Delores Cummings

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 017

Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh
June 20, 2008
Owyhee, NV

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DC: Okay, my name is Delores Cummings. Shaw is my middle name. My parents are Marie Jones and Kelly Shaw, Sr. My mother was from around the Golconda area. She was of the White [Knife][1] clan. And my dad came from Paradise Valley, Nevada. And after that, they both came this way. My mother came through—with her parents—came to Tuscarora, where they worked, her mother worked, in various ranches, like, cleaning, and cooking, and all of the things that were what people required of them doing on ranches. My father worked on ranches, too. Well, *her* fathers did that. They worked in the hay fields and everything. And somewhere along the way, I don't remember my mother calling my grandfather by his Indian name. I can't recall that. But one of the ranchers that they worked under took him in and named him Charlie Jones. That's where the name came from. In the Battle Mountain area, around in that area, there were Jones ranchers there. And I'm assuming that's where he got his name, then. And then, as they came from Battle Mountain, they came over to—well, I'm getting mixed up. They started from Golconda, and they worked their way over towards Tuscarora, where they got jobs and everything. And then, eventually, they worked their way over here to Duck Valley. And that's my mother's side. My dad came with his grandpa, who is the late Louie Dave's father. And he came over with them on horse and buggy. My father at that time might've been about five or six years old. And he lived here until they died, his grandpa and grandma, and he lived around different people around here. And believed that Joe **Simms** was one of his uncles. And he lived with them. Because my dad always said Jack **Simms** was his cousin. And as he grew older, my dad was sent to Chemawa Indian School, the

[1] Ms. Cummings says "White River" here, but it seems to be a misstatement (see p. 3).

boarding school. And that's where he got his education. And he stayed around in that area, working after he got out of school. He never completed high school or anything, but he worked on farms over there. He was a good farmer. And when he came back to Duck Valley, he had got his own little forty acres, and we had to clear that by hand—the sagebrush and everything. And he, about in the [19]40s, I remember him having oat fields and wheat fields. At that time, my mother was just a housewife. She took good care of us. But going back to my mother again, when they first came over, she used to say that they came over on wagons. They stopped in White Rock. One of my aunts, I believe it was **Katherine** Jones—Kate Cota, the late Kate Cota, rather—she was born in White Rock, coming over. When they got here, they made their homes out of white sagebrushes and rye grass. They weaved the rye grass and lived in that. And right now, it's over—the place where they all lived was over there by Donald Jones's. Where Donald Jones lives now, in that area. They kind of all lived in little groups there, the family. Some of the families that came over at that time was John **Paradise** and his family. And the Sopes, the **Strawbucks**… My mother always said that Sopes were relatives of hers, too. I guess back then, way back then, they had been living with one another, the Shoshones and Paiutes. So… My mother is Shoshone *and* Paiute. My dad is Paiute. His mother was Paiute, from Paradise. And they lived here, and eventually my mother and dad married. And of course, I was born. I was the first in the family. And as I remember, in our little homes, in order to keep warm during the wintertime, my mother used to put rocks, little round rocks—[__inaudible at 7:19__] rocks—those rocks that we have. And during the winter, she'd put them on the stove, and then she'd roll the rocks up in rags or whatever, and then she'd put that in our beds. That was one way of us keeping warm at night. And

we only had two beds. Them days, the big beds were double beds. And I think there was about three people that slept in one bed, and three in the other. I believe we had a good life then. My father and mother were very good providers. I think I was one of the more fortunate kids around here. Some of our people, like I remember **Darlene John** used to live up here on the hill going towards Paradise Points. And they just lived in little tents. I remember sleeping up there, spending the night up there with Darlene and her sister and her mother, and they were real poor, they were pitiful. They had just one stove. And she just, she didn't have wood, she used to just pull wood from around their house there to keep warm on. And they never had much to eat. I remember her mother making gravy, just plain old gravy, out of lard, and mixing it up with water, and flour. And they'd dip their bread in it, and that's what we had for our breakfast. I remember that so vividly. And did I mention White Knife in there? Anyway, going back aways, from where my mother came from, she was from the White Knife clan, which I'm real proud of. And I remember, growing up, my mother had this rock. She used it when she did her hides, to tan her hides. And I wish I still had that. We probably threw it away as kids. But we had hard times, too. I can't remember of anybody really being sick unless they died of pneumonia. And probably, like some of the others were saying, I think there was typhoid fever that killed a lot of people off over here. And my mother raised her nephew, who was Bobby Jones, because his mother had died of that typhoid fever. And he was six weeks old when he died, so she raised him until he became 18, until he died. It, to me, everybody in the valley had cows and horses. There might have not been that many cows, but I believe each family had a few head of cattle. And how they did it, they survived with that much. They bought maybe shoes once a year, and you had to wear them,

