

A TEI Project

Interview of Kathy Chee

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1. Transcript

1.1 SESSION ONE (JUNE 23, 2011)

BAYHYLLE

This is Ruth Bayhülle. The date today is Thursday, June 23[2011]. I am in Highland Park, speaking with Kathy Chee at her home. Kathy, when and where were you born? 0:00:21.7

CHEE

Born in Klagetoh, Arizona.

BAYHYLLE

Klagetoh?

CHEE

Klagetoh.

BAYHYLLE

Can you spell that for me?

CHEE

K-a-i-b-e-t-o (sic).

BAYHYLLE

And what's your date of birth?

CHEE

February 14.

BAYHYLLE

Nineteen—

CHEE

Forty-four.

BAYHYLLE

And what tribe are you?

CHEE

Navajo.

BAYHYLLE

As you know, we're talking to people about relocation and how people came to Los Angeles on the program. I wanted to ask you just a few questions about your home, where you grew up and what your home was like, how many brothers and sisters you had, and what kind of work your folks did.

CHEE

My home, my mom and dad, they raising sheep, and I herd the sheep a lot during my young childhood. Suddenly one day she told me, "I sign up for you to go to Intermountain School." That's what my mom told me, yes.

BAYHYLLE

That school is in Utah, is that right?

CHEE

Yes.

BAYHYLLE

Near what city is that?

CHEE

Near Brigham City.

BAYHYLLE

How old were you when your mother told this to you?

CHEE

1956, about twelve or thirteen.

BAYHYLLE

Prior to that, where had you gone to school?

CHEE

There was no school.

BAYHYLLE

So you were twelve or thirteen and you hadn't gone to school yet.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So what did you think about that?

CHEE

So I was already grown or too old for school, so they put me—they called it eight years' program. I learned a lot there. I didn't realize that—in school, English, write my name, A, B, C, 1, 2, 3, and then adding, and some sports, not baseball, some basketball, and swimming. Swimming is my favorite sport.

BAYHYLLE

Did you know how to swim before you got there?

CHEE

No, I didn't know how to swim.

BAYHYLLE

So you learned how to swim there too.

CHEE

Then from there one summer they put us to earn some money so we can buy our clothes or something if we needed, so they sent me to Denver one year, and I babysit and then I came back.

BAYHYLLE

How old were you when you went to Denver?

CHEE

It was probably '58 or '59.

BAYHYLLE

Okay, so you were about fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old?

CHEE

Uh-huh, maybe before '57, because they told us too young, "No, sixteen is the age you go."

BAYHYLLE

Age for you to go outside the school.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Were you able to work at the school while you were there, though, too?

CHEE

Yes.

BAYHYLLE

What did you do there?

CHEE

I work downtown café, wash dishes and peel potatoes. [laughter] It was fun, but they pay me money. I love that money. It was a little money. It was a lot to me, a lot of money.

BAYHYLLE

For yourself, right.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So prior to that, you had been working downtown in restaurants and doing things, just odd jobs as you could get them?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

But then when you were sixteen they offered you this opportunity to—

CHEE

Go out where we want. We had to choose where we want to go, like to go San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, and other cities.

BAYHYLLE

Now, we're talking about the relocation program now, right?

CHEE

During the school year. But the same thing for relocation. They sent me here.

BAYHYLLE

Let's talk a little bit about that. Did you know what relocation was all about? Did you even know what it was for?

CHEE

No. No, I didn't know.

BAYHYLLE

But you had gone to Denver just for the summer, is that right?

CHEE

Three months, maybe, two or three months.

BAYHYLLE

What did you do there in—

CHEE

Babysit, babysitter.

BAYHYLLE

For an Indian family or non-Indian?

CHEE

These are white people.

BAYHYLLE

And their children?

CHEE

He has two kids, a baby boy, I think it was.

BAYHYLLE

So did you like doing that, going out there?

CHEE

Yeah, I like it.

BAYHYLLE

What was that like for you in Denver?

CHEE

It was something new, yeah, something new and very—I'm very shy. I'm pretty sure they understand. Was totally lost, I mean, but I have some friend there, so we came there, and day off, we get together. Then came—they sent us home.

