: You ran away?

VN: Yeah. Even though I was a small tot, in the middle of the night, I ran and took off—And then I—then they get me the next day. What they call the Indian police and there was quite a few of them. There was a whole troop of them police. Then we lived over in Wind River and so they would just go straight to where home is. And then you can't get away from your parents and that is where I was heading for anyway and they said it will get better for you, as long as I could go there and stand the school, and gradually—I got, you know used to that routine, at least I

was with it until it—it's not like it is today when you gonna have anything you want, you know, your way, and you got to do what they wanted you to do—Many a time you worked plenty for not obeying everybody. Even for the smallest infraction on the [garbled] you needed a log on it.

SK: They put a log on?

VN: Hah?

SK: What did they do for infractions?

VN: Well, they punished you in those.

SK: Yeah, but what kind of punishment?

VN: Well, there was several ways. Most of them we're familiar with. They would stand you in the hallways. They stand there for hours on end and if that wasn't severe enough, they'd get a broom stick and put it with you kneel down, right under your knees and there you are! You have to squirm around and you can't holler—Holler what? Hell nobody'd help you, because the disciplinarian is very strict you know, uh—I managed to out grow some of that—as I went and got older—

SK: What sort of things did they punish you for?

VN: Well, any kind of infraction like—even the slightest breach of rules or regulations or—they called them regulations, today known as rules 'cause in those days, most of that was semi-military.

SK: Semi-military?

VN: Yeah, and (this man who was in charge of it was a retired Army officer.

SK: Really?

VN: Yeah.

SK: What was his name?

VN: I don't know—His last name I know was Reed.

SK: Reed?

VN: Yeah. And he and his family lived in the building. That lower building used to be, where the grade school is now. They tore that down—

SK: What were some of the rules? What were some of the regulations? Do you remember them?

VN: You had a—bell, call if it was your turn to go to class or chores or what ever that had to be done and detail you to every kind of chore they could think of. And if your name was on the roster, you had to be there. Other wise, you don't know why—Other than that, it wasn't too bad. After you got used to the hardship and the hard knocks and that—Well, I don't know what to call the rest of the students, the male students, see they range in ages from small boys clear up to full grown men.

SK: How old was the oldest student?

VN: I would say—Oh, about in their 20s, maybe older, because some of the school they did was not very difficult, but they had a hard time with the—See, much of what they did was, instead of that school is what they called a self supporting institution. In other words, you had to work on the farm operations, if you're old enough.

SK: And that was the boys' job to work on the farm?

VN: Yeah. Each of them would have to do certain jobs. After you got around about in your teens, I think, that's when they would assign you to the farming work.

SK: But as a little boy, when you went there, when you were so small, did you have jobs to do?

VN: Well, of course. You had to do the clean up around there in the yards and the inside of the building and keep it up and ship shape and you can't get it dirty because they would come around and inspect every once in a while to see if you are working or not.

SK: Uh—when you ran away from home—I mean when you ran away from the school, how old were you then?

VN: I started out at five, I said.

SK: When you were five?

VN: Yeah. I didn't keep anybody—It was the first couple of years were the hardest, you know, after you got used to being away from home before. I got so used to—didn't runaway after that, but I—during the weekends, that time was your own and your parents could come and get you and take you home. That is if they wanted to take you home. Sometimes, they never did. And some—when that happened, well, some of the students—they snuck off. But first they'd have to get permission. It's a pity they didn't show, they just took right off—make French leave on us.

SK: French leave?

VN: Yeah [laughs]. They generally had to wait in jail until they were released. While

the disciplinarian or one of his aides—

SK: Someone told me, maybe you can tell me if it's true or not, that they had disciplinarians and even Indian police that would even stay around the classrooms and go to the outhouse with the boys.

VN: Yeah.

SK: Was that true?

VN: Uh—to the what?

SK: To the outhouse. They would follow the boys when they went out to the bathroom.

VN: To the fields.

SK: Yeah?

VN: Well, if you're detailed you had to go out there, where ever your were assigned to do. And we had time, especially in the fall when the crops were ripe and all that. The whole school goes out in the fields and helps harvesting by picking potatoes, tomatoes and all the row crops and stuff like that. They had the—what machine they had, they had the potato diggers and I don't know what else. In these days—at that time, it was during the [garbled] usually they, they started pounding each other with the [balsa?] and they worked hard at it—especially the tomatoes, they were so squashy. Well, when that work was done, it was back to the classroom again. Well, most of the routine around the school was semi-military. We had to march—on the—what you call it—session, anyways. Another one we march in time whenever you go there, you know, they made sure you were doing a semi-military routine probably. [coughs] I'm about starting to dry—and every morning you observed what they call the raising of the flag.