whether they got small on you or not, until after school. Usually everybody ran around barefooted after that. And…

NC: So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

DC: Oh, I've got two sisters and one brother. We lost a baby, an infant brother. And, what else should I say?

NC: So as you were growing up, would your mom or grandmother or grandfather tell any stories of creation stories, or any stories that you remember or recall of how things should be and so forth?

DC: Okay, my mother used to tell us stories. One was about the *Itsappe* and his brother, the Wolf. And I can't recall that too well. But every night, that was our bedtime stories. One was—the one that I really especially liked was called, "The Mother Bear and the Mother Doe and Her Fawn." And that was my favorite. I should write a story on that sometime. It's something like the story that Beverly Crum told. It's almost the same thing. Only, it's a little bit different than what she writes, from how my mother told it, or how I gather in my mind. And…

NC: Can you share that story with us?

DC: Now?

NC: Yeah.

DC: It's, it goes along for a while.

NC: That's fine, we've got time.

DC: Okay. When they used to tell stories, you had to repeat to them almost everything that you say. When they were telling it. Like, my mother used to say, "*Himpaisen. Tepitsi himpaisen. Soteen weta*"—the big *weta*, the mother *weta* and baby. They lived up in the

mountains. And the mother deer and her baby lived up there, too. And just like anybody else, us Indian people, like Indian people, they had to go out and hunt for food for their babies. So they had their little homes out there. I always pictured it as being a cave, where they lived. And she said they used to, the momma deer and the mother bear used to go out, and they'd gather what they could for their babies, and they'd bring it home, and feed their babies. And they'd, while they were gone, out looking for food, the kids, like all children, got out and played together. They did all kinds of things. They chased each other around with sticks, and they'd be all dirty and everything when the mothers would come home. And they'd always, like children, always got into mischief and everything. Well, one day, the two fawns—there was two of them. There was two cubs, and two deer fawns. Well, they were out—they got tired of playing, and they decided that they wanted to do something a little bit different in playing. So they decided, "Well, we're going to smoke it. It's going to be called 'smoke out.' We're going to smoke each other out." So, in their houses, they went and put something in front of the house, in the door. They built a fire inside. And they all took turns of going in first. The baby bears went in, and they stayed in there until they couldn't stand it any longer. You know how the smoke burns your eyes and everything. If you start to cry and everything, *then* you let them out. This went on for a while. And the little cubs would go in, too. Same thing would happen. Finally, they sent the two bears in. And the two deer kept them in there a little bit too long. After a while, it got real quiet in there. And they were crying, they says, "Let us out! Let us out! Our eyes are hurting, are burning!" By the time they took the door down, there they lay. They were both dead. They died of smoke inhalation. So they didn't know what else to do. The two baby fawns said, "What are we gonna do? What are we gonna

