SESSION ONE

May 9, 2013

COATES: Today is May 9, 2013, and we are meeting at the Huntington Park Library. I'm with Michael McLaughlin, my name is Julia Coates, and this is the first interview.

You are Winnebago and Cayuga, is that right?

[00:00:45]

McLAUGHLIN: Well, I'm officially enrolled in Winnebago, Nebraska, but I also have Seneca-Cayuga ancestry.

COATES: Okay. Good. But you were born in Nebraska?

McLAUGHLIN: I was born in Sioux City, Iowa, which is right across the river from Winnebago, Nebraska.

COATES: Who are your parents? What are your parents' names?

McLAUGHLIN: My mother's name was Betty Ann Brown McLaughlin, and she was the member of the Winnebago Tribe. My father's name was Charles McLaughlin, who is not Indian.

COATES: So where does the Seneca-Cayuga come in? Through your mother as well?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Her mother was part Seneca-Cayuga, so I guess Mom was like three-quarters Winnebago and then a quarter Seneca-Cayuga.

COATES: Can you describe to us where the Winnebago reservation is located?

McLAUGHLIN: It's in the northeastern corner of Nebraska near the Missouri River, and the closest major city is Sioux City, which is perhaps 30 miles away. Then in Nebraska the next major city is Omaha, which is about 120 miles south. It's very woodsy. There

are deer there. Part of the reservation is alongside the Missouri River. The reservation itself is about as large as I would estimate would be the San Fernando Valley area, geographically. It was part of the Omaha reservation initially, then the Omaha agreed with the United States government to sell it in 1864, and so part of the history is that the Winnebago were moved around approximately five times from their original homes in Wisconsin. So they were located for different short periods to—Minnesota was one, I believe South Dakota, Montana, and several other states. They had treaties back to the early 1800s, but usually the land became desirable by white people, so the federal government would renegotiate each time.

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So finally the official reservation became the one in Nebraska, and all the Winnebago were supposed to move there, but because of the Civil War, half the Winnebago Tribe got up and went back to Wisconsin, which was later recognized as a recognized tribe, I believe in the 1970s, so like almost 100 years later.

COATES: So there are two groups of Winnebagos now, one in Wisconsin, and one in Wisconsin.

McLAUGHLIN: Right.

COATES: Two, but politically separate tribal entities.

McLAUGHLIN: Correct. Correct. The Wisconsin are Ho-Chunk. They renamed themselves Ho-Chunk, and in Nebraska we stayed [unclear] tribe in Nebraska, but there's apparently a lot back and forth as far as people in tract and family members and such, which was never true for my family. I'm not sure why that was.

COATES: They didn't go back and forth, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: No.

COATES: Where did they live when you were born, your parents?

[00:04:58]

McLAUGHLIN: When I was born, my mom lived in Sioux City, and my dad was all over the place, so we would go back and forth to, in the state of Nebraska, the reservation, probably for most events. That was probably where most of the casual time was spent. It was sort of about half and half, I would say.

COATES: Were there a lot of people in Sioux City, a lot of Winnebago people who had moved there from off the reservation?

McLAUGHLIN: No. No, not really. There were very few. At the time, Sioux City was a very white community, so dark people really stood out when you were there, I think. I remember, for example, there was a young woman who was black, and so she was the only Negro in the school. So there were no Asians, there was nobody else. And I usually passed for white, so when I was out by myself, people didn't question. But only when I was with family members that people would look at me funny.

COATES: So people just assumed, and you let them assume, is that—

McLAUGHLIN: Exactly. You know, you didn't think about it, you know.

COATES: Right, when you're a kid.

McLAUGHLIN: It just is, yes, and it's only as you start to get older and you start to realize, oh, there's a difference here.

COATES: Do you know what brought your mother to Sioux City then, if there weren't really actually many Indians there?

McLAUGHLIN: I believe it was for work, because Sioux City was—it still is—a meatpacking city, so you had Swift, Armour, and other sort of national brands for bacon and sausage. They all had packing plants there. Zenith also had a factory there, because I remember she worked for Zenith, Motorola, I think it was, because we had a couple Zenith radios that were pretty fancy.

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So I believe that was the reason, because there really wasn't a lot on the reservation. In fact, it was really pretty poor there. The tribal members primarily lived in the town. We called it the village, Winnebago. So geographically it was mostly the white families that leased their lands, which were farms. So it was in town were the tribal members. When you went out, it was usually white people, but you would see sometimes Winnebagos out in the different parts of the reservation.

It was sort of a mystery to me because no one ever talked about the history of the reservation or anything. You just sort of knew where the big white farms were, and you could tell by the equipment, and they'd all be lit up. They were like their own little compounds. You could mostly see by night. You could see the rolling hills. You could see the crops growing. But there were places where you could go out, like close down to the river, Missouri River, where there didn't seem to be anyone. There was a population in total was about 5,000 people.

COATES: This was Winnebago and the white farmers?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So it was about evenly divided, about half and half. So when you think of 5,000 people in a territory that's comparable to San Fernando Valley, which

houses, what, three million, a lot of that land out there was just like, wow. It was just like unknown. But you really didn't think about it. It was just the way it was, you know.

COATES: And these white farmers were people who were leasing the land from the Winnebago allottees?

[00:09:42]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: They're not people who own the land, and we should probably just say that for the interview purposes.

McLAUGHLIN: Correct, yes, yes. I would say it was all leased land.

COATES: But some of them, had they been leasing it for, like, multiple generations and things like that?

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. They were very proud members of leaseholders whose great-grandfathers were pioneers and helped till the land and make it productive. So they were very proud. It was sort of odd to me, because, I mean, it will never be their land, but they occupied their leased land for generations now, and they have a lot of pride in that.

COATES: Do they feel as though it's theirs?

McLAUGHLIN: I'm sure they probably do, yes, even though that's not real logical to me, but the federal government set up that system, so it's hard to backtrack.

COATES: So did that lead to tensions then between the Winnebagos in town and the white farmers that were leasing their lands and their allotments?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I think there has always been and there still is. It's like a truce, and when troubles flare up, it's usually because one side or the other went over the lines of separation, the invisible lines of separation.

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For example, what I remember or recall as being strange was, for example, part of my family was Dutch Reform, because that was what the federal government sent to that reservation early, first on. So Dutch Reform were assigned to Winnebago, Nebraska, and later the Catholics came in. So Dutch Reform were like 1855. Then Catholics were like early 1900s. I remember that in the initial period most of the lawmakers did not want Catholics going as part of this process, but later they opened up to Catholics. But so from what I recall, there was a Dutch Reform church in town, I was baptized there.

There were no white people there, so it's like when you saw white people, they may stop by the gas station or you may see them in town, but it's like there were separate lives. So it was sort of odd, because, for example, there was a high school, elementary school, junior high school, most of the teachers were white there, but they were not local, so they would go back to Sioux City or some other white town nearby. So you had that. It's like the white people on the reservation didn't deal with the white people who were outsiders who happened to teach on the reservation or happened to be employed by the Indian Health Service Hospital, which Winnebago had. So it's like you had these different groups that didn't really talk with each other that much, so it was sort of strange.

COATES: Was it just a lack of interaction or lines between interaction that were drawn, or were there actual sorts of discrepancies—what's the word I'm looking for? Differences in resources, so to speak. I mean, were the white churches wealthier? I don't

know what it might be, but the institutions that the whites used were sort of more endowed than those that the Indians had?

[00:14:05]

McLAUGHLIN: That could be. Because I was so small, I really didn't pay that much attention to that, but I just knew that there were the divisions. And just like a daily conversation, just like, "Don't bother them," or, "Don't go near them," or whatever. So, I mean, that was just part of daily life.

COATES: Did you have the sense that it was just sort of a cultural separation, or was it actually racial prejudice, do you think?

McLAUGHLIN: I think it was both, because it was like I remember hearing comments, like even when I went back recently—well, 1997, whenever. Actually there was a town nearby and I went into a store and some of the Winnebago members came in, and the young guy was disputing the amount of change, and so they had some words back and forth. The tribal members left, and I was sitting there, probably passing for white, and they said, "Oh, you know, they're always right. They never make any mistakes," and it was like, "Yeah, I know, I know." So it was just like that. You put on your official face, and it's like there's no real interaction. But I think that's just the sense I also got from being in the towns around there. These were small towns, a thousand people and maybe a little bigger, but they're all farm communities.

COATES: So the Indian people are pretty outnumbered by the whole white folks overall in the region, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. But I remember hearing like, "You really don't go there," like Pender, Nebraska, and the other places. You just sort of stayed away from there.

COATES: Was there actual violence and that kind of thing that—

[00:16:17]

McLAUGHLIN: I had heard that there was, simply because—and I wasn't really clear on it because nobody talked about it. It was only after the fact. For example, when I did my master's degree in American studies, history, and law, I specifically focused on the Winnebago allotment process and so forth, and in doing that research, I would come up. There's not a lot in Nebraska, for one thing I discovered, especially the Indians of Nebraska, but one of the things I discovered was there were Civil Rights Commission reports dating primarily in the early 1970s, in which these reports, various parts of them, talked about the corruption within Nebraska and part of what they would—the sheriff's department's legal process—that they would—it's like on the Winnebago reservation, they could count on people getting drunk. They would count on a certain number of arrests, because it would fill their other quota or whatever. But also there was no reports.

Then sometimes the young white guys, you're out in the middle of rural Nebraska where there's not a heck of a lot going on, and that was like a form of entertainment, so they would arrest the tribal members and release them, say, at midnight when they were still drunk, and they'd try to stagger home. So then was sort of like a shooting practice.

COATES: And they'd get beat up or—

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, beaten up or whatever. So I'd never heard that specifically when I was there. I just knew that you shouldn't go on the road. If you travel into Sioux City, try to stay right on the main highway, don't go off-road.

[00:18:45]

I remember one night coming home from Macy, Nebraska, which is right next door, which is on the Omaha reservation, and we'd gotten delayed. It was my great-aunt's, her husband, who was actually a sheriff. These were two-lane roads, and there's no streetlights or anything like that, and there was a point where we saw the lights behind coming up. You could tell by the interaction between my great-uncle and my great-aunt, she said, "Go, go, go, go."

"I am trying to go. I'm trying to go as fast."

And I thought it fun. I was in the backseat. Didn't have seatbelts back then. But there was just that tension of something might happen. I remember we practically raced. It was probably maybe a 10-mile distance. But then when we got towards the town of Winnebago, then the lights went away, so we had reached sort of the safety of town.

COATES: And you said your great-uncle was a sheriff himself?

McLAUGHLIN: He was a sheriff.

COATES: And still he had this concern, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: Wow.

McLAUGHLIN: It's like those things like that happened where you knew that there was something that was off, but nobody every really said specifically anything about it really.

COATES: It's just understood.

MCLAUGLIN: It was just understood. But then when I read the reports from the Civil Rights Commission, it's like it all started to click. It started to—oh, okay, this is kind of what they're talking about here. Okay. But it just made me think. Like once in a while you'll see a movie like about the old South, during the civil rights marches and so forth, when those two white kids and one black kid disappear and they wound up getting murdered, you just have that vision, because dark is falling, and that's what we were experiencing. I remember I thought it was fun. I guess they didn't want me to panic or anything, but, "Oh, we're going fast now."

COATES: How old were you?

[00:21:23]

McLAUGHLIN: I'm estimating, I was probably seven or eight, what I recall. But it was always sort of the feeling like there were restrictions on everything, like you weren't really sort of free, you know.

COATES: So in these circumstances or in this atmosphere that exists in this place, your father is non-Indian and your mother is Winnebago, how is that relationship taken by others and how does it emerge in all the rest?

McLAUGHLIN: I think that is part of—I never really had an answer to that, because it seems like—I think they met when she went to Winnebago for something, or Omaha for some reason, because he was at the Air Force base, and I think they just got along, but I think that after, I think, when he realized you're dealing with the Winnebago, on the Indian reservation you've got the different issues, so he took off when I was small. And Mom, out of pure stubbornness, just said, "To heck with you. I can do this on my own."

So even though nobody ever talked about it, again, that's the other part, is that I don't really know what happened there. When I'd ask about it, it was like, "Don't worry about it. Never mind." My uncle, all the family members accepted me, and it's like they just ignored the fact that my father was white. I mean, at least openly. I'm not sure how they may have felt privately. I sort of suspect my uncles weren't too glad about that.

COATES: So the relationship worked, not in that place, though. When it was in Omaha, it worked, but not when it came back to Winnebago.

[00:23:47]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I suspect maybe that's why she went to have me in Sioux City, because we had the Indian Health Service Hospital there, where she was born and all my other—my uncles and aunts were born there, and most of the other family. So why did she feel the need to go to Sioux City?

COATES: That is interesting, because she would have had to pay for it in Sioux City. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, where she wouldn't have had to in Winnebago.

COATES: Wouldn't have had to in Winnebago.

McLAUGHLIN: So by the time I started thinking about this type of question, it was like there was no one—

COATES: No one to ask.

McLAUGHLIN: No one to ask, or Mom was a great evader, so she just wouldn't talk about it. You couldn't drag it out of her. So there are a lot of question marks that I had about that whole experience, unfortunately, and no one to really talk about them.

COATES: So you grew up with your mother in Sioux City then, in a house in Sioux City, or a house or apartment or something there?

[00:24:56]

McLAUGHLIN: An apartment. Sioux City, Iowa, at that time, it was sort of like nobody was really rich, but nobody was like really poor either. It was sort of middle-class, and I think everyone just—Sioux City, actually, we got along fine with people. And I remember our landlords were this old Jewish couple, and they had survived the Holocaust, and the mother was really sweet. She was a really nice lady.

So I always felt perfectly at home there with the neighbors and everything. So I really had no complaints about Sioux City until later when Mom started having her drinking problems, and Mom was a loud drunk. She was loud and obnoxious, and she was the type of person who would walk up to the six-feet-four football player type and swear at them and call them a name and say, "Oh, you don't like me because I'm Indian," you know, out of the blue. So she proceeded to do that type of thing at my elementary school a couple of times, so that's when you began to—because when you're in still a fairly small-town feel, that's when other people started to look at me and say, "Okay, don't let him around, because his mother might come around," or something. They just don't want to deal with that.

COATES: So that inhibited you from being able to make friendships and things like that.

McLAUGHLIN: To keep them. To keep them, yes, because there were times, people I knew growing up, it's like they were fine. I mean, we walked to school together and do the normal stuff that kids do. But, then, anyway, started getting like eight and nine, that's

when you started to see the parents go, "Come here, come here, come here. Here comes Mike."

And the kid's going, "What the matter?"

[00:27:18]

"Come here, I don't want you—," you know, and that's when I think the reputation—and one of the things that I think really—it's not funny, but because when she was drinking, she would go off to different places and she'd meet guys and go for the weekend in South Dakota or wherever, and she finally got busted for that.

So it was one afternoon that I saw—you know, like you have your five o'clock news, and then I saw her on the five o'clock news in handcuffs, being carried away, and the reporter saying, "This is Mrs. Betty McLaughlin, and she's been arrested for child abandonment, which she's been doing," blah, blah, blah. It was like when it's on the local news, yes, in a small—

COATES: Yes, that's a shock.

McLAUGHLIN: In a fairly small town, it's like, "Oh, good god."

COATES: So for child abandonment, had they already come and picked you up then, I mean, or were you—

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. That was a really scary experience, because when they did come to pick me—because I just went to school, I just did my own stuff. I fed myself.

COATES: So when she would leave, you'd just be at home on your own, basically?

McLAUGHLIN: Right.

COATES: Making your own meals and stuff like that.

McLAUGHLIN: Right.

COATES: And you're about eight or nine years old at this point.

[00:28:56]

McLAUGHLIN: Right. So when they finally did pick me up, the police came, and, of course, it's in broad daylight, and all the neighbors are wondering what's going on and everything. And it was like I felt I had done something wrong, because there were no—and really criticized the system for that, because I never saw a social worker or anything that explained to me what was going on. It was just, "Okay, you're Michael McLaughlin. We need to take you."

And all my little childhood friends, they're watching, "Hey, what's going on here?" So they put me in the back of a police car and took me to the jail, and they had a little unit they had for, like, children's, I guess, protective custody or whatever, so it had little dollhouses and boys' toys, but it was a jail cell. So when they turned out the light—you know, nobody explained anything to me.

COATES: So they kept you there overnight in a jail cell?

McLAUGHLIN: They kept me overnight in a jail cell.

COATES: As an eight- or nine-year-old child.

McLAUGHLIN: As an eight- or nine-, yes, nine-year-old child. And it was the most awful feeling because no one said anything, and as their time comes to shut down, they don't tell you anything. You hear the bars roll, sort of like you do in a prison, what you see in a prison, by the way, and then they turn out the lights. So there's no, "This is what's going on, Michael, and things are going to—we're dealing with this," whatever. They just put me in there, brought me a tray full of foods through the bars, and you're on your own.

COATES: So you really do think that you've done something wrong here, huh? [00:30:53]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. And I guess it was the following day, they called. They had contacted my great-aunt, so then she came up and got me and took me back to her place, which is on the reservation. So I wasn't under custody for a long time. Thank god for my great-aunt there.

But that's when my mom was just becoming a full-fledged drunk then, and so when we stayed on the reservation, we stayed with my aunts. This was the militaristic one I told you about. She's the one who had sent me the postcard from California when she visited her children of San Quentin prison, saying, "You'd better be good or you're going to wind up here." That was the message, not "Love, Aunt Ethel" or anything. [laughs] You think about it, and it's like, oh, how horrible. I had to live with her then.

