A TEI Project

Interview of Randy Edmonds

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1.1. SESSION ONE (March 21, 2013)

COATES

My name is Julia Coates, and I am interviewing Randy Edmonds in his home, as he said, in San Diego, California. Today is March 21, 2013, and we are picking up and expanding on an interview that was done previously for the oral history archives. Mr. Edmonds, I wanted to just start again. You are a Kiowa and Caddo, is that correct?

EDMONDS

Yes. My father, Randlett Edmonds, Sr., was a Caddo Indian. His people came from the Louisiana area, around Shreveport, Louisiana, and they were transferred from Louisiana into Oklahoma when they brought all the different tribes into Oklahoma during the late 1800s, early 1900s. He was brought in by a special agent. His name was Larvey Edwards [phonetic], and all of the Caddo Tribe during that period of time from that area were brought into Oklahoma and to Anadarko, Oklahoma, area. When they signed the tribal members into the agency, they had Indian names. So when my dad's ancestors signed in, it looked like they signed in as Edmonds instead of—Larvey wanted them to use Edwards, but when they signed in, it looked like Edmonds. So we became Edmonds, and we still have that name, of course.

COATES

And what year was that?

EDMONDS

Oh, I don't know. It was late 1800s, early 1900s, somewhere in there. Records weren't very good in those days on Indians, but that was the story that my dad told me, that that's how we got our name Edmonds. Before that it was an Indian name, like Twinnin or something like that. So anyway, we became Edmonds. But my mother was Kiowa and she was from a family that had a white captive in her family. The lady's name was Millie Durkin, D-u-r-k-i-n, but was later pronounced Durgin, D-u-r-g-i-n. She was full-blood Irish. The Kiowas used to go down into Mexico and raid down there. They'd get horses and steal from people, and then they would capture some of the women or the young kids. So they brought back Millie Durgin with them. She must have been very young. I don't know how old she was, probably less than two years old. The cavalry would come looking for captives, and they would put dirt on her face and cover her up with a blanket,

and she'd look like she was Indian. She lived with the tribe for all her life. I think she was in her seventies when she passed away in 1934, the same year I was born. She had, I believe, maybe three husbands. Now there must be over two thousand descendents from her, and I'm one of them. So I'm part Irish and part Kiowa and part Caddo, but on my BIA tribal affiliation, I'm one-half Caddo, one-half Kiowa, and I'm enrolled in the Kiowa Tribe, my mother's tribe. So I'm full-blood Indian on paper, but you can look at me and tell that I'm not full. There is some white blood in my veins. So anyway, my mother died in 1939 at the age of twenty-three, and I don't hardly remember her at all. I know that when I was staying with her, I guess I was speaking Kiowa at the time, because I remember one word, and it was Behaindeh, because I was always pulling on her dress. She'd say, "Behaindeh," you know, "Get away, get away. Behaindeh." She had tuberculosis at the time, and she was about twenty-three years old when she passed away. I was there when she passed away, but I had no idea what was going on. My uncle, her brother, George Poor Buffalo, came out to the arbor. I was playing out in the arbor, and he was crying. He picked me up and he said, "Your mother has left us." And he took me in, and when I walked in, my grandmother was closing my mother's eyes. And I was just looking at her, you know, because when you're that young, you're not really capable of understanding what's going on.

COATES

Had they tried to help you prepare for it or anything?

EDMONDS

No.

COATES

You had no idea that—

EDMONDS

No idea. I probably wouldn't have understood anyway. So I told my uncle, "Can I go outside and play?" So he let me go. And then the next thing I knew, I was at a funeral at Rainy Mountain Kiowa Baptist Church. Those are just spotty things that I remember when I was that age. And I remember they were having the services in the church and I was outside playing, and when the services were over, everybody came out and they went to the cemetery, which was probably about maybe one-half, three-quarters of a mile, but to me it was a long ways, you know, being about five years old. And I said, "Where'd everybody go?" in my mind. I looked, I see all the cars going down that way, so I started running. So I got down there when they were getting ready to put her in the ground, and they had these little whirly things that they put on the graves, and I told my grandmother, "I want one of those." She said, "No, you can't have one. They're for the grave." So once she turned her head, I grabbed one and took off running. [laughs]

COATES

Is that a Kiowa something?

EDMONDS

No, it was just a decoration. It didn't mean anything. It's just a decoration. So I took off with that and ended up at the house with it. I don't remember what happened to me after that, either, except that I was at somebody else's house, and for a while I was with my grandmother, and her husband was a big man in the Kiowa Tribe. They had built him a, looked like a mansion. It was all brick, cement type, two-story, which I always called a mansion, kind of a mansion that was built for her husband who was I believe he was a

historian for the tribe. You could always hear him typing upstairs, but we weren't allowed to go up there. You couldn't up there. "Stay away from there," was my grandmother message. So I was there for a while, but somehow I ended up with my mother's sister someplace in the mountains there.

COATES

You don't remember going with her or anything like that?

EDMONDS

No. I don't remember her picking me up or anything. I just remember I was there. My mother's sister came and got me. She lived in the mountains. I believe it was Saddle Mountain, a place called Boone. I don't remember eating. I don't remember ever taking a shower. I just remember getting up, going outside, and there was a billy goat there that didn't like me. It would always butt me. I don't know why, and everybody says, "Hit him! Hit him!" And all of a sudden I slapped him, and he'd butt me and get me up against the screen door. So finally I'd have to sneak out. I remember them playing Roll the Tire. You get inside the tire and they roll you. And so that's a game we used to play. One of my cousins was down in the arbor area and he used to make these miniature drums out of tuna cans and then stretch leather over them and paint them and sell them, make money with that. They were drilling for gravel up on the mountain there, taking a lot of gravel out, and I used to walk up there at lunchtime, and I'd sit by this guy and he'd always have a Vienna sausage. I'd sit by him and look at him, you know, like my dog looks at me. And he gave me one. Oh, it was really good, you know. So he gave me one more, and then he kind of shooed me off. Next day I was up there again. I was up there for three days. The third day he says, "Go eat your own food." I don't remember eating it all. Then one day this nice car drove up and it was my Caddo aunt. She raised my dad and two or three of his brothers and several other kids. She came looking for me. The Kiowas at that time called me Roy. My middle name is Roy. She said, "Does Roy live here? Is he around here anywhere?" I said, "Yeah." She said this little raggedy kid come walking up, dirty and raggedy. So she took me with her, about 100 miles away, to Binger, Oklahoma. That's where she lived.

COATES

So your father and mother were not together when your mother passed away?

EDMONDS

No. He had left, and I believe he had remarried by then.

COATES

So you didn't really have much contact with him?

EDMONDS

Not till later on. So when my aunt picked me up, she took me to her house, nice house. She was married to a white farmer, and he had big fields of alfalfa, wheat. He had orchards full of fruit, just a beautiful place, and horses and cows. So she cleaned me up. I was dirty. I had matted hair. I had lice. I had itch, you know, sores. She put ointment on me every day and finally got me cleaned up.

COATES

So when you say don't remember ever having a shower or don't remember eating, you were hungry then?

EDMONDS

Yes. Everybody was poor in those days. I don't know how anybody—I don't remember. I don't even know whether—

COATES

But your Caddo relatives weren't, apparently.

EDMONDS

No, no, they weren't.

COATES

They were doing better.

EDMONDS

They were farmers and they had food. They had a cellar with all kinds of meat in it, and she always canned. She was a canner. She canned everything. So she had a whole cellar full of canned everything, corn, canned corn. She canned all the peaches, oranges not oranges, but apples and pears and grapes. She made jellies and all kinds of—she was really good.

COATES

So things really started to change for you after that.

EDMONDS

Changed for probably about one year, and my dad come to see me, but by that time, I think he was married to my stepmother. I think he was married at age twenty-one and he must have had me when—I don't know when he had me, actually. I was born in '34, and my mother died in '39, and I think he married probably about '37 or so. But anyway, my dad wanted to know what my aunt was going to do with me, and my aunt wanted to know what my dad was going to do with me. And there was this BIA boarding school. My dad owned a filling station right at the start of the road that goes into Riverside Indian School. He had a filling station there. So he took me with him there, and I remember staying with him a few weeks or a few months. His brothers were going to school there already. And they said, "Well, why don't you send him to Riverside." He said, "Do you want to go to Riverside?" I said, "I don't know. I guess." And then they took me back to my aunt's place and she went out and bought me a suit and new shoes, nice shirt and tie and everything, and took me to Riverside. Big mistake. When I got out of the car and went to the boys' building where I was supposed to check in, man, them kids was all over me. You know, here comes this little white kid with a suit on and everything, walking in. So I got to the dormitory and checked in, and they took all my clothes and they handed me some BVDs and some coveralls and some black shoes and what we called cornbread socks. They were cornbread-looking. That was our clothing. Sent me downstairs and there was a big boy down there with a barber's chair sitting, waiting on kids that just got there. And you got in the chair, and they'd cut all your hair off. There was another boy sitting over there with a can of kerosene and a fine comb. Then you went to see him, and he fine-combed your hair.

COATES

That was for lice? Is that right, with the kerosene?

EDMONDS

Yes, to see if you had any bugs or lice.

COATES

Did you have long hair then when you went to the school?

EDMONDS

Yes, I had long hair.

COATES

And they cut it off?

EDMONDS

Cut it off, yes.

COATES

What did you think about that?

EDMONDS

I didn't know what was going on, really.

COATES

Didn't affect you one way or the other?

EDMONDS

I thought that's the way it was supposed to be, I guess. But everybody had short hair, everybody. Even the girls had hair like this, you know. We used to call them football helmet. But that's the way they did them, too. They cut their hair and they fine-combed it. And I guess there was some bugs, you know, that was showing up.

COATES

So how old were you again?

EDMONDS

Six. I was six when I went to school.

COATES

So that was just a year after your mother—

EDMONDS

Yes. Six years old, yes.

COATES

And did you not stay with your father? Did his second wife not want you in the household?

EDMONDS

Pretty much, yes. The stepkids, you know, they're not too much wanted. But he did come check me out once in a while, and I stayed for the weekend with them and then I'd go back. But she wasn't very nice all those years that I knew her. During the summertime when I was about twelve or thirteen, he would come check me out and we'd go chop cotton.

COATES

So you stayed at the school even in the summers?

EDMONDS

Yes, pretty much.

COATES

Did they have school year-round?

EDMONDS

No. They just had the regular school time, but during the summer if you wanted to stay and work, you know, you could work at the farm.

COATES

So even when you were six, seven, eight years old and so you would work in the summertime?