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: In the morning they would raise the flag. Everybody, girls and boys, would have to be out there in formation, out in front of the building there. And they had the bugler there and the same thing in the evening. That's how I learned to march. They drilled us too, like soldiers.

SK: You had drills?

VN: Yeah. They had—well, some of the older boys, you know, some of them had been over in the military, as volunteers, and they came back and they were being used there as instructors, so that's why we got our training.

SK: Oh.

VN: Training in what they call close order drill, calisthenics and all the rest of the—and we did that just like the military, too. That's where I learned how to march.

SK: [laughs] Girls too? Did the girls march?

VN: When I went in to the service, I didn't have no trouble.

SK: 'Cause you already knew it?

VN: It was just routine to me, then, and that's why I was so good at the close order drill and the D.I.s¹ asked me "Why are you so good at it?" Here are all these other recruits, they are just marching all over the field, running into each other and here I was standing there and they told me "Go sit down. You know more about it than they do here." So here I sit, watching them. I was the only one of then that had that kind of instruction, and I didn't have no trouble with it.

SK: Did the girls also drill?

VN: Well, of course, yeah, they had to. But not like the boys did. They just—since it was not—since in those days, the girls were not military women and required to do all the military things, you know—

SK: Well, these older, Shoshone students that came and had been in the military and taught you to drill, what else did they teach you? Did they teach you farming or what—or were they students themselves?

VN: Well, I don't know—They were just instructors—were told to be instructors inn certain basics of the drills and all that stuff. And that was their job.

SK: But they were students? .

VN: Yeah.

SK: They were older students?

VN: Because I remember they had a drill team out there comprised of ex-cavalry troopers that they used to do drill out there on the campus. Some of them were pretty young and some of them were not too young. They had been what they call [quartering?] at the cavalry post down there. That's where they got their training. And when they came back, well, they put them to work here.

SK: Teaching you how to drill?

VN: Yeah, well, what that was, one of their jobs, I guess, since they got the military commissions all through these government schools, since they was run by the army most of the time—later on it was turned over to the—what do they call

it—the BIA—the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

SK: Uh—Val, these people who taught you to drill, who had been with the cavalry, what else was, what was their other jobs? What other jobs did they do?

VN: I don't know—that part, I don't know very much, but I saw pictures of them on the walls by some of these boys were in the pictures in these uniforms. They were mounted on cavalry horses. They showed a picture of Ames—[garbled] was doing the instructing. In fact some of them were in the Indian Police, too. That's where they came in.

SK: And it was their job to go get run aways—?

VN: Yeah, it was one of their jobs.

SK: If you ran away from school, what was the punishment for running away from school?

VN: Oh, they had that little block house back there. They—that's where you spent your time—back of the school building. And they gave you so much time to do that if you made it, then you could go back out again. I never was in that—what they called the—well, they called it the block house anyway. I didn't get that far [garbled] that the punishment was—

SK: But serious punishment, they would put you in the block house?

VN: Yeah.

SK: Overnight?

VN: Oh, sometimes more than that. Depends on the severity of your punishment.

SK: So, if the punishment was very severe you stay?

VN: Most of the time, they kept you in there a few days and turn you out again [or, until you're out again?]

SK: What was inside the block house? Did they have beds and things in the block house?

VN: Yeah. They went back into the routine of the whole school again and—I know some of the crime they committed too—you know—to spend time in that little house, well, I wouldn't mention it—it's not very—Well, morally, it's not right.

SK: The block house, did it have beds?

VN: Well, I don't know, I was never in it, I don't know. Probably had hard cots in

it—they had—Army [surplus?] material to dispose of, probably had army cots in there.

SK: In your dormitory did you have army blankets and army cots?

VN: Oh, yeah. Everything was army issue. So like army cots what there were—regular—Oh, what do you call—they weren't cots, they were beds. They were used in the hospitals, you know, had the springs in them, and—bed—not bed—mattress pads, so you wouldn't—and sheets and army blankets and all that—Everything was army issue.

SK: Huh!—Uh—could you speak English when you went to school?

VN: I never spoke no English, I mean—yeah, English. All I spoke was the Indian language. Boy, I had to learn fast, 'cause those instructors made sure we learned fast. You couldn't talk your own language among each other, if they caught you, why, you were in for it again. You're facing the wall or kneeling down or else—Sometimes they give you—another weapon, in other words. If they s think you needed it, then they'd let you have it. Some of those kids in there, they'd be in their rooms bawling their eyes out.

SK: Uh—What did they whip you with?

VN: Well, straps mostly.

SK: Straps?