BAYHYLLE

Back to the school?

CHEE

Back to my mom's house.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, back to Arizona.

CHEE

And then from there back to Intermountain. We spent, like, I don't know, two, maybe two weeks at home.

BAYHYLLE

When you were going to school at Intermountain, how often did you go home to visit your family?

CHEE

Every year.

BAYHYLLE

Every year when school was out you would go home?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Were you able to find work at home during the summer when school was out those years?

CHEE

I didn't find any work except for through BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs]. BIA trained us to—in 1966 or '67, '66, they trained us. I went home. I was here and then go back, go back to home, and they trained us sewing. I did it for, I don't know, six month. They trained us, and then I went to Flagstaff. I sew there maybe four or five months and then came back.

BAYHYLLE

Where did you work in Flagstaff then?

CHEE

It used to be Easy Mill. It's not there anymore.

BAYHYLLE

What kinds of things did you work on at Easy Mill?

CHEE

Sewing.

BAYHYLLE

Sewing jeans or curtains or—

CHEE

Sew t-shirts.

BAYHYLLE

Did you go by yourself or were there other young people?

CHEE

There are a lot of other people.

BAYHYLLE

A lot of other Indian people?

CHEE

Yeah. Most of us are trained at Winslow. Winslow, Arizona.

BAYHYLLE

What was there at Winslow? A school or a factory?

CHEE

Well, that was sort of a school because they train us and they let us live in a motel, hotel. When we finish that, we can go anywhere.

BAYHYLLE

Where was the school in Winslow? I'm just curious. Was it downtown or out—

CHEE

It's kind of out, outside.

BAYHYLLE

East of town or west of town? I used to live in Winslow. That's why I'm wondering where.

CHEE

It was a railroad train, other side.

BAYHYLLE

On the south side of town.

CHEE

Yeah, it's away from town.

BAYHYLLE

That's where the factory was where you trained?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Was it mostly Indian people or were there other—

CHEE

Yeah, mostly Navajo. I didn't see any other Indians.

BAYHYLLE

So BIA, then, set this up for you, is that right?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So they sent you there to learn how to sew and to be trained on machines, sewing machines.

CHEE

Yeah, sewing machines.

BAYHYLLE

Did they help you find a job from there, too, then?

CHEE

No, I can't sew. I'm too slow, because other people are fast. So I thought I can't make it, so I came back here on my own.

BAYHYLLE

You came back to Los Angeles?

CHEE

Intermountain, because I just happened to see the newspaper, Navajo Times, somebody want a babysitter, so I said, "I can do that. So just by chance I'll call her," the lady. She say, "Yes, come here."

BAYHYLLE

Who was this lady then? Do you remember?

CHEE

I don't remember.

BAYHYLLE

Where was the job at then?

CHEE

It was somewhere in Fullerton, I think, or something like that. I'm not sure where that is, but—

BAYHYLLE

But the woman put an ad in the Navajo Times. Was she Indian herself?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

How did she know to put an ad in the Navajo Times?

CHEE

I don't know. That's what she did. That's why I called, and then she said, "Come, come. I need babysitter," she said.

BAYHYLLE

So how old were you when you did this? Because you were about twenty-three when you—

CHEE

Twenty-something.

BAYHYLLE

In your early twenties.

CHEE

I believe twenty-three. I don't know.

BAYHYLLE

So you answered an ad in the paper for a babysitting job. How did you get from Intermountain to Fullerton then?

CHEE

From reservation I came to Fullerton.

BAYHYLLE

From Klagetoh. Catch the bus?

CHEE

I catch the bus. She pay—

BAYHYLLE

For a ticket.

CHEE

She pay my ticket. So she pick me up and brought me home, and then I worked there for a few months.

BAYHYLLE

What was that like? Did you like it?

CHEE

It was nice, very nice people.

BAYHYLLE

The people were nice?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Good place to stay?

CHEE

And then I start—my friend working in a factory said, “Come and work with me,” she said. So I apply. They hired me. They hired me right away.

BAYHYLLE

Wow. What kind of work?