EDMONDS

I think I went home. I think my aunt checked me out, I believe. Yes, I think my aunt checked me out or my dad would check me out.

COATES

So you'd go stay with your aunt or something in the summers?

EDMONDS

Yes, for part of the summer. Then I'd go back to school. And that's kind of how it went for the twelve years I was there.

COATES

But by the time you were twelve or so, you were working with your father in the summers?

EDMONDS

Yes, yes, I was doing something. I was always working at something. And then, of course, I learned how to work there at Riverside. I mean, I was a vocational training school. They taught you how to milk cows, how to farm, how to drive tractors and how to plant and how to harvest, all of that, because we're Indians. You're supposed to learn how to take care of your land.

COATES

That's what they told you?

EDMONDS

Yes, that's what they thought we should do. So they taught us vocational training.

COATES

Did they have any academic subjects as well?

EDMONDS

Yes. They had half a day of vocational training, half a day academics, reading, writing, arithmetic.

COATES

Kind of the basic things. Did you get math and science?

EDMONDS

Yes, and I was pretty good at it.

COATES

Geography and things like that?

EDMONDS

Pretty good at it, yes. Then I stayed there till I was eighteen, learned all I could from boarding school. I was an outstanding athlete: football, basketball, track, baseball. And I was the valedictorian of my class when I graduated, so I did pretty good, probably a lot better than other kids that went to school there. I remember at one time we had about ninety kids in two classes, like the seventh grade, and by the time we got to the twelfth grade, we only had twenty-one left that graduated. That was my class. All of them had left.

COATES

Had just dropped out?

EDMONDS

Dropped out, yes.

COATES

And what did they do?

EDMONDS

I don't know what they did. Some got married. Some became alcoholics. Some went to other schools. Just didn't like it there, I guess.

COATES

Did you like it there?

EDMONDS

Oh, I loved it. [laughs] Yes, if you lived like the first six years like I did, and then you went to a school where they had a nice bed, they had showers, they had three meals a day, to me, you couldn't beat it. I loved it, but other kids that had always had a good life with their parents, they weren't crazy about it. They wanted to go home.

COATES

Did you have people there that sort of showed a caring way with you? Did you have affection or anything like that?

EDMONDS

No. It was a disciplinary school, an army school's what most people call it. Was nothing but discipline.

COATES

Did you miss not having that?

EDMONDS

No, I thought it was all right. I know they used to make us march around with brooms on our shoulders and clean up the campus. If you didn't get enough trash, they'd punish you, things like that. If you talked your language, then they'd punish you. There was always some punishment for something, and I was pretty much being punished all the time because I was pretty radical. [laughs]

COATES

But you liked it, nevertheless.

EDMONDS

But I still liked it, yes. I loved it. I hated to graduate. I didn't know what I was going to do when I graduated.

COATES

You got married while you were still in high school, didn't you?

EDMONDS

Yes. My sweetheart at that time, started going with her about the tenth grade, eleventh grade, and then we got together in the eleventh grade and she got pregnant. And then I was waiting for her to come back in the twelfth grade and she never showed up.

COATES

Oh, you didn't know?

EDMONDS

But her parents did. [laughs] They came. They showed up. They said—her name was Wanda—"Wanda's expecting a baby and she said it was yours. What you going to do about it?" I didn't know. I said, "I don't know. What do you want me to do about it?" [laughs] And they said, "Well, we can't have a little bastard in our house. We need for someone to take care of it, and you're responsible and we think you should do that." So my dad and my stepmother got in on it and they was trying to get me out of it, and I told them no. I said, "I'm the one that messed up." So we went down to the courthouse and we got married. We were married in 1952. Rhonda, my oldest daughter, was born in 1952. So I graduated 1953. I wasn't doing much in '53. I started a college session. I had

gotten a scholarship to Jonesboro, Arkansas, a school in Arkansas, and I went there, but I wasn't college material because they didn't teach me enough in boarding school for me to even understand any of the courses that I was taking. And again, they put me in a course where "You Indians own land. You should learn agriculture." I had no idea what agriculture was about, the course itself. There was a lot of chemistry in there. I didn't even know what chemistry was. Then this guy that helped get me there, I guess, he wanted me to dress up like a Indian, and he'd take me different places and ride in a parade, stuff like that. And I got to thinking, "I think they're trying to make a mascot out of me, and I don't like it. I don't feel good doing this."

COATES

What did they mean, dress you up like an Indian?

EDMONDS

Well, I mean I had Indian regalia. They wanted me to wear it all the time. Arkansas Indians was the name of the school. So they needed a mascot.

COATES

So you really were a mascot.

EDMONDS

I was a mascot. So I stayed there probably, I don't know, six months to seven months, and I said, "This is kind of embarrassing. I don't think I'm going to make it." So I left.

COATES

Let me go back just a little bit. So when you and Wanda got married, you were still in high school. She was still in high school?

EDMONDS

Yes.

COATES

Did she continue on?

EDMONDS

No, she didn't.

COATES

So she didn't finish?

EDMONDS

She didn't finish, no.

COATES

The school didn't—like, there was a time when they would expel a student under these circumstances that you're talking about, but that didn't happen?

EDMONDS

It didn't happen to me, no.

COATES

So where did the two of you live?

EDMONDS

I stayed at school and she lived with her parents.

COATES

So you didn't live together when you were first married?

EDMONDS

I would go visit her once in a while after she had the baby. That was about it.

COATES

And then when you went to college, when you went to Jonesboro, did she—

EDMONDS

No, she didn't go.

COATES

She didn't go with you, either, at that time.

EDMONDS

She could have, I guess. They were telling me at that time that I could bring her and the baby to school, but I wasn't sure I was going to stay there after my mascot episode. So I left, and then I just kind of hung around Anadarko, drinking and not doing anything. My aunt who followed me, I guess, through high school, my athletic exploits, said, "You were the best athlete in Oklahoma and you're over here in the corner drinking with a bunch of drunks. You need to do something with yourself. You're embarrassing us."

COATES

They never picked you up as an athlete at the college when you were there for even a brief time?

EDMONDS

Well, there was a couple of colleges that wanted me, but I would have had to pay my own way.

COATES

Oh, really. They weren't offering scholarships?

EDMONDS

They weren't offering scholarships, just Jonesboro, and that was academic scholarship and not athlete. So they put out an APB on me, and her husband, my aunt's husband, was the director of the relocation program. They said, "He's looking for you. He wants to see you down at Old Town at the agency, BIA agency. So I went down and went in and talked to him. He said, "You're aunt is awful embarrassed about you, you know. You're out here drinking and you were the best athlete," all this and all that. "And here you are, you're making her ashamed of you. You need to do something. I have a plan for you. We have this relocation program where we can send you anywhere you want to go, Dallas, Cleveland, Minneapolis, San Jose, Oakland, Los Angeles." I got to thinking, "Well, I'd like to go to L.A." He said, "I'll send you to L.A., but you got to do one thing. You got to go pick up your wife and your daughter and take them with you." So I went to see Wanda at that time. I said, "We have a chance to go to Los Angeles. It's on a relocation program. Would you be interested in going?" So she talked to her parents, and we all talked and finally decided, yes, it'd be a good plan.

COATES

What was that conversation like?

EDMONDS

I don't even remember it. I just told her that, "We have a chance to get a job in a big city, either training or a job, and they'll pay for it if you want to go."

COATES

Were her parents—I'm just thinking, they have this daughter and this grandchild now that have been living with them and all of that. Were they upset at all at the thought of losing them?

EDMONDS

Not really, no. They wished us good luck, you know, pretty much. At least we were trying to do something. So we got ten dollars together and fried up a couple of chickens. Took us to the railroad station in Clinton, Oklahoma, Santa Fe Railroad. We caught the train, I think early one morning, headed to Los Angeles with ten dollars in our pocket, and took us a couple of days, maybe three days to get there by train.

COATES

What did you think about that, about the journey?

EDMONDS

I thought the journey was fun till I started getting tired, you know, because you sit up all night. All day long, you sit up all night. Hard to sleep.

COATES

Had you been on a train before?

EDMONDS

No, I never had been on a train. Neither had my wife or my daughter. I think we were out of chicken by the time we hit the state line. [laughs]

COATES

After three days, probably, yes.

EDMONDS

And then we wanted to buy some Cokes, and I think they were 15 cents apiece in those days, which to us was a lot of money. Today it's not much. But we made it, and when we arrived in Los Angeles at Union Station, we got our luggage and we had to go out in front of the train station and grab a cab. And there was assigned temporary housing set up by the BIA where we had to go. When you come into L.A., you had to go to temporary housing. So I told the cab driver, "Take us by the tallest building in town." He said, "Okay." It was about that time we were going by City Hall, he said, "There it is, City Hall. That's the tallest building." So we kept going and we went to this little hotel. I think it was on Broadway and Pico, somewhere around there. We stayed in a little hotel that night, and the next day I had to go report to the Destination Office. I checked in and went and talked to a counselor.

COATES

How far away was the office from the hotel?

EDMONDS

It was walking distance, probably two blocks, across the street. It was very close. They tried to put the relocatees in a place near the Destination Office. I talked to a counselor and she said, "Well, what do you want to do? Do you want to work or go to school?" I said, "Well, maybe I could go to school." She said, "Well, what would you like to do?" And I said, "Well, I like art. I'd like to be an artist." She said, "Well, I got a place you can go and talk to them." So I went down to this place and told them I'd like to be an artist. They said, "You got a portfolio?" I said, "What is that?" I said, "No, I don't." "You have any experience?" "No." I was only nineteen, I think. I had no idea what he was talking about. So I went back to the BIA. I said, "Well, it doesn't look like this is going to work. How about getting me a job?"

COATES

If you wanted to be an artist, you had been drawing or something before that time.

EDMONDS

Yes, in high school I was kind of a half-artist. I could draw and paint things, watercolors.

COATES

But you hadn't kept any of those things?

EDMONDS

No, I hadn't kept anything. So I said, "Well, I guess I'll go to work." "Tomorrow morning, go out to Northrup Aircraft and meet with the employment officer, human resources person." So I jumped on a train. In those days there were streetcars all over the place, and it cost a dime to go anywhere. So I got on the streetcar and went out to Northrup Aircraft. I think I had to walk quite a ways to the plant from the streetcar stop. Anyway, it was in El Segundo. I went in and I reported. They said, "Well, have a seat. Somebody will come talk to you." So I sat there for a couple hours, I guess. About noontime, people were going out to eat. This guy came out. He says, "Are you waiting for somebody?" I said, "Yeah, I'm supposed to meet with someone for a job here." He says, "Well, you know what department?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I talked to the guy there and he told me to wait for someone to come talk to me." "I'll tell you what. You go home and you come back tomorrow and you can start working." That was it. So I did, and I told the BIA, I said, "I got a job at Northrup." So they loaded me and my wife and my daughter up in a BIA car and took us out to Inglewood, El Segundo Boulevard and Prairie. There was a motor court there called Polly's Motor Court. It was a little hotel where the bed comes down out of the wall. "This is where you'll live for a while," they said. And it was walking distance to Northrup.

