

# **NEVADA** INDIAN COMMISSION

## **STEWART INDIAN SCHOOL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

### **STEWART FOR THE LONG TERM: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER SAM**

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Carson City, Nevada 89701

## Stewart For The Long Term: An Interview with Roger Sam

*Roger Sam is a Northern Paiute man from the Pyramid Lake area in northwestern Nevada. He first came to Stewart Indian School as a fourteen year-old, graduated, completed military service and then returned to Stewart as an employee. He raised his family while supervising the school's working ranch, Jack's Valley Ranch. He trained hundreds of boys in agricultural skills over the years and found time to assist in coaching football and basketball at Stewart, and boxing to kids in Carson City. He also mentored young people in the regional 4-H Clubs.*

*Without a doubt, Roger Sam is the longest-lasting figure on the Stewart campus, having been there from 1943 as a student until the school's closure in 1980 (excluding his military service, 1948-1952). He was inducted into the Stewart Hall of Fame in 1974, for excellence in basketball and football.*

*My name is Terri McBride. It is Thursday, May 4, 2017. We are at the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe's museum in Nixon, Nevada. The interview is with Roger Sam, a former student and employee at the Stewart Indian School. We will be discussing his experiences there during his time at Stewart. This interview is being conducted for the Stewart Indian School Oral History Project for the Nevada Indian Commission and will be archived at the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center, the State Library and Archives, Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Reno, and also by request, at the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Museum.*

*So Roger, when were you born and where are you from?*

I was born in Wadsworth, Nevada, and I'm from Nixon, Nevada, and I was born on December 24, 1929.

*A Christmas Eve baby! And how many people were in your family?*

There was five of us. A sister and a brother, my mom, Ida Curry and my dad, Willie Sam.

*What language did you speak growing up in your household?*

Mostly it was talked Paiute at the time, and then English, also.

*Were there communication problems between the parents and the children?*

There was no problem at all.

*And growing up with your family, did you celebrate American Indian customs like celebrations or traditions?*

No, not really, just what they call pageant or the Indian dancing and ceremonies like that. That's about all.

*Right. Did you go pine-nutting?*

No, not at that time. There really wasn't too much push for pine nuts in those days.

*Were any of your other family members educated at Stewart?*

They went to Stewart. My older sister, Eunice, and my brother, Louie. They were in Stewart and we used to go by wagon to go visit them. Take two days over and then two days back.

*So you were the youngest?*

I was the youngest, yeah.

*And what years did you attend school there?*

I went to school there in 1943 up until 1948, I graduated.

*How did you end up going to Stewart in the first place?*

My parents were getting a divorce and the judge ordered me to attend Stewart. I didn't have no choice.

*Right. And so, when they got divorced, were you—was your mom your main guardian?*

I was back and forth, back and forth.

*Alright. Alright, shared custody.*

Well, that was before the custody. When custody came they sent me away. (laughs)

*Okay, right, and so, were your brother—was your brother and sister—were they there when you got there?*

No, they're older. One was eighteen years older and the other one was fourteen years older, the boy.

*So you visited your brother and sister when you were little before you went, but what was your first impression of the school when you got there?*

Well, I woke up next morning when the, after they dropped me off and everything was nice place, pretty. Buildings and trees and lawns. People called it the "Oasis of Nevada," which it probably was. It was a really pretty place.

*Did you enjoy being a student there?*

I loved it! I enjoyed livin' after I got used to the routine and, and, you know, everything you do is all by time.

*Right.*

You gotta be here, there, everything's done on time so, after once I got used to that, it was nice.

*Good! So, well, we'll talk about the sports and stuff later but, so, you just liked what, the teachers? You liked the classes? You liked the kids that you went to school with? All of it?*

Yeah, I, I enjoyed . . . I had teachers, favorite teachers and my coaches and, uh, Walter Johnson was my teacher. Pretty nice man. And our librarian and science was Miss Delia Taylor

and uh, I had contact with her for a lotta years after I got in the service because she originally was from Virginia, and that's where I was stationed was in Virginia and then—it's a pretty place.

*What was the most difficult thing to leave behind at home though?*

From here after I got sent away?

*Yeah.*

Oh, I had chickens and I had horses and I had dogs, and my chickens were my only income that I had. We'd take the eggs to the store for exchange of groceries and, you know, we got by good with that. And I kept them long after I got into Stewart then they finally decided well, you know, it was too much for the older folks so they decided to get rid of the chickens and ended up with the horses and puppies. That's about all.

*Well, how did your—how did your family feel about you leaving Nixon and going all the way down there? Did they miss you?*

I don't know. I was staying both places, you know, back and forth but I don't know, they probably didn't have any say to it, anything to do about it. They'd just come and pick me up and left with what clothes I had on, and a few little things that I could pick up and that was it!