CHEE

It was something to do with—my job was gluing a big piece of sheet—I don't know. Some are small. Some are big. And then just pass on. I don't know what they do over there.

BAYHYLLE

So it was just piece—

CHEE

So it was kind of glue, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

—assembly work then.

CHEE

Yeah. That was a good job. And then I left again, back to babysitting.

BAYHYLLE

Why did you leave the job?

CHEE

I don't know. I went to babysitting again for this lady for a few months.

BAYHYLLE

The same woman or another woman?

CHEE

This one was—I think I came from Intermountain. I work for her for two, three years, maybe less than two years, and the boy is growing up. He's able to—not too much work for me to do. She can go—I don't know, but, you know, I can't do this for life. I want to do a job. Then suddenly I left that job to work in a factory again. It was downtown by the train depot, station.

BAYHYLLE

Los Angeles?

CHEE

Uh-huh. The factory's not there anymore. They were working with rubbers.

BAYHYLLE

With rubber?

CHEE

Uh-huh. They bring us the small piece—no, the smallest quarter on [unclear] so just have to stick onto something. That's how my hand got so ugly, because we had to put this on to push it. I worked there maybe almost a year and then I left.

BAYHYLLE

Where did you go from there?

CHEE

I left, I think, back to reservation—

BAYHYLLE

Back to Arizona?

CHEE

—and reapplied to BIA again. They trained me for nursing.

BAYHYLLE

Tell me about going back then. First of all, the factory you found on your own and the babysitting you found on your own. What was the first job that you had on relocation?

CHEE

Babysitting.

BAYHYLLE

So was that when you were about twenty-three or twenty-one?

CHEE

Yeah, about nineteen and twenty.

BAYHYLLE

Between nineteen and twenty. Let's talk about that for just a minute. You said you got the babysitting job. Tell me how that worked. You were at Intermountain.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Did the teacher, the counselor, come and talk to you and say, "There's a babysitting job open for you"?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

And so you were nineteen or twenty then, right?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Did they offer to pay your way out here then, or how did you get out here?

CHEE

I think they pay our way, and they gave us money so we can—

BAYHYLLE

Have something to spend?

CHEE

Something to spend.

BAYHYLLE

Did you come by yourself?

CHEE

I stayed in maybe hotel or something. I don't remember that part. I remember I was staying in a hotel one time.

BAYHYLLE

Did you come by yourself?

CHEE

From Intermountain?

BAYHYLLE

Uh-huh, that first babysitting job.

CHEE

There's a couple of us came.

BAYHYLLE

Another woman?

CHEE

Another girl, two. I know two or three of us are kind of close, but there are others too. Some are already here, but I don't see them no more.

BAYHYLLE

So the school came to you and said, "There's a babysitting job. We're going to pay for your bus," or—

CHEE

I just chose to go to Los Angeles and I—

BAYHYLLE

Oh, that's right. You said they gave you a choice. What were the other towns they said you could choose from?

CHEE

Chicago, and there was other cities, Denver, San Francisco. I don't remember the other one.

BAYHYLLE

Was the understanding that they had babysitting jobs at each one of these cities?

CHEE

Mostly, yes. One teacher told us that when you go on your own, you had to go be on your own. "Go back to school," he said. I didn't pay attention. So my friend was going to school, but I went to night school a couple months, maybe.

BAYHYLLE

You chose to come to Los Angeles.

CHEE

Yes.

BAYHYLLE

Why did you choose Los Angeles? Did you have friends out here or did you know anything about [unclear]?

CHEE

Maybe a friend here in Los Angeles, because my friend are choosing L.A. So I did choose to go.

BAYHYLLE

Chose L.A. too.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So they said you could go to one of these cities and there'd be a babysitting job there for you. And did they help you with the rent?

CHEE

Well, when we came, they look, the people that brought [unclear]. What do you call these people? The people that brought us here, they look for job for us. I don't know how they find my work.

BAYHYLLE

But they did find—

CHEE

Find somebody, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

How long did it take them to find you a job?

CHEE

Two or three days.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, not very long, then.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

And you stayed in a hotel, right?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

How did you come to L.A., on a train or bus?