COATES: So, you did. You actually when to live with her. It wasn't just a temporary thing at this point, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Correct. But even then I knew it was temporary. I think they were trying to figure out exactly what—you know, is she going to stay sober now? I think she was sort of forced to. Are we going to stay there in Winnebago? Can we go back to Sioux City? What's going on? But that happens to be the time when the relocation program had started. So what's the thing an alcoholic will do? Is it geographic? Now it's all Winnebago, all those people in Sioux City, all those rez people. We'll go to Los Angeles and—

COATES: And everything will be different?

McLAUGHLIN: Everything will be—yes. Now we'll be in California, we're going to have a nice apartment, all this stuff, and that's what the BIA was saying to people, with the posters of these happy Indians in their new kitchen with their—yeah. So, fine, we'll go there.

[00:33:28]

And we came to L.A. I think we picked L.A. because my uncle was here, my great-uncle was here, and my grandmother had already come out here. I don't think she was on relocation.

COATES: Do you know why they had come or when?

McLAUGHLIN: I think it was probably maybe 1958. I think my great-uncle may have come on relocation. His sister, my aunt, probably followed him. I'm not really sure what all the specifics of that were.

COATES: But there were other family members who were already here by the time that your mother came?

McLAUGHLIN: Correct. Correct. So I think that's really why they picked L.A.

So we packed up what—we didn't have much, but we packed up, and they gave us a train ticket and we headed out to L.A.

COATES: Before we make the move to L.A., can I go back to the reservation and ask a couple more things just to—

McLAUGHLIN: Sure.

COATES: Living in Sioux City, do you remember what kinds of interactions your mother and you had with the family on the reservation or with the tribe on the

reservation? Did you go there to—I think you said, you had told me before, you went to participate in different events and things like that and visit family.

[00:35:12]

McLAUGHLIN: Because we'd go to Winnebago when they had their powwows and for other reservation events, and that's also where my great-grandfather gave me my Winnebago name. Again, no clue as to why or anything else, because he didn't do it for his own sons, he didn't do it for any of his grandchildren either, but he came out and did it for me. But there was no explanation of that, and when that ceremony was over, he disappeared back into the woodwork somewhere, and we just went on like normal life.

COATES: You told me that this was the only time that he had emerged, huh, basically, for anything like this?

McLAUGHLIN: At least for—well, I know he hadn't done it for any of my—I was told he had not done that for any of his other children or grandchildren. He just did it for me, not for my little brother or any of the cousins either. So I have no idea as to why that happened.

So being in Winnebago, there was always something going on, so I liked being in Winnebago, but you had that undercurrent of tension also, so you—

COATES: There is, huh? In the family because of family events, or between the Winnebago community and the—

McLAUGHLIN: Within the Winnebago community, yes. I mean, they had a lot of social problems, and I think it was all connected to the whole tension within the white people who were on the reservation, the white people off the reservation, so there was always that sense of tension.

COATES: So that's creating tension within the Winnebagos themselves as well, huh, and with each other?

[00:37:20]

McLAUGHLIN: Right. See, part of what happened when the United States passed Public Law 280, Nebraska was one of the first states to lose its federal—the tribes lost their federal—

COATES: Jurisdiction, basically.

McLAUGHLIN: They lost the police force. They lost all the things that kept order. So I don't know how much of the tension was prompted by that and how much it was really there before. But you had the lawlessness, because the people in the neighboring towns knew that there was no tribal police anymore. There was no one to really keep order, because the State of Nebraska, they didn't want to deal with it either, because Public Law 280 was a surprise to everyone. So the county government didn't want to deal with it. The State of Nebraska didn't want to deal with it. The feds didn't want to deal with it. And the tribal government was totally federally funded and operated. So there was no one you could go to and say, "What do we do here?" So you started having different breakdowns in, like, the utilities. You'd have, like, trucks getting hijacked on the highway, because, again, where there's no law enforcement, people quickly become, frankly, bandits, and do whatever it is they think they can get away with.

COATES: So when you say the tribal government is federally funded, does that result in sort of an elite class of Winnebago people who are perceived by others as kind of running the situation and receiving favors and those kinds of perceptions?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. I guess what I'm not clear on is, for example, the great-aunt I was telling you about, she was a secretary to the agency chief or the head of the agency there, but her status didn't seem to change. So I never—and, again, I would have thought—I would have loved to have asked this at the time, but it was like—

COATES: She had something on somebody. [laughs]

[00:40:01]

McLAUGHLIN: They still had their positions, so they still had the Indian Health Service Hospital, and perhaps it was because it was IHS instead of whatever the other funding was, but I don't know if that was ever made clear. But the IHS Hospital seemed to continue functioning, but other pieces sort of started to fall apart. And that was also late 1950s. So I think all that combined.

COATES: But they were never terminated, were they?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: Winnebago was? It was one that was terminated.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: Okay, I see what you—that would do it.

McLAUGHLIN: But, again, what did that exactly mean as far as daily life for the people on the rez and, frankly, for the people on the leased land? It's like just a bunch of questions, because I would think if I were a white leaseholder on there, I would have thought, "Well, now it's time I can step up and buy the land." I mean, I don't know much about real estate, but that's what I would think. All of a sudden it's no longer a reservation.

COATES: I know there were different stages of termination, and maybe it didn't quite go to the full elimination of—

[00:41:31]

McLAUGHLIN: I believe that's what happened, is that there wasn't a full termination accomplished there.

COATES: So the trust status of the land was never actually ended, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Probably not. That's just what I'm guessing, because, I mean, at a later time, it's like nothing changed, as far as like who had the lease, leaseholders, and so forth. None of that changed. So can somebody answer this question somewhere? It's like, no. Because that's part of what, years later, when I was doing the research on the Winnebago Tribe and their legal system, there were just huge gaps of information. There were no answers, especially by the federal government. It's like, well, how did this happen then? I mean, the retrocession happened in 1983, but then what was happening between 1958 and 1983? I mean, it's a fairly big chunk of time, but there's no real clear markers of what the status was, so some things must have stayed in place but other things didn't. Can you make order—is there any complete narrative of that? No.

COATES: Not any of that, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: No. Because one of the things when I was actually doing the research and I did ask to look at the records, and they said they would be willing to let me look at the records, but they didn't have any. That's when I heard that there was a man from the National Archives who went there probably, I guess, in the early eighties, and he had found where the tribe or the agent had kept the records, and it was in the garage in part of the agency section, and they were just dumped there. So there was silverfish and all

kinds of critters, so they salvaged what they could, but it's like there was no real conscientiousness as far as any of the real activities.

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Perhaps because today everything is so regulated and every pencil is accounted for, but it seems like when you look at the records and ask the authorities, it's like, "Well, sorry, we don't know what happened between 1960 and 1980." How can you not know what happened? You have to have something, an annual report by the agents or something. And it's like, "Sorry."

COATES: It's all disappeared, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, or else it never was registered or kept track of. So, I mean, they were frustrated too. That's why the tribe finally started keeping records, but that wasn't till, like, the late nineties.

COATES: Fifteen years or so now, that's it, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: Were the people on the reservation economically—were they working also or was it a poorer situation then?

McLAUGHLIN: It was fairly poor. I think probably the people who were the government workers were the people who worked for the agency there, and people worked for the hospital there. For example, we had a gas station. We had two gas stations, actually, but one never was operational in my lifetime, and there was sort of a general store. Then you had the church, then you had the Catholic church was a bigger church with the orphanage. But there were not a lot of buildings there. There were

houses. But it just seemed like nobody seemed—like, you didn't see Cadillacs or you didn't see fancy bicycles or anything to indicate that there's—

COATES: But people did have cars of some sort, for the most part?

[00:46:21]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, for the most part. We didn't, but, again, they were sort of like average cars.

COATES: They were living in, like, HUD homes? I don't know if HUD even existed at that point, but government housing of some sort?

McLAUGHLIN: I guess it probably was government housing, but I think the HUD homes came later. They just seemed like normal houses. Because my aunt that I wound up staying with for a while, that was the agency compound, so it was like an ops building, like a bigger storage building, some garages, then maybe eight multi-unit dwelling-type structures. So, again, it wasn't a big complex, but nothing there was. Nothing was very fancy. It was all just sort of the frame and houses. I remember nobody had anything. There was nothing like, "Oh, look at that house." Actually, that was much later when you went, "Wow, where did that house come from?"

"Oh, that belongs to the tribal chief."

"Oh." Okay, this is 1990. That's 1990s, but back in the fifties, no. It was a small town, rural small town.

COATES: Now, you don't have any siblings, is that correct, or do you?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, I had a little brother, but he came around 1965. He was born here. He was born in L.A. But before that, no.

COATES: So do you remember anything at all, like literature or somebody visiting or somebody talking to your mother about relocation, or how it was that she made the decision?

[00:48:32]

McLAUGHLIN: I think it sort of happened around the time that she got arrested, and I think the authorities probably gave me to my aunt because she was a respectable federal employee, but I suspect there was such a push on the relocation at that time period, I think my aunt being a federal employee and having this wayward niece, I think it probably sort of fit in, "And your grandmother's in L.A." But I don't remember any of the processes. It just was. "We're moving to L.A."

COATES: Okay. So that's basically all you knew about it. How did you react? What did you think when they said, "We're moving to L.A."?

McLAUGHLIN: Fine. Frankly, there was nothing there, as far as I was concerned. I don't think I was old enough to really have a consciousness of will things be different. I just thought it would be warmer, which seemed nice, you know, and it would just be more of something than there. It's like I really didn't want to go back to Sioux City either.

COATES: Speaking of that, how did they heat the homes there in Nebraska winters in the 1950s on the reservation?

McLAUGHLIN: I assume they had furnaces and such. I don't really know. I don't really know.

COATES: Okay. Just popped into my head. Wood-burning stoves, propane, what was it, yes.

McLAUGHLIN: Well, I can't remember. The washer was [unclear].

COATES: The washboard?

[00:50:30]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, but water came through it and it had, like, that roller. So, I mean, that was fancy. I remember that.

COATES: So did you leave in the middle of a school year or something to move to L.A.?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I think it was more like sort of a frantic attempt to change. I think we actually got here, like, Christmas Eve, 1960. We went to my uncle's, had an apartment in Glendale. He was a janitor at some company out there. So it was just everything happened so quickly, you know. We're on the train, didn't have a lot of stuff to begin with. I remember pulling into Union Station and looking around at all these big buildings. I mean, they seemed big to me at the time. And I guess we took a bus out to Glendale, and we lived with my great-uncle then for maybe a couple months.

COATES: How long was the train trip?

McLAUGHLIN: I guess it was about four or five days. I mean, I sort of liked the train trip.

COATES: And you left out of Sioux City or someplace else?

McLAUGHLIN: Probably Omaha.

COATES: Omaha.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, probably Omaha, yes, because we never traveled much when we were down here. We'd go visit my—when I was small, before that, we'd go visit my cousins who were in Kansas City, Missouri, and that was always a bus. We always had

Greyhound or—yes, I don't think I actually ever went to Omaha personally. It was just through Kansas City, which was also a fairly big city to me.

COATES: Do you remember much about the train trip?

[00:52:43]

McLAUGHLIN: I remember liking it, and I remember, like, going through Denver. I remember sort of seeing the Denver skyline, what there was then, then seeing Salt Lake, because the Mormon Temple really stands out there. It was not snowy yet, so the visibility was pretty good. I remember like the plains of western Nebraska, boy, that was not interesting at all, just this flat and these grains. It was really just Colorado that things started to look interesting, mountains and so forth. I enjoyed it.

COATES: You didn't stop anywhere, though, huh, along the way?

McLAUGHLIN: [00:53:45] I do remember stopping. I mean, like the train would just stop and you couldn't really get off. But I guess it was Cheyenne, because what I do remember is you'd see the people had their horses tied up, like right at the train station.

COATES: Wow. In 1960, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: 1960, yes. It was snowing up there, though. It wasn't real bad yet, but it was snowing up there. I'm trying to think. It seems like sort of a big dip, but I guess that's what we did.

COATES: To Cheyenne and then south to Salt Lake City and across to Denver, is that—

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, I guess.

COATES: Or Denver first and then Salt Lake?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Yes, I think so. And we actually went by Las Vegas, too, but we couldn't see much there.

COATES: I'm going to pause it for a minute.

[interruption]

COATES: So you get to Los Angeles and pull into Union Station, and it's a lot of big buildings, and was someone there to meet you, you said, or—

[00:55:29]

McLAUGHLIN: I think my uncle was, and my grandmother was, too, yes.

COATES: So they had a car or some kind of transport, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Right. I think they may have brought, like, a neighbor, because I know neither my grandmother nor my uncle, great-uncle, had a car. I think it was probably a neighbor. We always relied on public transportation when we were here.

COATES: And they drove you to Glendale?

McLAUGHLIN: Beautiful south Glendale.

COATES: Was that built up as it is now all the way, or what was it like between Union Station and Glendale at that time?

McLAUGHLIN: I don't think much of it has changed, really, because where he lived in south Glendale was right behind where the bus terminal was, so they did bus maintenance there. So it's like Los Feliz is, like, the closest you could get to the L.A. River, and so it was more like small factories and just once in a while an occasional house. So we were one of those occasional houses. Primarily around us was the sound of the buses.

So this was where the poor people in Glendale lived, and it was mostly white. Oh, no, it was all white, actually, now I think about it. But it was that weird combination of machine shop, house, transmission garage, house, which is all mostly torn down now.

There's a Safeway and some other things there, but that was where we moved to. I didn't mind the house. It had big rooms and big tall windows, big ceilings.

COATES: How many rooms was it?

[00:57:42]

McLAUGHLIN: I'm estimating around four.

COATES: Four rooms or four bedrooms?

McLAUGHLIN: Four rooms.

COATES: Four rooms. Okay. And how many people were living there after you arrived?

McLAUGHLIN: It was me, my aunt, my grandmother, my uncle, Mom, and myself. And California was different.

COATES: In what way? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: It just seemed like there was a lot more energy, I mean, compared to Sioux City or the reservation. And I don't think much has changed. It's like people back there, they're just sort of living, they're just sort of existing, you know, and that's all, "Got to go work, got to do this, got to do that." It's like, you know, and people knew everybody's business, and it was like—

COATES: It's a small town.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes, yes. It didn't really register until I went back there when I was older, and I would hear the conversations. It's like they just talk about other people, "Oh, look how slow she's moving today. Oh, her arthritis must really be acting up." [laughs] I mean, it's like this ain't your business. Then I started to realize that that's an event. It provides some flavor into the day. It was like, wow. [laughs] Well, even when

I went back there and I spent a summer there, they had three television stations, and two of them went off, like, at six o'clock, and you watched the grain reports and that sort of thing. So it's like you're not talking a lot of outside influence. I'm sure there are probably people now who have satellites and such, but they were just off the grid for what we consider normal, what we would today consider, like, okay, yeah, your option of five hundred channels or something. The life was just like, whew, right there. Got to watch here's the corn getting tall. You know what I mean? That was your daily life. So when I came to L.A. I just knew that there was more stuff going on.

COATES: So you're about ten years old at that time when you made the move? [01:00:47]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I think I just was nine. Maybe I just turned ten or was going to turn ten.

COATES: Nine or ten?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: So what are some of the first things that a nine- or ten-year-old boy does when he arrives in L.A. from Nebraska?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, actually, it was, frankly, sort of action-packed because there again, it was holiday time, so we went to—for example, I know we went to Rose Parade, which was, again, you'd never see anything close to that. Glendale, actually, the main street was actually pretty nice. Brand Boulevard had a lot of decorations and so there was like the immediate stimulus of things going on.

I remember going to, like, the Pike in Long Beach. It had the best roller coaster down there. That's when Pacific Ocean Park was where Santa Monica Pier is now, and

that also had rides, the roller coaster rides and such. So I'm not sure exactly where we got the money to do all this. So there was a lot of stimulation, and when you're in Long Beach, when you're down there or in Santa Monica, I mean, you see the ocean, the beaches, and you see all these different types of people, so even though it was still mostly white people, you saw some diversity. So it was a totally different world, and I was glad to be here. I didn't miss anything about life in Iowa and Nebraska. If I never saw it again, that was fine with me.

COATES: So what did your grandmother and great-uncle, what were they doing? What kind of employment did they have?

[01:02:59]

McLAUGHLIN: The great-uncle, he worked as a janitor out there, and I'm not really quite sure what my grandmother did. I remember she had another husband, so who was a non-Indian, and I'm not sure what he did either, come to think of it. And Mom would get, like, usually real low-level clerical jobs.

COATES: Did the BIA help her to find work?

McLAUGHLIN: I think they did through—it seemed like there was, like, a training program that was like office skills, because I remember she went downtown for that, but she never really developed any skills, I mean not enough to really make her consistently employed in a continuous way.

COATES: So she had a series of temporary jobs, was that—

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Well, I think part of her problem, too, was because she kept drinking at different times. She was a periodic, so she'd not drink for a while and then something would set her off, and then she'd be gone again for a week, week, a few days,

a month, or weeks. So, basically, I was looking at my grandmother for permanency, as far as permanent was concerned. We moved into what is now called Echo Park, that's where the north side of Echo Park—

COATES: When you say "we." Your grandmother moved there and her husband? [01:04:58]

McLAUGHLIN: I think there were—I'm trying to remember exactly what. No, actually, we moved downtown. It was now where the Staples is. There was an apartment building there. I think it was my grandmother, my mother, and myself. And I'm not sure how long we stayed there, but then it was out to Echo Park, and then wound up being back in Glendale. So there was a lot of movement between the two different locations, but we wound up sort of settling mostly around Glendale, different locations.