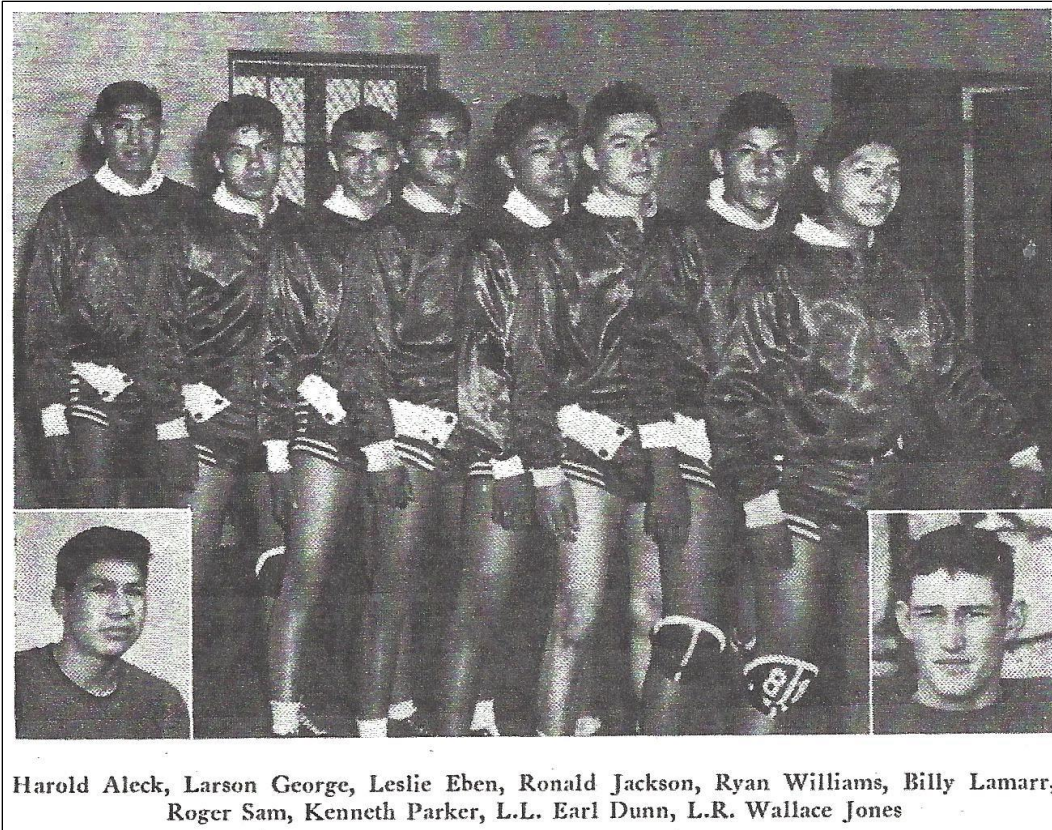
*So I'd like to ask a little about campus life. So what was living in the dorms like?*

After I got used to livin' in the dorms, it was nice. I had good roommates and we all kept our place, area, clean and we all had details to do and this is all by time, too, also. You had to get done before breakfast and, uh, get ready for school and once I got used to the routine, it was a nice place.

*How old were you when you first went to the school?*

When I first went to school?

*Yeah.*



Roger's Stewart Basketball Photo, ca. 1947. He is second from right. Courtesy of Roger Sam.

What do you mean, like grade school?

*Yeah, so, were you in the little boys' dorm first and then moved to the big boys' . . . ?*

When they took me over there, I was in seventh grade. They dropped me off at the small boys' building. They said, "This is where you're gonna stay." So, they assigned me a bed and everything and, uh, next morning they called me into the office and told me that they had talked it over with, you know, among themselves and checked my, I don't know, what they checked but they said I was advanced enough that I was, I could go over to the boys' building. So, I ended up over in Cottage 1. I ended in Cottage 1 with, uh, kids from Gardnerville, Washoe kids. Five of—four of them and they got kinda gang-y for a while, but after I got used to them, it was a pretty nice place, and they put me right in the

middle of the room where I had roommates on both sides that were Washoes. (laughs) So they were talkin' over and back and forth.

*And keeping an eye on you!*

Yeah! So, pretty soon they said, they asked me if I wanted to move my bed. I said, "Yeah!" So they put me on the end and they moved the other guy closer to the conversation track. (laughs)

*Right, so they could talk amongst themselves. And the dining hall; I have heard that the students had to march in single file to the dining hall. Did they do that when you were there?*

They still do that but you know I marched one, one evening meal with them, the evening I got there and all the other kids were in coveralls, little belts that they wear. Blue, blue coveralls. I hadn't been issued my blue coveralls yet so I

was still in my clothes but next morning I got up and they said, “Well, you’re gonna be movin’ to the big boys’ area.” So, that eliminated my coverall march. (laughs)

*Right, right! Okay, and so what were meals in the dining hall like? Did the boys and girls have to sit separately?*

Well, some, some of the younger ones stayed on one side. The older ones ate together.

*Okay, and what was the food like?*

Food was good. I had, I had more food than the rest of them, I think, ‘cuz that week I was there we were talkin’ in our room and talkin’ to my friend and he was askin’ me what I did during the summers and I said, “Well, I, when we doin’ our hay and stuff, I would drive the wagon for my dad and another man that was our helper,” and I says, “I drove the wagon for them,” and I don’t know, somehow, well, the guy who did the delivery of the milk, the milk wagon, went on vacation, and I got called to the office, and man, I was scared! “What’d I do?” you know, and this guy that was our supervisor that day, he was, uh, from Poland and he’s a rough-talkin’ man and just by talking to you, you think you’re getting scolded, and so he asked me in a tough voice, he said, “I understand you drive wagon.” I said, “Yeah.” Right then I felt good, ‘cuz that wasn’t, well, they asked me if I could—it was a week I think I worked—if I could deliver the milk and, uh, so I said, “Yeah, I can drive that wagon,” and so they sent me down there to, uh, to the dairy and then the older boys loaded the milk onto the wagon and this is all driven by horse and wagon. Wasn’t a truck, was a horse, so, that’s how I got my job deliverin’ milk and stuff. I had to deliver milk to the bakery and, uh, sometimes I’d get a treat from Mr. Larson, that was our baker, and then the cooks at the kitchen always had somethin’ extra, and then the Employees’ Club always . . . the lady, her name was Tropha. I always remember her, and she always had a sandwich or something. So, I enjoyed that week and I ate good! (laughs) Then I went back to, back to the dairy and the animals