CHEE

I think was train.

BAYHYLLE

What was that like?

CHEE

I don't remember how I came. I think train came. It was something new.

BAYHYLLE

Were you afraid or excited or worried?

CHEE

I was kind of scare. No more school. I'm thinking now what do I want to do, how will I live in the future, but I don't want to go home either, because that was too hard. My mom work so hard.

BAYHYLLE

What kind of work did your mother do?

CHEE

She doesn't work. I mean she work at home.

BAYHYLLE

Cooking?

CHEE

She make a rug, take it to the store. We get food from there.

BAYHYLLE

She trades her rug to the store for food?

CHEE

Yeah, that was a hard job. I don't know how she does. And besides I have how many sister? I think ten. I'm the oldest. Three brother, and one of my sister die, the one after me. So there was eleven, I think, eleven of us.

BAYHYLLE

So you didn't want to go back home because the work was too hard.

CHEE

Too hard. I don't want to hurt. She can't handle that. It's fun to herd sheep, but not for a living. And then sometime again I went to the BIA again to help me. This time I work for—I mean train for nursing and I start working at the L.A. County Hospital. I worked there for thirty-two years.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, my goodness.

CHEE

I retire four years ago.

BAYHYLLE

Did you work at this county facility up here on State Street?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Did you like working there?

CHEE

Oh, I loved it.

BAYHYLLE

So the BIA paid for your schooling then to—

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

What kind of program did you go into, LPN or LVN or—

CHEE

Just nursing assistant. And one of the representative tried to help me change, "Don't go to nursing. Go to something else," he tells

me. He keep tells me that. I don't know, but I can't work in the office either. I don't like office work.

BAYHYLLE

No?

CHEE

I want to keep moving around. I like to walk around.

BAYHYLLE

So you went to work at the county hospital, and that was a good job for you then?

CHEE

Yeah, it's good job.

BAYHYLLE

Was that sort of the way that other people did it too? If the first job didn't work for you, you could go back to the BIA and they would help you again?

CHEE

Well, that's what I did, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Were they happy to help you the second time?

CHEE

Yeah, they don't say anything.

BAYHYLLE

How did they know to send you to nursing school? Did you request it or show an interest in it?

CHEE

Yes, I request for it.

BAYHYLLE

How did you know anything about nursing?

CHEE

Always something make me think that I want to do that work.

BAYHYLLE

Did you have a friend who was in nursing?

CHEE

No. I just apply, and they put me training over there, the school across from L.A. County.

BAYHYLLE

From the hospital?

CHEE

Uh-huh, that's where they trained.

BAYHYLLE

How long was your training? How long did that last?

CHEE

About six month.

BAYHYLLE

Was it easy for you or hard or—

CHEE

It's kind of easy.

BAYHYLLE

So you enjoyed it, working?

CHEE

Uh-huh. And I go to school there, too, on my own, and I learn a lot there, my math, my English and spelling, vocabulary, and stuff like that, so basic stuff.

BAYHYLLE

How many years did you go to school then?

CHEE

I go off and on all this time while I was working at L.A. County and then finally finish my GED in 1987 or '86.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, my goodness.

CHEE

And then I should go on, but I stop. I slowed down. Something I do to not quit and don't go back.

BAYHYLLE

When you were in the program and living out here then, did you meet any other people on relocation?

CHEE

Yeah, the girls I came with. The two of them were friend. They didn't get hired.

BAYHYLLE

Did they find jobs at all out here?

CHEE

I don't know if they find a job or what.

BAYHYLLE

Did you ever speak to them again after—

CHEE

I didn't see them when I left from there because they stay over there at the county dormitory. They have dormitory there. We stay there.

BAYHYLLE

Did you stay there too?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

So it was associated with the hospital?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Was it for single women or single people, and you could stay there while you worked or went to school?

CHEE

Yeah, for students, for doctors. Well, doctors are a different building. Just one building is, I guess, for everybody.

BAYHYLLE

For everybody, medical students and nursing students. While you were living out here then, what kinds of things did you do for fun?

CHEE

For fun I used to like beach to go to.