COATES: Do you know if the BIA was helping them to find apartments and find places to live, all of these frequent moves?

McLAUGHLIN: I don't believe so. I remember going down with probably Mom to downtown L.A. to a BIA office, and I don't remember exactly—I don't know exactly what was going on there, but it seemed like the relationship with the BIA ended fairly quickly. So I think it was like, I guess, the initial period, months, but then after that, I'm really not sure. As I was thinking about it, I'm not sure the training that she went through later, months later, a year later, I don't think that was BIA. I think that was whatever that—I think it was a CETA Program, some other kind of federal program that had to do more for lower-income people. I don't think it was BIA-related after that.

COATES: What does CETA stand for? It's CETA, you said?

McLAUGHLIN: I think you can probably look that up.

COATES: I will.

[01:07:02]

McLAUGHLIN: I think it might have been like a War on Poverty program under Johnson or something, yes, because you had more of that type of thing coming under Johnson and then into Nixon's period, trying to help poor people. So I don't think it was BIA.

COATES: No, I don't think it is either. It's federal. I just don't remember what it stands for. I remember the program.

Do you remember, did they interact with an Indian community, your grandmother, your great-uncle, and so forth, when you first joined them?

McLAUGHLIN: No, no. I wondered about that in later years because in later years I heard there was, for example, here there was an American Indian Clinic. There were churches here in Huntington Park. There were annual or weekly powwows at a couple of the organizations, but I didn't know about any of that when I arrived here or as a teenager. So there was an annual powwow up by Arroyo Seco by Pasadena. We'd go to that.

I remember when there was a United American Indian Involvement. I think we went to their office. They were like mid-Wilshire somewhere. Sometimes relatives would come into town and we might play host to them for a couple days, but nobody ever really stayed. I remember we had a Navajo neighbor in Glendale. I remember her. She was really sweet, but she couldn't take it. She couldn't take being in L.A. She didn't like concrete. She didn't trust elevators. There were just so many things that she couldn't adapt to, so she went back to, I guess, Navajo country.

COATES: How long did she stay, do you know?

[01:09:41]

McLAUGHLIN: I'm not sure. I remember conversations she had, though. I remember talking to my grandmother. This was in south Glendale. When she rented the apartment—because her name was Robertson, her last name was Robertson, and she says, "I think they thought I was white, because when I showed up, they looked at me funny." [laughter] But they rented the apartment to her. So she was from the Navajo reservation. I think she had much more culture shock because at least in Sioux City and Winnebago, you're living in western-style housing with sidewalks and regular American stuff. But she was really sweet, and I was sorry to see her go.

Aside from that and the occasional relatives that would come in, and once in a while maybe one of my great-aunts, because her sons had basically moved to northern California, San Francisco area, and they would come down once in a while, so we might do something with them, but they all went back to San Francisco, so we were pretty isolated. So there were no Indians in Glendale.

COATES: You kept in touch, though, with the people back home, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Most of them actually sort of came out here or they went to Kansas City. The Kansas City aunt actually went—because her husband was Santo Domingo Pueblo, so they moved to Santo Domingo after Kansas City. But, like, my uncles, we just didn't know where they were. We'd just hear from them or we'd drop in. It was sort of funny, because, like, no one ever really talked about anything. It was like, "Are you married?" or, "Where have you been living?" There was no real conversation. I never

really understood that, because I was always sort of curious, but you didn't talk [unclear]. "Where you been?"

"Oh, here and there."

"What you been doing?"

"Oh, this and that."

"How long are you going to stay?"

[01:12:26]

"Oh, whatever." And then they'd be gone four days later, and, "Oh, he's moving to—you know. He's got a job in Seattle or something." They'd just be gone, and that was the end of the conversation. So there was no consistency, and I used to wonder about that. I thought it was just my family, because what I realized afterwards is that that was basically the same thing with my other great-uncles and these other relatives. It's like they were just gone, and then you'd get a letter from them or maybe you'd get a phone call or something, but there was no consistent family connections or any interactions, and they were all over the place, the Midwest, Pacific Northwest.

COATES: So the whole family is basically dispersed from the reservation, and so, therefore, you don't really have any reason to go back to the reservation yourselves or make visits or anything like that?

McLAUGHLIN: Correct. I know I still have cousins there, and we know who we are, but there's really no connection. It's like the only time that, frankly, I connect with them are when I went back for my mom's funeral and I went back for my older brother's funeral, and then they're there, but we don't really interact aside from those very specific events.

COATES: And that was true even when you were a child and a teenager and a young adult and all the way through, huh?

[01:14:12]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. It's like—well, actually it's like it was a paper cutout life or something. It's like, okay, here's the house and here's the school, here's the church, there's the general store, there's the gas station, and like none of it was real. None of it had texture to me. Like when I came to L.A., it's like all of a sudden there was reality. It was very confusing, but it was like there was a bunch of real stuff going on. I mean, it's starting to change now, but for that whole period, probably up to the 1990s, I mean, the buildings never changed. I mean, nothing changed.

I started getting the Winnebago newspaper. It's biweekly. It's like the headline was the old AAA gas station collapsed. And that's the one I had seen that was close to the Dutch Reform Church, but it had been abandoned for years, and one day it just went [demonstrates], and that's the big news. I mean, that was what life was like. [laughs] Sorry, no movie stars, no glamour, just a few people getting beaten up once in a while, and, oh, okay, car wrecks. Somebody got drunk and drove off the ditch over there. Okay. That was it.

COATES: Your mother developed another relationship, and you had a brother that was born here then, huh?

MCLAUGHLN: Yes.

COATES: Within five years or so after you had arrived?

McLAUGHLIN: Correct, yes. Mom had a lot of boyfriends, okay? After she got here, she was supposedly married around four or five times. I don't think she ever really kept

track, so but he was a longer-term one, but he was an engineer that did offshore navigation, so he could be gone to Ireland or Kuwait or whatever.

COATES: And he's almost fifteen years younger than you, as well, huh?

[01:17:02]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So he was always sort of in the picture somewhere, and then when he would come to town, it would be a big deal, but it was like he never really knew his son. We didn't really communicate with the relatives. We tried to. They weren't really—they were from upstate New York.

But my father had long gone from the scene. My half brother's father was not really part of his life, so, I mean, it was just random. There was no consistency anywhere, and Mom continued to have her drinking problem on and off, but my grandmother was sort of the steady focus. So if she hadn't been present, I'm sure we would have wound up in foster care. So my life was totally about my friends, none of whom were Indians.

COATES: Those were my next questions. When you started school, you're going to an all-white school, it sounds like.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: In Glendale, first of all?

McLAUGHLIN: Glendale, yes.

COATES: South Glendale.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So elementary school, junior high school, high school.

COATES: Is it pretty much the same thing, that you're just assumed to be white by everybody and that?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: So there's not any real—did it come up that you were, in fact, Indian? [01:18:50]

McLAUGHLIN: I think only really once, and that was because one of my buddies came home or dropped by my place, and my mother was doing something, she was taking out the garbage or something like that, and he looked at her and his eyes got real big, and he said, "What are you, Italian or something?"

And I just said, "No," and changed the subject. I think I had learned enough from being in Sioux City that it was better just not to say anything, and I think that they sort of felt the same way, my family.

COATES: Don't ask, don't tell situation, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, seriously. So it was just something that if you were forced to deal with, confront the issue, then you might say something, but they wouldn't really talk about it. It was like it was just when you had family members. And at the time I think mostly we came into L.A., I don't think we really stuck around Glendale when the family members did come. So there was sort of a stay away from Glendale and obviously really white areas, because if you come into Glendale, you can sort of mix with the Mexicans and people will take you for Mexican. [laughs]

COATES: So it's better to be Mexican than to be Indian, huh? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. I remember, because, like, when we would go shopping downtown L.A., downtown L.A. is where we usually went, and my grandmother, it was like some of the stores on Broadway, they would start speaking there in Spanish, and she would always get pissed off, but she would just say, "No, no, no, no, Indio, Indio, Indio,

Indio." And Mom was pretty much the same way. But, see, there were some Indian bars downtown L.A., so that was where they would go. My grandmother was not an alcoholic, but Mom would sort of be under control. Did you ever see the movie called—

COATES: *The Exiles*. Yes.

[01:21:33]

McLAUGHLIN: — *The Exiles*, yes. I've always wondered why I didn't see Mom in any of those scenes. So that was part of her life, not consistently, but she would go through periods where she would be there, and that was probably the only Indianness I ever became aware of, because we know where she'd go.

COATES: So she kept some interaction, even if it was only with bar mates who were Indian, probably, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. But I think that's probably how we knew about the powwows and some of the other things, because, as you know, the relocation, they didn't really try to keep people together. Their job was to bring people here and just sort of let them melt into the melting pot. But later I used to think it was strange, because there were places in Huntington Park and other parts of town that we never had any dealings with whatsoever, we didn't even know about them, so I always thought that was odd, but that's what that was.

COATES: Did you stay in the same schools in the same neighborhoods and so forth all through?

McLAUGHLIN: First I think it was Irving Elementary, which is still there, in Glendale. Then Roosevelt Junior High School and then Glendale High School, but I dropped out in the tenth grade. But I—pretty much consistent with the classmates and such, but there

was never anything Indian going on, and I always passed for white, apparently. So that was never an issue.

COATES: And you're living with you grandmother through most of this?

[01:23:41]

McLAUGHLIN: Well, Mom and my grandmother.

COATES: All of you together, huh? Okay.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, and my little brother towards—yes, after 1965. So that was all about Glendale until I started venturing off into Hollywood, and that changed everything for me.

COATES: Why did you drop out?

McLAUGHLIN: Because I guess Glendale had become to me what Sioux City had.

COATES: Okay. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: It was so predictable. It was really predictable. And Glendale was so conservative, and that was where the Nazi Party had their headquarters on Colorado.

COATES: Oh, my goodness.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, the John Birch Society before they moved to San Marino, you had—we're talking mid-sixties, so I'm like fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. There were different incidences that happened. I remember there was a black family that moved into a house in what is the nice—you know, the rich part of Glendale on Kenneth Road [phonetic]. I remember that it even made the *L.A. Times* that the cousin was a doctor and the mother or the wife was a professor or something. They had burned a cross on their lawn, so they made it real clear that you weren't welcome.

And I remember seeing this black family. They were probably coming from Pasadena through Colorado Boulevard, and they were stopped at the intersection of Brand [phonetic] Boulevard there, an older couple, respectable-looking couple, and I remember seeing—and I was probably waiting for a bus or doing something up there, where people were stopping and turning and looking, like "What are you doing here?" I mean, people literally stopped, looking at this black couple, who looked perfectly, like, normal people to me. But it was like you could feel they're just waiting for the light to change so they could move on. And you start seeing different stuff like that, and that's just like—and I guess I began to realize, if they knew what I was, you know—

COATES: I was going to ask that.

[01:26:24]

McLAUGHLIN: —that they would probably do the same, and so in—

COATES: So, really, you were able to keep all your relatives under the radar for all these years? [laughs] They were not going to parent-teacher conferences or—nobody figured it out, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: I know my mom went to school for some things, particularly, like, junior high school, and I think that because she spoke normally, her skin may have been darker, but, I mean, she was totally dressed like a typical lower- or middle-class woman would be. I don't think they put the two together. [laughs] I mean, because people have asked me questions like that and say, well, maybe she'd wear a shawl and straight hair, and maybe they would have thought something. But I don't think they really—because they knew who I was. She looked totally average, I think, as far as her dress and the way she spoke and everything. So I don't think anyone thought anything of that, yes, at least

not towards the mid-sixties and the later sixties, because we'd go up to Glendale, the main stores and stuff, and I don't think we ever had an issue with that.

COATES: So what did you do when you dropped out? Things had become stagnant and—

[01:28:11]

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, no, no, no, because I was already starting to—there were those people in, well, probably everywhere, I mean kids who were just dying to do something, to be different, and when they started having love-ins in Hollywood and you had the Sunset Strip riots, those became newsworthy, it was suddenly something you saw, "Oh, there's something really different going on here, and it's close." So it's not like I had to—you get on a bus and be in Hollywood in twenty or thirty minutes. So you had this movement of kids who wanted to be part of that, and you could spot each other when you were—even in Glendale there were a few. They were all heading west, so why would you stay in Glendale when you had—

COATES: How did you spot each other?

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, the clothing, the different—I had this huge peace symbol I would wear, not all the time, but at certain times. So there were certain signals that you knew, and so you would basically gravitate towards Hollywood, and you'd meet others along the way. It was so easy. In Hollywood itself, it wasn't just sixteen-year-olds trying to be older or hipper, cooler; you had the older people then who were trying to be younger and hipper and cooler, who had the drugs, who had the houses, who had the access to things. So it was really easy to move. The drugs were very easy to get a hold of. It was no effort at all. I mean, I literally never paid for anything. And if you were sort of young and

willing, the doors just opened up for you like crazy, recording studios, different types of parties, some of them turned out to be orgies, some of them turned out to be just drug fests that you had, I'd say, really the whole nation wanting to do some of that stuff. [01:31:05]

So you had from the upper-class kids, they wanted to get down and get dirty, so you had a whole lot of energy moving in that drug-induced, sex-induced, whatever, anything goes, and it was real easy to just fall into that, I think especially because in Hollywood, you had the show business, the music business, and that whole part wants that aliveness, they want that stimulation.

COATES: So it's really more around that kind of thing rather than social movements, because there's this antiwar kind of thing that's going on at that time, but this is different, this is—

McLAUGHLIN: This is pure sex, drugs, and rock and roll, with sort of the gesture of freedom. It was really in Berkeley and San Francisco you had the political activism. You had Washington, D.C., New York City, but in Southern California, in L.A., I mean, yes, they'd given token, "Oh, yes, we're with you, brother," and, "Power to the people," and all that stuff, but they were really looking for the next score of some good hash or some good grass or whatever.

COATES: Just hedonism, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: And what made it ideal for California is because you had the close proximity to places like Topanga Canyon, the canyons of Palm Springs. You had the different places to go where you could sort of do it fairly easily, Zuma Beach, Big Sur, places like that. So it was not a major effort. [laughs] Because you always had older

people who were trying to recapture their youth, so you had show-business people and you have the recording executives, and you have studio executives, and they're all looking for the next *Easy Rider*, man. So it was egalitarian in that you lost those distinctions, so it didn't matter if you were a movie exec or whatever, a makeup person or just a waitress or a street kid, you could all move in the same milieu and people were dying to get in.

COATES: I mean, this could potentially be thousands and thousands of people that we're talking about. I mean, you say people are dying to get in. How do you get in? Just being there and being willing, is that simply that?

[01:34:26]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I mean, it was easy, and then especially if you will do—like the way you dress, in a way that's not establishment and so forth, that was like it, and it was easy to do, really.

COATES: Well, what I'm just kind of wondering about all of this is if there's kind of a criteria that, okay, if you're just going to be sort of accepted in and taken care of by these older people and these kinds of things, is it a matter of being more interesting than the million other fifteen-year-olds who were lining up? Is it a matter of being more creative than the other fifteen-year—what is it that makes the difference between being one that gets into that? Because if it's simply being there, then that's a huge pool of people, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, it was. You're right. There were sort of different layers. For example, there were the kids that we called the weekend hippies, so they would go over into the head shops on Sunset or Fairfax and buy the things. Some would even buy wigs so that you would look the part, and you would try to talk the part, but then they would

go back to their normal lives during the regular school session or whatever. So there was a lot of that, and it's those distinctions that started to emerge. Are you a weekend hippie, or are you somebody who's really sort of hip and cool and maybe doing art or maybe doing something that qualifies you to move a little further in?

[01:36:17]

And that's really why I dropped out. It was like I can't party and then take seriously going back to Glendale High School and saying, "Okay, where are you on your literature?" or whatever. So being in Glendale and everything about it, that felt like death. That felt like going back to absolute nothingness. And because of my own family, we were so poor, it's like there was nothing to keep me there. So that freaked my mom out, that freaked my grandmother out, and so forth, but there's really nothing they could do. They would file a police report that I was a runaway and so forth, but there were so many, so the police were, like, overwhelmed with trying to keep track of everything, and you were just another notch, as far as all that was concerned.

I think partially, too, maybe it's like the terrain of L.A. that made it so easy. You go up into Laurel Canyon, you live with someone or stay with someone for a while, it's very laissez-faire, so it's not obvious. Like on the reservation, there's no secrets. [laughs] You can't do that. Everybody knows you've got somebody else there, and so they're all talking about it. But in L.A., especially when you're talking about the different landscapes, it's really easy to essentially get lost in there, and no one really questions it as long as you're not doing something super weird. And even if you are sometimes, they're saying, "Okay."

COATES: I was wondering what would qualify as super weird in a situation that's pretty weird to being with. [laughs]

[01:38:39]

McLAUGHLIN: Like major drug producing or major drug hangout or something like that, these people were fairly discreet, but because everything's shifting, then you have those who become, like, the hardcore addicts, so they become visible at a different level. But then you have those who were kind of like me, where I was pretty flexible, but I never really got—I wasn't like a full-blown alcoholic yet, and I wasn't a full-blown doper yet, so I could sort of pass and do little jobs and be sort of normal within that environment, so I never really got into trouble.