were unharnessed and then I’m ready to go back to school. You know, I, I enjoyed that! But it only last a week.

*Did you ever buy things at the student store, that Novake?*

No, at that time, that store was, uh, it was called ECA store and it was located right across, across the school building, two-story building that . . . and at recess time everybody would end up over there at the store anyway ‘cuz it’s open all day long and, uh, get little snacks before you go back to class and I’d generally buy Pepsi or peanuts and stuff for after practice.

*Roger, did you have a favorite class?*

I have classes that I like. Uh, science, Walter Johnson, my teacher, and then Miss Taylor—she’s the librarian, and I think she taught science or some, yeah, I think science or, oh, history, yeah. That’s right, history.

*History? So, you liked Miss Taylor—or Mrs. Taylor?*

Miss.

*Miss, yeah, okay, history class and she was also the school librarian?*

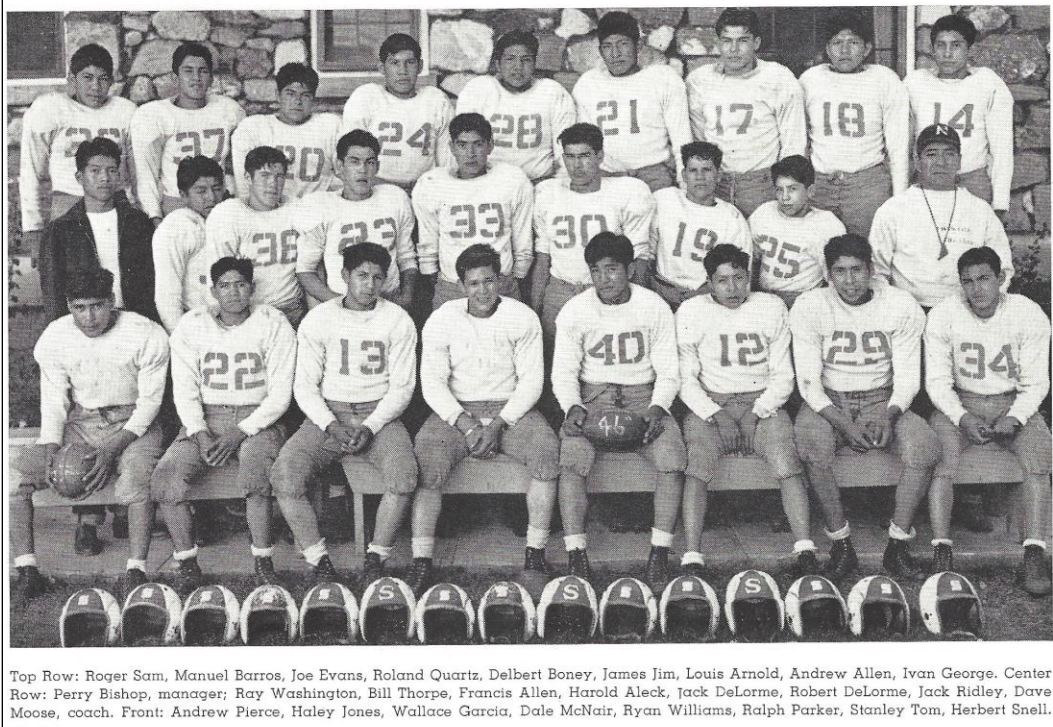
Yeah.

*Did you spend a lot of time in the library?*

Yeah, I spent a lot of time in the library. (laughs)

*Uh-huh, getting your homework done. And so, you were involved in the school agriculture program?*

I was, that was, that was a funny thing. I was, we . . . they gave us, uh, exploratory classes. You went to Agriculture. You went to Plumbing, Carpentry, Welding, Shoemaking, and, uh, Paint Shop. So, I chose mostly Ag because, when I was at home, we had animals. You know, I had cattle with my dad and—but he done most of the work when I was with him—but then when I went to school and they sent me



Roger's Stewart Football Team Photo, ca. 1947. Roger is top row, farthest left. Courtesy of Roger Sam.

to the exploratory program, it was feeding, nutrition, castrating, dehorning, and branding and things like that—animal husbandry—and I enjoyed that part. That summer, I was fourteen then, I come home and they were havin' a roundup at home. So I asked my dad, they call his name, roped his calf and they call his name and I asked my dad, I said, "Can I do that? Can I go and dehorn and castrate that?" And he looked at me and he kinda whimpered a little bit and said, "Okay, go ahead," you know, so I went and done all my job, vaccinated, castrated, dehorned, and I impressed him so much, even the other guys, the older ones, I was doing their work 'cuz they get on the ground . . . they can't get up, some of them, you know! (laughs) And, so, I was doin' that too, while I was fourteen years old!