COATES

What was it like around there at that time? Because the whole city has grown up so much since. Were you in the city at that time?

EDMONDS

I was in the suburb, El Segundo. You know where El Segundo is?

COATES

Yes, I do, but it's pretty much swallowed up at this point, and I just wondered if it was more—

EDMONDS

Well, to me, it was way outside of downtown. It took about almost an hour to go from downtown to El Segundo. And it was kind of spread out in those days. It was residential areas, and then, of course, Northrup had their big plant there with the runway where they tested their airplanes. So anyway, I went to work there as a general helper. That means a gofer, you know, someone that goes for this and goes for that. I stayed there for five and a half years, but I think what kept me there, my athlete background. I was a good softball player, and they had a team, 5437 had a team, softball team, and they were looking for a pitcher. I was the man. [laughs] So I pitched for them for five years. I think that's what kept me working there. They were a pattern-making department where they made patterns for airplane parts and from that you had to make the moulds, and you had to make different kinds of tools, male, female tools and precision tools. We had to make the mockups. We had to make the casts out of plaster, and then they kind of moved into polyester, plastic manufacturing. We made a lot of precision tooling out of that, and I learned how to do that. By the time they lost the contract, it was five and a half years I had stayed there, and I had won four championships for them in softball.

COATES

Who did you play against?

EDMONDS

The other aircraft industry.

COATES

Were there a lot of Indians on those teams? Because I think there were a lot of Indians that worked in the industry. I don't know if there were.

EDMONDS

I was the only one.

COATES

You were the only one on any of the teams, huh?

EDMONDS

I was the only Indian, yes. We played against all the other aircraft industry, North American, Ryan, all those different aircraft agencies, and we beat them all. So in 19 I believe it was 1959, they lost the contract or it was over or whatever, and then they laid a whole bunch of people off, and I was one of them. So I went back to the BIA and I said, "I'm out of a job. I need a reference, and if you have any jobs available, send me out." So they sent me to South Gate, U.S. Gypsum. I think I had a car by then. I think I had an old '36 Chevy or something. I don't know what I had.

COATES

Can I step back a few steps here and ask you some things?

EDMONDS

Yes.

COATES

When you first got to this very, very, very big city with a wife and daughter that you hadn't really spent that much time with, it doesn't seem like, for a while, at least, what was that like?

EDMONDS

Well, we seemed to get along all right. Our needs were, of course, money. I made $50 a week, and 25 of that went to Molly's Motor Court, and then the rest went to food or movies or something like that. So we lived good there for, oh, I guess about a year.

COATES

What did you think about the city in your circumstances? Was that a very different—

EDMONDS

I had no problems with it. I adjusted well. I thought it was nice. But other relocatees that came out, many of them didn't stay. They went back home, couldn't take it.

COATES

Your wife liked it too?

EDMONDS

She liked it. She liked it, and my daughter Rhonda, she went to school. I think she was too young then to go to school, but she liked it.

COATES

Did your wife work also?

EDMONDS

She didn't work for a long time, for maybe after we had three other kids, I think. I sent her to a training school to be a grocery checker.

COATES

But that was later on? That was not when you first—

EDMONDS

That was later on in my life, yes. But we stayed there about a year and then I started making some pretty good money, overtime and raises, so we were able to move to a bigger place up on the Imperial Highway and Vermont.

COATES

And you found that place yourself? That wasn't the Bureau sending you?

EDMONDS

No, from that point on, they pretty much released us. It was on our own by then. So we were upstairs in a one-bedroom place, kitchen, living room, a pretty nice place for us. So we lived there for, I don't know, two or three years. I kept getting more money and more money, and I was able to buy a car and start assimilation into the mainstream.

COATES

Were you doing the same job, or were you getting promotions and things?

EDMONDS

I was getting promotions, yes, but still in the same department, but they were doing different things.

COATES

What other kinds of things were you doing?

EDMONDS

Well, pattern making.

COATES

So all of the things that they did.

EDMONDS

Same things, yes.

COATES

Did you have more children coming along during those years?

EDMONDS

Yes, I did. Ended up with five kids when it was all over.

COATES

How many of them did you have in the one-bedroom place?

EDMONDS

Just one.

COATES

Just the one while you there?

EDMONDS

Yes, and then we started having some more, and we moved to—when I got my job in U.S. Gypsum, then we moved to South Gate and we had a nice apartment there, and that's when two other kids came and we had enough room at that time for them. We went home to visit one time and then I ran into a friend of mine which was married to my wife's sister. And they weren't doing anything. I said, "Why don't you go back with us?" So they jumped in the car and went back with us, and we both lived side-by-side in Cudahy. They did real good. They ended up retiring and everything from Los Angeles.

COATES

Did you personally help to bring other family members or other people from Oklahoma?

EDMONDS

Not till 1972. That's when I helped them. But in the meantime, I had to make a living and take care of my family. And then, of course, I was involved in the community, mostly in the athletic community where we formed the American Indian Athletic Association. We used to hang out downtown all the time, was at Third and Main, which we always called it the first Indian Center in Los Angeles, which it wasn't, but it was just three bars down there where we all hung out. But the first thing they tell you when you arrive in L.A. is don't down to Main Street. Well, what's down there, you know? Let's go see. [laughs] So we did. And that's where a lot of the Indians hung out. They went down to visit tribal members or relatives or whatever. Became a big gathering every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night down on Third and Main. It's just three bars down there, and that's where a lot of the kids hung out. I don't know if you've seen the movie The Exiles. Have you heard of it?

COATES

No, just on the interview.

EDMONDS

That was made down there, The Exiles, how people came and how they ended up at Third and Main, what they did, where they ended up. So did a lot of that for a while.

COATES

Now, from the time you arrived until you went back, the five years or so, five and a half years that you had a job at Northrup, you didn't have really any interactions with the Bureau about anything during that time? You really were just on your own?

EDMONDS

I was on my own until I lost my job.

COATES

And then went back to the Bureau at that point?

EDMONDS

Then they got me a job at Northrup Aircraft.

COATES

Okay. And then Gypsum.

EDMONDS

But they gave me no financial assistance of any kind.

COATES

Not even in the beginning they didn't?

EDMONDS

Very little. I think they only gave me enough money to start out for maybe the first week till I got my first check, and then they released me.

COATES

Did they have arrangements with these companies, with Northrup and with the two—

EDMONDS

Pretty much, yes, like a job developer would do, you know. You contact the employer and, "I'm going to send you somebody. Look at them and maybe you could hire them."

COATES

So when you went in and waited for two hours and didn't even get an interview, but then they came in and said, "Well, just come to work tomorrow," so it was already pretty well set up.

EDMONDS

Seemed that way, yes.

COATES

They took a look at you, said you seemed okay.

EDMONDS

Yes, seemed that way.

COATES

They were going to give you the job and the Bureau had probably arranged that.

EDMONDS

It seemed that way, yes. But when I had the relocation program, it didn't work that way. [laughs]

COATES

Jobs were probably a little tighter in that era.

EDMONDS

Yes, I suppose. But anyway, yes, U.S. Gypsum, I stayed there for twelve years, and I started out as a tester, testing raw materials. They didn't want to hire me. They said, "You make too much money, overqualified." And I said, "I need a job. I'll take anything you got." I was making $3.12 an hour at Northup when I left in 1959, and they wanted to hire me for $1.56 at U.S. Gypsum. And I said, "I don't care. I need a job." So they said, "Well, all right. Well, come on in." So I was just testing raw materials. I looked at my first check, I about cried. It was, like, fifty bucks a week, and that's what I'd started out with five years before. But luckily, the housing industry started picking up, so I began to work overtime, so then I started making back up to what I was used to. They had us on shifts, like day shift, swing, and graveyard, three shifts like that, and I didn't like that at all, but it was a nickel more on swing, it was a dime more on grave, and then if you worked overtime, of course, you get time and a half. So that was looking good. But I worked down in the pit there for about a year, and they needed somebody in the laboratory to test—

COATES

What's the pit?

EDMONDS

It's down there where all the manufacturing's going on, raw materials are being made into roofing and different kinds of material. And then I moved up to the lab and testing raw materials up there, when they bring in asphalt and you have to test the asphalt to make sure that the asphalt meets a standard flashpoint. I think it flashes at 112 degrees or something like that. So I tested that, and then I stayed there another year, and a guy quit in the paint department. He was a foreman in the paint department. They said, "Would you like to be a shift foreman in the paint department?" I said, "Sure." So I had to go over and take a little written test at the office, and I started as a shift foreman in the paint department. I was in charge of probably thirty-nine employees at that time on my shift. And then I stayed there for a little while and they made it a general foreman. He retired, and they said, "Would you like to be the general foreman?" "Sure." So I was making like $1,000 a month in those days, salary. So I done pretty good. I was just two steps away from the general manager. So I stayed there for twelve years at U.S. Gypsum. Then they began to put out proposals for money to run Indian programs. In Los Angeles, there was United Indian Development Association, called UIDA. I don't know if you heard of it.

But they called me up and said, "We need someone to run the relocation program. Are you interested?" And I said, "Sure. When do I start?"

COATES

So how did they know about you?

EDMONDS

Oh, well, all Indians know about Indians in Los Angeles.

COATES

So explain that to me. [laughs] So Third and Main is a place where people just came to meet?

EDMONDS

Everybody goes, everybody goes, and we had a recreation program where we met at Ford Park and we played basketball, played softball every weekend, sometimes during the night. So everybody knew me. Even the churches knew me.

COATES

What was your first connections to other Indian people when you first came here? Was it being at Third and Main and going down there, and then from there it just kind of expanded out?

EDMONDS

Yes. That's where all the friendships started, yes. It was all kinds of people down. There were pow-wow people, there were athletes. Even sometimes church people would be there. So everybody knew you or you knew everybody else that was there.

COATES

So was it all around drinking in these three bars and everything like that?