COATES: So is doing little jobs, that means like running errands for people and things like that? What does that mean exactly? Is it actual things that people are paying you to—

McLAUGHLIN: Well, sometimes when you do that, you don't always really paid, but you may get fed.

COATES: Drugs or something like that or a meal?

McLAUGHLIN: You get drugs. If they had clothing and such. But a lot of it was sex, too, so you'd live with somebody for a while, and it just worked out. You get fed, you get taken places, you meet people, you meet somebody else, so it was like an ongoing-ness. And, frankly, when you're sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old, it's like, "I'm going to go back to high school? I'm going to go back to taking math classes?" Especially I think when you're that age, you don't think it's going to change, especially when it gets more and more interesting all the time. I wound up in places, in

houses, with people I never would have met in my life. Like I remember we were going to this place where's then been talk about [unclear] and that whole religious movement, and it's like, "Oh, there's going to be free food there."

[01:41:06]

"Sure, why not?" And it turns out to be a mansion in Bel Air with the biggest [unclear] I've ever seen. There were different movie star types. There was some very elegantly dressed people there. I remember talking with a girl whose parents were having the meeting, and she was a Catholic girl and she was not too attractive. She was maybe fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. And I had spent some time with the big group, and they were doing their thing, but I spent more time actually talking with her in the—I guess a den or something. And it's interesting, because when you're sort of a random person, people will tell you all kinds of things that they wouldn't tell their normal crowd. And that happened to me with wives. It happened to be with this girl. It happened to me with husbands and all kinds of things. It's like you are, in a sense, sort of that confidante that they get to spill things to, because they know you're not going to be a permanent part of their life, so you hear a bunch of different things, and you're kept around because it sort of is convenient or it serves some purpose for them. Then when you disappear, it's not a big deal, you know. You've served your purpose. So that's kind of what I did, it turns out. [laughs] That wasn't my plan.

COATES: In hindsight, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: But that was sort of—yes.

COATES: Go back to the question that I keep popping in here was that this is getting to be into, I guess, the late sixties, into the early seventies, is that—

McLAUGHLIN: Late sixties.

COATES: Late sixties, and I think that Indians are becoming kind of hip at this—I would imagine. Is there any point here where you're beginning to reveal that's what you are or anything like that?

[01:43:26]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes, and I'm not sure exactly why, I mean if it was part of being on drugs or something, but that's when I did occasionally talk about that, and I think that is probably something else that made me more interesting. So that made me more—

COATES: Exotic or something like that.

McLAUGHLIN: —exotic, desirable, and so forth. So I think that was—because I never claimed anything, but I think it was in their mind. [laughs] In their mind, there was something else going on here. I never did try to exploit it, but I think sometimes if I would talk about the reservation or something, I think that may have added flavor, desirability. [laughs]

COATES: It worked for you.

McLAUGHLIN: "Oh, yes, I'm having a vision right now." No, I never did any of that. I don't think I did, anyway. I mean, I could have. I might have. You know, I mean I might have, but I wasn't predatory or exploitive about it. But, yes, I remember people did ask, start to get into different things and where you came from. And I do remember this conversation with these fairly wealthy people, and I did mention that I had some interest in land in Oklahoma, and I think it let of sort of be assumed that it was sort of like Osage. [laughs]

COATES: Those oil-rich Indians, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Those oil-rich Indians, yes. [laughs] I think I was guilty of that.

COATES: No, you didn't exploit it at all. [laughs]

[01:45:21]

McLAUGHLIN: They took me to some nice places, gallery parties, and I met the chairman of what's now the Norton Simon Museum, and his wife, and they were giving me champagne. "Oh, you're empty. Would you care for another drink?"

"Oh, sure. Thanks." The same way I got the clothes, the pass, and different things. It's kind of a blur, though.

COATES: Does there come a time when there's kind of an ugly element that begins to enter into this? Because you talk about the different—the weekenders, and then those that are more hardcore. But I know in some of these movements there's begins to be really a violent, criminal sort of aspect that begins to emerge out of it. Did that happen?

McLAUGHLIN: I think, frankly, I was too scared. I remember going up to a party at Castle Argyle. I'm assuming it was like 1967, '68, and the party, I think it was mostly like LSD. Part of their reality is I didn't ask, for the most part. I just took it, whatever it was. But I remember when I was coming out of it in the morning, and it was the early morning hours, and there were some people passed out on the floor. It was a common thing. There was dirty bottles and stuff. But I remember I was looking for somebody who was awake, and so I was sort of—I'm not sure why, but I was sort of walking around this fairly big apartment, and I walked into this room, and there were about, I don't know, maybe eight people sitting around, and they had the—in other words, cooking. And I remember something like one of the guys said, "Oh, who's he?"

And somebody else said, "Oh, he's cool." So he just continued cooking, and then they were shooting up. And there was just something about that. I think it was the intensity that they had. There was something that was just desperate and kind of frightening about that, and that really scared me. Something about that turned me off on needles. I would swallow anything. I'd smoke anything, but don't stick anything in me. [01:48:19]

There were different people, because you started to see more like the street people, so you started to see like the dirty kids, and actually I became one for a couple different times, because the magic wasn't working, you know. [laughs] Then I would go back to Glendale, and I'd get cleaned up and then I'd start again. That was when you start to see—where it used to be sort of a fun, free scene, you start to see the breakdown, the hardcore, and the real addicts and the real streetwalkers, and the business of it started to emerge. So that is where I started being more alcoholic, and so my reliance on Glendale and trying to get jobs that would last longer, and so I was sort of shifting into "I've got to really do something so I don't become one of those." So this is like 1970s, early 1970s.

COATES: So how long of a period of time is it then between when you first begin to enter into that culture and the moment when you start to think, "I've got to make sure I don't slip into this dirtier side of it"?

McLAUGHLIN: Probably about four years, maybe five years, because I wasn't really convinced I needed to change either, so that it wasn't like, "Oh, I'm going to be reformed now."

COATES: There's not a moment of epiphany.

McLAUGHLIN: No. No, that didn't happen till 1980s. But I just sort of became conscious I should do something other than sleeping around, drugging around, and so forth.

[01:50:33]

That's when somebody turned me on to UCLA's High Potential Program, and I went to it solely because I thought, "Well, there's some kind of a meal ticket here." So I applied for it. And that's when I started to get a bunch of really self-abilities and so forth continue to get skewed after that, because, for example, when I went to take the entrance exam—and it was actually one of my friend's buddies who found out, who was aware I was Indian, that he began to—he was pushing. "Push. You've got to do this. You've got to do this. You've got to do this. You've got to do this."

And frankly, if he hadn't kept pushing me and pushing me, I probably would have just said, "Fine," you know, because that's who I was.

COATES: Can we go back? What is this program? I'm not familiar [unclear].

McLAUGHLIN: That was University of California. That was there first attempt to really recruit minorities, so American Indians were included in that group.

COATES: Had you gotten a GED or something in the meantime, or they're recruiting you without a high school diploma, or what's—

McLAUGHLIN: I believe, yes, I did get a GED. I'm not sure what really prompted me to do that, frankly. It must have been somebody else pushing me to do.

COATES: And you did it during these four years, sometime during those four years, when—

McLAUGHLIN: Well, it had to be before July 1970, because I think they required that, so when I took—it was like an all-day exam, too, and then it was like—and, frankly, I did it because Joe or whatever it was, he was a good friend of my buddy's, and he was so insistent, and I said, "Well, okay, I'll just shut him up."

[01:52:39]

But I was so drunk the night before. It was like it was an all-day Saturday and I'd been partying all that week. "Partying." It wasn't really partying. It was getting drunk and being sloppy and stupid and whatever, if there was grass or whatever else was involved with it. I mean, it's, like, so I just passed out, and then Joe's come over, knocking on the door. "You've got to be at UCLA at eight o'clock!"

"Huh?" So I was a wreck, but he drove me up, dropped me off there, and I had all the registration, and I thought, "Oh, fine. I'll just do this." Well, I passed with flying colors, so I got accepted. But a part of the dangerous thing for me was that I sort of got the idea that, oh, I can still drink till, you know, three o'clock or do whatever.

COATES: This is going to be easy, huh? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: No problem. So that started my time at UCLA, but I didn't change a thing. I didn't change a thing, so a year and a half, two years later, they let me go because I didn't change. Literally, I don't think I sat through one—no, I must have sat through at least a couple classes to begin with. Yes, because I remember some of the people there and I remember some of the work I did, papers I did. But after a certain point, it was like, "Oh, I can do that. Oh, yeah, later. All right, I'll get back to that. I can do it later."

But I was more on the alcohol, I was being more alcoholic in my actions, my behaviors, but I was a periodic, which is why I could keep a job for—so my alcoholic patterns were developed so it would be like once a year we'd come to a huge drunk, and then the job loss because they couldn't find me, didn't know where I was, and maybe drinking heavily for about a year and then a detox. I'd have to be detoxed.

[01:55:08]

So that sort of pattern developed from the time I was twenty-one till thirty-one, so it was almost consistently the same thing. "No, I can handle this. I don't really drink beer, so I can just drink a few beers." But what I realized in hindsight was that things were getting too real for me and things were pressing me like you really have to grow up and be accountable. And it was just so easy to say, "Well, just a couple of joints. It's not going to be a big deal." Then it just started again and again and again, and so there were lots of jobs, lots of schools.

COATES: We've been going for almost two hours. Do you realize that?

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, okay.

COATES: Shall we stop at this point, and pick up next time?

McLAUGHLIN: Okay.

COATES: Is that okay?

McLAUGHLIN: Sure.

COATES: Okay.

[End of May 9, 2013 interview]

SESSION TWO

COATES: So the date is May 23, 2013, and I am with Michael McLaughlin again at the Huntington Park Library in Huntington Park, California. My name is Julia Coates, and this is the second interview that we are doing together.

I think, if I recall, we left off last time just after the first attempt at college that didn't go so well. Is that about right? Do you—I think that's what I was remembering. [laughs]

[00:00:34]

McLAUGHLIN: Okay, well, let me think about that.

COATES: You had gone to UCLA and taken exams and passed them, even though—

McLAUGHLIN: That was the High Potential Program.

COATES: Right, but then had not really gone to class or anything and had eventually left. Is that it?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I was pretty scattered in that being at UCLA was really not a big deal for me. It was just, well, sort of a convenient place to be between Hollywood and the beaches, and with a dorm. Those were my main considerations for being at UCLA. It wasn't really focusing on studying. Usually at the beginning I would go to classes. I remember dealing with the different people there. I remember some of the classes, and it was interesting, but it was always secondary to getting high, getting drunk, doing other things. So as I continued at UCLA, it just became more difficult. They weren't like finals, midterms. I mean, this wasn't part of the consciousness. It was like this minor thing way in the back somewhere, and so that when on for, I guess, about a couple years.

COATES: How did you manage to stay in? How did you manage to—you were living in the dorms and—

[00:02:35]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, well, part of the time, some of the time, not all of the time.

COATES: Were you on scholarship or you were working or you were just—

McLAUGHLIN: I was on scholarship, but I was all over the place. I mean, showing up for class was not a priority or doing the work was not a priority for me. So I'm sorry to have to say it, but that's how it was. [laughs]

COATES: But you were doing well enough to continue to be able to get scholarships at least, was that it or—

McLAUGHLIN: At the time, that was the High Potential Program, and from looking back on it, I think they probably understood, because this was a new experience for most of these kids, but they were going to be a real lot more flexible. [laughs] So, I'm sorry. I always feel a little badly about that because I really wasted the taxpayers' money. I mean, it's just like [demonstrates].

COATES: I'm sure we all have at one time or another. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, I was like, "Oh, jeez." So, no, it was not a priority at all, I mean, because I was wherever it was convenient. If I'd meet some new girl or whatever, it was like, okay, I'd go off with that for a week or a day or three weeks or something. I never stuck to anything, I think is probably the main characteristic. So anything that seemed like it was going to ask me to—I was out of there. I mean, I just took—it was like a gut reaction. If it started to get a little too close or a little too familiar, it was really easy.

COATES: This had to do with friends, with girlfriends, with any kind of relationship, any kind of work, any kind of anything, huh?

[00:04:41]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Yes, particularly during that period, because it took several years before I started to realize I needed to get a job. While I was at UCLA and probably the first couple years thereafter was, like, I would be wherever and a drifter, really. But I always survived. I always thought it was okay. That's the advantage of being young, but that was part of the advantage of the time too. I don't think it's that easy anymore, but then it was; early seventies it was.

But when I realized I did need to get a job, I did try to go back to school, college, and so I was at different colleges for different periods of time, Santa Monica, LACC, Woodbury University. During that period I think those were the primary ones I went to.

COATES: So you would be out for a while and, I don't know, working or not working, and then you would figure, "I'd better go back to school if I want to get a job," and would go back in and then would stop going, or what was the pattern like?

McLAUGHLIN: Frankly, I think that I don't think I ever articulated to myself in quite this way, but I think the idea was if I was in school, I knew I would get some funding so I could have something to fall back on. So that sounds really mercenary, and I don't think I was that mercenary in my intent. That just seemed to be the obvious thing to do at the time. So, no career plans per se. [laughs]

A part of that, when I look back on it now, was that it was just a general listlessness, general purposelessness, and listlessness that I'd basically always felt, but when you're a child, people don't really call you on it, as long as you go to school and

you appear to do the normal things. But then as an adult, that's when I guess I realized there was something inside that wasn't present, like career goal, like thinking in terms of long-term relationships or with anything, a person, a job, an apartment, anything. [00:07:55]

So I remember when I got my first car, which was probably about 1975, I remember thinking, "Well, if I can't throw it all in a trunk, I don't want it." And you could rent apartments at the time that were fully furnished, so it was very easy to have a transient life and just pay month to month rent. There were no leases. Probably wealthier communities might have had leases, but it was very much new neighbor next month, new neighbor the following month.

As part of that transient generation—I would say a transient generation, but there were a lot. I think part of what that era really exposed was even though we may have gone into late sixties with this idea of free love and we're going to change the world and peace and [unclear] and so forth and so on, I think all that really did is it brought out a lot of people who were lost anyway. This was just sort of a continuation of that lostness, that we had defined some way to survive or not survive. You know, a lot of people didn't survive. So there just never any intentionality, as far as what you consider normal plans for life.

COATES: Were you continuing to have a relationship with your mother, with your grandmother, with your family and all of this?

McLAUGHLIN: On and off. Not really. Not really.

COATES: So there really just wasn't any direction coming from anywhere to you or for you, huh?

[00:10:06]

McLAUGHLIN: Correct. I think I shared with you, like, my uncles, for example, they pretty much went off and did their own thing, so it was not unusual to hear from them a year later, two years later. They would drop in all of a sudden, so it wasn't like I was doing anything different. I just didn't think I was like that, which is funny. [laughs] I was probably exactly like them.

Yes, there was no steadiness, but I did experience a lot of things, and some of which were really fun. I've seen Janis Joplin, The Doors, and Jefferson Airplane, all the big bands at the time, and sometimes go into recording sessions, sometimes winding up at a party, so it wasn't like I was just holed up in a room somewhere. There was always something going on, so that was—

COATES: There's probably a feeling of energy and of movement around that, that makes you feel as though there is something going on, even though when you look back on it, you kind of say, well, maybe there was for them, but not so much for others.

McLAUGHLIN: I think there was, but for a while I think it was really kind of, I'd say, in a sense, a desperate grasping, trying to grab on to something, because you would see—part of that time I was up in San Francisco, most of it was in L.A. that I just remember seeing there'd be older people, and you would comment with a younger person, "God, he's working so hard to try to be hip and cool."

But I mean, there were always—I think back to some other situation, it's like, how did I meet those people? I remember one time I stayed with these guys, it was in Hollywood, and I don't know, I don't even remember meeting one of them, but it's like they had this kind of cool apartment, and it was like sort of very retro feeling, and I

always thought about them later, said they must have been government agents or something, because, like, they never asked me any questions. They never said, "What are you doing? What are you plans?" It's like I would show up, and they would just make another plate at the table. But what I do remember is the phone would ring, and you'd hear one talking, and then he would leave or a couple of them would leave. They'd wash my clothes for me. They never gave me any money or anything. It was like I just sort of showed up like a lost dog, and they said, "Well, okay, here's a puppy and we'll pet him, and while he's around, we'll feed him. And when he goes off, we'll ask no questions." [laughs]

COATES: Wow. Were they doing that for a lot of people, I mean, for other—

[00:13:51]

McLAUGHLIN: I don't really recall. I don't think so. I remember, like, two of them were white, and I remember one was a black guy. They were all real friendly, they all seemed to be really smart, but they didn't seem to have jobs and they didn't seem to have something they were doing. You know, it was like watching TV.

COATES: They weren't dealing or anything like that, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: I don't think so, because they were actually very orderly, they were very clean, they were neat.

COATES: That is weird.

McLAUGHLIN: So I don't really know what was going on there, but they never hassled me. Like I said, it was like a stray puppy. They just took you in and fed, clothed, and watched TV and no questions. And I have no idea what any of that was about, but those are the types of situations that I wound up stumbling into, not really knowing what's

going on. But as long as I wasn't getting pressed, I didn't ask questions either. This mistress of this older man, and he didn't mind her having friends over. It was mostly young guys. It was a nice house. It was up above Hollywood, Lake Hollywood.