VN: Yeah. That's the only way they could drive the lessons into the—Whereas today, you can't do that. You have to learn your own way. But then you had to learn whether you wanted to or not. That's the way I learned how to speak English. At first it was only broken English and gradually it was—, I get better at studying grammar and you know, in class, that's where they taught you to speak correctly. It's just speaking book grammar—kind of—not like what I am talking now. You had to use every word in that book—use it in your every day English. I gradually got away from that. I used to remember that it always sounded funny, you know, you used to speaking funny, like one of these Oxford students.

SK: [laughs] Everyone was speaking like that?

VN: Yeah—and I heard them talk when I was over there—Over in England, you know, they got that funny accent.

SK: And they taught you to speak with that funny accent?

VN: Yeah, just exactly how they used to sound back in those old grammar school days, we called it Gravy High after we got older, because all they served, morning, day and night was gravy. And we called it Gravy High. Gravy in the morning, gravy in

the noon, gravy in the evening. Is it any wonder that some of us picked up a lot of weight?

SK: Well, when you were at home, before you went to the school, was the food different at home? What were you eating at home?

VN: Oh, most of the time what we ate was what our parents just find in the fields. Sometimes wherever their vegetables were. Like my parents, they grow their corn. That's how I know how to use the—and some of those—what do you call—the wild berries and stuff like that. Sort of a rake on that—daily routine of eating—They finally got us involved in, what do you call, the 4-H—taught us how to raise gardens—plant gardens.

SK: How old were you when you had 4-H?

VN: Round about in the early teens. I'd say about 15, 16—maybe a little older—They had these station agents going out among the homes, checking on them, seeing if they're doing things right. I still have a book on that away—or how to—Oh, it shows you how to—If I could show it to you—

SK: Yeah, I'd like to see it.

VN: Come out here. In those days the department of the Interior's continue 1968 on the back—by the back of it, this is the way all the other stuff came in. Bunch of flowers and all that stuff and how to, they were taught them to raise food.

SK: Well, did the 4-H come to the school?

VN: Oh, yes.

SK: So you had 4-H programs at the school?

VN: Yeah. I thought they had more of that in here but the book—

SK: Uh—someone told me that they had fairs then at the school where people would show produce and things like vegetables that they had grown. Do you—

VN: Later—later on.

SK: Later on?

VN: Yeah. They didn't have no fairs then. No fairs were known then, during the school years.

SK: Someone else also mentioned rodeos.

VN: But after they started the 4-H, that's when they got the fairs started. Because I

was involved in it. I had to raise vegetables to submit to those fairs. Here, right here, they still have that at the school. Where they—if you were good enough, your, whatever you produced will go on into the county.

SK: So you would have the fair at the school and if it was good enough you would go in to the county?

VN: Yeah, what they call the old gymnasium, alright. It's where we had all of our athletic events and other special events and ball games and stuff like that—Later—Later on we started doing that—after we got into the upper grades, after we get into the 16-17 year olds, and they started teaching us social classes and all that.

SK: What kind of classes?

VN: Social—all kinds of socials, like what are tent dances, tent gatherings or things like that—some times if they were rather organized they'll go up there to another location, probably Lander and all that—[starts drumming fingers on table, makes it hard to hear]

SK: Do you remember having rodeos at the school or was that r~ after your time?

VN: Oh, I don't know. I know they had rodeos but not the regular kind of rodeos it was just make up rodeos. The older ones would go out and get some horses and, on the lawn they would put on these shows.

SK: Oh, I see.

VN: But they didn't have no rodeos, like rodeos, because they never had any facilities. Even up here at the Fort there was no rodeo grounds at that time.

SK: When?

VN: Oh, I'd say about 1928 or '26 in there.

SK: How old were you when you left the school?

VN: When I left that school?

SK: Yeah.

VN: I was about in my 20s.

SK: So you stayed a long time?

VN: No, I spent most of my time in the hospital.

SK: Oh?

VN: —I had eye trouble all the time, almost every day, I had trouble with my eyes. They'd go blank on me.

SK: Huh?

VN: I never could finish school at the—In other words, I decided to drop out.

SK: Uh—did your brothers—did you have brothers or sisters who went to the school?

VN: Well, I had brothers, but they were not living then. They were deceased. In the '30s and, in anyway, they were deceased.

SK: So, you were the only child who went to the government school?

VN: No, there were six of us.

SK: There were six of you?