EDMONDS

Pretty much, yes, pretty much. But nobody knew what I did. Nobody knew I was general foreman at this factory in South Gate. They just thought I was one of the drunk guys around town, and even the preacher of the church thought that. But I was a responsible individual during the week at U.S. Gypsum, running the factory. When the Indian program came and they needed somebody to lead it, they thought of me because I was already in a responsible position. And then when I got it, there was a big uproar by the church. Reverend Stoneking, who was taking in all the Indians at his church, he was providing all the services and converting everyone into his church and taking care of them, his flock, and he saw that this little program, relocation program, was going to take some of his people, or threatened to take some of his people. He didn't like that, especially me. He said, "You're putting that drunk in this position here. You know, he doesn't have the history or the experience to run programs like that." So he wrote to the BIA and they started a big investigation, and we sent him my résumé that showed I worked at Northrup for five years in a pretty good position, worked at U.S. Gypsum in an authoritative position, management position. So BIA said, "He's all right with us." And Mr. Preacher, he didn't like it at all.

COATES

So where was he getting his flock from?

EDMONDS

He was going around to different—even go downtown, you know. He had a core group of Indians, some of them who I knew, some that were ex-Main Streeters, and he got them

to convert into his church and help build a church, and they built it from the ground up. Then also sent out gatherers to bring other Indians into the church, and he was the savior.

COATES

What do you mean by that, gatherers to bring other Indians into the church?

EDMONDS

Well, to go out in the community and talk about the church and bring them in, you know.

COATES

And where would they find them other than—

EDMONDS

They were all around. There was 70,000 Indians in L.A. by that time.

COATES

And how would they track them down? How did they find each other?

EDMONDS

The Indians knew where the Indians were most all the time, wherever they hung out, at Ford Park, at the bars, wherever Indians were. His gatherers were pretty familiar where everybody was at, and they'd go out and try to bring them in.

COATES

So what were some of the other places where Indian people would gather besides Main Street? Ford Park, you mentioned.

EDMONDS

Ford Park was a big gathering there on Saturdays and Sundays. That's where our athletic program took place, basketball, ball games, picnics. All kinds of things would happen there. Hundred of Indians.

COATES

So that would be a little bit more family kind of environment, then, in that case.

EDMONDS

Yes. So he got some of those. There's two guys that still are there at that church that I knew back in the old days. They still help run the church. Mr. Preacher Man left, went away and then he died. But we used to say, those of us that were a part of the relocation program project would always say we're going to put a loudspeaker on a helicopter and go over top of his church and say, "Stoneking, let our people go." [laughs] Because he thought he was the savior, you know, and he had his congregation pretty much convinced that he was.

COATES

Really.

EDMONDS

Anybody outside of that group were devils. That included me. And then my wife—we had already split by then. I think we split in 1959, not too long after I went to Northrup. She was working as a checker and she started drinking, and I couldn't make her stop.

COATES

Why did that happen, do you suppose? I mean, somebody who hasn't—

EDMONDS

I don't know. I think I'm the one that started her, because she never drank. And then I think we used to have poker games at our house on Friday and Saturday night and we'd drink beer. She would never drink, and then finally one time she started trying it. Some

people get hooked fast, you know, and she got hooked. She wouldn't let it go, and finally we split. She tried—

COATES

Because she started to surpass you, even?

EDMONDS

You mean as far as drinking?

COATES

Yes.

EDMONDS

Oh, yes, she became an alcoholic. I was just kind of a weekend warrior, kind of a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday drinker, not on weekdays, because I had responsibilities.

COATES

I think we've got this in my family, too, and I don't think anybody drinks because of someone else. I think there's something in them, you know, something going on inside them that pushes them over the line or whatever. I don't know.

EDMONDS

Well, she tried to repent, and so she went to Stoneking and he tried to help her, put her in rehab and so forth, but he blamed me for it. Preacher Man got after me with a bunch of letters to the Bureau saying I was a bad man and I abandoned my wife and my children, which I didn't. I was paying child support.

COATES

So you feel like he had a role in the marriage breaking up?

EDMONDS

Yes. He treated all his flock that way. Whoever had a problem, he was there, Mr. Preacher Man. So he kind of jumped into my business as well. I told him to mind his own business, you know, preach to the people. Leave me alone. And we used to fight every time we'd run into each other. He'd always come where I'm at someplace. So we had conflicts quite a bit. Finally, he decided that our program, the relocation program, was working. Finally, the BIA told him to leave us alone. So we continued to work with the relocation program bringing Indians into Los Angeles. Every day we had families or individuals coming in for work or for vocational training. What we provided was temporary housing, avocation, and orientation, and then placement of them into the temporary housing as well as orient them on what to expect as they come into the big city, and also provide them with some outlet. Like on the weekend, we would take them to Disneyland or some fun place, or have a big picnic or do something with them to kind of entice them to stay. It worked for a couple of years. They only give us two years to prove this, and they even sent some evaluators down and they went back, said what a wonderful program it was. But we could only fund it for two years, so after two years, we had to end the program. By that time, the BIA went from fifty employees down to about ten, and that was pretty much phasing out of the relocation program under the Bureau and under us. About that time, the model Urban Indian Centers project started, where Health, Education and Welfare, Department of Labor, and I think it was one other government agency at that time. I think it was CSA. Maybe it was CSA.

COATES

What's that?

EDMONDS

Community Service Agency. They all poured $200,000 into L.A. and to Fairbanks, Gallup, New Mexico, and upper Midwest to establish model urban centers. So that started. So when I left the relocation program, I applied to be the director of the L.A. Indian Center, so I got that job. That's the way I became the director of the L.A. Indian Center, with that model centers project. That was only good for a couple years too. So I had to find out what kinds of problems Indians were having coming into an urban area. How could we, as other Indian people that had been there for a while, help Indians to make the transition into an urban setting, basically help them to assimilate? That was the goal of the Department of Interior BIA programs, assimilation of Indians into the mainstream of society.

COATES

When you had come here, though, you said that your transition was pretty easy for you, it was pretty smooth. But had you known other people that had had difficulties making that transition? What kind of difficulties had you seen before that?

EDMONDS

They just didn't know how to live in the urban setting. They didn't know how to use telephone, use a bus, use elevators. They had no idea how to get around in the big city, so that was part of our orientation to them, was that. This is how things work in the big city.

COATES

Had you known how to do those things, to use elevators and buses and things like that?

EDMONDS

Oh, yes. By that time, yes. I'd been here—

COATES

No, but I mean when you first came.

EDMONDS

Yes, I had no problems. I don't know where I learned it, but I didn't have any problems. [laughs] Yes, I didn't have any problems, but a lot of Indian kids, especially on reservations, you know, living way out in the desert somewhere, had no idea how to use a telephone, how to catch a bus.

COATES

They hadn't been at a boarding school or a university.

EDMONDS

Yes.

COATES

I mean, different places you'd been.

EDMONDS

They had no idea. Families and individuals. So we had to orient them through orientation program how to do that. We had orientation every day for them, and then we took them around, tried to show them. Some people turned right around and left the next day. We had one young man get killed on the freeway. He came in—I remember him because he had these fancy boots on. He was from New Mexico, Navajo Nation, and he came in and he was dressed like a cowboy and he had these boots on, white leather Tony Lamas, I think. Next day we got a call, said, "One of your clients was killed on the freeway last night and we found his boots." When they described them, I said, yes, that was one of our clients. I guess he had got drunk and maybe made a phone call home or something. I don't know what happened, but he jumped on a bus, and on the bus he was raising hell,

and the bus driver pulled over on the freeway and kicked him out. He somehow got on the freeway and it killed him, ran over him. So it was my responsibility to contact the family and let them know what happened. It was kind of hard. That was the only tragedy we had during my time with the relocation program. There were times when the families, individuals couldn't take it. They just couldn't adjust, and that's that old saying, you can take the Indian out of the reservation, but you can't take the reservation out of the Indian. They're so strong, you know, the traditions and the culture and the language.

COATES

Why do you think that is?

EDMONDS

Well, because of that cultural tie with where they live, where they grew up. You try to break that, take that out of them, they resist it and they just go back to it. That's where they're most comfortable.

COATES

Do you think the people who didn't have such strong ties are the ones who were more successful then?

EDMONDS

I think so. I think so. Because I went to boarding school and they taught us a lot, even though it was a strict disciplinary school. I had no problems in adjusting, and there were several other kids that came from the same area that I did and they stayed in the area, in L.A., for a long time. When reservations and Indian communities began to get their own money and develop their own economy and provide jobs to their own tribal members, a lot of them went back. That was the only reason they went back. It wasn't because they were homesick, but they had the opportunity to go home and work. That was twenty, thirty years later. Like now there's probably just a handful of the folks that I knew still in L.A. that didn't go back to Oklahoma, or go back to where they lived.

COATES

Do you think that they go back for—well, I know people who've gone back, and they've gone back when they've retired. It hasn't been for a job.

EDMONDS

Yes, that too.

COATES

Something like that, what do you think—because like you just said, people are here for twenty-five, thirty years sometimes and still they go back. Why do you think that might be?

EDMONDS

It's their home. It's where they came from. I always say when I see somebody, "You been home lately?" I'm talking about Oklahoma. When I die, that's where I'm going, to Oklahoma.

COATES

But not before then?

EDMONDS

Not before then. I mean, I'll go back to visit.

COATES

So what keeps you here?

EDMONDS

Well, I have a life here now. I mean, I had a good job. I have good wife, nice place to live, money in the bank, two cars. I mean, I couldn't have that back in Anadarko. There's no way.

COATES

Really?

EDMONDS

No. No way. When I was growing up, you never seen any Indians working in Anadarko. It was all white. They monopolized everything. Prejudice against Indians. Now when I go back, I see Indians working in fast-food places and K-Mart. I mean, not K-Mart, but Walmart and places like that, Indians are working.

COATES

But even as a retiree, you don't think about you could go back there and live there?

EDMONDS

No. Been out here too long, almost sixty years now. This is my home till I die, then I'll go home because all my family's buried in this one cemetery. That's where I'll go.

COATES

Are all your kids here?

EDMONDS

No. I have one son here that lives in L.A., two granddaughters, and then I have three daughters and a son that lives in Oklahoma City and one daughter lives in Mountain View, Oklahoma. She works for the tribe and my one son works for the tribe. So they're back there and I'm out here.

COATES

You have grandkids here?

EDMONDS

Only have two, and they're going to school. One's in Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. The other's in IAIA.

COATES

That's what you were telling me the other day.

EDMONDS

American Indian Art Institute [Institute of American Indian Arts], yes. She's there, third year. So I see them maybe two or three times a year when they come home. I go see them. But I'm settled right here. I mean, I'm too old now to be relocating anywhere else. This is it. I'll live here till my time expires.