[00:15:24]

I remember being at a party that he gave, and the older guy was there, and I'm thinking, well, is this old guy going to be jealous of these younger guys? He wasn't at all, and I don't know what that exactly was all about either. But we were there. I would stay there for a while. So there was all kinds of—how do you describe these relationships?

COATES: Yes, all these different arrangements that people have made with each other, it seems like are just—

McLAUGHLIN: I think being in Los Angeles was part of that, too, because I doubt if you could have done that in Omaha or Nebraska somewhere. [laughter] And that's like, okay, okay. So I just went with the flow. So I met a lot of different types of people. I mean, I know some of them were very wealthy. Some were from—that's not what they told me, but as I would hear other people talk about them. So that's how I lived.

COATES: Because you were telling me last time that you were living this way between about fifteen and nineteen, something like that, and then but this—now you're talking about after the UCLA experience and so forth, so this continues into your twenties as well?

[00:16:54]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, but the difference was, in my twenties, I started having jobs, so I would at least be self-supporting for certain periods of times.

COATES: What sorts of jobs did you have?

McLAUGHLIN: I worked in insurance.

COATES: Doing what? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Like an office clerk, just general paperwork. I remember I worked in a clothing store in West Hollywood, so it was sort of hip. I remember actually I tried being a busboy once. I lasted about two weeks. But mostly these types of places, they were not what you'd call, like, corporate, real corporate environments, except for the insurance job.

COATES: That one amused you, obviously. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: They were the types of places where people would quit out of nowhere. "So I haven't heard from Fred. Did he come in?"

"No."

And so people would show up, people would—I don't think any of us were really permanent. [laughs] And again, I think that's sort of an L.A. thing with the entrepreneurial, and I think you have a lot more of that than you would have in like a smaller city and so forth.

COATES: So these were the kinds of jobs where people could move in and out of them without impacting the company very much, so obviously they weren't spending a lot in training or anything like that.

[00:18:45]

McLAUGHLIN: Correct, correct. I mean, even though it was mostly office stuff, it was very menial because you think in those days they didn't have computers and such, so it was the filing or typing something or assembling paper or something that they could

easily show somebody else if you didn't show up the next day. But those work experiences were always quite interesting themselves.

COATES: So how long does this continue on, for your twenties, into your thirties, that you're continuing to have these kinds of jobs and stay for short periods of time? Or, like, what would, say, an average length of time that you'd be at a job during these years?

McLAUGHLIN: Average? Probably less than a year, probably months, maybe ten months, nine months, ten months, and that only started to change when I actually got a job with the county, and that one lasted a longer time. It was for the Beverly Hills Municipal Court System. Again, I'm not sure what prompted it, because I got these jobs, and, frankly, I never had like a career objective or career counseling. I'd go to some, like, the unemployment office, or somebody would hear, "Oh, they're looking for somebody to help." So I would sort of show up and generally got the jobs. Not always. But it's like I had no real interest in, like, what you guys do. [laughs] So you're convenient, okay. It was always what was more convenient, and those were my criterion, not what they did.

But, like I say, no sense of permanency or the desire to connect to anything. It was just sort of floating randomly along. Sometimes I would describe myself like you see a plastic bag on a windy day and it just goes forever, the wind takes it. That's how I would describe my life until I got to be thirty-one.

[00:21:19]

COATES: Weren't you telling me you'd go through periods where you'd stay pretty sober for a while and then you'd kind of go on a binder or something and then not show

up for work, and that would be the end of that job and on to the next one or finding another one?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, actually, because a part of me always knew I should have some kind of permanence or something you could rely on, but I think I had a lot of undiagnosed issues, and even though I might try to be normal and steady for a while, I'd usually become either depressed or defensive or hostile or paranoid, and so I needed something to take that away, and for me, alcohol was always the easiest thing. It worked. It was easy to get a hold of. So when I got drunk, I never started with the intention of getting drunk; it was always to mellow things out.

And that happened, frankly, every year for—I went to my first detox—I was dropped off at my first detox when I was seventeen, and that continued at least once a year until I was thirty-one. So I was sane enough to know I needed to do something, but not quite clear on what that I needed to do. But that whole process made me more schizophrenic because it's like the more options I tried, it was like, "This didn't work either, so what am I going to do now?"

COATES: So there gets to be more and more a feeling of desperation as this doesn't work, that doesn't work, that didn't work or—

[00:23:39]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. And I'd say for, frankly, part of towards the late twenties, early thirties, it was like, "When will these just end?" By this time, I'm tired of it, and I had been to counselors all through that those years, but what I later realized, I never told any of them the truth. Because I was scattered, I might tell them one aspect here, but I never really let anybody into the whole picture. So even though they gave me different

insights and such, it was nothing that would last. It was like always just taking the pressure off a little bit, but I would always then need to mellow out, and then somehow the drunk became worse, so the detox became worse. So that was my pattern from basically seventeen to thirty-one.

COATES: Then what happens at thirty-one?

McLAUGHLIN: I had the worst detox I've ever had, and by that time I'd had enough to know. [laughs]

COATES: It just seems like that—I mean, you've mentioned that age several times, so that's the moment when something changed, it sounds like.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I'd been through DTs at different times. You know what DTs are?

COATES: Yes.

McLAUGHLIN: Okay. But this one, what was so scary about it is I knew it was real. The other ones in the past, I remember thinking, "Okay, this isn't so bad. I can hang on through this one. This'll be okay," especially if I was in a place where I was getting medicated."

[00:26:04]

And I remember one time I was at this one detox, and I was starting to get really [demonstrates]. I was kind of freaked out, and they gave me something, and it took just a couple minutes, and I started feeling this really, like, euphoric feeling. And I just remember so clearly thinking, "Oh, this is going to be a breeze," and about a minute later, it stopped working. And the guy in the bed next to me, who was also strapped down, he became like a tiger's head with weird-looking fangs and stuff. Of course, I'm screaming.

See, I was willing to take the risk to have that happen until the last time, because the last time, what I saw was me at the edge of a cliff, and I was looking down into hell and I was seeing all kinds of—it was like your worst nightmare kind of stuff happening with people down there and so forth. And as I was on this cliff, I realized that—somebody told me, said, "If you keep drinking, this is going to become your reality, and you're never going to come back from this." And I got that real clear, and it was [demonstrates]. It was like the first real thing I ever grasped onto, and I was terrified of that.

But another part of it, and it was just as significant, is, "You're the one who got yourself here, not your family, not your background, not all the stuff that you've done. You got yourself here, and you're the one who's going to have to be responsible to not come back here again."

And somewhere in that, I was in an apartment, I had a small guest apartment in Silver Lake by Hollywood, and I remember saying, "God, I will do whatever it takes never to come back here again." And it was like that was, like, the first time I had ever made, like, a statement where I was clear and fully aware of what I was saying, and that changed everything, because, frankly, I'd never been really clear about anything. [00:28:53]

I'd never made a commitment to anything before, and because I hadn't actually—I'll tell you. I'd been going to AA since I was seventeen, but not consistently. I didn't follow the suggested rules. So I would show up once in a while and get what I felt was the fix I needed so I could go on, all the time in denial I'm alcoholic, because I would always try to convince myself, "Well, if I were alcoholic, I'd be drunk all the time, and,

look, I've been sober for the last ten months." "Look, I've been sober for the last nine months, so I couldn't possibly be like them."

But when it happened at thirty-one, it was like it was real clear. I am just like them. My pattern may be different, but this is exactly what I am, and I could accept it finally. So that's when everything changed, and in a sense, that was the worst because I didn't—now, if I was really the one responsible for my life, not these random people who I had been mooching off of for the last—since I was seventeen, what is that, what am I going to do now?

I screwed up all my college efforts. I have no credibility with anyone nor with anything. I suppose I could go back to Mom, my grandmother, but for what? I mean, where am I going to go? I'm not connected to anything, and that was why, basically, I grabbed onto AA because it was, like, even if I can't make it, at least these people will know what to do, whereas if I do it with—I couldn't do it with any of the other random people in my life, because they didn't have anything permanent either, really. And I couldn't do it to my mom or the tribe or anyone, because I knew they didn't have much to hold on to, themselves. So I was finally confronted with having to grow up, and even though I didn't really know what that really meant, I knew that that was my only choice. I couldn't make any of the excuses I had made in the past.

COATES: So how did you do that? What were the first steps?

[00:31:41]

McLAUGHLIN: I cried a lot. This time I wound up in a detox, and actually it was a very nice one. It was very strange. At that time, I had been working for a department

store, Robinson's. Macy's owns it now. Anyway, so I had decent retirement or health benefits.

In the detox, it became clear to me, as I listened, that most of these people were just like I was, and a part of me knew that somehow something had changed because I knew I was different somehow, and I couldn't laugh at the same things, I couldn't join into the same types of conversations that I had, and I really saw how they were just laying the B.S. on each other and lot of self-pity going on, a lot of baggage. That was, like, my first ability to see, "Oh, my god, this is how I've been, just full of these lines and this bullshit." And the thing is we all know we're lying to each other, but we want to believe it. So that little bit of clarity, I was like, dang, where do I fit in here, because these are the type of people I've lived with my whole—or I've spent my life with, so now what am I going to do?

So when I got out of there, I went back to some of the old AA meetings I had gone to in Hollywood and Atwater, primarily. That's mainly where I lived. I lived in Santa Monica for a bit, I lived in West Hollywood for a bit, I lived in Pacific Palisades, so mostly this sort of northern Hollywood area. And I started going back, and I just started showing up. I'm trying to remember. I still had the Robinson's job, because I, frankly, lied and said I had a physical emergency or something, so they didn't fire me.

COATES: That's good. [laughs]

[00:34:37]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So it was, like, oh, god. I did make amends to them later on, but part of my awareness was that I'd been taken care of. I could easily have succumbed to overdoses and all kinds of stuff, because I left myself completely wide open all those

years. Some things had happened that were potentially life-threatening to me. I did have overdoses. I did meet with some people who were really—I think they would have killed me if it were clearer, if it were a little easier for them. But I became aware that, no, I'd been taken care of really this whole time and not—meaning these people, but there's something higher that's been operating in my life. So I never got arrested. I never had any legal issues, actually. So, in a sense, I was sort of an upright citizen, who just happened to go to detox a lot. [laughs]

COATES: You still had a pretty clean slate to work with then, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Again, this was, like, I'm aware of this after the fact. Yes, thank you, god, because it was like wow.

So I started immediately going to AA meetings, because I felt like I really didn't have a choice, but I felt like my life was over at the same time, because it's like up to that time it's thirty-one years of not having any real perspective or mature perspective on anything, that catches up with you. You're not suddenly really a clean slate. You now have to deal with this stuff that you'd done before, even though you didn't know exactly why you were doing that stuff you did before. So, in a way, sobriety was scarier than—and what was so scary about it, because I knew I couldn't race off and look for something to fix it, either through alcohol or drugs or anything else. So that's why I knew that I needed to jump in and say, "Whatever else, I've got to do this."

[00:37:30]

And I was lucky because I found sponsors right away, and the man who turned out to be my longest sponsor, he had known me before. I'd come in and out and be there a few times. Then I went back, and when I went back, I was really, like, this frightened

animal, "Please don't kick me out. Please don't kick me out." And when he looked at me, I mean, it was like, "I can see right through you, guy." [laughs] And he scared the hell out of me. So he's the one I asked to be my sponsor.

COATES: Did he see that it was different for you this time, though, from the previous times?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes, and I'm grateful. I'm so grateful for that, that if he'd say to do something, I'd do it. I'd follow him around at meetings, straightening up chairs, or doing any little thing. It wasn't because I wanted AA. It wasn't because I wanted sobriety. It was because me on that cliff that night, that never went away, and it's stayed there ever since. It's like this is, really, that was god tell you, "I have given you so many breaks, and if you go back there, this is what you're guaranteed." It was the most real thing that had ever happened to me in my life.

COATES: But when you go through something like this and you start on a different path now, you've got to change friends?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: You've got to change—I mean, how do you change your family? Because your family is drinking also, aren't they?

[00:39:49]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, the friends, I didn't really have any really what I'd call long-term friends. I mean, I did have a few.

COATES: But you've got to stay out of the circles and the environment and the life too.

McLAUGHLIN: Well, see, frankly, part of that, again, to me there's a lot of contradictions going on that were part of my reality, is that the few friends I had didn't drink and didn't use.

COATES: Interesting.

McLAUGHLIN: So those were the closer friends, but I had a lot of other acquaintances. So when I would be together, I might do something with the normal friends, but it was mostly with random people. I don't remember names or anything.

COATES: That's fine. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: No, the reason I'm chuckling is because when I go back to Hollywood, Silver Lake, and I just drive the street, and I go, "Oh, I remember that house. I remember that apartment. Hmmm." [laughs] I mean, I literally can drive down Los Feliz Boulevard and say, "Yeah, I remember that. I remember that. First LSD trip there. And there was a boxing thing going on there." And I never did quite figure that out.

So, literally, I mean, today, you know, I still [unclear], because I'm going to see a friend, an older friend, who's sick in Hollywood, and sometimes I go different routes and such, and I'll find myself sitting at an intersection, "Oh, yeah, I wonder whatever happened to her. I wonder whatever happened to that guy." So the ghosts are always there, which is kind of funny because I can laugh about it all, praise god.

[00:41:57]

So it was really starting life anew in most ways, because by that time Mom and my grandmother and my little brother had moved up to San Francisco, so they were no longer a factor in L.A. So AA made my life anew, so, I mean, I had my steady commitments there, still kind of lost and still not real clear on where I was going. I can

honestly say I wasn't probably really clear for probably the first ten years or so. I would say clarity started around ten years. I'll be thirty-two pretty soon, and what I realized is that it took me decades to get clear on really having a sense of perspective and not taking things so personally and sort of having compassion for the people in my life in some of these situations.

So the first few years were kind of iffy, because I had no idea who I was, I had no idea what I was supposed to do, I had no idea, you know, where I was supposed to go or anything. I do share this at meetings, I have shared, is that probably for the first two or three years, part of me always thought that I'm never going to be able to be competent to live a life by myself, and it's part of what I had always felt. It's just that the alcohol and the drugs and everything sort of covered it up. But if you asked what my opinion was about myself, it was really not capable of any type of permanence or any substance. So the sooner the authorities recognized this and they can send me somewhere and put me on, like, Flurazine or something, that's probably going to be the best thing, because now that I'm sober, all this stuff is going to come out anyway, because all the other years in the past, it was just alcohol and drugs just kept it down. So now without the alcohol and drugs, what's real, the craziness that's there is really going to come out.
[00:45:19]

So I remember seeing *Streetcar Named Desire* and there was that end scene where the men in the white coats show up and they take Blanche DuBois off, and because it's what everyone knows is the right thing to do, so there's no anger with it, there's no real judgment with it, it's just like, "This is the right thing to do." That is what I felt my sponsor would do. I felt that at some point, it would either be at a meeting or he'd show

up at my house with the men with the white coats, and he would say, "Mike, you knew this was coming, so let's do it." And I welcomed that. I looked forward to that, because that's what I really believed was right for me. And he knew that, but he also had the patience and the awareness that most of us when you really surrender, we go through something like that, and you have to get clear on these things for yourself in order to own them, confront them, and move on. But that's how I really felt for, I'd say, at least three, four years. So even though there was permanence or more stability, I still didn't believe that that's what my life was going to be like.

COATES: When did you start to believe that? I mean, three years go by, and the men in the white coats haven't shown up yet, nobody's called them and so forth. At what point do you start to say, "You know, maybe I'd better start thinking in a different way about something"? When do you start to believe that maybe you could be capable and maybe you could—

McLAUGHLIN: It wasn't something that was specific, but it was just me participating in life. For example, I got this job. I left Robinson's. It was nice to leave.

COATES: Of your own free will? [laughs]

[00:48:04]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Instead of being asked to leave or whatever.

COATES: Right. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Again, but that's part of the old thinking was, "Okay. I need a job. I need a job that pays more." One of the AA guys worked for an employment agency, so I went to see him. It turns out his specialty was law firms, and so he set me up on this appointment. I went to it, it was at Fifth and Figueroa, so it's in that sort of corporate

feeling, and I got the job. And, again, I'm not looking at it in terms of, "Okay, I really want to be part of a law firm," blah, blah. It was paid much better, the offices were nicer, and so forth. Even though I basically hated it, and it exposed me to sort of really corporate-minded people. It was a tax law firm. So we did some very wealthy people's pension plans, which is basically—because I always thought of a pension plan as like a profit-sharing plan, I mean, which it is, but ours were not for "the people." Ours were for individuals. So we did corporations. Mostly our clients were doctors, lawyers, some powerful people in show business, and other substantial wealthy types. In that process, somehow I realize that I can do this, as I would hear, "We hired three other people just before you, and they couldn't handle it after a while."

COATES: Wow.

McLAUGHLIN: "The person you replaced went on to become either a top paralegal or something," and it exposed me to a whole different class of people I was not used to dealing with on a consistent basis, at least on the business side.

But in the process, there were different things that would happen. I remember when, for example, President Reagan's Tax Reform Act came into play, which was a big news event at that time, 1986, and being a conservative law firm, and it was a small firm, so the partners, we had to find out how we were going to deal with these new tax changes. So I was included because I was in charge of the documents. They each had their different tasks, how are we going to deal with the clients, how are we going to deal with the building structure, how are we going promote the changes, how are we actually going to incorporate the changes and so forth in the law.