*Right! They were willing to let you do it, yeah!*

Yeah, it was really a skill that I learned and I really put it to, you know, work. I enjoyed that!

*Yeah, it sounds like it was a natural fit for you.*

It was, and I still do that. When I retired, got rid of my cattle, I was still doin' it.

*Oh! So you graduated from Stewart . . .*

In, 19 . . . graduated in 1948.

*Quickly, let's talk about sports. So what did you play while you were there?*

I played football. I played football and basketball, baseball.

*Did you have a favorite?*

Basketball, my favorite, yeah. Football, I didn't know anything about. Oh, I got . . . and basketball, I was picked First Team, All-Conference, and I played forward, and football I was picked also All-Conference and quarterback and guard and center.

*Oh! What do you mean, "All-Conference?" What is that?*

It's, uh, from all the schools, they pick out eleven outstanding players and put 'em in

different positions. Like guard, like basketball would be two forwards, a center, and two guards. They're picked from all the schools. The top individual players and they make up a . . .

*So like an all-star team.*

Yeah, it's from, from the day that you started playing the season 'til the end of the season, how you compared during the year is how they judge your . . .

*Your statistics!*

Yeah. So, that's how they picked them.

*Uh-huh, oh! Okay, so all-star teams, basically.*

Football, the same way. Then they got First Team, and they got Second Team, and they got Honorable Mention.

*So was this your senior year that this all happened?*

Yeah.

*Wow, great! And did you go to watch sports events there? Were you a spectator sometimes too?*

Oh yeah, we have, we have, uh, boxing. Then we have track. We'd go over and watch.

*Okay.*

That's where Rolf [Brown] and his brother, they fought, they fought.

*Rolf and Ralph Brown.*

A lotta fighters; they had a lotta fighters come outta Stewart.

*What kinds—what kinds of events did you do in the auditorium?*

Well, there's not really that much. You'd go to movies. Then they have, uh, talent shows.

*Okay, student talent shows?*

Yeah.

*That sounds fun.*

And different—different, different classes would put on different types of programs, skits and stuff.

*Did the band play in there?*

No, they did mostly their marching. They participated in the Nevada Day Parade and . . .

*. . . and at the games? Did they play at the games?*

Some of the games, yeah.

*And when you went, Roger—in the auditorium—did they make the boys sit on one side and the girls . . . ?*

No, they were pretty well . . .

*. . . mixed.*

Mixed up, yeah.

*Sit by each other, okay. And then, were you in any clubs?*

Yeah, we—I was in Lettermen's Club. Yeah, you have to earn your way into the—like you had eight games, you have to play over half the quarters of that season to qualify for a letter. Then you become a Yannigan and then you, uh, have that for maybe six weeks or some even, if they don't have enough, they make you go a little longer and you perform every Sunday, some dining hall time. You get up on a table and sing and dance and, and things like that or run errands for the Lettermen's to go get a slice of bread, or a piece of meat or somethin'.

*So when you're a Yannigan, it's like you're a pledge.*

Yeah.

*Yeah, so you have to make your way through that and then you're a Letterman. Right, but in the meantime—so they hazed you, basically.*

Basically, yeah. The one I really hated was they'd line you up on, uh, on the sidewalk at the



bakery and there's a bunch of trees over behind the ECA store, which is about 150 yards away, then they paddle you and send you off, then you outrun the Lettermens, and climb a tree and then you have to sing your theme song.

*In the tree?*

Yeah, in the tree after you get up there.

*Uh-huh.*

My theme song was "My Darling Clementine." (laughter) And I don't even know the words anymore! I had to learn it then though, otherwise you got paddled! Then after that, they have the . . . just before school's out in May, is the last part of the initiation. They take you down to the river and they have a midnight picnic, party, or whatever you want to call it, but anyway, that's where you get your butt whipped and become a Letterman, and jump into the Carson River at twenty below zero. (laughs)

*Right, right, polar plunge! And then regarding the other buildings on campus: do you have any memories about a particular building that stand out to you?*

I'd say the gymnasium.

*The old gym?*

The old gym, yeah, 'cuz I spent more time in the gym doin' this and doin' that; either setting up something for something else or I spent a lot of time in gym and the Ag Department. There were animals to be fed and stuff.

*Did you get sick at Stewart? Did you have to go to the infirmary?*

I had to go to the infirmary in 1945, '44, somewhere. I don't remember. Had my tonsils out. Had 'em taken out. Stayed over in the clinic one night and the next day they said, "Well, you're well enough, you can go back to the dorm." (laughs) So, I was in and out.

*Were they nice there?*

Yeah.

*Okay! So you never went to the infirmary for anything else?*

Oh, yeah, if you had a cold or somethin'.

*Okay.*

Vaccination or something. They call you. They let you know. So, other than that—oh, dental. You know, you go to dental.

*So, you get checkups?*

Yeah.

*And did you attend church when you were at Stewart?*

Yes, there was only one church there on campus, the Baptist Church, and everybody—no matter what denomination you were—you all end up goin' to the Baptist. That was the only one there. Generally, we'd always go in the evening.

*And then, did you ever leave campus? Go into town?*

Oh, yeah, we'd go to town.