do?" And then, so, they planned it. They went ahead and they put one cub on this side of the door, and the other cub on *this* side of the door. And then, they went and put the bear, the mother bear's *pisappen*, huge on their faces. Dressed them up like that. And here comes—that evening, when they came home, there was the mother bear, looking at them. She said, "What'd you guys do? You guys got into my rouge!" She slapped them. One fell over and didn't move. And she went back and did the other one. Slapped the other one. The other one fell over. And she was mad walking around. She finally realized that her babies were dead! And she, right away, she started sniffing around, and looking around. And she, right away, she knew what happened, because she followed the footprints of the little fawns. And by then, when they got home, the mother deer started looking for her fawns. Her babies. She took off looking for them. She followed them. And the mother bear was sniffing along, she was tracking them. They were going on and on and on. They went down, they were running along the—they knew that the bear would come after them, so they were going as fast as they can. The younger deer was just barely making it. But the older one was urging him along. They come across this river, then. They said, "How are we gonna get across? How are we gonna get across?" I'm making this short, now. And there's that *koonta*, sleeping. A crane. He was sitting there sleeping, and he had his legs crossed. He was sitting there sleeping, and then finally the deer says, "Oh, we're really, we're running away from this mother bear. She's after us." And the little fawns said, "Our uncle"—they were talking to the crane, that was their uncle—"help us! We need to get across over there! How are we gonna do it?" He says, "Yeah, I'll help you. So he stretches out his long leg, and he puts it across the river. And those two little fawns, they ran across the river. And then pretty soon, here comes the mother

deer off the mountains. She seen that happening, so she went after them. And the old crane was sitting there, half asleep, with his leg out across the river yet. She come along, and she asked him, "I want a drink of water, I'm real thirsty." So the crane says, "Well, here's my cup." So she takes his cup, and she goes across on his leg, and halfway across, she decides she's going to take her drink. And when she was doing that, she took her drink and she was watching the little deer going across on the other side, running. Well, she took her drink, and after she took her drink, she went and hit the cup on the crane's leg, and hurt him. And he says, "*Ataa*!" He pulls his leg up, and the mother deer falls into the river, and she's carried away down the stream. And that was the end of the story. [Laughter] But that's just, I'm not saying it all the way like my mother had said it. I did write it down somewhere, but I can't remember—I think I let my sister have it. But she hasn't returned it yet, and that's been a while, so hopefully I'll get that back.

NC: Yeah, that's a nice story, Delores. Okay, in terms of, when you were growing up, were there things that your mom shared with you as to how important it is for young girls growing up to, type of practice, or whatever you should do in terms of getting into ladyhood?

DC: Mmkay. Well, this is what my mother did when I started my monthly flow: she said, "You got to start learning how to take care of yourself. First thing you've got to do is go out into the willows, and bring some willows home, and you build a fire. You heat your water, and you take a bath in it. And you clean everything up that you slept in. You also cannot eat any meat that is red," like deer meat, beef, rabbits. Anything like that. The only thing you were allowed to eat was vegetables maybe, if you had it, and maybe fish. And then, too, you had to take care of your utensils that you used. You washed them and

put them away. And that's where it stayed. You will always use that, from the time you become—when your flow starts again. And you couldn't be around men. She always said, "[**Shoshone at 23:17**]" [Laughter] You stay away from them until you're through. And after, too, after you have your baby, again, you stay away from a man for a whole month. You're not seen in public places with your child. You stay home and take care of your child until you've passed that. And then, you cannot ride horse, is one of the things that they always stressed. You don't go anywhere hunting with your man, when you're on your monthly period. And what else? And you're always next to your baby. Of course, that's how it was when we were, years ago—you didn't have anything else but that. And that kind of—set your babies two years apart. You don't wean a baby until about two years after, and that's when most babies were born. Two years apart. Anymore, sometimes you have your babies nine months apart. But I think that was a really good thing. When you did that, you had to bring your—before my time, when my mother was a young girl, she said they had what they called moon houses, *hunnaikahni*. That's what the Shoshones call it, *hunnaikahni*. And you stayed in there. You did a lot of sewing. You took care of, maybe, your little brothers' and sisters' stuff that your mother taught you how to sew. And too, we also had—listening to the other ladies, too, they talked about blankets. Rabbit blankets. They say they sewed theirs, but I remember my aunt Anna used to take the fresh rabbit and they twisted it some way. And then they kind of weaved it, this way and that way. And then I guess they tacked it down, you know, with, I don't know, cord of some kind. Probably rawhide, is what I'm thinking. But I remember sleeping under that, and like the other ladies were saying in their interview, it was just nice and comfortable. And that's all they had. And, let's see…

NC: So did you ever watch your grandma or your aunt make those blankets, those rabbit blankets?