[00:51:46]

And there was a period, it was a really long meeting, and I had something to do that night, and these were the type of people they'd work till midnight, and that was fine. They were getting to the point—yes, this is the senior partner, the other senior partners, junior partners, and they were sort of, I call it having a pissing contest back and forth. And there was a point where I said, "Vern," who was the senior, "Vern, you need to focus on doing public relations. Michael, you need to do this," blah, blah, blah. You need to do this, you need to do this, you need to do this, and at the end, after I had my little spiel, that was really an outburst, they went, "Yeah, okay. So, okay. So, okay, yeah."

So everybody went back to their office, and I'm looking at the clock going, "I'm going to be late for dinner." I got back to my cubicle and I'm thinking, "What just happened? And he said okay?" But it was very clear to me what needed to be done. They were all these highly educated—they had law degrees from beyond that, and it was like it was simple to me. Why didn't they see that? Why didn't they articulate that? Where I did, and it was like, "Hmm," that was shocking to me.

[00:53:16]

But things started happening like that, and it was like, "Yeah, just do this. This should not be a big deal." So it was shock to me, seriously. It was a surprise to me.

COATES: Starting to figure out skills and talents that you sort of innately have or have picked up somewhere and how they can be used.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. It was like, oh, okay. So that sort of thing started to happen, and also in dealing with people, with other people in AA, it was very clear to me, like, "No,

you need to do this. You need to stop doing that." So I would take my advice, my own advice, "Okay, you need to stop doing this. I need to start doing that."

But I slowly became aware that, no, I'm not really worse off, I'm not more crazy than a lot of people. I have my issues, but there are people who were in responsible, respectable positions who are a lot less—"Okay, I can compete with these people. Hmm, that's interesting." So that's what really started to change, but it was always AA because that's what taught me how to work in the real world.

COATES: So do you start to put together or begin to think in long terms about where you might want to head at some point, and how does that happen?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Well, again, that was back—

COATES: I mean, through everything you've been talking about, but when does the plan begin to come into shape?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, actually, I think it actually probably started when I was fairly newly sober, because my sponsor was the type of person that made me sit down and write out the bills, and I had too many bills and not enough money, and I had to write to each company and tell them what I was going to do, blah, blah, blah. So he was very into responsibility and the details of it.

[00:55:31]

Somewhere along that process, maybe three years, four years, he said, "Well, okay, you've got all these incompletes, these failures at UCLA, at Santa Monica, at LACC," blah, blah. "Okay, to make amends to them, you have to go back to school and you have to start showing up for these classes, and show up for the classes and do the homework and participate." So I didn't see it as an educational goal.

COATES: Oh, I see, okay. You saw it as amends.

McLAUGHLIN: I saw it as amends steps, which was totally different then because all of a sudden I'm focused on what's actually going on, so I have to go through all that process with no High Potential Programs and grants and such like that. So I have to focus on what's going on there.

The law firm was flexible, because they let me work less hours, but it was, again, sort of a growing process, because by that time I'm in my thirties, a lot of my classmates are twenties, teens, so I really had to listen to them and pay attention to their critiques and critique them and so forth. So it was also an interesting learning process, but again it was no education goal. It was just to make up the credits and then—

COATES: So you went back to, like, each of these schools and made up incompletes at each one or—

McLAUGHLIN: No, no. What I did was I went to Cal State L.A. and then made up the credits through—

COATES: Through them.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, through them. So I didn't really like going back to school, but I saw it as a necessary to do because of my history.

COATES: What did you like about it? What's not to like? [laughs]

[00:57:49]

McLAUGHLIN: I didn't like showing up to class. I didn't like having to take the time to do homework. I wanted to do other stuff. I was too old. They're all too young and immature. I really didn't like anything about it. But I grew to like different things about it.

COATES: So it was the struggle to do it then, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: At first, but then it became easier.

COATES: Did they all begin to go together into a course of study at some point, or were these—I mean—

McLAUGHLIN: I was going to be an English major but I had more units in history that were acceptable, so I guess I had always liked history, even though I'd never really said that. So I took English. English is very strange, because at the time, for example, introductory classes, you had to do the anatomy of studying each speech pattern and all this stuff.

COATES: Oh, wow.

McLAUGHLIN: And I'm going, "I want to learn how to write and read. I don't care about glottal stops and what causes a glottal stop to do something," blah, blah, blah. "So I'm going to switch to history." And history was actually pretty easy, and then as I got into it, I began to realize I've always wanted to understand why there's such conflict in the Middle East between the Jews and the Arabs, I always wanted to understand what the different empires were in Asia and how that evolved, and so what I was able to do was focus on those classes that answered those types of questions. So what was the difference between the Incan Empire and the Aztec and the different empires and peoples in Mexico and so forth.

[01:00:11]

So that's what got me interested in school, so I got a degree in history from Cal State L.A. But I did go to UCLA for one semester, and I would have stayed there but they would accept my BIA scholarship. I would have had to have first taken the USC

scholarship, which I had to pay back, before they would allow me to take the BIA scholarship. So I disputed that, went to the court, and so forth, or the student—whatever the academic court was, and that was their rule. So if I wanted this 15,000 from BIA or whatever, 25,000, I first had to take the USC financial package, and I said, "No, BIA will pay for all Cal State L.A., so why—?"

COATES: That's crazy.

McLAUGHLIN: "So why I am going to go into all this debt?"

COATES: What was the advantage to USC in that whole—

McLAUGHLIN: Well, they just had more status, you know, than Cal State L.A.

COATES: But I don't see why it's to their advantage, because they going to lose you as a student, or not you specifically, maybe, you know, why not take the BIA's money, you know? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: I mean, it seemed like it would be a—

COATES: What's the advantage to them to force you into something that you're going to have to pay back and have you say, "No, I'm not doing that," and go somewhere else? I don't—that's weird.

[01:01:51]

McLAUGHLIN: It made no sense. So that's the way it worked out. So I was like, "Okay. So I'll go back to Cal State L.A."

COATES: So you did go back there, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: And finished there, yes.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I got a few good classes in at USC, though. I had enough familiarity to know that these kids aren't so smart, and they have their own issues. I think what, for me, has been the most interesting is that I would never have chosen, really, first, to go the USC. I would never have chosen to go to work with this law firm. I would never have chosen practically anything that transpired, but each thing I learned from. I saw life differently, and I began to appreciate those perspectives. And those I disagreed with, I understood why I disagreed with them now. It wasn't so theoretical anymore. I had more firsthand experience with it, especially with the law firm.

COATES: [laughs] How long were you there?

McLAUGHLIN: Eight years.

COATES: Wow.

McLAUGHLIN: And I left there, again, and I just sort of—well, it was a highly political environment where cutting your partner's throat was not a problem. It was not an issue. And if it meant you used their family, their aging mother's senility to take advantage of that, that was no problem.

COATES: Wow.

[01:03:49]

McLAUGHLIN: Even though it wasn't a big law firm, it was an important one for the caliber of clientele we had, and I really understood it's about winning. That's all it's about, winning, and they don't care how they do it. They don't care if they have to drag your mother through the mud to do it or even their own mother through the mud to do it, you know, it's all right.

COATES: Were you being asked to do things that you had objections to doing? I mean, were you at that level also or was it—

McLAUGHLIN: No, because basically I was not a lawyer and I was just in charge of documents.

COATES: So it was just what you were seeing that was—

McLAUGHLIN: See, I would create the documents. They would not be my signature would go on them.

COATES: Right.

McLAUGHLIN: For example, when the senior partner finally did get married, he had his junior partner tell me, "Well, we need this document transferring all the funds from this one profit-sharing plan to another plan, but we need it backdated to last year," because he was getting married. So there was this. [laughs]

So when he brought that to me, he couldn't look at me, because I was looking at this and I sort of looked at him, and it was sort of disappointing to see that in him, but I knew that type of thing was going on. But it was, like, it became more pronounced as time continued on. But it was really a valuable experience, though.

COATES: So was it for reasons like that, though, was why you left, because it was a pretty cutthroat place and so forth?

[01:05:50]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: That was really why you left, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, not entirely. I was tired of it. The cutthroat-ness was done in, I'd say, almost every way. I mean, it's like part of the goal was to torture the secretaries,

torture the file clerks, torture—if you got on their bad side, it was like needle them and see if they could really withstand the needling.

I, for example—it's not funny, but it is—at one point, maybe it was about two years working there, we probably had about twelve support staff, secretaries, a couple receptionists, a couple file clerks. They took out their paychecks in the morning, they all went out to lunch together, and never came back, because they'd just had enough. When your entire support staff does that, I mean, that's—

COATES: That's a pretty loud shout. [laughter]

McLAUGHLIN: Not that anybody heard it.

COATES: Right.

McLAUGHLIN: "Why isn't anybody answering the phone?" I mean, seriously, it didn't faze the senior partner at all. "Well, okay, we need to hire some new secretaries and a receptionist," and everything."

COATES: It's just interchangeable parts, wasn't it?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. What really sort of turned me off on him is he had his mother come in and substitute, who was a nice lady, college educated, country-club-type person. Yet when clients came—because I always watched him—he just treated his mother like, "I expected this message five minutes ago. What are you doing out here?" I was like, "She donating her time to you. She doesn't have to do this stuff." He treated her like she was nobody, but that was not an issue for him. That was not an issue for them. So it wasn't just sort of the blatant legal stuff, it was the way they treated people.

[01:08:14]

I used to ask, "Why do you want me here, exactly?" I'm still not really clear on exactly what that was, but in a way it was sort of an example of I thought I wanted to be, and I guess it took working with him for eight years to realize it's not what I want to be. Because when I started working for him, and he's, I guess, maybe a couple years older than me, but he was fraternity boy. He was editor for the USC whatever, their yearbook.

COATES: The Law Review or something like that?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. President's Commission to Evaluate Judges. He had a Ferrari, Maserati, Porsche, a Suburban, a Cadillac Fleetwood. He had a classy girlfriend, and he was [unclear]. He had the big-busted redhead girlfriend for another type of events. He had different categories of girlfriends. He had a membership to the Jonathan Club. He had a house in Aspen, a house in Lake Tahoe with a boat, plus his house in Pasadena. So he looked real impressive to me. All his clothes were custom-made. All his shirts, everything was custom made from Wilkes-Bashford in San Francisco, and some were from London. So when I went to work for him, though—

COATES: You thought you were set, huh? [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: I thought, "Well, if I can learn from this guy and be part of this team, this is going to be—this is a far cry from living with FBI agents or kept ladies, drugstore kings," or whatever. So it was a whole different world to me.

COATES: A very far cry from the reservation too. What's going on in the twenties and thirties in terms of interactions with an Indian community, with your identity as an Indian? It's just something not even on the radar through these—

[01:10:52]

McLAUGHLIN: Correct.

COATES: —through these decades, huh? Yes.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I'd get close to somebody or mention I was a member, a tribal enrolled member, and that would be interesting to people, and I think sometimes that's why they kept me around. But I did not grow up with an example of connectedness, so I wasn't really doing anything differently, because when you connected with Indians, it's because they showed up or we ran into them.

[interruption]

COATES: Okay. We are on again. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: So did we complete that thought?

COATES: I think you were just talking about how you used being an Indian sometimes to make yourself interesting or something like that, but it wasn't particularly working in this situation, or I don't know where you were going with it.

McLAUGHLIN: No, I don't think I ever used it to make me interesting. It was just part of what sometimes somebody would ask, you know—

COATES: It was interesting.

McLAUGHLIN: "You don't look all Irish," or something, or words to that. But, frankly, I never really thought about it, because the things that had happened back there were not necessarily things I wanted to remember, and the few things that did seemed to be so extraordinary. It was like, I don't think I really want to share that, so it was not a part of anything, especially here in L.A. I would be an Indian person once in a while. The few that I did meet were already in the West L.A. life, so they were already not doing their Indianness, so it was—

COATES: "Not doing their Indianness," what is that?

[01:13:14]

McLAUGHLIN: For example, I remember this one young woman I met, and she was in interior design or something, and she was very obviously a full blood, but when I actually went to talk to her about, it was like she really didn't want to talk about it, because she was very much into her profession and succeeding in her profession. It's like she didn't even want to discuss any of that.

COATES: Did you get the sense that she just wasn't interested in it, or did she not want to talk about it because for that to be known would have actually had a cost for her?

McLAUGHLIN: I don't think she could avoid it, I mean the way she looked.

COATES: It was just very obvious?

McLAUGHLIN: It was very obvious.

COATES: So she just wasn't interested.

McLAUGHLIN: She just didn't want to discuss the whole matter, you know. Frankly, at least here, aside from the experience at UCLA, I never really met Indians who were proud of it or wanted to be involved.

COATES: That it was out, yes.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: That was out front as part of their identity.

[01:14:32]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I'm proud to be Indian. I can honestly say I never met anyone like that. That's really sad. II met wannabes who obviously were not Indian, but it was like—

COATES: [laughs] What was it that was obvious?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, when they look like Paris Hiltons, and it's, like, they just think it's cool for something, and it's, like, I don't know a lot about Indians, but I know this isn't it. [laughs] I think part it, though, is, I mean, there was just so much going on, music and stuff, drugs, if not drugs, there was always something material going on. So the thing about Los Angeles or probably any city, you get a lot of distractions, so if it's not real important to you or real significant in your life, it's just okay, today we're on this, today we're on this, today we've moved on to this. So that's really the lifestyle here for a lot of people.

I'd say even the Indians here, for example, my assistant here, she was a full-blood Navajo and she was born and raised here. She doesn't like to go to powwows. She went to the reservation a few times because, you know, family issue or something. She has no desire to go back there. She only does it for family obligations. When she left here, she went to work for a fashion house, and that was her whole thing. That's what she wants to do, so it was just—

COATES: She was born here?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. And I've talked to her cousin, met her cousin a couple times at a powwow, and she said she hardly ever sees her. She knows she's in L.A., and she's doing her thing somewhere, but they're not connected. So that's been my experience until recently working with Indian groups here. But before that, no real connection.

COATES: So when you get out of this job or you leave this job with the law firm, to jump back into this, by this time you've got eight years' experience at a fairly small but well-known wealthy sort of firm here.

[01:17:21]

McLAUGHLIN: Right.

COATES: You've also got a college degree now at this point.

McLAUGHLIN: Right.

COATES: So where do you with this? Things are opening up a little bit or—

McLAUGHLIN: Well, what I had wanted to do actually for the last couple of years was to work for a city government to be more sort of involved in legislative matters. So part of what I did was, for example, I started going to Democratic Party meetings and met some of the people who were in the structure. For example, one of things, I was a delegate or substitute delegate for a Democratic Party convention. I'm trying to remember what year that was. That must have been 1988. So I was in Sacramento. Maybe it was the year Kathleen Brown Rice was running for governor, and she's very sweet. She's very nice. I liked her a lot. When I met her, she was like you were the focus. You were her focus, as opposed to being like Dianne Feinstein, there it was like, "Are you important?" Pleasant, but it's like you could see the calculating. [laughs] So I was sort of looking for jobs that would take me in that direction.

COATES: So where did this interest emerge from, this interest in politics and legislation and—

[01:19:07]

McLAUGHLIN: I'm not really sure, frankly. I think working for that law firm, starting with Reagan's 1986 Tax Reorganization Act, I think it just made me more aware of how legislation filters down and either does things for people or doesn't do things for people, and being there, for example, because I'm the one who was the document specialist, who wrote up the documents. For example, a pension plan was roughly an 80-page document

with a lot of details all specified out. After Reagan's simplification plan, it was 120-page document. But of all the different modifications I made in there, there was a statute that was added that said basically the principal of a pension plan, if they become convicted of a felony, their interest in the pension plan will not be affected by that. So in other words, you could commit treason, you could be convicted of major fraud, but that wasn't going to touch your money you had in the pension plan.

So as I began to see more of that type of thing, it just made me more conscious of there's a legal structure here, there's the way the IRS is used, then you have presidents that can influence this, you have Congress that approves it, so you have what I personally saw as a real conspiracy to make sure the rich got richer and make sure that the people at the lower end basically were blind to it. That's sort of the main feeling, that after working there for eight years, I mean, I set up the Articles of Incorporation for people.

COATES: I'll bet they didn't think they were training a revolutionary when you were working there. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: I wouldn't say revolutionary.

COATES: Or resistant, at least, right? [laughs]

[01:21:48]

McLAUGHLIN: Oh, yes, resistant. Yes. It was like so many advantages that were written in, and, frankly, what all our lawyers did, basically, was they would take the statutes and negotiate with the IRS to make an exception for our client. So that was all we did. That's all we did. So when you say profit-sharing plans, pension plans, it wasn't for the clerk and the secretary and everybody else; it was for only the principals. They had their own plan, employees.

Interestingly enough, the only employers that actually had a plan that included their staff were the pornographers, so I thought that was—well, that's interesting. [laughter] You know, we're lawyers, so you make your money running drugs or slaves or something, we'll find a nice way of calling it social consultancy and somebody else. [laughs] So leave it to us. You pay us our—

COATES: Those businesses need to keep people particularly happy, I imagine. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Exactly, yes, seriously. It was like, damn, they could do anything for money, and the IRS is more than willing to bend over to make it possible. So that was very eye-opening in that way. Plus all this personal stuff going on, you know, setting one girlfriend against the other, setting your partner against the other partner.