*Uh-huh. What'd you do there?*

Oh, go to movies and . . . but away, away from there on sports travel team, you get to travel a lot to go to the other schools on the weekends.

*Did you have a job during school or some of that weekend work? Did you do any of that?*

No, not weekend work but we had regular detail thing that we do on Saturdays. Scrub the floor, mop the floor and all this. Oh, then I stayed there in 1947 during the summer I worked. I went up and worked as a painter one day and I asked them, "Do you need help for the summer?" He said, "Yeah!" That was painting the buildings on campus and, uh, painting what has to be done in the dorms and stuff. So, I stayed there that one summer to make money to buy clothes and things for the last year.

*And so did you know—did you have any friends from home, from Nixon or Wadsworth there?*

Oh, yeah. We had quite few friends. I can just name a couple. There's uh, Albert Phoenix, Earl Dunn, James Jim, Harold Aleck. There's just name a few. Les Eben, but there's some younger ones then, that were there that hadn't been playing sports with us. So, there's younger kids like Lyle Poncho and some of those, but they played later.

*So, wow, you named several. So you have some good memories of your classmates?*

Yeah, I have the ones that I played ball with 'cuz we live side by side all the time and played ball side by side and you know, it, it just. . . .

*Well, that brings me to a question that comes up later but I'll ask you right now. So on your teams you had kids from tribes from all over playin' all together, right?*

Yeah.

*And so, what was it like to go to school with kids from all over the place?*

Well, you know, it . . . once, uh, once a team is developed, it just seemed like it just one person, one people and nobody was outstanding more than the other or just all together and that's the only thing that I can think of.

*Did you learn about different native cultures by going to school with kids from different places?*

No, it seemed like you never do talk things like that. I never did. Once in a while you talk about animals at home, stuff. That was, you know . . .

*Typical kid stuff.*

Yeah, but that was, but they got along pretty good. Everything was fine.

*Okay. So did you keep in touch with classmates or teachers after school?*

Not really.

*You said you kept in touch with Miss Taylor because you were stationed out there.*

Yeah, I was stationed in Virginia and then I would write to her and tell her how pretty, you know, the Shenandoah Valley was and, uh, she'd always tried to write letters back and tell me news about Stewart, and kids.

*Okay. That's nice!*

And she was really, I guess she was the only one for at least a couple years, anyway, 'cuz we went on a basketball tour up through Shenandoah Valley and down up into, uh, Pennsylvania, and down to Tennessee, and then back home. Eight days we were gone. They had a converted bus, made some bunks in the back so if you're tired you can lay in the back.

*So you played basketball while you were in the service?*

Yes.

*And you toured? Your team toured around out there. Neat! So what kind of student were you, Roger? Were you shy?*

I was shy, yeah.

*Were you, were you quiet? Were you happy, were you a happy student? Or sad?*

I was happy and a little shy. (laughs)

*Okay, and so what were your goals? What were your future plans as you were graduating?*

Well, I knew I was goin' to be goin' into the service sometime so that was my first, was to get my military duty out of the way and I went right in after I graduated. I went a couple days outta school and, uh, enlisted in the Navy. Two of us. Ryan Williams, one of my teammates. He and I both went in at the same time and we both end up in Virginia. (laughs)

*Rolf Brown also enlisted in the Navy.*

I think so, yeah.

*And he said that his coach drove him up to the recruiter's office up in Reno, like the week of*

*graduation. So, about the same time and did you go to the office in Reno and enlist or . . . ?*

Yeah, he was behind me. Rolf was behind me. He graduated in it must be '49.

*Okay, okay.*

Yeah, 'cuz he was . . . no, we had to drive up there ourselves to get in.

*So you and Ryan Williams, your teammate from which team? Your basketball team?*

Basketball and football, too.

*So, how long—so you did your four years with the Navy?*

Yes.

*Did you end up going overseas?*

No, we didn't go overseas 'cuz that was when, uh, Korean War broke out. We were already stationed in Virginia and, uh, the only thing that happened to us is they broke us up, the team and everybody went different directions. You know, they ship you out different way. They fill their quota up first before they—so I end up in Portsmouth, just right across the bay from where I was before. (laughs)

*Okay, so you were stationed in States, in the States the whole time?*

Yeah.

*And the East Coast, too, for the whole time?*

Yeah.

*Okay! Well, so were you near the Norfolk Naval Base?*

We, uh, we were not Norfolk Naval Base. Norfolk Naval Base or Naval Air Station, we were joint with Subgroup One, Portsmouth, and uh, it was affiliated with the Naval Air Station.

*So what did you do while you were with the military? What was your position, your title?*

Well, first I was a gunner's mate. Yeah, and then I was a boatswain's mate.

*A what mate?*

Boatswain's mate.

*I know how to spell that!*

And then there was—I had a chance to go to the Sea Bees that same year but what happened? I don't know whether they, uh, they filled their quota, I think, before they go to where, when we were supposed to go. A lotta people wanted to get into construction. That's where Sea Bees was, Construction Battalion and they go heavy equipment and stuff, truck driving and Caterpillars and graders and most all these were people that were in the construction before, you know, state, when they were at home. So, those are the ones that filled them, them positions and it filled up fast. They can have only so many openings. I don't know whether it was every two years or every year but anyway, they had their quota in for that year. So, we didn't go.