DC: No, I never did. I wished I had. But, I seen them do hides. My aunt Anna made beautiful buckskin gloves. My mother made—she didn't work with beads, but she made work gloves, that the men use when they do their fences. And also—going back to, when, your monthly flow, and everything, you couldn't even go down to the Fourth of July grounds if you were that way. You couldn't be hanging around there. And one of our traditions, here in the valley, was—this is going to be on the Fourth of July. Lot of people from all over came to celebrate the Fourth of July here. Our people started making their shades like a week ahead of time. And our Fourth of July grounds still exist down there. I think it was somewhere else before they had it where it is now, today. But before you went to the grounds, you had to purify yourself. We had little sweat huts—my mother said, back in *their* days—and you had to clean up, clean yourself, before you went down to the grounds. It was like a sacred grounds, I guess. And I thought that was good. And then, the last night of—no, I shouldn't say last night. The last day of, when we broke camp, they would sing during the day, and then they went clear around. And it was like blessing, blessing our grounds again for the next year. And that always stuck in my mind. I didn't really get to know my grandparents. My grandparents that I adopted was Willy and **Lina** Wines. They were my grandpa and grandma. And they, she taught me a lot of stuff. And hers was giving. She was always giving. And I think all of our people around here always gave something. You know? Grandpa Wines used to buy us anklets. And that was to take during the Fourth of July. He used to give me—and I used to get kind of jealous of my brother, because he would buy him more than us girls. He bought him cowboy hat, and

boots sometimes. Where they got their money, I'll never know. Because our people weren't the richest. But those people always had money to give. And I think our grandpas and grandmas always had a little money tucked away somewhere for each and every one of their grandchildren, because they always had little bit of money to give. I'm—there was a lot of handgame and cards, those days. We used to go to different homes, and they gambled. And I remember my Aunt Daisy, before she went, she used to put this rouge on her face. That's to keep the spirits or bad medicines they brought against you. She was a great believer in that. I'm proud to say, too, with our old people, they did leave us something. And it's making cradleboards. And today, that still exists. And I'd like to mention those names of who the cradleboard makers were, and I start it with my aunt, Daisy Teller, because she made my cradleboard for my first child. And that was a gift. And she never charged me anything, she just gave it to me. Nowadays, cradleboards run you to two or three, four hundred dollars, and even more. They're decorated with buckskin and beads. But **Minnie Jones** was the other one. Lucy Hall, Nell**ie** Harney, Rosie Dick, **Elsie** Hall, **Jessie** Charles, Alice Whiterock, Mamie Thomas, **Allie Thacker**, **Jessie Little**, and… I'm not sure who else did, there probably was some more out there. Today we've got Pauline Whiterock carrying on this tradition yet, and Rosie Shaw. And, I believe Pauline has taught her grandchildren, and some of her—well, I guess just grandchildren, because she didn't have any. Oh yes she did; she's got some of her girls working on cradleboards, too, which is really nice.

I'm going to talk about death now. How, from years back, from what I seen, I believe a lot of our Indian people practiced it. How they said they kept the body for five days. Well, when my cousin Bobby died, that's what we did. My mother kept him for five

days. People came to our home when his body came back from Elko. And we kept him in a tent, not a tepee—in them days, they didn't have tepees. I believe tepees at that time were used for just mostly peyote meetings. But anyway, we kept the body there at the home for five days. We cooked all those five days. We usually killed the—my folks, when Bobby died, they killed their cow, they butchered. And everything was given away. They cooked—what was left after the funeral was given to the people around. With the person that died, they took his clothing, his personal belongings, and they burned them. They'd go towards the west, and they'd burn the clothes. That, I think, was a practice from way back. But as I recall, one time my mother was telling me that when my dad's—my grandmother died, her one and only horse that she had, they took that horse after the funeral, after the body was buried, they killed the horse on top of the grave. They sent that horse, I guess, along with the person that died, to the other world. And I don't believe they practice those any more. But that was a good way. Lot of people had used ashes. They felt that the spirits came back. We call it ***haantma*** [**34:54**]. I don't know them days what they called it. But there was a, they called it spirits, I guess. They'd get ashes, and they'd put ashes around the house so the spirit wouldn't come in. And then they'd get that cedar, and they'd cedar your house out. That's so that your dead won't come back and bother you. I think Lorraine did that to my—Lorraine and Alvin did that to our house when my mother and dad passed away, different times. I felt real good about that. You never felt that they would be around, and they never were.