COATES

So we've come up to about the early seventies or so when you were taking over the relocation project from the Bureau, but that only lasted for two years.

EDMONDS

Yes. The Los Angeles Indian Center, I spent two years there.

COATES

And you were one of the founders of it?

EDMONDS

Kind of, yes. We were advocating for an Indian Center because we found that in the relocation program we couldn't use services that were provided to everyone, but if the Indians went there, they said, "Oh, well, you're under the BIA. You go see them. They'll take care of you." So we had to have some way to make the greater society realize that

we were citizens of that community, too, and that they should take care of our needs as well because we're part of the community. So the Indian Center pretty much did that. You know, we've contacted the agencies and explained how the Indians got into L.A. relocation program. They came to work and came to go to school. They became a part of the citizenry of Los Angeles, and they now are a part of the communities that services rendered to everyone should be rendered to them as well. So they finally got to start working with us at the Indian Center, and then I was appointed Human Relations commissioner. When I was the director of the L.A. Indian Center, I got appointed to the Human Relations Commission for the City of San Diego, and my feeling was that if you're going to make any changes in the communities in which you live, you have to get into position to help make those decisions by utilizing and incorporate it into your life, into your community, the society in which you live. So I was able to talk to the city about Indian people and where they lived in the area, and that we're into a part of the L.A. scene and that we should have at least some kind of recognition. So that recognition was like being appointed to Human Relations Commission. We went to the county and talked to them as well. We finally got them to create an American Indian—the one that Ron Andrade runs now, that council, got them to institute that way back in the seventies because we said we need a liaison group between the city and the communities of Indian people, and that liaison would be an Indian group appointed by the county and the city to help the cities and counties understand about Indian people.

COATES

So that's existed for about thirty-five years now, something like that.

EDMONDS

Yes, I left there in '74, and between '72 and '74 we got county to do that.

COATES

Almost forty years.

EDMONDS

Our first director was Tom Sellers. I don't know if you know him or not. I was supposed to be the first director, but I had been offered a job down here, so I came down here and started my life over down here as well.

COATES

What was the job?

EDMONDS

It was a solo parent project, similar to a relocation program, where unmarried females and their children would come out to San Diego to work or go to school. My job was to bring them out, pretty much the same thing as relocation program, temporary housing. I'll get them enrolled in vocational training school or find them a job.

COATES

Were you a single parent yourself by this time or were the kids—

EDMONDS

No, I had another woman by then.

COATES

And the kids were with your ex-wife?

EDMONDS

Yes. They were pretty much grown by then. So I did that for a year, and then, of course, the Bureau always takes our projects, so they decided that that program had run its

course, so they ended, terminated that program. Some of those girls are still here from that program.

COATES

When they came here from somewhere else, they brought their kids with them at the time?

EDMONDS

Yes. Solo parents, yes, with children. We provided babysitting and transportation, orientation, vocational training, job development, those kind of things. I stayed there for about a year, and then that program ended and I went to work with a consultant group, with Ron, actually, Ron Andrade. It was called Wasca, and we provided consultation to Indian tribes in urban centers in Southern California in board training, administrative training, economic development, things like that. We provided them the techniques for that. And that program, again, had its life expectancy of two years. So I left there and went to the Indian Center here in San Diego. It was called The Americans for Indian and Future Traditions. It was the Indian Center, and I applied there for work, and they put me in the job development department, and my job was to provide employment and training for American Indians in San Diego, reservation and urbans, mostly urbans. That program ended as well. So I got tired of working for everybody else, so I founded my own organization. It was called The Indian Human Resource Center, employment training, advocacy, social services. I founded that in 1979, and it turned thirty-three years old this year, but I think it's defunct now. [interruption]

EDMONDS

So anyway, the Indian Human Resource Center lasted thirty-three years. I was the director for twenty years. In 1999, I retired. We did a lot of things in San Diego.

COATES

Now, how did you set this up? You went and got grants and things like that?

EDMONDS

Yes. The Indian Center that I was working for, they were out of compliance with their funding agency, but I knew the funding agency guys because I grew up with them in L.A. They became big shots in Washington, D.C. So when the Indian Center here was beginning to flounder, I called them up. I said, "I don't want these programs to be lost in San Diego. I want to pick them up." They said, "Well, you incorporate and get you an organization 501(c)(3), and we'll talk." So the lawyer that was working there at the Indian Center, I told him what I was going to do and he helped me write up all the bylaws and everything that was needed for incorporation, and he flew to Sacramento and incorporated us, and came back. I took two of the main people in the Indian Center, the fiscal officer and the MIS, management information, person, and we sat down and tried to come up with a name for the center. We came up with Indian Human Resource Center. Then about that time the program went under, and I took a lot of the furniture and moved it over to El Cortez—not the El Cortez, a hotel on El Cajon Boulevard that the guy had worked there at the office area where the Indian Center was, he moved over to this other place. So I told him, I said, "I'm getting a project, I'm getting it funded. Could you let us have two rooms here? We want to move some furniture in and some equipment. We're getting funded." I really didn't know if we were anyway. But he said, "Yeah, yeah, we can do that." I said, "I'll get this money and I'll pay you what I owe you." And so we moved in, and somebody challenged us on our proposal, and I had to go talk to them and

tell them, you know, "We're experienced in this work. Give us a chance to see what we can do." So they released their challenge. The Department of Labor sent down one guy to talk to me, and by that time, we had an office set up, but the telephones weren't working. The electricity was on, but telephones weren't hooked up. So I told my two staff members, I said, "Let's act like we're working, because this guy's coming to evaluate our program." So he came and my secretary was in there typing away. [Unclear] was in there doing some books, and I was sitting there, you know, acting like I was working. He came in. "Randy," he said, "Pete sent me down here to check you out." Pete was the director of a division of Native American Programs, special programs, who I played basketball with and hung around with in Los Angeles, all the way back to 1965. So I knew him. He told me, "If you can get set up down there, we'll get you some money." So the guy came and he said, "Well, I'll tell Pete you got a pretty good place here. I got to go over to Coronado, meet with some people, have lunch, and I'll tell Pete you're okay." So he left. Let's see. That was September 7th. October, November 24th we got our first check, and the rest is pretty much history, thirty-three years later.

COATES

So it's just one funder for all that time, pretty much?

EDMONDS

Department of Labor Community Service block grant, United Way, Administration for Native American Programs, City of San Diego. I got all those different grants to help the program, provided employment training, social services advocacy, cultural awareness.

COATES

What was cultural awareness? What were those kinds of programs like?

EDMONDS

We established a two-day event in Balboa Park where we brought Indian vendors in with their arts and crafts. We set up a pow-wow-type program where we invited drums and dancers and singers to come and be there for the two days, and invited the public to come see what Indians do in their celebrations. I would talk about it throughout those two days and invite the local media to come. They'd come and I'd tell them what it was about, pow-wow is a gathering of people, to also inform the city that we're here, the county that we're here, and this is our celebration. A lot of people think that the Indians are no longer around, and we want to make sure that we let them know that we're still here. So that was basically it.

COATES

So this was before gaming really sort of got off the ground.

EDMONDS

Before gaming, yes.

COATES

And suddenly people began to realize that Indians were around.

EDMONDS

Exactly, yes. So we did that for over twenty-five years.

COATES

Wow.

EDMONDS

We did it for—I think the last time was about a year ago Mother's Day. But the program, I think, is no longer able to do that. So that's kind of when we established a Indian

church-gathering concept where we met at a Methodist church and invited all Indian people of all denominations to come to church on Sunday and sing their Indian songs and pray. Marv Abrams would come down, Meredith's grandfather. He'd come down on Sundays and we'd have our gatherings in the evening. He had to preach in the morning. He'd come down and we established a gathering system where we got people to come to our church, sing their Indian songs, you know, their traditional religious Indian songs. Some was just the regular preaching, you know, of the gospel, and then out of that came the big Christmas feast and Thanksgiving feast that is still ongoing to this day, where we invite the community to come and share with us food and celebration and gathering and socializing and all of that.

COATES

You know, I would love to hear more about this, and the other thing I want to hear more about is your involvement in the pow-wow community as well. I have to meet with someone else in half an hour, though. May I impose on you for one more session with you next week or sometime?

EDMONDS

Sure, yes, that'd be fine. [End of March 21, 2013 interview]

1.2. SESSION TWO (March 26, 2013)

COATES

This is Julia Coates. The date is March 26, 2013, and we are continuing with the interview with Randy Edmonds in San Diego, California. Last time I think we left off, do you remember we were talking about some of the things that you had done here in San Diego and you were sharing with us about some picnics and cultural types of events that had taken place every year.

EDMONDS

Yes, when I was the Director of the Indian Human Resource Center, which I founded in 1979 to provide employment training, social services, and advocacy for American Indians, we always looked at the community and what some of the needs of the community were, and the reasoning for that was to make sure that as the Indian Human Resource Center we could provide services to the Indians that needed services in San Diego, and how we did that was to make sure that they knew what we were doing, and also help develop the community in cultural ways, economic ways if that's possible, and, of course, social ways as we needed to for all the different tribes that lived in San Diego. So we decided to look at having Cultural Days at Balboa Park. I worked with the City of San Diego, the city manager, who was a good friend of mine at the time. We were able to access Balboa Park and begin to put together a cultural program, a two-day event twice a year, once in May and one in September, which coincided with California American Indian Day. What we did there was to call upon Indian vendors that wanted to sell their arts and crafts and have them set up around the arena, and then we did intertribal dancing and specialty dancing with other tribes that we invited to come and share with us, especially the local tribes. We had them come and also provide us with their traditional songs and dances, because we felt that this was their land, so we made sure that they were involved in the Cultural Day event. The idea there was to have the vendors that came to sell their arts and crafts, and they would also be able to keep the money that they made

from the arts and crafts, thereby establishing somewhat of a mini economic development for small business folks that were a part of the Indian arts and crafts groups. So it worked well for twenty-five years or so, even longer than that, up to last year, which was probably the thirty-second year of the founding of the Indian Human Resource Center. So we did that, and then we also created a program called the Indian Ministries, where we had a lot of the Indian people meet at the Methodist church to sing their own tribal songs that they wanted to, and then also pray in their own tribal language, as well as English language. Then we invited the Reverend Marv Abrams from Los Angeles to come and be our preacher for the Sunday event. At that particular setting, we established the Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts that are still ongoing today, where we invite the community to come and share food with us and they can dance, they can sing, or they can make speeches, whatever they want to do, and also partake in a festive feast during that day, celebrating Christmas and Thanksgiving. So those were the things that we wanted to establish in this community so that the community itself could participate in that establishment, and it worked very well, but since I've left, it's slowed down somewhat and, as I've been told in this past year, it looks like they're not going to be able to do any of those events again till somebody gets some money.