*So, after the military, what did you do?*

Well, the best part of it was I went, we were all stationed and the season was over in '48 and the ones that were from the West coast were a long ways from home, you know, for Christmas vacation so we just stayed at the base. A letter come from Bermuda, saying that Bermuda is closing their base but they have a running game between Navy and Air Force down there. It's called the Lily Bowl and they asked us, uh, if we would like to come down and help play this annual game. They had eleven, eleven people that were still playing football for Navy which probably wasn't enough, so they asked us to come down and help. So we flew down and we won that game for them and the next year we went down, we won that game. So, we went and won possession of the Maple Trophy that they give. So, the Navy got closed down, the base down there, and we were goin' back and forth on a shuttle that was bringing things back and forth.

*Right, 'cuz they were trying to move things off the base. So, well, did you get to spend a little extra time down there on the beach?*

Ten days down there. We had a lotta fun!

*Good! That sounds great! And, did you go steady in school? Did you have a girlfriend?*

No girlfriends!

*No girlfriends?*

Had too many girlfriends chasin' ya!

(Laughter)

*And so, did you get married when you came home?*

Yeah, that's what . . . I got married to my girlfriend, Joann, and, uh, she went to school in Carson. She graduated in Carson in 19, what, 51. Then she went to Haskell for two years but she finished hers in one year. She finished up in a year and then she came back to Stewart and that's where I met her. Got married in 1952 and then I went—I got back and I applied to, I went applied for job at—there was a opening at the ranch at that time—so I just applied for it 'cuz my background was agriculture anyway. So, I applied for it and they told me I can start to work on Monday. So that's where I'd been ever since, until it closed. Worked there from 1952 to 1980. Then we had, uh, two boys and Shawn [his daughter who was present at interview].

*Well, and so Joann was working there when you met her? She was an employee there?*

Uh, no, she just come back from Haskell, yeah, and then her dad, her dad was, uh, one of the big bosses at Western Nevada, Chris Tyndall, Jr. Then we had—his son, Chris, Jr., he worked there and had a family and . . . oh! Mr. Tyndall's wife, Mrs. Tyndall, was an English teacher and, and, Chris, Jr. was a maintenance man and he married his wife. She was in school there at Stewart and while she was a student. So, they got married and they raised their family there.

*Well, did attending Stewart change your life after your time there? I mean . . .*

Well, it . . . not really changed it, but I was early in background agriculture anyway and then when, when the time was over, we moved down here. I had some cattle already. We had cattle started. So, I continued raising cows and still . . . until I couldn't get on my horse anymore. (chuckles)

*Right, right, yeah.*

My horse won't let me get on him.

*(Laughs) Won't let you! Well, I guess since you liked it so much being a student there that it was an easy job, you know, for you to take. It was like going back. So do you have some bad memories of school?*

The only really bad memory I have is, uh, our last game, our last year, we were playing for a quarter-finals. That's a first night game. We were, we were beating Reno by six, seven, eight, nine points and it was gettin' close to the end of the game, about a minute and a half, guess who fouled out? I did and we lost by one point. (laughs)

*Ohhhh!*

I never, I never forget that! (laughs) Never, tell you that! And Reno, Reno was a top team that year.

*So, they were your top rivals.*

In fact, yeah, they were in the top bracket and we were mid, mid, I think we were in the fourth, fourth place, fifth place. Anyway, one and five play, or one and four play. We picked and Reno picked us and we were beatin' 'em. We had already beaten 'em at home one and one. We beat 'em in Stewart and then they beat us in Reno and we were beatin' 'em in Reno for the State tournament.

*You fouled out!*

I don't know who to blame, the referee or me! (laughs)

*Well, there were other teammates that could've won the game!*

Yeah.

*And, some of your best memories then, about school life or work life there, really?*

There's a couple of 'em. The main one is, uh, when our kids have a 4-H program. We have mostly Navajo kids from the Southwest, and each student was given a calf for him to raise for the show. So, and by givin' 'em the calf, they had to earn it. They worked on weekends and whenever something happens out at the ranch, we picked 'em up and went out and helped to the chores or whatever, but weekends is the main, could divide 'em into fours, four in a group. They go out on the weekend and feed. See, we had over 600 head of cattle that I was responsible for, and seven bulls, and three horses that have to eat too, you know, they—like, like we are. So somebody had to feed 'em, so they—this is how the boys pay for their cattle. At the end of the year we raise one beef for, for, to butcher for our buyers that bought our steers, and we cut that beef up into steaks and hamburger, that's all, and turn 'em loose out there at Clear Creek and, uh, and everybody come home full and happy and everything else, besides makin' money on the sides with their calves. Then they'd have them write the thank you letter for the purchase of their animals to the buyer. It was good! We always did that for 28 years that I know.

*Right, the 4-H kids did well, they got a lot of ribbons, yeah, from Stewart. So, you really liked that. And then, do you share your memories of Stewart with your kids like Shawn or other family members?*

They don't listen.

*Okay!*

(Laughter)

No, I do! I do. I talk to 'em about Stewart. They always ask me about different buildings and stuff and campus.

*Have you brought them down there?*

Shawn Sam (daughter): We grew up in Stewart.

*Right! So, well, that's great that, uh, that you raised your family there because I have some more questions. So, um, so talking about your employment years, the time that you worked there, how did your co-workers seem to feel about the school and working there and how did you all get along?*

(Laughs) Oh, I don't know . . .