NC: So when they did the cedar, did they smoke it, or did they just leave it around, or what did they do with it?

DC: They smoke it. They build little fire, and then they, where the ashes are still hot, they sprinkle the cedar on them, and then they go through the house, in each room, and they pray, and they say, "You're gone now, and you're in a different world now, so just go on. They'll be all right here. Your family will be okay." And I experienced that with what Lorraine and Alvin did for us, and that was really appreciated. I think it helps you, sometimes. Anymore, when somebody dies, what do we do? We go out and get drunk, and we try to forget about our people that way. We cry and everything. But I believe that really helped me, when I lost my folks. So that was a good thing. And one thing I think we've lost now is our medicine men. Some of our medicine men that I remembered was—I'll name them. One was Alex Cleveland. John **Damon**. Billie Shaw. Hugh Thomas. And there might be some more out there that I don't know of. But that's been all gone. And I wish that somehow—I think you had to be gifted in order to be a medicine man. And I don't know how that was, whether they named those people, agreeing that they, this is what they were going to do, or what. I don't know. But, I'm glad that we still carry on the peyote tradition. It hasn't gone away. In fact, I believe it's coming back. A lot of our people have gone into that. I do believe it's helped in a lot of ways, especially now with meth and everything out there. Some of our younger people have gone into that. And I'm really proud to say that this has helped them. Some of my relatives, I believe, have gone into the peyote meetings, and I believe it's helped. And we also, the Sundance still exists here, too, and I think that is a good thing, too. That we have Sundances. And I believe that, to me—I respect all that. That's their tradition. I wished I could be a Sundancer; I believe that's a *real* hard thing to do! But I'm always there to—what's the word for it, now?—to support them along the way. Same way with, when they

have their peyote meetings. I've tasted the juice, and it's helped me, it has made me feel good. I haven't done the other, where they eat it. It's very bitter. And I have a lot of respect for those people. I think they're kind-hearted people, the peyote people. When my folks were sick, they always remembered those people out there, no matter who they are. If they were ill, if one of your relatives was serving in the service, they always remembered them. They prayed, they prayed to the Great Spirit, that they be safe. I know my grandson—my great-nephew, I call him my grandson, it's my sister's grandson—Kendrick Owyhee. He went over to Iraq two times. And he had difficulties. But with those prayers, I think it really helped him. He was, I'm really proud of him right now. He's a sergeant now, still in the service. I believe he's making it his career. But I think with the help of those people, the medicine people out there, they came in and helped. Even Pete Putra, he came in the day before my grandson went to Iraq for the second time. Pete went down to the house, and he prayed for him. And I believe that helped him, also. And I'm just proud of what he's done in this life, so far.

NC: Are there any medicine men, or healers, that you know of today that practice healing people here in the valley?

DC: I'm not too sure, but some of them come in and they pray for you with their own—maybe not medicine, but they just pray to the Great Spirit that you're helped. It's just like going to church, I guess, where you're asked for blessings, and sometimes they're not really involved with peyote and all that. I believe lot of times, when you go out and pick up some medicines like the roots—the *antappitseh kwana*, and *totsa*—those are healing stuff. And usually, what our people do—at least, that's what my mother did, is when we went out to get *totsa*, she'd talk to it, to the *totsa*, and ask that it would help us in some