VN: Well, anyway, I'm glad I got along in life and used to do what we had to do and all that stuff and it wasn't so bad that—after I got out of the government school why—

END SIDE ONE BEGINNING SIDE TWO

VN: I don't know about that, it was an Indian hospital, run by government personnel, for the Indians. That's where I spent half of my time in there—in those days they didn't have the proper—you know—care for all the—whatever—what protected eye sight, I was having trouble—Well, one year, 'cause one year, this doctor—what do you call it, they key eye doctor, they call him. The government doctor—came in and gathered the whole student body from down at the school and put them in the hospital up there, and he was—I don't know what he was doing, training or an intern. Well, anyway, he started operating on them, operating on the eyes, that's where I ruined my eyesight. He just [garbled] through and that was it!

SK: He was operating on your eyes?

VN: [garbled] and a lot of us—I'd say about 100 of us students, were all put in the wards up in there so every day there were several students going into those operating rooms. The whole place smelled like—I won't say chloroform, but in those days they was using ether.

SK: Was he operating on their eyes as well?

VN: Yeah. Whether they needed it or not, he would just go ahead. Because in those days the government had their say in what they were doing to do with you—That's why I started losing my eyesight.

SK: After the operation?

VN: Yeah. Well, at first, it improved it a little bit, but right away, it started feeling worse again. And almost every year, my eyes are failing me a little. You have nothing but—all I could see is a blur out there. And I tried to go to school, but I couldn't make it. Keep running into doors and walls—until, well, in—they brought in some new medication, a new medicine. It's what they call a wonder drug. Sulfa drugs. That's the only thing that helped my eyes. It helped me to see better than I had before, after the eye operation, because I never could see that good.

SK: Did a lot of students have trouble with their eyes?

VN: Huh?

SK: Did a lot of students have eye—?

VN: Oh, yeah, of course, yeah—'Cause I remember when they were doing that operations, one student they put her under the ether and she never came out of it.

SK: She died?

VN: Yeah. She had a weak heart. See, they didn't even take that into consideration, whether you have a weak heart or whatever it is—Her parents came in and they created a ruckus in there and manhandled that doctor for doing that. 'Cause we came out—at that time, we had bandages over our eyes, looking up and all that noise coming down the hallways and see the people running back and forth and you could hear that woman, that lady, that girl's mother—shouting her head off. She came in over there with what they call a riding whip and that's what she worked that doctor over with.

SK: She worked the doctor over with a riding quirt?

VN: Right.

SK: I don't blame her. Do you remember other health problems that a lot of students had? Were there other problems that they had?

VN: Well, TB is another, in the school they had it. I don't know where they got it from, but many of them were taken to different out of state institutions, TB sanitoriums, they call them. I remember my sisters and brothers were all shipped out to different hospitals. Located here and there and over there—

SK: They had TB, your brothers and sisters?

VN: Yeah, they never survived it though.

SK: Oh, I see—

VN: My sister's the one—the older sister, survived a long time but—eventually that TB finally got the best of her.

SK: Did your brothers and sisters go to the school with you?

VN: No, they were younger than I was.

SK: They were younger? So you were they only one that went to that school then?

VN: I think it was the older sister that lived down here, but she married—she didn't have anything to do with that. She thought she was above us until our senior year. Us younger ones, we stuck together.

SK: Uh-huh. Well, what was the hardest—you went to school at age five and you couldn't speak English. What was the hardest thing for you going to school?

VN: When I'm going—you mean in the way of lessons?

SK: Oh, just anything. Either in the way of lessons or—what was it?

VN: I really never had any trouble—Well, as they say, I just took it in stride, but—the—but the only place I had was in this different lessons I was weak in—like mathematics, maybe, because I couldn't see very good. I couldn't see the board working up there, it was all blurry. Sometimes I had to go up to the wall and take notations down and I didn't want to do that all the time.

SK: What were your teachers like? Were they helpful or were they military too?

VN: Well, most of them were female teachers and they were—they tried to help us. Some of them were pretty stern—and some weren't and there were a few male teachers [garbled] and they helped us a lot. They weren't harsh or anything like some of our disciplinarians that were—that was after the grammar school days, though, what they called the way they changed the way the school down here, they changed it over to a day school.

SK: Yeah.

VN: That's when things started easing up.

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: They weren't still treated as they used to be but you still had that feeling hanging over you all the time, somewhere somebody is going to come and you know, give you what for. guessed they worked there until they get rid of it pretty good. That stayed with us for a long time.

SK: That feeling stayed with you?

VN: Yeah. It's what they call suppression, is—

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: You're suppressing—suppressing yourself—what they call—Your American Native tongue and that all other traditional stuff. Well, most of us forgot it—how to—' our elders couldn't teach us. They wouldn't allow [us] to do that. They would be pulled off of that. So that's where most of our traditions went. It's only when the BIA changed over into this other day school that—they eased up on that—by that time, it was too late though, we tried—the elders tried to teach us. That's where I learned to speak my own language again, what little I could pick up, I started learning—'Cause most of our elders in those days, very few of them spoke English, and they still had that traditional Ind—Native ways and speech—So that's why I have been more fortunate learning—

SK: In the summer—

VN: Huh?