COATES

So it's a lack of money.

EDMONDS

The Indian Clinic, I believe, was looking at possibly reestablishing the Cultural Days, and I'm not sure who's going to take care of the two holiday feasts that we have.

COATES

How many people would attend?

EDMONDS

Well, at the Cultural Days, we would have probably up to a thousand people.

COATES

My goodness.

EDMONDS

That includes non-Indians. That would include the public. As far as the feasts are concerned, we'd have upwards of three to four hundred Indian families, individuals, and children that would attend those two feasts.

COATES

So the feasts would be predominantly Indian people, but the Cultural Days, were they—

EDMONDS

Was open to the public, yes.

COATES

But was it still predominantly Indian, or was it more non-Indian?

EDMONDS

Well, it was pretty much Indian-run, but it also included the public to come and see who we were and try to understand our traditions, as I would try to explain it. I was the emcee of the Cultural Day event, and I always talk about some history of American Indians and those people that lived here, and those that come from out of state and the different tribes and where they come from, what some of their traditions were and how the northern groups are different from the southern groups, and the southwestern groups are different

from the northeastern groups, and northwestern groups are different from other groups. Traditionally they were different, but culturally, pretty much related to each other.

COATES

So that one had sort of a different purpose to it. It was more educational of the general public. And was the general public predominantly the people who were there, or was it mostly Indian people too?

EDMONDS

There was mostly the general public, a few Indians that didn't actually participate in the event but came to visit and came to watch their own traditional ways, and so they came and shared with us their time. We also set aside a section there where the elders of various tribes would be able to come and sit. Most of those elders were from San Diego and also from some of the reservations that came.

COATES

So the local reservations.

EDMONDS

Yes, local reservations that were interested in some of our intertribal exhibition dances, and we had specialty groups come. We had guitar players that would sing songs an Indian way, and flute players and people that would do that. Then we had intertribal dancing, the various types of category dancing like the War Dance, the Gourd Dance, the Buffalo, the Snake, the Round Dance and Two-step, and all those dances that I would explain what they were about.

COATES

So these are social dances that are sort of shared across a lot of different tribes, is that right?

EDMONDS

Yes.

COATES

And some of them are kind of pow-wow-related, but most of them are not. Most of them are just social sorts of things.

EDMONDS

Well, the pow-wow basically means the gathering of people to practice their culture and their traditions, which includes singing, dancing, and prayers for that day's event, and that's what we usually do.

COATES

But you might have a Gourd Dance before the pow-wow, but it would not be actually a part of the pow-wow dancing. That would be kind of a specialty thing.

EDMONDS

No, like we would have to start would be the Kumeyaay Singers, a local group would come, and then we'd have the Gourd Dance, and then we'd go into the intertribal dancing in the afternoon. We only could dance until about six because that time the sun went down. We had no lights out there. So it was usually a ten-to-six event throughout the day. We had big crowds, and a fry bread stand, of course, had the biggest crowd. They always had long lines for fry bread.

COATES

How did you get into pow-wow? Did you do that before you moved to Los Angeles? Were you involved in it when you were in Oklahoma?

EDMONDS

Well, no. I was a dancer. I mean, I danced at our ceremonies.

COATES

In Oklahoma you did?

EDMONDS

Yes, they were kind of like tribal events, like the Caddos would go to Binger Y and they'd have their annual dances and they had War Dancing and Turkey Dancing, [unclear] dancing, and the women do all those kinds of dances. The boys, of course, would just do the War Dance. We did that. We weren't really intertribal at that time. Once in a while maybe the Comanches or the Kiowas would show up, and, vice versa, if the Kiowas were having their annual pow-wows or ceremonies, some of the other tribes would come and join. But if they had traditional-type dances, then they were the only ones that did it. They would do their own traditional dances. Like the Black Leggings Society, they only just allowed a very specific type of dancing and singing and participation from the tribe, only the tribe.

COATES

So you got into pow-wow then when you actually moved here.

EDMONDS

Yes. I moved here in 1954 to Los Angeles, and I guess my first emcee experience was probably about 1959. I think I went to a gathering there in Los Angeles at a park somewhere. We had a hard time finding places to have our pow-wows. And they needed someone to be an emcee, and I said, well, I could try it. So that's when I started, and it was just a couple days, one-day event. I guess I did all right, because they kept calling me and calling me. [laughs] So fifty years later, I'm still doing emceeing, and I've been all over the place, usually.

COATES

All over California or outside of California?

EDMONDS

California, Oklahoma, I've been to Washington. I've been to Denver, Colorado. I've been in many states emceeing the pow-wow.

COATES

So you developed a lot of relationships with people in other states?

EDMONDS

I have, yes. I've been able to meet a lot of people from various tribes across the United States, and still today remain friends with a lot of them. Of course, most have passed on to the spirit world, but we still have contact with those that are still around.

COATES

This makes me think about a couple of things, because when we left off last week, we said one of the things we would touch on today was the relationship between the Indian people who came here from other places and the people who were local, from local tribes. So that's one thing. But then what you're talking about here is also the relationships with people who are here with people who remain back home, right? And back home is not even necessarily just Oklahoma, but it's all kinds of different places, right?

EDMONDS

It covers many states, yes.

COATES

How do you find that in different places, I mean, what have been kind of the reactions of people who are maybe more rural or reservation people, to the Indians who are coming to pow-wows and other things from the urban areas? Are they pretty open to people or what's been your experience with that?

EDMONDS

Well, you know, when we first started the pow-wows in Los Angeles, it was just the urban groups, those that lived in the city that have relocated or came maybe with a parent that was in the armed forces, that remained in the area. A lot of those guys, of course, had some pow-wow or ceremonial experience. They knew how to sing. They knew how to dance. So we got those all together and established the first group in Los Angeles with the Drum and Feather group. Then eventually, the Sioux, they used to come to our pow-wows, but they didn't like our songs, didn't like the way we dance.

COATES

Why was that?

EDMONDS

It was just a different style of dancing, different style of singing. The Sioux sing a lot higher. They have different steps than we do. They wanted to know why we weren't singing their songs. We said, "Well, we really don't know your songs right now." So we just kind of encouraged them to start their own pow-wow groups, which they did. They did start a couple of groups there in Los Angeles. Then they began to have their own pow-wow weekends. We had our pow-wow weekend, they had their pow-wow weekend, and then we kind of visited with each other and danced with each other, and then everybody seemed to be satisfied with that alternating weekend pow-wows. So that's how we started in Los Angeles, and that phenomenon, as I said earlier, was that a lot of Indians had to come to the urban area to learn how to sing and dance, and they learned from those that brought the songs with them from the various tribes across the Indian country. Most of the southern tribes, like from Oklahoma and Kansas and those areas, you know, they had certain ways of singing the songs, certain ways of dancing. Those that came from the North, like the Dakotas in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Montana and those areas, had different styles of singing as well, had different styles of dancing. So as the pow-wow evolved into what it is today, there's a lot of mixture of northern and southern singers and dancers. I don't know if you've been to a pow-wow lately, but you'll see that. You have the northern drum, have a southern drum. Maybe you'll have ten northern drums, maybe a couple of southern drums, and before it used to be just southern drum, and maybe two southern drums and maybe one northern drum. Now it's evolved to where there's a whole lot of northern drums and just one or two southern drums. At the pow-wow, of course, they have drum contests, and then they call upon all the drums to sing specific songs for the various dances that they are going to take place in the arena. So it has caused a lot of tribes to come together in the arena, and that's why they call it intertribal, because you have a lot of different tribes that are in the arena, and mostly the dancers are from the northern part of the United States or the southern part of the United States.

COATES

So when people, as you say, have learned kind of that tradition here in urban areas and then they go to pow-wows in other states that are in more rural or reservation areas, they find that acceptance from the pow-wow community, even though—

EDMONDS

If those rules in reservational pow-wows are similar to what we have in the urban area, then they're acceptable, but if they're ceremonial, then it won't happen. You won't be able to attend.

COATES

Right. But ceremony is usually different from pow-wow, yes.

EDMONDS

Yes, there are certain tribes that have ceremonies that you just can't attend. A lot of the tribes that live in San Diego now, we must have about sixty different tribes in San Diego, and I imagine Los Angeles has just as many or more from the various Indian nations.

COATES

Which groups are the largest do you find in your experience?

EDMONDS

Well, for a while in Los Angeles the Navajos became the largest group because they had the most people coming out from New Mexico and Arizona to the urban area. Up in the Bay Area was more the Sioux. They, more or less, were the biggest group in the Bay Area. In San Diego, we had pretty much a mixture of different tribes, but no one was larger than the other. We had Omahas, we had Kiowa, Caddos, Comanches. Those were pretty much the tribes that were here when I got here. Then, of course, the local tribe, the Kumeyaay, some of them lived in town, not necessarily on a reservation, but they were in town. But we were considered urban Indians because we lived in the urban area. So there was no dominant tribe in San Diego that I really saw. We had Sioux here as well, too, but mostly up in the Bay Area.

COATES

So the Navajos were the most numerous in Los Angeles for a while. Did they stay?

EDMONDS

I don't think so. I don't think a lot of them stayed. I mean, they stayed for a period of time, maybe fifteen or twenty years, able to get a vocation or a job and eventually learned a trade, and they began to disappear. I guess they were going back to the rez to live. I think at that time the reservations were also being funded by the federal government for various kinds of programs for economic development and education, so a lot of them went back to work with their own tribe or to take advantage of any programs that they could.

COATES

So it was sort of a relocation program in reverse.

EDMONDS

Yes, pretty much. They kind of go where the money is and where the services are. I don't know if you remember Peter MacDonald. You know him?

COATES

Yes.