*You don't have to name names!*

I don't know. I got along with everybody there was.

*Did everyone seem to enjoy being there?*

Yeah.

*Workin' with the kids?*

Everybody enjoyed it because they always called Stewart the "Oasis of Nevada." Every teacher in the United States that wanted to come to Stewart to teach 'cuz of the buildings and the lawns and you know, just, uh, every night liberty and stuff like that. That's the most part they want, the gambling, all night long.

*Really?*

Yeah!

*Uh-huh!*

And when they get broke, they wanna go back home.

*(Laughs) Right, they've had enough. Okay, just a few more here. So where did you live on campus when you worked there, with your family?*

We lived right a—first, when we first moved out there, we lived right on the corner, right next to



Roger Sam, Nixon, Nevada. May 4, 2017.

the new store. That was Novake, then. So these kids didn't have very far to go to buy things.

*Okay.*

And then from there, we went down to the, the main Ag building or the Manager's house down at the farm.

*Oh, they had housing down there?*

Yeah.

*Okay.*

We stayed there 'til closing.

*And were there like, planned activities or social events for the employees to do after hours or on weekends?*

Uh, no, I don't think . . .

*There was the Employees' Club, right?*

Yeah.

*What was that? What did you do there?*

Well, the Employees' Club, that was mostly for people that were bachelors. It's meals, breakfast meals, lunch and dinner, and that was all it was. I don't know; they may have had a party there, I don't know. (laughs)

*Yeah, did they have Christmas parties for the staff?*

Yeah, Christmas parties.

*Yeah, where were those held?*

There were individual buildings, wherever they, whatever, uh, club, or whatever class or something, puttin' it on.

*So different buildings. How do you think the Anglos and the American Indians got along? The different staff?*

I think they got along pretty good, I think. I never had any . . . nobody ever had any complaints or anything about that.

*Okay, good! And what kind of contact did you have with people in the surrounding community, you know, in the larger Carson City...?*

Like in what?

*I don't know—well, you said that sometimes you sold off beef to people in the surrounding area, right?*

Yeah. Well, once we, uh, established our, our setting, people come, you know, on their own and buy our beef and stuff. Other than setting up 4-H programs and stuff, judging livestock shows, I judged the county shows and I judged the State show, and . . . but that's about it.

Shawn Sam: He taught a lot at the 4-H clubs.

*Okay.*

Shawn Sam: All of northern Nevada.

*Right, so . . .*

Shawn Sam: Aside from Stewart.

*Right, so, sometimes you went to Carson High to talk to the kids there?*

Shawn Sam: Dayton was a big one.

Mostly Dayton, mostly Dayton, 'cuz there wasn't too many people involved in 4-H in Carson. There's a few and then they're generally with Dayton anyway. They joined the club with Dayton and, uh, 'cuz there was not that many interested in Carson for livestock.

*Right, I'm just curious about how the staff, you know, interfaced with the larger community. I*

*mean, they shopped in town, they ate at restaurants in town, you know, and did the community come to the campus? Did Carson City folks come, like to watch the boxing, or the sports, the football games or . . . ?*

Oh, yeah! Carson, the boxing was probably our biggest draw, besides Indian people comin' to the football and basketball games, but boxing drew a lot of people. That old gym used to rock and roll!

(Laughter)

*Roger, is there a particular person, event, building or any kind of memory of Stewart that really stands out to you?*

The buildings, the gymnasium, you know, 'cuz I was . . . seemed like somehow just got to be hangin' around the gym, and pretty soon I was being assigned to do things at the gym.

*So you coached for a while?*

I coached, yeah.

*Yeah? So what teams, what sports did you coach?*

When I first came back from, uh, service, they, they called me—well they had a Navajo program that's called Fourth and Fifth Year, not Fourth—First, Second, and Third, Fourth and Fifth Year. The Fourth and Fifth year students were high school age, so—but they were, my tackles were 110 lbs. and my guards were 90 lbs. and, you know, they were small persons, small people and, so, they asked me if I would take these students, Fourth and Fifth year students, to start a football program. So, I said, "Okay," and some of them were non-speaking 'cuz they were just comin' outta the reservation and they brought 'em up for vocational training, to teach them something so they can go back. Anyway, I had a couple kids that were good. They were interpreters, who teach 'em how to block and get down and show 'em how to block, and tackle, and run, and all this stuff. So, they got to be pretty good interpreters, you know, and we

ended up with a season, six won, and one loss, and, uh, I thought maybe that was my highlight of my football career, coaching! (laughs)

*So at first you did the Navajo football players and then did you coach anything else?*

I coached . . . well, let me finish off that one. They, uh, they had these kids that . . . how would you say it? They would take one another and practice by themselves, you know, me not being there, and the ones that are low on blocking or something, and the ones that are experienced and knew what they were talkin' about would take these younger guys—well, they're not younger, they're eighteen year old—and work with 'em, and that's how they helped me do a lotta these things. It made it easy!

*Right! They coached themselves!*

Yeah. After we taught the interpreters how to do things and then once they see that they need help, they'd get out there before and not even in uniform. They're just out there in their street clothes and then at practice time, they're ready to go.