way. We use *totsa* in smoking when we got a cold, and then when it's dry we use it like tobacco, I guess. And they even cook it. They boil it. And with that, they put it on your wounds, if you've got a sore that's not healing properly. Or sometimes, I remember, my mother got this *totsa*, and she gave it to little Stevie Hall. Stevie Hall had this baby—I call it a "baby disease." It was, something was wrong with the body at that time. You get it on your cheeks real bad, and some on your legs. And my mother used to—well, Stevie's mother said, "I'm getting tired of this, now!" Because I kept encouraging her, "Why don't you try that on him? That might help his face." Little guy would be sitting there, digging, scratching his face. So she finally says, "I'm tired of all this. Will Grandma help me?" And I says, "Sure, take him over there." So they boiled it, and they put that on him, and they prayed with it and everything, and she sent Judy home with that medicine, and she put it on his face. And it cured it! And I think a lot of people did—they were healers, I might say. The same way with the *antapittseh kwana*. And when my sister was sick, laying in the hospital, she was paralyzed from the shoulders down. Some kind of a disease of the nerves, I guess—because she couldn't walk for a month. In them days, too, the hospitals thought that peyote was bad. Or any kind of Indian medicine. But my mother used to take a jar of that. They just kept my sister in the hospital for about nine months up here. And she used to boil that *antapittseh kwana*. It's just leaves. And she used to have her drink that, with a straw. And my mother noticed that when she started doing that to her, she had **catheterization**, so she wouldn't be wetting her bed. And it cleared it up. Her pee became real clear. Eventually, my sister started walking again. And maybe it was through that, too, but she got blessings from Guy Manning, and Tom Premo, and then—Tom Premo, and who was the other man? Louie Dave. They went up

and blessed her. They anointed her with oil. And after a while, she started walking again. So they were healers, too. In the whiteman way, through the church. And I believe that we should always respect religion in some way. Because I believe it's helped.

NC: Okay, next, in closing, Delores, what are some—I guess advice, or important things that you'd like to pass on to your grandchildren, or to the young people, that are important to you, that you think that they should be made aware of, and that they should maybe practice or… along that line?

DC: Well, one thing I got for my grandchildren, and I gave my relatives around here to use—they're all relatives here, in some way—is, have respect. I think that respect can take you a long way, when you respect everything around you. You respect your elders. You respect your mother and father, and you listen to them, regardless of whether you don't like what they're telling you. They may have been through it before, and they don't want you to be doing what they had done. And this is one reason why they would like for you to be better. And respect food, healthy foods. Eat that instead of junk food. We've got some hard times coming. I think it's almost starting now, I think that's happening. And one thing I really like: I talked with some of my grandchildren, [__inaudible at 47:49__] a little bit with Rachel's boys, but—respecting a woman. I've told them that. You come from a woman. You were born through a woman. You're part of your mother. And you don't go and take a girl out and take advantage of her. And then make fun of her. Don't go with anybody else and rape anybody, gang a girl. That is very wrong. And that's one thing that I've talked with them. I'm hoping that the rest of the kids around will do that. And one thing that I have done, which I am doing now, is I take my little grandson, Monty, to the senior citizen's when I can. And he's got to go over there and shake the—

"grampies" and the "grammies," he calls them—their hands or hugs them. And he goes over there, and he empties their plates and put it in the trash. And so, I think that's my way of trying to teach respect to him. So he could help them as he get older. I've noticed sometimes some of the kids will say, "Who's that?" And they don't know. And I always say, "You don't say that! You *know* everybody here! If you don't know them, they needs something done, go over there and ask, and say, 'Well, I'm Delores's grandson. Can I help you?'" Or something. And—**I feel old!** [Laughter] But, I think respect is something that we should all do. And sometimes, we have our bad days, maybe this person is hurting and they may growl at you sometimes. But diabetics are bad. They have bad days. You don't know when they're having good days. Sometimes, like before when my mom was sick with diabetes, and would go down there and start talking, you know, "I'm happy to be here with you." I'd ask her, "How you doing mom?" She'd say, "Lousy!" And that tells me that she's not feeling so good. She's hurting somewhere. And you have to respect that. You just don't turn around now and walk off or anything. But I think we have to show respect, and not lose that. I think a long time ago, our older people did have respect for one another. That's about all, I guess.

[End of recording]