COATES: So you got out and looked for something with some social meaning, doing some legislative work, or working for the Democratic Party and things like that?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, that was interesting too. So, I mean, I wasn't in love with the Democratic Party, but I didn't really know where to get started, so, again, it wasn't intentional, but that's sort of where I got steered to. Then as I showed up, this one woman sort of embraced me as a full-fledged delegate and so forth, and it was like, okay. So I just went along with it. [laughs]

[01:24:21]

Nothing works out the way you think it's going to, and it just is cutthroat there. But what they did was prompt me to change jobs. I thought, well, I don't want to work at the federal level. So at the time, the city of L.A., because that's where I lived, they said that makes the most sense. So I took a management training test, I passed it, but there were a lot of people who took that test. So I thought, well, you know, if I can get in just

to be in the right position, I mean, in City Hall and work in some capacity, that might be a good place to get some background, get a start.

So a position opened up with the Municipal Reference Library in City Hall, which had all the city documents and state and federal government documents, historical as well contemporary. So I took that job, and part of what I discovered in that job was a lot of history. So, for example, we had the original plans for the Coliseum, the 1932 Coliseum. We had all the plans that were submitted, so that building is one of the plans. So we have all the architectural renderings, we have the architectural layouts, the people coming in.

We had some very unique things there. For example, there was a contest that was held in, like, 1880 to choose Los Angeles' theme song. So you had these old volumes, some of them were hand-painted watercolor, showing the mission, showing deer drinking out of the river, and all this handwritten music and lyrics and such.

And we had things like the *Police Gazette*. I remember one story, and it was explaining to the police why the Negro mind is essentially criminal and the things you had to look out for. But through that whole thing I started to realize, people see this as government documents. What you're looking at is the history. What you're looking at is the history of different ways of thinking and changes over time and people's efforts to do something. That's when I really, again unintentionally, began to respect the library, because, frankly, I don't think I ever fully respected the law firm. It started as a job that paid me more money, and I appreciated what I thought was the glamour and the power with it, but never really respected it. I never really respected most things in my life, except for AA, and I began to respect the library.

[01:28:20]

So that's what really prompted me to go to library school, and, again, that wasn't a fast decision, because I resisted the idea. I had my bachelor's degree now, but I really did not want to go to graduate school, and so I applied for different departments to promote up beyond the library, because I was still convinced that I could get just sort of a nice upper sort of clerical job or something, because that I'd like to do that, because it's fairly steady and civil service hours, you know when you're going to work and so forth. You're not going to work till ten o'clock at night and do this other stuff.

So I went on literally thirty different interviews within the city, and the boss at the library, they understood and they were supportive, and part of it was because they have to be as a city, you're supposed to encourage promotion and blah, blah, especially if you're a minority person. But my one boss who was a Mexican guy, who he was the first educated in his family, he used to be a street sweeper, he joined the Marines, and he became a librarian, you know, in his path, so he was constantly saying, "You should go to library school. You should go to library school." He would always bring me stuff, scholarship for this, scholarship for that, and I would just politely ignore him as much as possible.

[01:30:12]

When I finally got a job with the Department of Water and Power, which was the highest-paying city department, lots more benefits, they had postponed that, and Gene [phonetic] is pushing me to go to library school, "Just apply. It could be an alternative. You could be paid a lot more," blah, blah, blah.

So I said, "Okay, I'm going to shut him up. I'm just going to apply."

And guess what? "If you come to UCLA, we'll pay your tuition for the first year. We can give you $10,000 the first year," blah, blah, blah.

Even then, it was, "I just don't want to do this. Come on, DWP, unfreeze, unfreeze."

So they unfroze DWP, and I had to send back the acceptance letter like the following Wednesday. They unfroze it the week before, then they froze it again like two days later. I actually was over in the DWP Building downtown and I saw my name and the little plaque and all that stuff. They said, "I'm sorry, we're going to have to—we have these other problems with the—." I think it was by Lake, and it was creating some issues, blah, blah, blah, politics again.

I said, "I might as well just go to library school rather than—." So that's the only reason I went to library school, because DWP fell through at the last minute. [laughter] So that's how my life has gone, seriously. It's like, "Oh, jeez, okay. I might as well go to library school."

COATES: Those of us who don't have a plan get one made for us, it sounds like. [laughs]

[01:32:16]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. I'm the walking example of that.

COATES: I kind of am too. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: None of this was part of my plan. So it was like, okay, and so that was another journey into—I kept my job at the city, so I was on an extended leave, and then I got a job with the American Indian Studies Center and then the National—

COATES: Now, when was this? This was in the nineties sometime, or what?

McLAUGHLIN: This was 1993, '92, '93, I think. Yes. So then I got a job working with the Thesaurus Project of the—I probably shouldn't say them, because they always caution me not to say it—a major tribe back east who built its own museum.

COATES: Let me guess which one. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: No, no, no, don't guess. Which was a lot of fun, actually, because we were doing a thesaurus for them, so we went through literally every authoritative book to look at terminology to create our control vocabulary, and that lasted about, oh, I guess about four years, because after I left library school, I continued to get a master's in American Indian Studies, history, and law. So it all sort of started working together, and there were different facets of that experience, because part of what was going on was that UCLA was trying to close down the library school and they were trying to close down American Indian Studies or all the ethnic studies departments.

So we got involved in the politics there, and I wrote a few letters to the editor, the *Daily Bruin*, that were published and put on the front page. Then I got to know the principals over at American Indian Studies, and I got to know them more personally and saw how they had differing agendas. So that's sort of when I started to get more involved with Indians.

COATES: Now, how did you get the job at the Studies Center to begin with? Was that part of something you applied for or part of a financial aid package, or what was that? How was that?

[01:35:13]

McLAUGHLIN: No. Because I was going to library school, I had met the principal. She was the only American Indian who was in the library school. When she left there,

she got the job with this tribe. She knew what the tribe was looking for, the logical place to do it was at UCLA with library school students. So they funded us, our project.

COATES: So was this sort of collaboration between the three institutions in a way, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Right, and the American Indian Studies Center. So we actually got paid through the American Indian Studies Center. So that's how we got attached to the American Indian Studies Center. Even though we were in a different building and we weren't actively part of the Studies Center, we were connected enough that we knew what was going on and got invited to everything.

I got involved in the American Indian Students Association and the Graduate Students Association. Most of those people were not local. Most of those people were from out of state. So that was a different world too. And all this time I'm still doing AA, and so I had a very full life. I've always had a full life, yes, and I really would like to slow down from it. [laughter] I think I've earned it. I think everything from now, I think everything really worked together. I wouldn't have been there if I hadn't had that living hell experience. Nothing else would have happened, you know.

COATES: Yes. Or had meant much, probably, huh?

[01:37:34]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: By the time you get to this point.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So it's like, okay, so in that sense I don't regret any of it. It's still a mystery to me, because I have come to believe in god and I have come to believe in Jesus Christ, but I still have not let go of my belief in that which was here, because that was something that I think was orchestrated all by god. So it was the naming ceremony

when I was four or five years old, and through each phase it's like it's showing me more, even when I was reluctant, even in spite of my reluctance from the very beginning. It's like god keeps showing me how there's more here, there's more for you, there's more for you and learn, to share. So it's like, okay, wow. So that impresses me, but it's not me at all. [laughs]

COATES: Yeah. Something just sort of moving you forward, huh, in these directions.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, so I'm grateful for all these different experiences, but I think I'm mostly grateful that I can share them with other people. Some of the students who come here are people in AA, people in Indian community, so there's a lot of interaction in my life. Even when I retire from here, I'll stay involved with the Indian groups and church groups and AA, and sometimes they overlap, so there's a continual ebb and flow of people and events and so forth. So, to me, that's a huge blessing. I think a lot of people get stuck in what they think is their little venue, and that's why people die, you know, because the—

COATES: [laughs] Long before they actually die probably.

[01:40:02]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. It's fairly well known in our culture, people, executives, they die. I mean they retire and a year later, they're dead. Frankly, if I hadn't had this unique experience, I don't think I'd appreciate the wide variations of possibilities, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, that are present just as we are. We don't have to go get a Ph.D. to learn this stuff. We don't have to go to the Peace Corps or anything like that. Those are all fine things, but there's plenty of life going on if you pay attention, if you stay sober and pay attention. [Coates laughs.]

It's funny, because most of my friends are drinkers; they're not drunks. I remember I used to, when I first started hanging around with non-alcoholics, I remember this tiny little drink. If you had served me a drink like that when I was drinking, I would have had a fit. But these civilized little things. I remember this buddy saying, "I'm beginning to feel this." It's like I—that's the whole point, isn't it? I mean, I was really shocked. I mean, I was shocked.

COATES: [laughs] That people who could have a glass and a half of wine and not want the other half of it and a third glass and a fourth.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes. I mean, those were mind-boggling. That was [demonstrates].

COATES: Yeah.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, the clouds parting and something, it was, "Wow, what was that?" But I feel real lucky because I get a lot of those, and I have through the years, so I'm saying, wow, there's really something far beyond what I can comprehend or what I've thought of, so I'm real grateful for that.

[01:42:16]

Like this young woman who's working here, and her and others, I love seeing these bright young people. They're looking at something differently and they ask the questions and make me think about something differently and pique my interest in something else. So I feel very fortunate, really, all the way around.

COATES: So let's cover the last twenty years and a little more. [laughs]

McLAUGHLIN: Okay.

COATES: We got you to UCLA and America Indian Studies Center, and then we dropped—we took off sort of reflecting here. But it's actually in these last twenty years

that you've been reintegrated, so to speak, much more with the Indian community around here, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, yes.

COATES: So that begins at UCLA and the American Indian Studies Center, and you worked there for about four years? You were on that project for four years, was that what—

McLAUGHLIN: No, actually it went to about 1999.

COATES: So more like six years, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: So more like six years, seven years, yes, because I wasn't planning on going for a second master's degree. It sort of worked out that way again.

COATES: And what is that one in?

McLAUGHLIN: American Indian Studies, history and law.

COATES: Oh, it is?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: Oh, you said that, yes, yes. I remember, yes.

[01:43:55]

McLAUGHLIN: So that's when I started becoming more involved with the people and with some of the issues and learned more about the politics, but it was primarily focused at UCLA, didn't really venture off into UAII or SCIC. I know about them, but I didn't really have any firsthand experience with them.

So the firsthand experience with them came after I got this job in 1999, so that's when I met—for example, the American Indians Children's Council was established a couple years before that. Someone invited me to one of their meetings, so I became a

part of that. I started going to the commission meetings that are held every third Tuesday, I believe. Then I started going to some of the board meetings for SCIC and then events at UAII. So then I eventually met just about everybody who's a player or a principal, and those relationships have continued to various extents up till today.

COATES: During these six years you were working at the project, you were in school working on two master's degrees during pretty much all of those years. Were they continuing to give you—you said they were giving you extended leave at DPW or at—

McLAUGHLIN: They actually had kept my job for me at the city with the library system, but by the time I graduated, it was like—

COATES: Yeah, they didn't keep it for six years, did they?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, they didn't keep the position, but they kept me as a—I wouldn't say active employee—as an employee, but not active. So I could have gone back there, but I let them formally know that I wasn't coming back. I did apply for a city library position, but I really wasn't interested in the city. I was first offered a position with the Autry Center, but that didn't work out because they didn't want to pay enough, basically is what it boils down to. The county paid a lot better, had a lot better benefits, and again it was sort of like serendipity. So I was doing interviews for practice, the city, Autry, the county, and a week after I interviewed for the county, I got a call because the person who was here had submitted her retirement papers, so they wanted me back to interview me again, for this position specifically. So then they offered me the job.

COATES: So this is the American Indian Resources Center, is that what it's called here, or what is—

[01:47:25]

McLAUGHLIN: Well, it's County of Los Angeles Public Library, American Indian Resource Center.

COATES: Yeah. This existed before you came here, and they wanted you specifically for this job.

McLAUGHLIN: Right. But I had also applied for Native Americans Rights Fund in Boulder, Colorado, and also for the National Museum of American Indian, Washington, D.C., and both times those positions got frozen, and they notified me again when they were again available, but by that time I thought, "I really don't want to leave L.A. The people I know are here, the community I have developed is here, and I can't leave this." [laughter]

Did I talk about my internship in Washington?

COATES: No.

McLAUGHLIN: No? Okay.

COATES: When was that?

[01:48:30]

McLAUGHLIN: That was probably 1995, so I was just completing library school. So I spent a summer there, and really surprised at how political everything was, I mean even within the department, really within just the office. This person, that new secretary had previously worked for the Museum of History, but she was involved in a lawsuit with the archivist out there because of the coverage or disputing the holding of a collection, so she can't talk to him. He can't talk to her. So if I need a question, I have to wait for the other guy who comes here, and it was, like, so many layers of politics.

Part of my thinking had been that I would like to work for the National Archives, I would like to work for the Library of Congress, but after I spent some time there, it's like, "I don't think so." [laughs] But again, it was another eye-opener. I did get to meet Senator Inouye, Senator McCain, Senator Nighthorse, and so there was some social involvement as well, which was fun.

But Washington, D.C. is every bit as transient, probably more so than Hollywood is, and nobody's helping each other; they're all using each other. With the interns there, it was sort of an eye-opener, but I began to see how the politics worked again. I was staying at George Washington University first, then moved over to Washington Circle, which is close to Georgetown, so DuPont Circle, which is all the desirable—Watergate complex is fairly close. But sometimes I'd walk home, walk from the National Museum, walk back from the Mall, and you walk past the World Bank, the National Geographic, and all these law firms working 24/7 to monitor what other legislators were doing, what that department's doing, and you start to realize that all these people who you see on CNN, when you see, like, a congressional hearing, you think they're discussing an issue, all those aides were coming up and bending the senator's ear or handing him something, they have been watching the other staff of the opposing senator, they've been milking them for information at the gym or over dinner, gossip. It's like everybody's manipulating each other to try to get something done.

[01:52:15]

Then when you look at things like legislation for Indian country, what you start to realize is, number one, most of these people don't know what they're signing—we're talking congressmen, we're talking senators—because it wasn't a priority, because they

thought they could milk it a certain way. So as soon as a law passes, they're reworking it again. It's like Obamacare. A lot of people signed it that had no idea exactly what it says because there are so many—it's like it's 2,000 pages or something. Then in two days they had to review it. [laughs] But it's like that's how this legal system works.

When I think back about that experience there, even though I wasn't involved in the political end, everything was—you could see it, you could hear it. You heard it in formal conversations, like everybody is trying to get information and use it and manipulate their way into something. It's like this would be too much for me, you know, I mean, and in a way it's worse.

COATES: Deal with that.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. But, again, it was a valuable experience, so that was a valuable part, but the other part was looking at all the records and realizing how little the authorities really know. For example, I interviewed the librarian at the Department of Interior library where a lot of the BIA stuff was. I interviewed with the head archivist, who was over American Indian collections at the National Archives, and other people. I was mostly interested in the National Archives, because that's where all the old records are, and what I realized, what I learned her from is that, number one, she'd been on the job a very short time, that where American Indian records, where these different collections used to have subject specialists, that administrative structure had disappeared like twenty years ago. She used to handle the records of the Panama Canal. Now she's handling World War, Korean War, the records of the Supreme Court, American Indian records, Bureau of Reclamation, and all this other categories. So she's never really going

to know what she actually has. I had made a comment to her, "It's like one of your finding aides says this, but when I looked at the actual records, this is not accurate." [01:55:37]

And she said, "Oh, we appreciate all the feedback we could get."

I'm like, "I'm here for a summer and your staff doesn't know this stuff?"

Then I began to understand how political it is within the National Archives. So what's a priority, what records to look at, and it all comes from either the president or Senate or some other issue. So when something like 9/11 happens, whatever it was they may have been working on before, that gets put back in the sideline.

What I was looking at were basically for allotment information for the Winnebago Tribe, and when I actually looked at the books, when they bring the books out to you—you can't go in to the shelves—they're in boxes. They're probably about that size, a little bigger. They bring them out on carts. But in the months I was there, each day I looked at a different group, and probably 85 percent of them, the dust was so thick that it was a time-consuming process just to get the dust off. I began to realize that's why I see people with these white gloves and with these little smocks, because when you're looking—for example, I found these—they call them plats. They're from the 1800s. They're, what, maybe two feet long, maybe a foot and a half. They're this thick, and then they have thick, thick, thick covers, and then whatever, the back part of the book. But when I would lift up the pages, when I'd lift up the cover, it would actually crumble in your hands. So it was a process just to figure the right spot out to gently lift it.

COATES: Wow.

[01:58:07]

McLAUGHLIN: Then when you looked inside the plat books, it was the same for each page, because it would literally crumble as you grabbed it. Then when you looked into each book, you started to realize that page numbering was not a practice. Indexing was not a practice. Description was not a practice. All the things that people take for granted when they go to a bookstore or a library and they look at it today, a title was not standard. And what you see, the information that's actually contained could be as cryptic as "42 degrees latitude northwest, 12 degrees east Smith." That's what's on the page.

Then you look and try to find some order, and after looking at several of the plat books, I said, well, either I'm really unlucky or none of these plat books have any type of description or whatever. So I understand why they wouldn't really have investigated them that much, but that's where the laws that we exist under now, especially Indian country, that's what they're based on. So when you have something like the *Kobel* [phonetic] case, and how long did that case last, eighteen years, and the judges keep saying, "Well, where is this information?" and the government keeps going, "We're investigating." And it made me angry, actually.

COATES: Maybe it was important at the time when they did it, but nobody would be interested in looking at it 150 years later or whatever, first of all?

[02:00:17]

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: And for the most part, they were right.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: So nobody has—

McLAUGHLIN: What I always remember of some of the statements from that time period—well, actually, more recently reflecting back on that time period—is that you'll hear things like, "We didn't think that there'd be anybody left to really bring the matter up."