*Right, so they put in extra practice.*

Yeah. That was it. I coached freshman basketball. We had—most all my kids were from the Southwest then and uh, we did pretty good. We had played mostly freshmen, freshmen, oh, that's what that Navajo program too. The Interscholastic League put us in the freshman class, the eighteen-year old and nineteen-year old kids, cause they were equivalent to that age but we didn't have no experience. So, that's how they ended up in interscholastic ninth-grade. Basketball, we won a lotta games, home and home and then, on the outside, I coached Little League. My kids all went to Little League and Babe Ruth and, uh, and I also worked with Carson base- uh, soft-uh, basket-, boxing team and we won quite a few. Had a lotta—couple of 'em went to the Indian Nationals, AAU, and one went to the Pacific AAU and Golden Gloves and Western, uh, Western Trials in Stewart in 1976, I was a

Head Glover for that tournament. We had three rings goin' at the same time and had to have each glove on the right person and send him to the right ring at the same time and before that, we had the Golden Gloves in the 1950's and early '60's, at which I did participate in the Head Glover again. So, I spent a lotta time in boxing also.

*Did you box?*

I boxed a little bit intramurally when I was in the service.

*But you helped train the kids.*

Yeah, we worked with Carson City.

*Okay, all right. So did you help box, or did you help Robey Willis with the coaching or . . . ?*

No, Robey was at Stewart and we were in Carson. Robey was our rival. We took Robey out one time for a steak dinner. Robey was unbeaten. He was beatin' everybody on the—on his schedule. So one night Carson—I think we beat him seven to five or somethin'. That night we took them, that whole team, everybody, to a steak dinner at, the Toki-Ona, the Basque place, and Robey didn't eat his steak.

*Why?*

'Cuz he was mad 'cuz his team lost. (laughs) You should've mentioned that to him!

*Now I will!*

(Laughter)

*And, you came back to the Pyramid Lake Reservation after, after leaving Stewart?*

Yeah.

*Did you have another government job or were you done? You retired or . . . ?*

Oh, I retired from, from the—from Stewart, I was idle for, what, a couple weeks?

*A couple whole weeks, huh?*



A couple weeks, and my wife worked for Division of Forestry, which is pretty close to Nevada State Parks, and the director was Gary Downs. So, she was talkin' to Gary, and Gary said he needed somebody to do some welding. So, with my background in welding and . . . he contacted me and asked me if I would come out and work with what they call seasonal, just during the summer. I worked there for how long? Ten, eight years? Eight years, seasonal. I did all the back work, back-country welding. These people—when Marlette Lake was opening and fishing was good up there, they would sneak in and pull the gates off, bend the post over, and it was all metal and stuff. So, it would take us three days to weld one gate. One day to clean the needles and stuff off the ground so it won't catch fire, second day we do the welding, and third day make sure everything was not hot. So, we had to put the cones back on and the needles back in place. Took three days to weld. I enjoyed that! It's all back-country work and then I worked all the different parks: Dayton, Cave Rock, Sand Harbor. Sometimes we'd go to Fallon or, uh, Silver Springs. It, it was a good job. Travelin' a lotta different days, do different things . . .

*Working outdoors.*

. . . Mormon Station.

*Yeah, right!*

Shawn Sam: You forgot about when the Washoe Tribe picked you up.

What?

Shawn Sam: Washoe Tribe.

Oh, after I, uh, after I left there, oh, no, that was before. That was in between. I left, Stewart closed, and I was . . . I didn't take a day off that day. They just automatically asked me if I would take over the ranch. The Washoe Tribe, after the Stewart closed, then they acquired the ranch and asked me if I would, uh, my boss, Jerry Emm, had already moved over, already moved over to the Washoe Tribe and so he, he—

they wanted somebody to continue where the cattle and stuff, 'cuz we still had a lotta cattle there, and he asked me if I wanted to come over and help. So I went for a couple years over there and then, they decided that by that time, they had their own people was ready, you know, to take over the—care of the cattle and alfalfa work and all that, so. . . .

*So did your family live out there still, then, out at the ranch?*

No, we moved out at Genoa, on Jack's Valley Road. That grey building out there on the right-hand side? The old Fulstone Ranch.

*That's where you lived with your family.*

Shawn Sam: He and my mom.

*Okay. So what, more than anything, needs to be told to visitors who aren't familiar with Stewart or the Indian boarding school programs? What really, do we really need to make sure and get across to them?*

You know, it was really a nice place for students to, to go because it gives 'em a lots of opportunities to increase their knowledge and what they wanna do and, uh, where you could go to get help to do these things and, I think above all, the athletic program that they have is great. It's set up so that every age group has a chance to participate. They're not all thrown in one big pot. They've got seventh-grade ball, eighth-grade ball, which is good and it's a good program. And boxing is individual, and baseball, you know, it's all what you want to make yourself want to be.

*Well, playing sports builds confidence in kids.*

Yeah, besides that you meet a lotta people. I met one of the greatest guys ever played ball.

*Who?*

Jim Thorpe.

*Really? Wow!*

I played ball with his son. His picture's in there, Billy, Jr. I played with Billy Thorpe, Jr.

*Wow! All right! He went to Stewart?*

Yeah, and then Jim Thorpe came in 1947. He laid out there on the lawn telling us stories. You know, he said, "You guys are in a good position. Just do what you wanna do and do what you want to be." That was his word.

*Cool. Roger, anything else you want to say?*

No.

(Laughter)

That's it!

*Well, thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate it.*