BAYHYLLE

How did you get around? Did you have a car, or bus?

CHEE

Bus. I used to catch the bus everywhere. And other than walking or jogging, I participate in the 10k run sometime.

BAYHYLLE

My goodness.

CHEE

I can't do it now.

BAYHYLLE

So you were an athlete.

CHEE

Yeah. My friend was Japanese, a Japanese lady, and she likes to run and she's fast, too, so that's what we used to do. I don't know where she go. I don't know. Don't see her no more. She's a nurse, a registered nurse.

BAYHYLLE

She must have moved away.

CHEE

She move away, maybe back to Japan. I don't know.

BAYHYLLE

So you liked sports. You liked to go to the beach. What other kinds of things did you do for fun or recreation?

CHEE

For fun, anything.

BAYHYLLE

Movies?

CHEE

Sometime we'll be a—

BAYHYLLE

Go out to eat.

CHEE

A picnic. Sometime go eat out some places.

BAYHYLLE

Did you get married and have children or have a family out here?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

You don't have any children?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

It sounds like you probably spent a lot of time at work, though, didn't you?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Different shifts and different hours.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Is this the only county facility that you worked at or did you go anywhere else to work?

CHEE

No, this the only place.

BAYHYLLE

When you first started working then, did you meet lots of other Indian people?

CHEE

A few people.

BAYHYLLE

How did you meet them?

CHEE

At work. As soon as you get to know, they disappear. I don't know where they go. Back to New Mexico, Arizona? I don't know where they go. Or another city.

BAYHYLLE

I met you at the church last week on Sunday. Tell me about your work with the church. Or how did you get involved with the First American Indian Church?

CHEE

I was downtown and this lady, this is an old friend of mine, she saw me, and I didn't know who was calling me. Her name is Marian. I went to Cortez School. That's where I got to know her.

BAYHYLLE

You mean when you were younger, you also went to Cortez School?

CHEE

No, that was during '68 or '69. I came to L.A., '69, I think it was. I only went there, like, half a year and then I didn't go back to Cortez. That was a mission school.

BAYHYLLE

What was the name of the school in Cortez, Colorado?

CHEE

Cortez Navajo Institute something. It's not there anymore.

BAYHYLLE

I remember there was a school there, but it was a very small one.

CHEE

Yeah, very small. I should take advantage of that because they teach you a lot. They teach singing, how to sing the note, how to read notes. I didn't go back because I don't have any money, no transportation, so I chose to go back to—

BAYHYLLE

Intermountain?

CHEE

No. Something. Maybe that's when I went to—that's when I came back to L.A., because I spent two months at home because I don't have any money. When I came back to L.A., they pay my way to babysitting.

BAYHYLLE

Who paid your way? The BIA?

CHEE

No, the person—

BAYHYLLE

Oh, that's right. Your employer then.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So you're walking downtown L.A. and you heard someone calling your name.

CHEE

So she told me, "Come to church at First American Indian Church." I say, "Yeah." I didn't know there was a church or other Indian church. I didn't know. When I got to church, too, I go any church, anywhere. I never thought there was an Indian church here.

BAYHYLLE

It never occurred to you to look for one then?

CHEE

No, but she told me, "Come to church. We live nearby." She told me all about. So she give me her phone number, so I came. That's when I came—I think I came to church.

BAYHYLLE

Do you remember what year that was?

CHEE

It should be '60 or '70.

BAYHYLLE

My goodness, that's a long time ago.

CHEE

Because before 1970, I think I work in the factory somewhere around in L.A. and I go back to reservation, apply for nursing. I start work in 1973 for L.A. County.

BAYHYLLE

So it was after 1973 that you found the church there then.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So you started going to the church?

CHEE

Uh-huh. I go there when my day off. I work Sundays. I work most Sunday all the time, so I don't go to church until when I retire, I start coming to church.

BAYHYLLE

On a regular basis then, right?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

You were able to go on Sunday.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

I noticed at the church there, quite a bit of the congregation is Navajo.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

There seem to be some people I already knew and some people I've just now met, and a lot of them seem to be Navajo or married to Navajo people, husband or wife.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

When you first started going to the church, is that the way it was? Were there a lot of Navajo people going to that church?