SK: In the summer, when you weren't at school could you pick up any traditional ways during the summer?

VN: Of course, yeah. See, during the summer, the entire—the entire tribe put on different traditional doings so—like they do now—they put up—well—In those days, they didn't have no powwows, but they still had those Indian dances, you know, only in their own way—the powwow as it's known now, wasn't run like they are now in those days. It was your own tribe that had the [place?] out there. And then, other traditional ways, like the Sun dance and the—quite a few of these older dances which are not used today—most of them, they just forgot about those—the way—because at the time, I know them they started getting used to the white man's ways and picking them up and the traditions went right along with that, they started losing their traditional ways and they started picking up in English and you couldn't speak both languages. At one time, I spoke English all the time, even among themselves. It still happens today—sometimes I have to remind my younger relations "How come you kids can understand our language but you won't speak it?" They try to speak it and—I have heard them try it—but they won't hold a conversation with another person in our language. I guess our generation is the only one that could still talk that way.

SK: You said that you had to re-learn your native language.

VN: Most of it, yeah. but—I didn't know it all. I lost most of it—too many white contacts, too much assimilated—what they call assimilated—lost your ways or what ever.

SK: How old were you when you tried to re-learn it?

VN: Oh—I don't know, I don't know exactly how old I was. About the only time I remember my running my [eighth Sun dance?] and started thinking about picking it up, you know, 'Cause in those days, I didn't know how the traditional ways was—and I started picking it up from those older ones, the generation ahead of me—they still know a little bit about something. They are the ones that helped us. They actually didn't help you, you had to learn it yourself. They didn't go out and teach you how to do this and that. You had to use the reasoning by, you know, observing, listening and all that. And try to imitate them. That's how we learned it.

SK: So you didn't—did you have a formal class setting or would you go out and just be with them?

VN: What?

SK: When you were learning the language again, did they have special classes. [Val shakes his head to indicate no] No formal classes?

VN: No.

SK: You just went and—

VN: You had to pick it up where ever you heard it. That's how I picked mine up, I know—It went to doing that in the tribal gatherings, people all come together and they start talking and doing and asking each other about how—what they're doing and how you do that. 'Cause I remember, they used to ask one another "How did you go about doing this?" And they go and do a certain traditional thing and they'd tell us—if you had any sense, you'd go ahead, otherwise, you'd forget about it—

SK: And you said the dances changed—When did—When did the dances begin to change and become powwows?

VN: Well, about 1950 to '60s—that's when the powwows started starting up and the—what do they call them—these other tribes started coming in with their ways of doing things and you had to go along with them—with their ways of doing things and you had to go along with them, you know and—well, as it was, we started losing our traditional dances and stuff and theirs—theirs started pushing ours out.

SK: Uh-huh. Well, when you had the traditional dances were they held in the community hall?

VN: They didn't have no community hall.

SK: They didn't have one then?

VN: About all they had was a round strip.. round log structure—Pretty dilapidated looking. It looked like a barn. It was still [a hell of a building?] whether it was cold or not—In the middle of winter, they used to have camps around there. Tent camps, not what they call camps now. Many of them would come in wagons and bring in them—their whole homes and their belongings and—all that stuff and they camped there around that building. No matter how cold it was, whether the snow was blowing, they would be right there. Not like today—you have to have a warm place to be in [laughs].

SK: Where about was this round—?

VN: Hah?

SK: Whereabouts was this round place?

VN: Oh, right there, just on this side of the cemetery, above there—just church door—I can't remember which church was built there.

SK: Which church?

woman: [too faint].

SK: Oh, Ab Large's church?

VN: Yeah.

SK: Oh.

VN: Above that—I would say about a quarter of a mile from there. There is a house sitting right on the place—on the exact site it was a—where the place used to be—today—

SK: What happened to the structure?

VN: I don't know—It rotted away, I suppose.

SK: [laughs].

VN: It was there for a long time. They could re-build it, but you would have to patch it up every year. There was nothing modern about it—Dirt floors and—our heating system was a wood, a coal [stove?]. No bedding—What bedding there was was an old straw—that they brought in to spread over where the people were sitting. They don't have no chairs in those days. People sat on the ground and—they don't have the drumming groups like they are not. They had their only single drum in the center all the time, that was the main drum.

SK: You were the main drummer?

VN: Huh?

SK: Did you say you were the main drummer?

VN: No.

SK: I'm sorry. What did you say?

VN: I said that that was the main drum that they used to sit in the center.

SK: Oh, yeah.

VN: They didn't have no drum groups like they got now.

SK: Well, you went to these then when you were younger?

VN: Yeah.

SK: —So when did they have them? During the winter? What time of the year did they have those dances?

VN: I want to say about the same time as they do now—'Bout Christmas and all the holidays. That was the hardest part—the hardest part is when they went on the holidays—They had the Christmas programs and they didn't have no, what they call, Christian programs, like they've got now. They did it their own way—

SK: What sort of—Well, you got out of school then at Christmas time? They let you go home from the school?

VN: Oh, yeah.

SK: Do you remember how much time you got off at Christmas?

VN: From where?

SK: From the school.

VN: You mean for those days? Those doings?

SK: Yeah.

VN: Well, they let us have our vacations, just the same as they do now. They give you, what they call Christmas vacation, you come home from the government school. You were on your own. You were excused from the holidays. Like right now, same thing today. It was more liberal, in other words.

- SK: But you could go to those dances when you were at the government school because they let you out around Christmas?
- VN: Yeah. At last, they finally, towards the end, before they closed it, they allowed the tribes to go down there to hold their doings down there in the gymnasium. 'Cause I remember I wasn't too old—you know getting up to—they had their Christmas programs in there then and most of them were held by the school itself and people were invited to be down there.
- SK: When they had the dances out in the old structure out there, you could go as a—You were away from school so you could go and attend them though?
- VN: Yeah.
- SK: Yeah? How long did the people camp?
- VN: Oh—right through—as long as they could weather the weather out when they stayed there. If it was too severe, they cut it short.
- SK: It would be about a week, though, would it?
- VN: Oh, yeah, it would be about a week anyway—
- SK: About a week.
- VN: But they were camped there so they had to have it a week. We lived not very far off so we didn't have to move. We lived about a quarter mile away from there. Most of the time we walked. We didn't need a nice car to jump in and ride around in like now.
- SK: Were you living in a tent or a cabin at that time?
- VN: No, we didn't live right there. We just came there during the, when their doings were on, you know. It was other people that moved camps. They're the ones that stayed there. They do what they do now, today. They play cards, they hang in, you know, all these different camps, you know. Some of them are set up for that purpose, and men played in one tent and women in another. Then stands in another, serving—serving refreshments. Well, I know that was the way things were done. When Rogers, this trader, this white man, came in and took over the place. He kind of changed things around out there.
- SK: Took—Came in during the dances?
- VN: No, he came in when he thought he could move in and to set up buildings and all that, you know. He knew that he could give out—that people would trade with him for the things that he sold in there. He stayed there a long time and he finally

moved away from there. You know and then it moved to the place, what they call Hunter's Trading Post. At that time, it wasn't Hunter's, it was Stuart's.

SK: Stuart's?

VN: He ran the place, yeah. He brought that piece of land there. Of course, his wife was part Indian, so that's how he was able to buy that land. He set up a regular trading post there. Real long side of the building there, all the out buildings around it.

SK: And it was called Stuart's Trading Post?

VN: Well, I don't know what they called it. I think maybe it was Stuart's, but I don't remember the name of it.

SK: Uh-huh—And what did they sell there?

VN: Huh?

SK: What sorts of things did they sell there?

VN: Well, all that commodity they sell there that they sell in the store right now, convenience stores, that's what it was. Like groceries, dry goods, canned goods and stuff like that and—he started branching out after that. He's the one that got his start up here at the old lodge. What they call a lodge, what they call it—

SK: Uh—We've just got a little more here. I was wondering if—thinking back to the government school were you homesick when you went there at age five?

VN: Of course! Who wouldn't be!

SK: I know [laughs] it sounds—it sounds very hard.

VN: That was the hardest thing to fight. You used to suppress that feeling. You had to have had. If you showed any signs of it, well, you caught heck for it, you know. They gave you sometime for your—In other words, they punished you. If you're too weak to admit it, "I'm not liking it," you had to like it.

SK: Did your parents want you to go to the school?

VN: They had to have wanted me there, because if I didn't go to school, they still—the BIA would come and get you, you weren't—you couldn't do what you wanted. They wanted you to go to school, period!

SK: Did some families try and hide their children?

VN: Of course—I'll tell you about eh BIA, keep their kids with them, but they got

reprimanded and well—some of them got—I don't know, punished for that—'Cause I remember that one family was like that. The family that's known today as Shoyo family. Their father was trying to keep his sons from being taken to school, you know, he'd fight, tooth and nail, with the Indian police. He went down there and picked them up if they came and got them. He kept doing that—and I guess they finally decided they would leave him alone, because they give him a bad time for—It sounds like today, what's it called [harassment, suing you?] and Benjamin, they were another one. They were [cloistered?] from going to school—

END TAPE ONE

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

VN: —Probably—that's probably the reason the two of them, the two men today can't talk very good English. If you hear them talking in public, you can tell their lack of schooling—As time went by, I guess, they picked up what little they could from being among the English people, English speaking people. Well, the older one had to have, because he was a—he had a job as a BIA, what's it called—a janitor. And he had to learn how to speak English and how to put—affix his signature on a paper and that—and follow his work detail, I guess, he learned how to do that, I guess, and now, you think, the way he talks, he's been through college and all that. The way he talks. But I know him better than that.

SK: Were there other families that tried to hide the children?

VN: Oh, yeah! They was the oldest ones at that time. The younger ones weren't even born at that time. They were—the older boys. I don't know, I wonder about them, those other boys, they were around there, they probably got the same treatment.

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: 'Cause, I never saw any of them going to school when I was down there at the grammar school. I never saw them down there. They probably brought in now and then, but the—let them go again.

SK: Uh—Do you remember your first day of school?

VN: School?

SK: The first day? Do you remember the very first day of school?

VN: [chuckles] I don't know. All I know is it was kind of hazy. I don't even know where it started from. I think they had, what they call kindergarten in the building. That's probably where I was at—for students who didn't know how to talk English. They had to learn them how. And I was in that bunch and—in kindergarten, we learned how to talk—and they made us read boards with all kinds of characters² up there. We can—I can still do that—ABCs and the numbers

and all that stuff.

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: And they had sand—sand that we play in out there when lessons was over with—In a way—that's how we got our schooling—got our English. Of course, we had our teachers there, our instructors there. They repeat the same things over and over again and then we had to repeat it after them.

SK: Uh-huh.

VN: And gradually, most of us learned how to talk a few words of English. I don't know how long—maybe it took three or four years for any of use to learn how to talk—I don't know what to call it—credible English.

SK: Three or four years, so you were about nine years old when you could finally speak?

VN: and the graduated you up into the first few grades and first grade, that's where you started learning and from there on it was just a mere progression and on, know how to talk and do school lessons and all the other—the rest of the things that go along with school.

SK: You said it was military—did you have to make your beds a certain way and do that kind of thing?

VN: You mean, at the school?

SK: Yeah, at the school.

VN: Yeah, of course. They made us do it. Some of us, they didn't know how to fix a bed when they first started. We had to make it a certain way though, you couldn't have a fluffy pillow or anything—It was almost like, what they call Spartan like. They would be tight. Your sheets got to be real tight, your blankets real tight, pulled real good. And if you didn't, well, the instructor or somebody would come around and upset it again and tell you to do it over until you got it right, at least, what they thought they knew was right. And—during the service days, we had the same thing, you know, so it was—tight—Well, this noncom³ come along and dropped a quarter on it. If it bounced up, why your cot was OK. But over here, they didn't do that.

SK: When you were five years old, you had to learn how to do that?

VN: No, we couldn't. We had to learn how to do it anyway, at that time. I think we had the help from the older students. It was only when we got older and were able to, you know, how to fend for ourselves, that's when they started teaching us how to make our bed a proper way. The way they thought was a proper way.

SK: Was that different from home? Were you sleeping on beds at home at that time?

VN: No, I didn't have no bed. I mean, what bed we had was—We didn't have to fix up beds—we had beds, alright, but they were—somewhere on the—in a group, with a—like several boys, they bunk together, you couldn't even have a well made bed with that kind of a group [and you wonder how they all are rumpling up the thing?]

SK: What was the worst thing about the government school? Looking back—what did you dislike the most about it?

VN: What? Tell it back again.

SK: What was the worst thing about the government school, when you look back—what did you dislike the most about going to the government school?

VN: Oh, you mean—looking back at it later on?

SK: Yeah.

VN: Well, that part was just a bad experience—same way I look at overseas service—It was like a—nightmare—Oh, I didn't dwell on that too long—When I didn't thought about, it was probably disappearing from your mind, unless you want to think about it. That's where your trouble started. You keep thinking about it and you'd get depressed or—

SK: Were there any things in particular that were depressing, any things that stand out when you look back at it, now that were really bad about it?

VN: Oh—I wouldn't say it was real bad about it—they taught you a lot of things that you never knew before—Like—Oh, I don't know—but you weren't the same boy that went in when you first went in school. And so, that's how I graduated from that kind of a—Oh, well, thinking, I thought better later on, that I could even think much about it after that—It's another experience in life that you have to go through.