EDMONDS

When I came to Los Angeles, he was working at North American, and he was married to a Comanche lady who went to Ft. Sill Indian School when I was at Riverside Indian

School, so I knew her. We had a church there, was a Baptist church, and all the Indians that were living in Los Angeles that were kind of "churchy" were going to this church, and that's where I met Peter. We had a lot of good athletes that were coming to the church, and so we formed a softball team and a basketball team, and Peter MacDonald was our coach for both basketball and softball, so that's how I knew him. The church was a kind of a focal point for gatherings for most Indians that were on relocation, that had nowhere to go. They didn't know too much about what was available for Indians to come together as a group. So that was a good start for some of the programs that started in Los Angeles. He eventually moved back to New Mexico and then became tribal chairman. In fact, I saw him last year down here at the Convention Center. I was sitting there and I saw him coming, and I had got somebody's badge. McCambridge or something. He was really looking at me. He wasn't sure if he knew me or not, and he walked up, "Hi, Mr. McCambridge." [laughs] I said, "I just got somebody's tag. My name's really Randy Edmonds." "Randy Edmonds!" He was really glad to see me. So his wife, Wanda, was there and some other tribal members from Navajo. We got to talking, you know, and taking pictures and hugging. We had a good time. I hadn't seen him in a long time.

COATES

Peter Mac.

EDMONDS

He still remembers our days in L.A. So he always said that we were the pioneers of the development of the urban experience amongst Indian people because we came out early and started putting together different kinds of things to help Indians, the pow-wows, the service agencies, the churches, the recreational programs that we had in those areas of L.A., and we needed that to pretty much bring the Indians together for socializing with each other and also being able to participate in some recreational activities that kind of kept us busy for probably about twenty years or so.

COATES

As you were putting these kinds of programs together, did you discover people who had sort of been here on their own from earlier times? Did they start showing up at these programs also?

EDMONDS

Yes, once they found out we had a group of Indians coming into town and were doing things, they would come.

COATES

So these were people like who had come during the Depression or during World War II?

EDMONDS

During World War II doing their service, when their husbands were in the service and they brought their families to L.A.

COATES

So they had been here, but they just hadn't really sort of grouped, I guess, kind of connected up, huh?

EDMONDS

Yes, I met two or three people that were here earlier than the relocation program, but they came out to be in the service. Some of the people that came out with me were on relocation program, but they joined the Marines and they were stationed down here at Camp Pendleton. Guys I went to school with, actually, were some of those guys, but they

weren't on relocation program, and they didn't actually stay. Once they left the Marines, they went back to Oklahoma, lived back there. But I would say about 60 percent of those that came on relocation program stayed and the rest returned to their own tribes.

COATES

What about the second and third generations? Because the people who came, they had families here, right? They had kids, they had grandkids, and so those kids and grandkids were raised here. They really didn't have the original connection with places back home. What did you see in those generations? I mean, what was their relationship like to Oklahoma or Arizona and New Mexico, or the other places that their parents had come from? Did they maintain those ties into the later generations?

EDMONDS

Well, I can only speak for my own children. When I came out with my wife and my oldest daughter, we used to go back at least once a year to visit home, what we call home. "Have you been home lately?" or, "We're going home next week," or, "I was home a couple weeks ago." And that's what we considered home, and most Indians that you talk to when you ask them, "Where you from?" they'll say, "I'm from North Dakota," or South Dakota, "I'm from Minnesota," or Wyoming or somewhere. That's their home. That's where they came from, and they always say, "I'm going home," or, "I've been home."

COATES

So did your kids say that also as adults?

EDMONDS

Not necessarily, no. They were raised in L.A., but on the other hand, they would kind of know that they weren't from Los Angeles, even if they were born there, because of my ties with Oklahoma and their grandparents were still back there. I know my oldest son, he's always saying, "Well, I'm going back home next week," and he was born in L.A. But the tie is still there. When he passes away, he's going back to Oklahoma to be buried, even though he was born in Los Angeles. So that generation or those generations, they still kind of look at Oklahoma as their home place, where their ancestors are, where their parents came from.

COATES

Some of your kids have moved back there, haven't they?

EDMONDS

Yes. Let's see. One, two, three, four—four have moved back.

COATES

Most of them have.

EDMONDS

They moved out here and they've moved back, moved back and moved back. So they kind of come and go.

COATES

Is it just according to where they get a job? Why do they go back and forth?

EDMONDS

Not necessarily. Not necessarily. Their mother lived back there for a while and they went back to be with her before she died. Then they kind of inherited some land and some property. Then they started working for the tribe and so they just felt comfortable back there, even though they were born in L.A. And I always say, you know, that that's where

I'm going when I pass, is the Rainy Mountain Cemetery. That's where all my family's buried, so that's where I'll go.

COATES

You know exactly where.

EDMONDS

Yes. That's where I'll go. That's home to me, even though I've been out here almost sixty years.

COATES

And so your grandkids, were they raised mostly here or mostly there?

EDMONDS

Here. Here and in Oregon, where my daughter lived. And then my son lived in L.A., kids were born there and raised there, but they still go back to Oklahoma too. So even though it's a generation kind of relationship and experience in the urban area, they still are kind of tied to where the family came from, and that's kind of the way I feel too. Even though I've been out here sixty years, I still think of Oklahoma as my home.

COATES

We were talking the other day about why some people seem to be able to make the transition and to make it here, and then other people just couldn't or didn't, didn't want to, whatever it was, and went back pretty quick. I know we were talking about maybe some of those that were pretty strong and pretty deep in their culture might have been the ones that had a harder time making the transition, but I also know people who were pretty strong in their culture who did make the transition. I guess what I'm trying to ask what you think about is the statement that you make of when you can't take the rez out of the Indian, out of the person. I think you know what that means. I have an idea maybe what that means for myself, what I think it does, but what I'm thinking is if there's somebody listening to this in five years or fifty years that's not Indian and we've got people who they always tell our story, whether it's anthropologists or missionaries or government agents or whoever it may be, but this is your voice, you know. How would you explain that statement to somebody who didn't understand what that meant, that you can't take the rez out of the Indian, or you can't take home out of the Indian, to somebody that maybe didn't really quite get what that meant? What does that mean to you?

EDMONDS

You know, when you're involved in your own culture and it's real strong, like you speak the language, you're involved in the traditions of your own family or your tribe and that's where you're comfortable as an individual, you've lived there for a while that you understand all that, and you really haven't been touched by the white society, it's hard to take that out of a person because they still speak their language. They still sing their songs. They still say their prayers in their own tribal language. They still practice their traditions. They still have that real strong Indian tie to their culture, and when you try to break that, bring them to an area that is foreign to them, such as coming into an urban area where there's mostly just English spoken and the society is white, and they have trolley cars and buses and telephones and elevators and high-rise buildings, that's really, really foreign to them, so they have a hard time adjusting to that. They have no one really to help them adjust to that because they come from a family where they're very traditional, and so that tie is still there. If they come to an urban area, urban setting, it's like night and day, and unless they make that adjustment somehow, they will not be able

to cope with that society in which they're put into. I myself was able to come to Los Angeles and make the adjustment because I worked with white people when I was growing up in the boarding school, so I knew the language, the English language. I wasn't much that involved in my traditional language or songs or dances, not as strong as some people are, but I was participating. But it wasn't enough to hold me back to where I would not be able to adjust to an urban white society. The intent of the BIA schools, anyway, was to make you like the white folks. You can't speak your language, or you need to listen to the history of America, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and all those great presidents and learn about the history of America and how it got started. So they teach you that in boarding school, and then I as a student pretty much picked that up, so I had some geographical knowledge and history of what America was like. So when I got to the big city, I really didn't have any problems adjusting, but if I'd have lived on a reservation in, like, Navajo, lived way out where the hogans and the sheep are, and my language was traditionally Navajo and my songs and dances to Yei'Bi'Chei and all that, I may have a lot of problems leaving that to an urban setting. So, to me, it's a very traditional tie that you have with your tribe that keeps you there. And if you try to break that, then sometimes it don't work and then we see a lot of people returning to their families from an urban area once they tried to relocate.

COATES

Did you see people trying to recreate that in an urban area?

EDMONDS

Recreate?

COATES

Their culture, their traditions, adapt it, I guess.

EDMONDS

Well, we tried to somewhat through the pow-wow system, and that was just songs and dances and prayers, but that was as close as we could get to it because there's so many different tribes, so many different languages, so many different traditions that you have to put all that together and come up with some system that would be comfortable to all groups, and that's the southern pow-wow and the northern pow-wow that includes all the different tribes from the northern part of the United States and all the tribes that are part of the southern tribes, and try to utilize some of the songs that were predominantly southern tribal songs, same way with northern songs. A lot of the songs that we sang in Oklahoma were like 49s, Round Dance, War Dance songs that kind of what everybody knew, and we transferred that to an urban setting and then used that as our basis for the pow-wow, the southern drums, the song, the dances, and the same with the northern groups. They did the same thing. So within the northern groups, it included everybody from state of Washington all the way to the Oneidas, the Great Lakes people, all the way through that northern part. Southern tribes, Kansas, Oklahoma, some parts of Texas were considered the southern groups. They had the basic songs, dances that the utilized in the pow-wow, and it still goes on today. The northern tribes, they're all together in the styles of dances and singing that they do, southern tribes same way. And then we have the pan-Indianism going on where a lot of the East Coast tribes who have lost their language, their traditions, and their songs borrow from southern tribal groups bring it to East Coast and use it as a part of their pow-wows. Also they borrow from the northern tribal groups and bring that to the eastern groups, and they sing and dance like the northern and

southern groups. I don't know if you've ever been to an eastern pow-wow, but it's different.

COATES

Don't think I have, no.

EDMONDS

One time I was invited to a Seneca pow-wow, Salamanca, New York, and I was really studying up on the Senecas. I don't know what kind of pow-wows they have there. So when I got there and they started the pow-wow, it was the same people I saw at all the pow-wows every other place. [laughs] There was only one Seneca dancer, and she was dressed differently, of course, but all the rest of the dancers and singers were all from all the pow-wows that I had been in other parts of Indian country. So it has brought together different tribes in the pow-wow arena and they pretty much continue the same format, even today.

COATES

You told me the other day that you drew dancers also, that you had been drawing dancers or something.

EDMONDS

Oh, yes. I'm a halfway artist and I have drawn some dancers. Not very good at it.

COATES

Well, I wondered because you told me that you'd wanted to be an artist and they had said, "Do you have any training? Do you have a portfolio?" and that kind of ended it right there. But that continued to be an interest for you, and that was something that you continued to do throughout your life, that you continued to draw?

EDMONDS

No, I just did sketches, nothing for show, just for my own self.

COATES

But it was still something that you continued to enjoy?

EDMONDS

I still enjoy doing it, but I can't see too good no more. My hands are a little shaky. [laughs]

COATES

Was that a disappointment for you to not be able to become more trained in that like you wanted to?

EDMONDS

Not really, no. Not really, because I had other things that I was involved with. Like when I retired, I planned on getting me some canvases and I bought a whole bunch of paints, pastels, and acrylics. They're still upstairs in the closet. [laughs] I just haven't had time to do it. But my granddaughter who's going to American Indian Art Institute, is very good. She'll be our artist, I think, in our family.