CHEE

Yeah, I don't come to church, but now come. There's a lot of people. All the seats are full. Now the regular seats are full. That's how I noticed that. It was a lot of people then, but I don't come every Sunday. I don't know, maybe some Sundays are like that. So I met Trudy. Her name is Trudy, very nice lady. She's a white lady and she's handicapped. She used to pick me up to go to church sometime. Sometime I go to her house and she teach us, teach me.

BAYHYLLE

What did you study with her then?

CHEE

Anything, anything in the Bible.

BAYHYLLE

So she did Bible study then with you, for you, with you.

CHEE

Uh-huh. So that's how my friend told me about the church, so that's when I learned there were some more Indian church.

BAYHYLLE

Were you surprised to find how many Indian churches there were?

CHEE

Yeah. Oh, yes.

BAYHYLLE

What other kinds of things did you do with your time?

CHEE

Wintertime, we—this is with the Japanese lady—we go to Big Bear to ski. We used to ski there too.

BAYHYLLE

That was fun.

CHEE

I don't know. She has a friend that rent a place, a cabin, a little house, and we stayed there maybe couple days. That is fun, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

It's pretty there, isn't it?

CHEE

Oh, yeah. I can't do that no more either.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, you probably could, but—

CHEE

No, no.

BAYHYLLE

Let's ask just a few more questions. I'm still interested in this—it sounds like you went to BIA maybe two or three times, either asking for work or looking for work or asking for assistance. Where was your area office? Where was the BIA office for you?

CHEE

Where?

BAYHYLLE

Uh-huh.

CHEE

Well, it used to be downtown, over there—

BAYHYLLE

In Arizona.

CHEE

In Tuba City.

BAYHYLLE

That was the agency office. How far is Tuba City from your home in—

CHEE

It's not far. It's not too far, about twenty miles, maybe thirty miles.

BAYHYLLE

Did they have a special office in the BIA that would help you with employment?

CHEE

Yeah, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So that was someplace sort of like your own unemployment office then in the BIA. Is that right?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

So when you would go to this Employment Division at BIA, would they give you tests, or how did they work with you to find a job?

CHEE

Yes, they do, but they didn't give me a test. Just sent me away. But if you want to particular job, yes, they test you if you want to go looking for—I don't know what. I don't know, maybe me, I just came to go look and train me. I think I said nursing. They didn't test me. But they did say test, but they didn't give me a test.

BAYHYLLE

The nursing job you got through the BIA here, though, is that right? In Los Angeles?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

But in Tuba City, I guess if you were already out of school but you didn't have any work skills, they would just try to find whatever kind of job that they thought you could do.

CHEE

Yeah, you find a job almost everywhere, I think.

BAYHYLLE

People there at the BIA, did they speak Navajo then?

CHEE

BIA, uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

So there was someone there that you could talk to in Navajo.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Did you prefer speaking to them in Navajo or were you able to speak in English and Navajo easily enough?

CHEE

English and Navajo, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

But there was someone there who spoke Navajo that could help all the time—

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

—and translate something or help you with something.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

When you came out on relocation, if you can remember a little bit, tell me about how that was. Were you happy to be going somewhere or were you worried, or how did you feel about it?

CHEE

Well, for me it was both. I'm happy to go find a job and work, one day own a car because it's hard to get around on the reservation. That is what happened, mine. And sometime I get scared, live by myself sometime, but these days I live by myself, but I feel safe here because I know the neighbors are nice.

BAYHYLLE

This is a nice neighborhood.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

You've got the school right up here, so it's not—

CHEE

So I'm stuck right here for now. I don't know. But in those days, you move anywhere, anywhere and anytime. It's not like today. I move a lot those days. I move here and there.

BAYHYLLE

You mean when you were younger and when you were first working, you moved different places?

CHEE

Yeah, in those days I have, I guess, only my suitcase. That's all.

BAYHYLLE

No furniture, or very little things to take.

CHEE

Yeah, but sometime I get homesick. Maybe sometime I want to see my mom, my dad, my sisters. I do come home. We just write letter to each other. That's all.

BAYHYLLE

Are your parents still alive?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

They've gone on?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

When you were working, then, away, living away, were you able to go home very often to visit?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

What was that like?

CHEE

I'm happy to see my mom and dad.

BAYHYLLE

And your home.

CHEE

Yeah, and the animals, the sheep, the horses. I loved to ride horses in my young days. Nobody ride horse no more these days. The kids are spoil.

BAYHYLLE

They all want cars or motorcycles or something.

CHEE

Yeah. So I made it okay because I retire. I'm fine.

BAYHYLLE

Anyone else in your family come out on relocation anywhere, your sisters?

CHEE

My sister.

BAYHYLLE

Where did she go? What was that like for her?

CHEE

She came up here one summer and they went back. I don't know where they go, but she chose to be a teacher. She went to NAU.

BAYHYLLE

In Flagstaff.

CHEE

Yeah. So she's still teaching in school.

BAYHYLLE

Oh, that's good. Good for her.

CHEE

I mean at Red Lake.

BAYHYLLE

At Red Lake in Minnesota?

CHEE

No. I mean Tonalea.

BAYHYLLE

Tonalea, Arizona.

CHEE

Yeah, near Tuba.

BAYHYLLE

Near Tuba City, right.

CHEE

Yeah, and my other sister working for—they call this—in Page, Arizona—Navajo Generator or something. She working there too. She work a long time. The other day she mentioned, “I work thirty-five years.” She’s better than I did. [laughs]

BAYHYLLE

When you were doing all that work then at the county, at the hospital there, you liked it, but did you ever think of transferring back somewhere to Arizona to be closer to your family?

CHEE

At one time I was thinking, and then I check it to see how much they’re making. They’re making way less than—

BAYHYLLE

Less money.

CHEE

Yeah, so I said, “Maybe I’ll just stay here.”

BAYHYLLE

Well, it seemed to work, a good fit for you because you stayed at the job, you were able to work at the job for thirty-some years, and you have a nice home and have a nice church.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

The people there are very nice.

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

If you had it to do all over again, you could go back and do that again, would you do the same thing, come out on relocation?

CHEE

The relocation, yeah, but I might choose different stuff.

BAYHYLLE

What would you do differently then?

CHEE

Well, today, these days, computer technician or something.

BAYHYLLE

You're interested in that, then.

CHEE

Uh-huh. Oh, yes, I'd like to learn it. I don't know anything now. That's the way I was with work. I don't know what it means to work and earn money.

BAYHYLLE

When you were younger, you mean?

CHEE

Yeah. And they just say work, going to work, and that's about it. What kind of work, I don't know. Yes, in school they teach us, too, what kind of work you're interested, and I don't know what it's about. At that time I don't know anything, because some people, they choose—the students, they choose to be—there were library stuff, librarian. And what was the other one? The dormitory attendants, as I remember. For woman, it's good, I think. But I

tried dorm. I don't like it. I don't like attendances. I said, "No, forget it." [laughs]

BAYHYLLE

What about library? Did you try that?

CHEE

No, I didn't try, no. I don't know what's about library. The only thing I know is babysitting, because I used to babysit for my dorm attendant. She has a little boy, and weekend, she put me with her baby.

BAYHYLLE

And you enjoyed that then?

CHEE

I like it. And they teach us, too, over there, go to nurse the little children, take care.

BAYHYLLE

You didn't start a formal education until you were about twelve, you said. You said your mother decided for you that you were going to go to Intermountain. Was there just no school near your home in Arizona that you could have gone to?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

Where did other children—

CHEE

Well, there are school, but the school is for young kids. I'm too old to go to school there, so they put us a special program, like five or six or eight years.

BAYHYLLE

Right. You said it was an eight-year program.

CHEE

Yeah, that's all, and after that you go find a job and work. That's why I don't go to school.

BAYHYLLE

Why is it you didn't go to school when you were six or seven?

CHEE

I don't know.

BAYHYLLE

Did your parents need you at home to work or take care of the other children, help your mother?

CHEE

Maybe, yeah. My mom told me she don't know. Once I got in school, it's hard to live this way, she said, because the way she lived, working at home, you have to take care of sheep, take care of everything, cooking, had to make cheese. She did that.

BAYHYLLE

Made cheese?

CHEE

Make rug, yeah, rugs too. Earn some food. That's all we have. There's no welfare until way later.

BAYHYLLE

And your house, did you live in a traditional hogan?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Or did you have another kind of house? Lived in a hogan, all of you and your sisters and brothers?

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Did you have running water?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

Electricity did you have?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

Did you have gas?

CHEE

No.

BAYHYLLE

It was all wood, wood stove you cooked on?

CHEE

Wood stove, oh, yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Now that you're retired, do you think of going back there to live or to stay?

CHEE

Well, these days everything is different. There's no place to go. I do think I may go back there, but not to stay there, maybe a couple months.

BAYHYLLE

And spend some time there.

CHEE

Uh-huh.

BAYHYLLE

Do you still have your family, your brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews?

CHEE

Well, sisters and brothers, yeah. They live there.

BAYHYLLE

What was it like living in Los Angeles in those days, though, when you were working and getting around and going from job to job? Was it a good place to live, do you think, or it was just where you ended up?

CHEE

Me, I like to go catch the bus and work. Work, work, work, that's all I do.

BAYHYLLE

That's what you wanted to do, wasn't it?

CHEE

Uh-huh. And sometime I find school, something to learn. Like, I didn't know much about math. That's what I take during my work.

BAYHYLLE

When you started nursing?

CHEE

Yeah, but these days, the math are different, very much different of the way I learn. I don't know anything looking at that, because you have to learn all the way from the beginning again for me.

BAYHYLLE

Almost. Seems that way, doesn't it?

CHEE

Yeah.

BAYHYLLE

Did you ever think of taking any classes in adult school, or did you ever try any of those courses that they offer for anything, computers or—

CHEE

Yeah, computer. I took it.

BAYHYLLE

How did that work for you?

CHEE

It was good.

BAYHYLLE

You liked it?

CHEE

I love it. I took classes for—this is after my retired in '05. No, '07 to last year, I took computer class.

BAYHYLLE

Wow, that's long. That's, like, two or three years.

CHEE

Uh-huh. Yeah, it's very slow. For me it's very slow. Some people do right away. She gave me certificate. I earned two certificate. The

third one, I didn't get it yet. It's over there. I meant to pick it up, but I keep forgetting it.

BAYHYLLE

Those are really all the questions that I have for you, Kathy. Someone, your nieces or nephews hear your recording on the web, hear you talk about your experience, is there anything that you'd like them to know about relocation or about your life?

CHEE

Like them to know?

BAYHYLLE

Uh-huh, that you'd especially like to let people know how your life went or how it was for you that's especially important to you.

CHEE

I wish I could put it in good word, but I don't know how to say it.

BAYHYLLE

Sounds like you worked hard and—

CHEE

Yeah, I work hard.

BAYHYLLE

—you had a good life.

CHEE

Well, I do work—workaholic I was.

BAYHYLLE

Was that a good thing for you or was that—

CHEE

I think it's good, yeah. Keep me busy. Keep my mind busy.

BAYHYLLE

Keep earning money.

CHEE

Money, yes. You can't go without. Well, I really don't know. I wish I could say something good. I can't think right now.

BAYHYLLE

Well, it sounds like you had more opportunity here maybe than you might have if you had stayed in Arizona.

CHEE

Yeah. Yeah, I did it. I learn a lot as I go. What did I learn? Well, anyway, I learn how to live, take care of yourself in the city—

BAYHYLLE

Right. How to be safe.

CHEE

—how to meet the people, yeah, some people. I met a lot of people with different language. Some I don't understand. Most of them I don't understand, you know, another country. A lot of people working at L.A. County and they hardly speak English, so you don't know what they're saying. Sometimes they say something you don't barely understand. But that was good, something new to me. That's about all I could think of right now.

BAYHYLLE

Well, that's fine. I appreciate your thoughts and your contribution you made. I'm going to turn the machine off now, if that's okay.

CHEE

Okay. [End of interview]

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