SK: Any good things that you particularly remember about it?

VN: Yeah, you got to associate with all the—those kids, you know, other kids, boys and girls, what you never had before. You learn how to mix in among others—others of your own kind—and, well, it was easier on you that way. Where as, if you lived a solitary [life?] it would be tough.

SK: Was your family kind of isolated where you lived before you went to the school?

VN: What?

SK: Was your family isolated where you lived?

VN: Nh-huh. They wasn't isolated. They had a lot of relations coming and visiting all the time. In those days, the families around here, they visited quite a lot. They traveled in—wagons, you know, horses and wagons—and they thought nothing about driving way out to relations or relatives or to a friend's place. Spend their time out there. That's the same thing that was going on around here. And I got to go on many of those trips—get to where they were living and mix in with the other kids, the children of those people that we went to go visit. That was—they were some odd characters, those kids. I found that out. In other words, you got to learn how to mix [in with?] other people.

SK: Well—on the not so good part of it—the disciplinarians, were they white people or Indians? Were they the same as the Indian police?

VN: Police?

SK: Yeah. Were the disciplinarians the same as the Indian police?

VN: No, they weren't police. They were hired for that job. They hired the police and the—in other words, they were like a tiny posse.

SK: Like a posse?

VN: Yeah. They were on call all the time.

SK: This is the disciplinarians?

VN: No, those police.

SK: Oh, the police? Uh-huh.

VN: Yeah, of course we had the—a police officer at the school and he just about keep waiting down there and call for the rest of the police when they needed to be—when they needed to be called.

SK: Now, he stayed at the—he stayed at the school?

VN: Yeah.

SK: Uh—

VN: They're not only the police for this area, our tribe, you know, they were down the other way too. They went and picked up a lot of those—What do you call—violators down there too. 'Course, we know, I remember we had a lot of Arapahos going to school here. I remember some of those boys that used to go to

school down here and of course, that—that's how they ran their organization and kept order or something like that—

SK: And the disciplinarians, were they Indians?

VN: No.

SK: They were white?

VN: Yeah.

SK: And what exactly was their job?

VN: Their—their job, if you know what a disciplinarian is, their first job is to make sure your—you're running your job right and the—I can't remember how—anyway—Oh, shoot [garbled]—the students are away in order to obey—I can't remember most of it hardly. Well, in anyway, they had to keep on their toes, to keep things going and all—in their line of work.

SK: Do you remember about how many there were? How many disciplinarians?

VN: Nh-huh—They just come and go, you know. So they put another—how many—the only one I know—this particular disciplinarian, he's the one that had the charge of the boys' building, the boys'—Him and his family lived in the building. They had quarters in there. And his wife acted as sort of a matron to all of the younger boys.

SK: I see.

VN: She would do the housework for them and all that—

SK: I see. Were they good people? Did you get along with them?

VN: I believe his wife was. But he was kind of gruff when [garbled] but his wife was just the opposite. She was genial, well—and awfully good young woman. Not a very young woman—Middle aged woman. But they were part Indians, those there, so that's how—but, you couldn't tell that they were part Indian, unless you were well acquainted with them. I don't know what tribal affiliation they had, but he always wore the army attire, you know, like, puttees and, what do you call them, jodhpurs or what ever you call them, and army shirts, and all that. That's the kind of outfits he wore.

SK: Was that kind of scary?

VN: Yeah. He [carried a big old whip? carried an officer's crop?] all the time.

SK: Did he use it?

VN: He probably did. I could always hear him tapping it on his legs all the time, on his puttees and [laughs]—Oh—But I don't know whether he used it or not. He probably did—He just probably give somebody a little swat like that, to draw their attention or something, or emphasize what he is trying to say—I don't know. Other than that, that's all I know about him, personal habits, that's all I know. He was always smoking a big pipe, you know, puff, puff [laughter].

SK: Uh—you said that when you went there you changed a lot. You weren't the same person as when you went—

VN: Of course, who wouldn't be changed, with all that—strict regime that we went under—went through—It's just the same thing as when you went into the service. They put you through a certain type of training. I'd never forget a lot of the stuff I learned in the school here—well, I adjusted to it anyway—'Cause I was used to it by that time [drums] because that army life was more strenuous. It's tough [drums].

SK: Well, almost finished there—

VN: Oh, I hope that's the last of it.

SK: Oh, you're getting tired of talking?

VN: Yeah.

TAPE OFF—END OF TAPE

¹ Drill Instructors.

² A rebus or an alphabet chart?

³ Non-commissioned officer, usually a sergeant