COATES: That it would matter.

McLAUGHLIN: So National Archives did the formal legally mandated thing to keep it. [laughs] That's all they did and it was—

COATES: Yeah, because it doesn't sound as though it's actually been preserved, so to speak, not when pages are crumbling and dust is an inch thick, literally, on top of it.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. So one of the questions I asked her was, "Well, how much of this stuff is digitized or put on microfilm?"

And she said, "I would estimate maybe 8 percent."

And I said, "Well, do you think it's ever going to be?" [laughs]

And she said, "Well, due to the reality of the budget and so forth," like she's now holding—doing five records groups where she used to do just one, and so forth. [02:01:47]

And I was like, "Yeah, I already knew what the answer was." But it was to hear her say it, it's disheartening, but at the same time it's sort of inspiring in a way. And part of what that did for me was as I realized that because nobody there had really real control, but it sort of took me back to when, yes, I remember when I was smaller and would be on the reservation. I seem to remember this one incident more than—we got some kind of letter from the BIA, and it was something to do with the allotment there, and I remember we didn't have a phone, going down to the phone booth, which,

fortunately, was working, and I remember—I think it was Mom just putting quarters and quarters and being put on hold and finally being told, "Oh, we don't have those records here. You're going to have to contact somewhere else."

And if they had the number, then you called that number, you know, putting more quarters into the phone booth. I remember after a while, they just was like, "Let's go home." And I finally understood why, because none of those people in the BIA office, none of those people in National Archives, none of those people at LC [phonetic] really know what they've got, and they don't begin to know how to answer questions, especially for Indian records. I'm sure it's true for a lot of other things as well.

When I thought about that, that was probably one of the first times I really had compassion and realized that her generation, my grandmother's generation, these uncles, they had only what they had in front of them, and there wasn't going to be anything else. The white people nearby who didn't want them around, when you looked on the reservation, with the one store, the one gas station, and the white people owned all the land, and there was really nothing to do, because in theory while you're supposed to have a high school diploma now and you should be able to do that, the reality of going to Sioux City or Omaha, you weren't going to get a job. So what was there? There was nothing to do but leave and try to get something somewhere, have a different life. [02:04:54]

And so all that stuff came back years later, and that's what I think probably stirred me more than anything else. It's like dealing with this, dealing with the Indian communities. I was like, if they did that in Winnebago, I'm sure they did, that's the same

story repeated over and over wherever you go, or something similar to it, which is another reason I've stuck around here.

COATES: What does the Indian Resources Center here do? What is the Center? What kind of things are you involved in?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, because we're a branch of the county library system, we really don't fit here. Again, it was politics that got us placed here. It wasn't the design of the library. So this started as a federal government program. It was located in Fresno, I believe. There was a branch in Fresno and there was a branch in L.A., and this happened and occurred after the Civil Rights Movement. So the federal government had the idea of a library. It was called Library Services to American Indians. So it was organized to service the relocated Indians here in Los Angeles, and there was a fairly large community in Huntington Park, Cudahy, Bell, and this general area around here. There used to be Indian organizations here. There was a clinic here. There was weekly powwows a few blocks from here. There were some other organizations, or actually a lot more organizations in that period than there are today.

[02:06:56]

So when the L.A. County took it over and they placed it within the library system, the library was not thrilled about it, but because our boss is the Board of Supervisors, we do whatever they say. So they took the books that were, I guess, in that Fresno office, and at the time there was not a lot. There was not a lot of materials about American Indians. It was mostly anthropological studies, language studies, and so they purchased anything that sounded like it had American Indian, but they never really—most libraries

had what is called a Collection Development Plan. So this is who your target audience is, this is the types of materials you collect, and so forth. This place was never given one.

So when I started here in 1991, we had a lot of, frankly, junk. Was it Barbara Cartland novels with, what's his name, Sergio or the Italian guy with the long, flowing hair, darkened with a feather in it or wearing a headdress or something, wearing loincloth, with these really tacky-sounding titles, *Savage Love*, you know. [laughter] I wound up tossing a lot of that stuff out.

COATES: Thank you. [laughter]

McLAUGHLIN: It was too funny. It was too sad. But the library didn't really have a plan for it. It was just supposed to be a central location where any books that the county library had about American Indians would be. I mean, it's sort of vague.

So the initial librarian was a tribal member, and he had tried to make it a functioning collection and he did a fairly good job, actually, of looking at more specific types of materials, going to powwows, taking books to the powwows, making people in the American Indian community know that this place existed.

[02:10:02]

But then after he left, he left fairly early on about 1981, 1982, somewhere, but after that, they had non-Indian librarians who tried to do their best, but basically had no clue about the community or the issues and so forth. Again, because it's part of government county politics, people were assigned here because they had the right rank, it wasn't because of expertise, and that's still true today within the county library is they don't—is this person a good fit for here or not, that's not the issue. It's a civil service issue that assigns people.

So when I was interviewing, sending out résumés, and I came over here, it was because she had just announced she was going to leave, to retire, and so I sort of, again, fell into this. I really wanted to work for the Autry, but they were going to pay 10,000 less to start, and they weren't covering all the benefits, so I said, "Okay, I'll go for the county, but I'm still looking elsewhere." [Coates laughs.] So I didn't want to work for another government, I mean, but that's where I always seem to wind up somehow.

COATES: So did you develop the acquisition plan and all of the things that didn't exist before that?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Even though we don't have a formal Collection Development Plan, we'd actually proposed one back in 2007, but it has never been acted upon. So in some ways, it's very typical of government ways of doing things. AIRC is part of the—there are four other, three other resource libraries—Black Resource Center, Chicano Resource Center, Asian-Pacific Resource Center. We're all lumped together, as far as the county library is concerned.

[02:12:26]

We finally did have one boss over us assigned around 2007, again, who knows nothing about any of these groups. She's white, she's—anyway. But she has just tried to help us, but the real boost came when one of the county supervisors discovered she had one of us in her district and wanted to make it a big deal. So, well, even though that got all the direct attention, when she discovered that they had these three other ones, she at the Board of Supervisors spoke about us, and all the supervisors think it's a great idea and so forth. So, actually, that's what's prompted the county library system to assign us a separate boss. So my boss isn't here. We're just located here.

That's where we started to get some attention, and even though things are—again, we're still waiting for the Collection Development Plan to be approved, so forth, part of the problems with being in a system this large, we're the second largest library system in the United States, is that all the other branches, their issues come first. So when you're dealing with, for example, fundraising, you're looking for fundraising for all eighty-four branches first, and then anything that comes to us, it's sort of an afterthought, although they are trying to get a little more intentional with us.

But as far as they give us a program for budgets, they give us a budget for programs, but they're primarily somewhat restrictive, so they have to approve all the flyers, they have to approve all the people, they have to approve all the efforts. So it's still very much a government situation. We can't have or promote anything that's political or actively political or controversial. So, for example, when they have Proposition—I forget what it was—about Indian gaming, and, of course, those people wanted to put materials here, "No, we can't have that."

COATES: Wow. [laughs]

[02:15:13]

McLAUGHLIN: Anything where something might be sold, "Oh, no, we can't have that." So they try to keep us as neutral as possible, and I understand being part of the County of L.A. government that it doesn't really work for us because we're inherently political. I mean, the only reason we exist is because of politics. [laughs] So administration does have sort of a difficult time with us in that sense, philosophically. But, on the other hand, because they really don't know anything, they've given us freedom, basically, to collect the types of materials that we choose. They don't select

them for us like they do for all the other branches, and they give us some leeway as to what types of programming we can have.

So within that, I've tried to focus on getting rid of a lot of old stuff and focus on buying materials that deal more with contemporary issues, urban issues, gender issues, political issues around identity, education, mental health, some legal issues, and so forth. But we also will have sort of the standard books on individual tribes and Five Civilized Tribes, and the issues involved with that.

So we do have unique collections, like government documents that date from the 1800s. Those are on microfilm. And we have strong collections, for example, dealing with, say, California Indians, different tribes, federal Indian law, and basically everything that's sort of recently published that's available to us, not everything, but most things. So the people who come here or contact us, basically they already know this collection, so they are interested in very specific topics, whether it's American Indian Movement or boarding school issues or relocation or removal.

[02:17:59]

So most of our clients contacts us through email or telephone, because a lot of them are not local, they're not from the Los Angeles area. We get a lot of college students, graduate students, people who are doing research. I do try to have things like music and DVDs, movies. Part of the problem with those is that there are not a lot produced and they're not vendors that we're authorized to use, so that becomes another process that can sometimes get approved, sometimes not. And it's not because they're hindering us, it's like they've got so much stuff they're doing.

It's like my boss, my big boss' office once had—I believe it's eight people, so now they're down to three. She's also in charge of the Internet and so forth, so all the web pages, all the computer systems, so her staff is dealing with those issues first, just to keep the thing going and updating. Then she's got to deal with each of our collections and with similar projects for each of the libraries, so they've got more than they can handle.

They are thinking more about us and spearheading grant-writing projects, and fairly significant ones to deal with some of our materials. For the one that we're working on would be digitized or transcribing letters from 1849 to 1880 that deal with the California agencies during that time period, which was really the founding of the state of California, the Gold Rush, and you're looking at the raw data, so you're reading what they really thought, with all their biases and priorities and concerns.

So the goal is to make that available online. It would be a three-year project just to do the work on it, and then partner with other institutions, some of which have already expressed interest. CalSTERS, the University of California, major website, Berkeley feeds into it, they're connected to all the UCs, the Huntington Library expresses interest, the Autry has expressed interest, and others, because it's California history.
[02:21:03]

Even though their intent was to focus on Indians, inadvertently you can't ignore people like John Sutter, John Fremont, and the other historical figures who are part of that Gold Rush land acquisition, having to deal with the tribes' issues. So that's exciting. It's not just me; it's people at library administration also. So I have some good thoughts

for the AIRC for the future. I think it will evolve again in its own, perhaps, random way. "Oh, you have this? Oh, okay."

COATES: It seems to be the most creative way that things happen, isn't it?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, seriously.

COATES: So you said you'd become or gotten to a point where you know pretty much all of the players, so to speak, in the Indian institutions in the community, the very active community at least nowadays.

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: So what has that meant to you over the last twenty years or so as that's developed?

McLAUGHLIN: Well, I'm glad to see that they were fairly—how can I say it—stuck in their ways for a long time, you know, folk group. There was the powwow Indians and the academic Indians and then the SCIC Indian and the UAI Indians, and they didn't always get along.

[02:22:47]

But especially these young people who are coming up, I think they're more interested in the community as a whole, so that's really encouraging to see, because they have a whole different perspective on everything. They have whole different ways of doing things. So I think it's moving in a positive direction, because I think finally all the older people, they're starting to realize there's kind of like—I suppose like me, it's like, "Oh, I'm grateful for all this, but let them take over. Let them do it. They know how to do these things." They use Facebook and Twitter, and it's more effective than trying to get all these people to show up at one meeting.

So I'm assuming, hoping that economically and governmental-wise, things don't get worse, I think it's a positive thing. But even if economically, politically it does get worse, I think that the younger generations will have more flexibility, more awareness in how to deal with things, because we really weren't, I don't think. I think that we were so stuck because we thought that this was the way it had to be. I mean, what do we do? Can we only do children's things? Can we only do workforce development things? Can we only do powwows? So I don't think this generation is as stuck in their thinking.

COATES: About what it is to be an Indian and how to bring that out into the world?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes, how to live in this world, in the current world, and see, I guess, opportunities. I think a lot of the old-school ones, they were stuck.

COATES: Not the new school, though, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: No. I mean, I'm really encouraged, like when I got to the AICC. I know most of the people there, but see how different people are really leading to go in certain directions to take up issues. It's not an ideal situation to be urban Indians in Los Angeles because of all the geography, because the different tribes, different experiences from their families to today. So sometimes I do get despaired about that, because, well, there are 140,000 Indians in this country, why aren't most or more of them showing up at meetings like AICC? Then I also think about, like, the former young lady who worked here, doesn't seem to care, didn't want to do anything about it, and it's like you just hope that sometimes they will get interested or concerned enough.

[02:26:47]

I really think it has to do with, again, back to a spiritual sense, that most of the odds were totally against us in surviving at all, so the fact that we have and we keep sort

of reinventing ourselves, even people are born and raised urban Indians, to me that says something about a bigger, much bigger plan here that continues in spite of everyone's efforts, especially the authorities. But I believe that we have role here. I believe that I have a role here, and that none of that happened by mistake. Whether it was the naming ceremony, whether it was the alcoholism, whether it was working in that law firm, everything that's happened, I don't believe any of it was a mistake. But I think that's true for the American Indian community, too, as a collective, that, okay, that has not been ideal, doesn't even make sense to a large extent, but still, we're still here, and there are things going on, so I'm going to say okay. [laughs]

COATES: Okay. [laughs] What happened with your mother, your grandmother, your brother? Can we close up those stories briefly? You said they went up to San Francisco, huh?

[02:28:56]

McLAUGHLIN: Well, my grandmother died in 1983 in San Francisco, my mother died in 1991, and my little brother died in 2002.

COATES: Were they all still in the Bay Area when they passed?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

COATES: So nobody ever went back home, huh? They just—

McLAUGHLIN: No. Well, actually, you know, my mother and my little brother did, so I took their ashes back—or my little brother had—his were sent back. So they're on the Winnebago reservation.

COATES: Are they?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. My grandmother wanted to be buried at sea, so she got her way, so she's in the San Francisco Bay Area.

I've got one uncle—it actually was kind of funny because I saw the tribal newspaper, the most recent one, and he writes his opinions, usually very fiery, very—a it said "location, Lancaster, California," so, okay, so California. But the tone of the letter was much more sort of low-key, and I thought, well, maybe he's finally mellowing down. [laughter] I thought, location, Lancaster. He calls me once every three years or something. But he still had an opinion, but it wasn't as fiery and confrontive, and I thought, "Okay. Why you kept him alive, that's another mystery to me." It's like, "Okay, so he's serving some purpose for you. Fine. Okay."

But all the rest of them, yes, I've got cousins, but lord knows where they are, and I don't think any of them really came to California.

COATES: And you don't keep in touch with family?

[02:31:10]

McLAUGHLIN: I think they were a lot like me, actually, except for one cousin, but she's fairly transient also, even though she's not an alcoholic. She will work for Montana School District for six months and then move down to—I think she's in New Mexico right now. Next year she could be back in Minnesota or wherever. So she moves around a lot. So she's doing okay. She's about five years younger than me. I guess her kids are having problems, though.

COATES: And you're headed to Palm Springs within a few years, you're hoping, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: I hope so. We'll see. We'll see.

COATES: And that will be a new adventure, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: Yes. Hopefully a better one than it has been. I mean, it's been good, but, I mean, there's a lot more free time. In a sense, there's a lot going on there, and with the Internet and with the emails and such, I can still keep connected here.

COATES: You already seem to know quite about Aqua Caliente and have some involvement with them. Do you think you'll continue in this Indian community?

McLAUGHLIN: We'll see. Yes, but I'll have to really wait and see what that is, because, as you know, most tribal governments, they're pretty tightly knit. I had wanted to work for their museum, but they put that on hold, so I haven't heard anything about it in a long time. But that's what I really had wanted to do.

But there are other tribes out there that are doing things: the Cabezon, Morongo, San Manuel, Torres-Martinez. The head of library education is going to be coming up next month to visit here, so I think there are all kinds of possibilities out there, whether it's employment or something else.

COATES: Anything else you want to add or to cover, or other thoughts?

[02:33:48]

McLAUGHLIN: No, I think we hit—well, you know, I think this project you're working on, I think it's a positive thing because I think sometimes the message is carried in unexpected ways and to unexpected individuals, because I found that a lot of things that helped me were not the standard things. Even though the experience at, say, for example, the National Archives, it was disappointing in many ways, I did see enough snippets of things that I got a good idea, so I saw what people were trying to do and I got glimmers into other things.

I think that's how life really works, you know. In the Anglo-Saxon world, you've got this chart you're supposed to follow, go to school here, graduate there, get married here, retire here, blah, blah, blah. I don't think that's how life ever really works, because most of those people I know who've done that, they're not really satisfied, and they wind up doing something different anyway.

COATES: Or it didn't work out anyhow, even though they followed the plan, huh?

McLAUGHLIN: It didn't work out, and they died wondering what happened. So I think doing this, I think this, in a sense, it really is the native way, because it's like one of the things I really appreciated about the natives is they knew it was a daily basis, just like in AA. And we ask god, "What is your direction here?" There were no set plans, you've got to do this in five years, you've got to do that in ten years, for individuals or for tribes. So it was very organic, and they dealt with the circumstances as circumstances arose, and they weren't about financial security and other types, because they knew there was a different source.

[02:35:54]

That's what I'm really grateful to AA and to my belief in god, because I keep looking back at myself, my life, and say I've been taken care of and given insights in so many different unexpected ways, so, okay, you still have a use for— maybe still have a plan for me, and for people like my uncle and other people I don't even know. I mean, you never know. There's something going on here, so, I mean, I never know what it all means, at least in this life anyway. That's cool. I'm cool with it. So, no complaints, not really, except for traffic.

COATES: Okay. [laughs] Well, thank you. Thank you very much. You've given me a lot of time today in particular, but on both interviews. I appreciate it.

McLAUGHLIN: Okay. Good. Well, I hope this is very useful.

COATES: Okay.

[End of May 23, 2013 interview]