COATES

So the talent has come through the family; it's just been developed.

EDMONDS

And my son Larry, her dad, is a very good artist, very good artist. And I've been trying to get him to go commercial, you know, with his stuff, but he won't do it, and he's good enough. Just doesn't want to do it.

COATES

We haven't talked very much about your kids. Did you maintain a close relationship with them as they were growing up?

EDMONDS

Not so much. I got a divorce from my first wife, the kids' mother, in 1958. So we had some drinking problems in our family and she continued to do so. So we split, and then the children stayed with her. We all were in Los Angeles at that time, and I was paying child support to her for the children, but I kind of got busy with my work and didn't get to see them that often. So she was the one that pretty much raised them in the urban area. Then she moved back to Oklahoma and they all went with her, and they lived back there for a period of time. Then they finally all began to drift back to L.A. Then they stayed here for a while, then they all drifted back to Oklahoma. So that's where most of them are now, except for my oldest son, Larry. He lives in Los Angeles.

COATES

So when she went back to Oklahoma, they were still minor children, or were they young adults by that time?

EDMONDS

They were probably, I would say, in their twenties, getting in the early twenties.

COATES

So they were adults, but they just went back with her anyway, huh?

EDMONDS

Yes. Then my oldest daughter, she just stayed back there and lived with her grandmother, because the mother got sick after a while. She had diabetes and she finally passed away, I think in 2006, somewhere along there. So Rhonda, my oldest daughter, and Lenny, my number-three son, he works for the tribe. They both work for the tribe. And my other daughter, she lives in Oklahoma City and she's kind of an artisan. She makes a lot of beadwork and bags and clothing, and she has her own web page. Then my other daughter, she lives there in Oklahoma City and she works for the University of Oklahoma. She is a director of one of the departments. I think it's the scholarship or some department she works in, but she works there. So everybody's working. My other son that lived in L.A., he was working at a trailer park as a manager and then he decided to go to another job, so yesterday he started in another job. He wants to be in the artist area, field, so I think he's going to be doing that again. Real good on the computer. He put a lot of stuff together I don't understand. [laughs]

COATES

Like graphic artist?

EDMONDS

Yes, that's it, graphic artist. That's what he is.

COATES

Very good. Very good. So when did you meet Bonnie? How did you meet her?

EDMONDS

Well, when I started the Indian Human Resource Center in 1979, I founded it September 7, 1979, and I had been working at the Indian Center in San Diego called Americans for Indian and Future Traditions, but it was run by a lot of reservation folks and it was supposed to be an urban program. They were told that they have to have urban management, urban Indian management and a board of directors and service to the urban Indians, and they didn't think they had to. So they finally were defunded because they

didn't comply with the government. I just started working there in the Department of Labor programs, and I knew they were going to go under. They had a couple of lawyers that were working there, and I told the lawyers, "I want to incorporate a new organization. I've talked to my friends who are in the federal agency that can fund us, if you'll get me a nonprofit status." So he went to Sacramento and incorporated our program, Indian Human Resource Center. Then about that time the Center went down and I took the labor portion of it and moved into another office area and began to operate that program. I had to hire staff, and I hired, oh, probably about five people, and then Bonnie was one of the staff, I think, that was hired at that time. She had just come out from Minnesota. She was supposed to be working for a legal program here in San Diego, but Ronald Reagan at that time disbanded all those programs. She came to work for us as a job developer, and I was the director at that time. I was still in a relationship. Then in 1986, that relationship stopped. In 1987, Bonnie and I got together. So we've been together since then.

COATES

Twenty-six years.

EDMONDS

Twenty-six years, yes. Actually married twenty-three but took us three years to see if it's going to work. [laughs]

COATES

That's a good long time to check it out.

EDMONDS

So, yes, that's how I met her. She came from Minneapolis to work here and then she became my staff member.

COATES

So she's a tribal person also?

EDMONDS

She's from the Chippewa/Cree Nation of Minnesota.

COATES

Do you know which band? They have different bands in reservations.

EDMONDS

Yes, she's from the Pembina band of Chippewas, and they're way up almost to Canada, a little town called Aleck. That's where her family lived before she was born, and then they moved to Bemidji.

COATES

Now, Bemidji, I know.

EDMONDS

Yes, Bemidji. That's where they lived. Then she ended up in Minneapolis, grew up in Minneapolis till she was about forty, and then she came out here, and that's when I met her.

COATES

So she was kind of a relocatee also to Minneapolis.

EDMONDS

Yes. She worked for the legal department there in Minneapolis and then she got fighting with her husband and she said, "I'm leaving." So she moved to San Diego and had a job

here from the court systems out of Minneapolis, the same, comparable. But when she got here, Ronald Reagan cut the legal services.

COATES

And that's when she came to work for you.

EDMONDS

Well, no, she didn't come then. I think she did some other work, some other agencies, and then we advertised for a job developer and she answered it. At first we didn't hire her, hired somebody else, but that person didn't work out. So I had one of my staff call her and see if she wanted to come to work. She says, "Would I?" She was having a hard time, I guess, finding work. She was with us for eight years, but I had to let her go once we had a relationship going. [laughs] But she found a couple other good jobs. She's a very good worker.

COATES

You said the other day she was a lifesaver. Why is that?

EDMONDS

Well, I was pretty wild in my younger days, a drinker and partier and not taking good care of my health, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, sugar diabetes, all the diseases as you grow older, I guess. And when I got with her, she pretty much insisted that I start taking care of myself, which I did. I stopped my drinking. I started looking at my health as I should, and started going to the doctor and trying to maintain my health. So I've lived, I think, an additional ten, fifteen years because of her, because she was pretty disciplined in that. And she watches me pretty good. [laughs] She's got me off of carbs now. I can't eat any carbs.

COATES

So I brought the wrong things and she's going to slap your hand.

EDMONDS

Oh, yes. She can eat them. She's a hypoglycemic.

COATES

Oh, she goes the other way, then.

EDMONDS

She has low sugar, yes. But her diet is pretty much the same. So we have to really watch it. We break the rules once in a while. Sunday I went to Phil's Bar-B-Que. Oh, man, I really greased out over there, a half order of baby back ribs and onion rings and beans and cole slaw. Oh, my god. I can't do that often, because I checked my blood after that. It was way [unclear].

COATES

It's like anything, you can do it once in a while. You just can't do it every day.

EDMONDS

I had to get that needle out and [demonstrates] give myself a shot. Yes, so I have to be real careful. April 4th is my birthday. I'll be seventy-nine. So that's not far away, next week.

COATES

About ten days.

EDMONDS

Week from Thursday, I guess. So I've lived probably longer than I should have, because I have a lot of friends that have left this world that I used to hang around with. They're gone. So hopefully, I'll go another five, ten years.

COATES

I hope so, at least. You got a lot of friends left, I imagine, too, though.

EDMONDS

I have a lot of friends, but no one close. My close friends are two white people, two older white people. They just turned eighty this year. We meet them for breakfast on Sunday morning at Denny's. Once in a while they'll call and say, "Let's go eat some Mexican food." So we hang around like that. I have no close Indian friends, although I have a lot of friends. I mean, I know about every family in town and they know me, but we're not real close.

COATES

What else?

EDMONDS

I don't know. [laughs]

COATES

Are there things on your mind?

EDMONDS

Not really. I think that my life has been pretty good, and my goal is to try to help my Indian community grow and make sure that they can access services that they need. I helped start the Indian education program here in San Diego in 1976, and that's still going. I started a bowling league in 1976. That's no longer in existence. Been a part of the pow-wow scene here since that time. Started the Indian Ministries to help people that want to go to church, go to church. I started the Indian Human Resource Center, which provided employment training, social services, advocacy for American Indians. I developed the two Cultural Days events at Balboa Park, developed the two Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts that still continues to go on today. So I've done, I think, about as much as I could do. I wanted to try to get a small business program going, but I couldn't get enough interest in that, so it went for about a year. I tried to start an Indian Chamber of Commerce, which went for about a year and got the wrong people on that one that took our money, stole our money. So that died. Then I tried to initiate an American Indian Cultural Center and Museum at Balboa Park. I got a building from the City of San Diego for a dollar a year. It's an old building that they had no use for, and I was able to get $1.2 million to renovate it, but that wasn't enough to do it. So that's pretty much gone too. Couldn't get the local tribes to help either. It would have been a nice museum in an area where the other museums are. We don't have a museum, American Indians. When I left the Indian Human Resource Center in 1999, I turned it over to them. They didn't do anything with it, either. So I've had some visions, but some have been made a reality. Others, just because lack of interest, no money, whatever the reason was, haven't materialized. But I'm pretty much satisfied with my life.

COATES

And you continue to stay pretty involved in the community, you said.

EDMONDS

I do. Yes, I do. There's some pow-wows coming up that I'm involved in. There's a Community Night that the Indian Clinic has every month on Thursday night, which I am

the prayer man for them. I work for Southern Cal American Indian Resource in El Cajon as a senior advisor. I mean, I just give advice, you know, how you do this, how you do that, and I just tell them how it's done, and they pay me for being that person.

COATES

You've done a lot of things throughout your life. Why is it important to you, or why do you continue to stay involved? I mean, it's a point where you can sort of just sit back and rest on your laurels and take it easy if you wanted to.

EDMONDS

Well, I tried that, but I just couldn't do it. I mean, I was retired for about four years. I traveled a lot. I went to Europe, Greece, Germany, Paris, Italy, traveled there and I've been to Mexico, the Yucatan, Baja, been there, been to Puerto Rico, been to the Bahamas. But I still enjoy working in my community. I still enjoy getting the hype of being able to see something develop for the Indian community. I just feel that I need to do that. I mean, that's where my joy is as a person, seeing something built, economically, socially, spiritually, whatever. I think it's needed. There's a lot of people that don't have any idea what they need to do to be a part of our community. They're just followers. We need leaders, you know, to help, and there's one or two in our area that's able to do that. So I talk with them quite a bit to make sure that we're doing the right thing, we're helping the community. So that, you know, that's kind of why I'm in it.

COATES

Just making sure people continue to make it.

EDMONDS

Yes. How's that? Is that okay?

COATES

That's good. Well, thank you very much for all of the time that you've given to me over these two days, and to Meredith before that.

EDMONDS

And Tom Brokaw before that.

COATES

And before that, and Joan Weibel, and all of them.

EDMONDS

Joan Weibel before that. [laughter] [End of March 26, 2013 interview]

Date: