

# **NEVADA** INDIAN COMMISSION

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

### **THE LAST COACH OF THEM ALL: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBEY WILLIS**

Interviewed by Terri McBride

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## The Last Coach of Them All: An Interview with Robey Willis

*Robey Willis started up the Stewart boxing program that had languished since 1948, and coached some champions in the boxing program who ultimately competed for spots on the 1976 Olympic Boxing team. He coached the Stewart boxers 1969–1980, when the school closed for good. He was also the assistant football coach at Stewart Indian School from 1969 to 1976. “Coach” Willis taught U.S. History and Civics classes to juniors and seniors at Stewart. He obviously loved working with the students and he was well-liked in return. After working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for a short time at Stewart after the school operations ended, Robey became a Municipal Judge in Carson City, only recently retiring. He lives in Carson City.*

*My name is Terri McBride. It is Thursday, March 9, 2017. We are at the home of Robey Willis. The interview is with Robey Willis, a former employee at the Stewart Indian School. We will be discussing his experiences as an employee there. This interview is conducted for the Nevada Indian Commission and will be archived at the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center, the Nevada State Library and Archives, and Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Reno.*

*Personal background is where I would like to start with you. What year were you born and where?*

July 24, 1942, Bellingham, Washington.

*Where did you grow up?*

In Bellingham, Mt. Vernon, and Seattle.

*Mt. Vernon? In Washington or Virginia?*

Washington.

*Tell me a little bit about your family history. What were your mother's and father's names and where did they come from?*

They're both from Whatcom County, Bellingham and my dad was a shoe man. He had a shoe store in Bellingham and one in Mt. Vernon. When we moved to Seattle, he worked for others and then he had a Florsheim franchise. My Grandpa Robey, he had fishing boats that he

took to Alaska and later worked at a mill, and eventually a tugboat captain. On the other side, Grandpa Jones, Burt Jones, was a farmer and a college graduate. My Grandma Willis was an RN; she had a degree too, on that side. He also had played college sports and was a professional baseball player until he was 41, a little minor's league and he bought part of the team. He wanted to go to Stanford, but his parents said no, and he had to stay there; he was accepted, I guess. Anyway, my mother, she's still alive, she's 94 and lives next door to my sister in Seattle. She's fine, doing fine. She'll be 95 in June. They're coming down, my sister and her family and my mom.

*Good! How old were you when you started working at Stewart?*

Twenty-six. I turned twenty-seven two weeks later.

*Did you happen to meet your spouse there?*

No. We were married; we married relatively young. I was twenty-three and she was twenty, in Seattle.

*Did you have kids, little kids, when you started working at Stewart?*

No, our daughter was born here, end of March in 1970. That's our only child. My wife had some problems and she had to have an early hysterectomy and so that ended that. So our daughter will be 47 on the 29<sup>th</sup>. She was born on

Easter Sunday. We were living out at Stewart and she kept saying, “we gotta go!” I kept saying, “No we’ve had some false problems before. No, we’re not going to wake up the doctor at 3 o’clock in Easter Sunday morning.” Finally about 5:30 or 6, I had to call and got her ready and by that time the kids were going up to the cross behind Stewart for sunrise services, the kids from Stewart. So, I got her to the hospital, little town that it was, and still is, to a degree. The [*Nevada*] *Appeal* came and took her picture. My wife, Barbara, and my daughter, Liz, were on the front page of the *Appeal*. Coming from a big city like Seattle, the first Easter baby born isn’t such a big deal but they got all sorts of gifts and so on. It was kind of a neat deal.

*Special baby! What did you do before working at Stewart?*

Well, lots of things. Let’s see . . . I worked on the waterfront in Seattle, going to night school and so on. Finally, when we got married, my wife says, “It’s time for you to go to school full time and finish.” I did, and so the first job I got was with the federal government, first teaching job. I taught on this Urban Teacher Training Program for a year at Garfield High, where Jimmy Hendrix went. It was during the ‘60’s and lots of things were going on in the world as far as the school and so on. But, we made it.

With that background, I got a job with the feds teaching in Minnesota for a Job Corps outside Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, Tamarack Job Corps. We got there on Super Bowl Sunday. It was 42 degrees below zero with a wind chill factor and we’d gone from plane to Minneapolis, little plane to Fargo, and then got on a train and went fifty miles east to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. It was Super Bowl Sunday. It was early in those days. It was the first full weekend, I think, in January. My wife said, “Let’s get on the train and go back home.” But we didn’t. So, we had a good time there, teaching there. Beautiful, 240 lakes in that county. But, the school closed at the end of June.

So, we got offered—this fellow named Ed Gorman and I—we both got offered job at either Sherman Institute in Riverside or Stewart Indian School in Carson City, Nevada. I said, “I’m not going to Riverside.” I was in Southern California at boot camp for the Marine Corps and didn’t like it then and I’m glad I didn’t make that choice. It was kind of funny, the woman said, “Well, that’s just an old western town, Carson City.” I said, “That will fit me just fine.” So, we came at the end of June that year and we had to check in by June 30<sup>th</sup> because the fiscal year ended; at that time it was June 30<sup>th</sup>. Coming over the hill into Carson, Barb [Robey’s wife] said, “I’m giving this place six months.” We’ve been here . . . it’ll be 48 years this summer. She grew to love it. She became the State Personnel Director, part of Governor Miller’s cabinet.

I was teaching history and civics. That was my major, U.S. history anyway, and I was the assistant football coach for a guy named Bill Whipple, who was Director of Education. Bud Allen and I . . . I don’t know if you’ve run into Bud Allen or not, good people. He’s still alive—he’s over at Stillwater, east of Fallon. His boy, Sonny, was a fullback up at UNR, Shoshone. I think he’s the county clerk-recorder or something over in Churchill [County, Nevada] now. Sonny Allen is. Anyway, Bud’s got a farm out there.

The next year, Bud took over as the football coach and I was his assistant through many changes in the football program. We went from a good team to a lousy one and I was the only thing that stayed.

The first winter I was there, the first fall, I asked Bill Whipple—I saw all the trophies, the most trophies for anything were for boxing. They hadn’t had a program, let’s see this was ’69, in probably 15, maybe 20 years, not quite twenty years but it was quite a while. He said, “Sure.” I had boxed off and on as a kid up until the time I left Seattle in January of 1969. I had an amateur fight that weekend before I left. It was

in the family. My dad had boxed in the Navy and taught all as kids and I boxed for different groups. I wasn't the world's greatest and never pretended to be but I knew how. Sometimes you're a better teacher if you're not the world's greatest talent. So, he [Bill Whipple] said, "Sure." So, we got started that winter. In December we had some matches to decide who was going to be on the team. The school turned out and I took the team to Elko. They had a team up in Elko. Then Bishop [California] came that winter. We had what was called the Silver Gloves in February and Carson had started a team again and it just started exploding again. We won Silver Gloves as a team. In a few years we brought the Golden Gloves back.

From there, 1974, two of my kids won the San Francisco Golden Gloves. Billy Turner won, too, but he was boxing for Bishop at that time. John Kinsey was his coach. He and Louie Torres were also on the team that went to San Francisco. There were eleven weight classes in those days and we won six of them from our team in the Sierra Nevada. I mean, that made a splash because people didn't realize, I mean the Bay Area has millions of people, in Northern California. So, we did good and two of our kids went on to Knoxville, Tennessee, to the finals, the national AAU tournament, from winning the San Francisco Golden Gloves. Two of the kids from Stewart.

Then the next year, 1975, I was named the U.S. coach for the U.S. team to fight the Soviet Union. We fought the Soviet Union up at what the casino was called at that time, the Sierra Tahoe. They trained at our gym. Those guys from the Soviet Union were pros; there was just no doubt about it. We lost, six to one, but two of my kids got to box against the Soviet Union.

The next year, '76, no, '75, later that year we went again to the national AAU tournament in Shreveport, Louisiana. By that time, Billy Turner was on our team. He went to the semifinals of the nationals that year. I think he'd won three or four bouts by that time. I had

another kid or two from Stewart on that team. That time was the National Indian Activities Association team. Ron Johnson and his wife had founded that and Billy Mills was involved. There was sports all over the country for Indian kids they had developed. It was wonderful! We went to Shreveport representing the National Indian, I guess it was, Athletic Association.

While I was there, there was a day when there was not too much going on for my kids, so I went over to the national AAU meeting for the boxing. They were trying to decide where to put the west and the east Olympic trials. We had gotten a new gym, the brand new Stewart gym in 1974, and I said, "I think we could host it and I think I can get one of the casinos to put the kids and coaches up from west of the Mississippi that wanted to come, pretty reasonably, at the Ormsby House. So, I called Bill Whipple. He was still Education Director and he said, "Yeah!" Van Peters was there too as the Superintendent of the school. Van definitely okayed it. He was from here, had been the quarterback at Carson High and was Washoe. He had been the quarterback at UNR. Very interested in sports. So, both of them said, "Yeah! We can have it." So, I told them we'd take it. Detroit got the east. Nobody put in for the west but us, so we got it. That's June, I believe it was, early June of '76. Kids from all over the west came to Stewart. The year before we'd put on the National Indian tournament there. We did that two, three, four maybe, years at Stewart because that new gym was so wonderful. It started off the first day or two with three rings, there were so many kids. Then it got down to two and down to one.

I coached, and there were assistant coaches too, but I coached the team to Cincinnati to the Olympic finals to see who was going to make the American team. It was held in Montreal that year. The Soviets had refused to come, I remember that. But anyway, I had Billy Turner and Adrian Dennis. The guy at Riverfront Coliseum, big place, it was just beautiful, Riverfront Coliseum. . . . On the front of the

program was Roger Stafford, all-military champion. They had four military branches, national Golden Gloves, national AAU, eastern winners from Detroit, and our winners. That's eight kids in each bracket, or whatever you want to say. Roger Stafford, the all-military champion, was Billy's first opponent. Billy knocked him out! I mean, he was the man on the program! We get to the semifinals. Adrian won his first match against a guy he'd already beaten in the San Francisco Golden Gloves, a Navy guy from Vallejo [California]. Adrian won his next bout. Billy ran into Howard Davis, who was the number-one ranked in the country at that weight class; Billy's lightweight. He had him beat. I was sitting next to Rolly Schwartz, the director of boxing for the AAU. Howard was from New York, the referee was from New York. Halfway through the third and final amateur round, the kid started throwing real fast uppercuts with nothing on them. We used to call it "shoe shining," and the referee stopped the fight! Rolly jumped out of his seat and ran to the ring, telling the guy. But it was too late! So, Howard Davis won the Gold Medal that year. He beat Aaron Pryor later and became the world champion. He beat him in the finals of [unintelligible] boxing, but Billy had him beat. Adrian Dennis went on to the finals, fought Louis Curtis from Washington D.C., 106 pounds, light flyweight. Adrian truly did lose that fight. It was the only year he'd ever boxed! He'd never seen a fight until he was in one. His mom was a teacher down at the Hopi reservation, I don't think he'd ever seen a fight. The kid beat him because he knew how to box. He was [unintelligible], Adrian chased him the whole way but could never land enough.

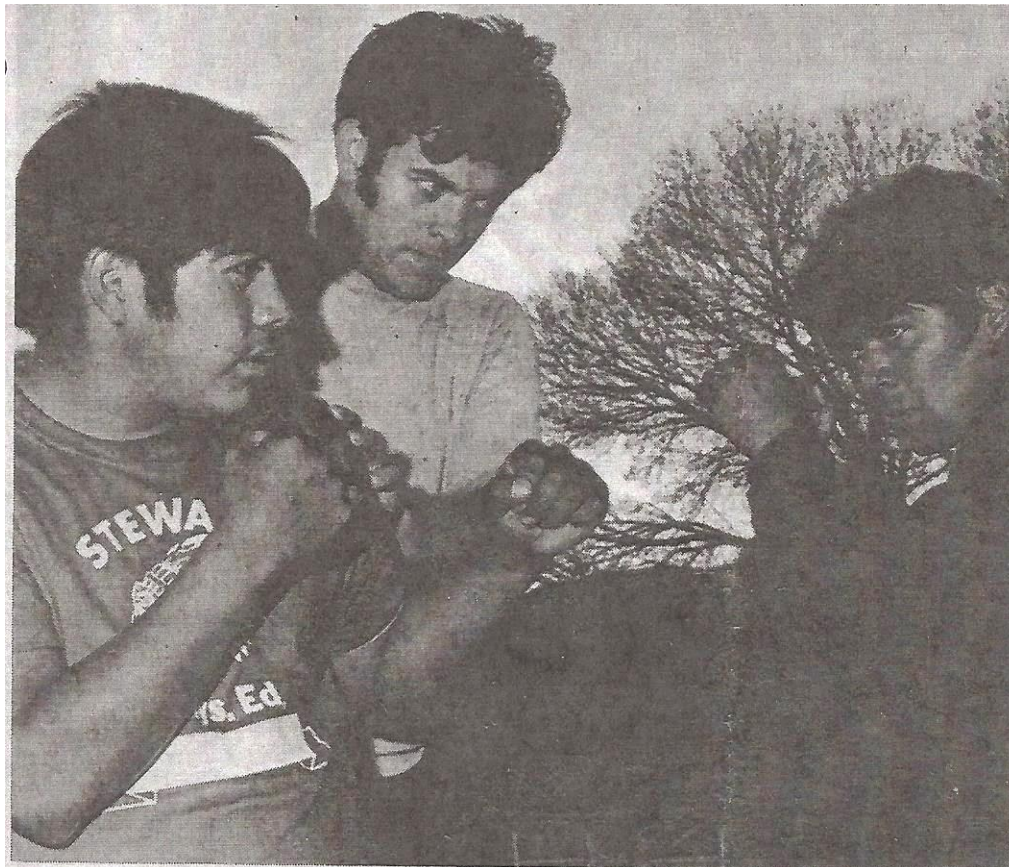
Then Louis . . . after the Olympics . . . then Adrian did make the Olympic team as the alternate. He was the alternate at 106 pounds. So when Louis retired in . . . that would've been the fall of '76, when they took the American team to Europe, they took Adrian. They fought all over Europe. Then he was on the national televised fight with the Soviet Union. He won

some bouts in Europe. This fight, we were all downtown watching it on a television downtown. Friends, family members, everybody was watching Adrian and the Russian fight. Right before Adrian's fight, there were three American judges and two Soviet judges. The American should never have won that fight. The Russian got screwed, or the guy from the Soviet Union, three to two. So, Adrian's next and I'm thinking, "Adrian, you've got to knock him out," because now there's three Soviet judges with two American judges, remember how things were in those days. As the fight wore on, Adrian wore him out and knocked him down twice. The fight ended and I thought, "There's no way!" They gave it to the Soviet, three to two. People were going nuts! I got a letter from an Italian couple from Sacramento. One of them threw the spaghetti up onto the ceiling in their family room where they were watching it! (laughs) So, that was that!

Then Adrian graduated in '77 and went on to Haskell in Kansas. Then he had some problems and some Christian veterinarians found him down at the edge of Grand Canyon. He was thinking about offing himself. They got him straightened out and he graduated from Northern Arizona and became a Baptist missionary. He came through town once with his family. We went up to listen to him. He was headed to Washington state. He was just really grown up and had turned into a wonderful guy.

The school closed in 1980. I had coached from '69 to '79. They were telling us it was going to close, I wasn't going to mess around anymore. The school closed in 1980. There had been some other kids who were real good boxers and actually, I took a number of kids to the nationals. . . . But anyway, the school closed in 1980 and I stayed. There were two of us that stayed. A guy named Bud Heron, who was the Athletic Director and the basketball coach, had been the Marine Corps in World War II and I had been in the service. So that helped us. We stayed at the Indian agency out there. We were both in the Education Department getting local Indian kids

into trade schools and colleges and so on, education specialists.



Robey Willis (center) training with students Ed Lewis (left) and Doyle Schurz. Nevada Appeal, November 20, 1970. Courtesy of Robey Willis.

In the fall of 1983, the Justice of the Peace, Municipal Judge here in town, Tom Davis, died of pancreatic cancer. My wife said—they moved John Ray, who was the Juvenile Special Master, which is like the Juvenile Judge, here in town and Associate Municipal Judge, to hear municipal court cases two days a week. My wife says, “Why don’t you put in for that, Robey?” I said, “Geez, I make it to 50 and I get a retirement from the feds.” They had that bill in that since Indian preference was given in jobs in those days, those who weren’t Indians could get out after so many years, I think it was 50. She said, “No, you’re not going to be happy retiring at 50 and so put in for it!” So, I got the job! I was already on the Carson City School

Board by then. From ‘81 to ‘89 I served on that. I had to stand for election twice.

Anyway, this was December of ‘83 when they finally made the decision for me to take the job, basically the juvie judge and two days a week of municipal to help out John Ray now he was going to be Justice of the Peace and Municipal Judge, because he moved over there. So I did that. They kept sending me up to the National Judicial College, right up here at UNR. Paul Laxalt brought it here when he was Governor. The only one in the country! I went as much as I could to learn ‘cuz this was a totally different profession for me than what I’d done. I did that for five years. John Ray retired.

In December of 1988 the Board of Supervisors appointed me the Justice of the Peace and Municipal Judge. Even though the salary was about the same and you have to stand for election, I decided I'd move up—not move up—but I'd go over to the adult court with some of the kids I'd had that had moved on up to the adult system! (laughs) Most of the kids I saw as juveniles, they grew up. Others, they just grew older and I saw them in court for years. I still hold court every once in a while. I did this past week on Tuesday. So it's 33 years I've done that.

Anyway, back to Stewart. Teaching U.S. history and civics. It was very interesting. They used to have teacher of the year. You could win every other year. I was very fortunate the years I was there, '69 to '80, that I won it four times. Maurice Harris and I both won it. Apparently, they had a male and a female both years. She was great; a black lady who I think moved to Herlong [California] to work with feds, I think, after the school closed. I really enjoyed teaching out there. As the school was closing, I was one of the few people left. For the last few months . . . I already had a Master's up here from school at UNR. Bill Whipple told me early on, "You're going to make a great principal." I got the degree and Indian preference passed and that didn't happen until the school was closing. In the last few months when I was one of the only ones here! So, I was the last principal that they had at the school for two months, I think. (laughs)

Anyway, I had a great time. We lived in a fourplex at Stewart from '69 for a few years. The first house as you come in on the left, Bob and Mary Kinney lived there. They got divorced and left. Great people but it just didn't work out and so we moved in that house. As people come in [to the campus] the church is on one side and the house is on the left side. It was a wonderful house. The rent was good except the pipes clanked, the heating pipes. We lived there until, oh gosh, we moved in, I think it was still called Washington's birthday at that time instead of

President's Day. We moved into town on that day of 1975.

I stayed there teaching until the school closed, like I said, I stayed there until December of '83 and I took that job effective of January of '84.

*Actually, you've answered several of my questions, which is great! That's fine, because we want to go with the organic flow of this. Just tell me, real briefly, about your military experience.*

I was just in the Marine Corps Reserves. I went to boot camp down in San Diego. Nothing was going on in the world at that time except the the Cold War, you know.

*Were you drafted?*

No. Sixty-two, it was 1962.

*You enlisted.*

I enlisted in '62 in September.

*So between wars.*

Yeah, in fact a buddy and I were downtown in '63 and we were going to go home and then go to Reserve meetings later. We went to a movie instead of getting into trouble that night. We just wanted to get out, you know? We got out of the movie theater and there were these guys wearing these battle ribbons. There hadn't been anything since Korea. We went over and talked to these guys and they said they were observers in Vietnam. Our unit, this friend of mine, Dennis Anderson and I were together for six years in Reserves in Seattle. Our unit never got called up. We were a shore party and they weren't landing shore party platoons like they were in World War II and Korea, in Vietnam.

*Did you know American Indians before working at Stewart?*

Oh, yeah!

*Okay, just growing up in Washington?*





Robey Willis, Carson City, June 1, 2017.

Yeah. My grandpa's farm, which I spent a lot of time on, almost bordered on the Lummi reservation in northern Washington. My cousin and I would go down to the little town of Marietta, which was predominately Indians and we'd play with the kids down there and so on when we weren't working on the farm. We'd go out to what they called the stamish [?], which was a big Indian celebration out at Gooseberry Point, the salt water. We'd watch the canoe races. It was really neat! Grandpa and Grandma would take me out there. My Grandpa had played ball with a lot of them growing up and so on.

*Cool! Did working at Stewart change your feelings about Indians?*

No.

*Because you grew up around them.*

Yeah. Didn't make me feel one way or the other.

*You talked about your wife's first impression when you came into town, down the hill. What*

*about you? What was your first impression of Stewart when you got there?*

Well, it was a beautiful campus. I'd played football as a kid but I didn't know, a few days after I got there they drafted me to be the assistant coach. I liked playing it but I hated practice and that's what you do most of the time! (laughs) It was so boring! Practice, and then I had to do it for a number of years. But yeah, it was a beautiful campus. It was like living in a park.

*How about the people there? Did you hit it off with the folks once you got there?*

Yeah. Max Neuneker, who became the warden of the prison out here, was one of the first people. Kinneys, Bob and Mary Kinney, and then the Neunekers, Barbara and Max. She was from Schurz and had been the homecoming queen at Yerington and at UNR. A Paiute, that Max was married to and I guess they still are! Anyway, they were our friends. But before school started they got all the teachers together and we were getting our rooms ready. Max came in and he said, "Robey, I know you've

taught other places, but I'll give you one piece of advice." He says, "Start strict and then as things go on you can let it out because," he says, "loosen things out as long as they all behave." He said, "If you don't, and you try to be their pal from the first day on, it doesn't work!" He says, "It's like opening up a bottle of 7-Up and trying to put the fizz back in. You can't do it!" I saw that time after time. People making that mistake in all those years I taught at Stewart. I told them when I was teaching and coaching, "I'm there to help you as a teacher and a coach, but you've got other friends here. I'm an adult." So I didn't try to be buddy-buddy with kids.

*Your coworkers, was there a kind of camaraderie there? Especially since you all lived, most of you lived there.*

Yeah, most of us lived there. Some lived in town and other places but there was a camaraderie. People had come from all over. There were Indians, whites, blacks teaching there. Albert and Waldene Tyler come from the deep South, black people. Leonard Dickerson, the counselor, was black and his wife was Japanese. So, we had everybody out there, you know? It was nice, it was very nice!

*It was just a high school when you were there. A junior high and high school when you were there. Or were there little kids there still too?*

No, you're right. It was junior high and high school. Seven through twelve, I'm pretty sure. I taught juniors in high school with U.S. history. Government and civics was seniors, I believe.

*Your description of people coming from all over the country, that just wouldn't have happened at a regular high school.*

No. You'd have had just the locals, pretty much. Here, being a federal school . . .

*That's interesting! You told me where you lived on campus, in the quad at the first left at the church . . . was that in the front entrance loop, where you loop around? Or was it in the back where there were several duplexes . . . ?*

No, it was, as you come in, to the left was our stone house and next door was a wooden two-story. It might still be there. Two and a half story. There was another stone house, smaller stone house. Ours wasn't big. The big house was where the superintendent lived. Later the museum and then was the agency, right next to that.

*Did residents have gardens?*

If you wanted one. I was so busy we didn't, I don't think we ever planted one. People did, yeah! They had a great agricultural program. Kids raised animals.

*Yeah, they did well in 4-H.*

Yeah, they did. In fact, I've got a friend, Skip Thurman, who owned Thurman's Ranch House Restaurant until it closed a few years ago, and Roger Sam, who was the agricultural teacher, had helped him with his 4-H project. He'd go out to Stewart with his pigs. (laughs) Roger's up at Pyramid [Lake].

*Yes, he is. People have told me about him. That I need to find him.*

Good people. His daughter, Shawn, I believe she's now retired from DMV. She was teaching, she was not teaching but she worked for DMV as the person who'd give the driver's tests to kids.

*That must have been fun!*

She's up there at Pyramid now. I saw them at a funeral not long ago. Oh, and he was in a picture of that Honor flight going to Washington, D.C. He was right on that front page. The Honor Flight of all Indian people. It was on the front of the *Reno Gazette Journal*.

*Yeah, that was a really neat thing. I'm glad they all got to go. So, were there social events for the staff there on campus?*

Yeah!

*Like what?*

The Christmas party and then the end of school party. It was the darnedest thing. Since I was coaching all the time, I don't know how many times they elected me president of that association for the teachers because I wasn't there to say no! So, we'd organize a Christmas party, a lot of times have it downtown. Then we'd have the end of school party out at Fuji Park and usually the wind was howling through there, like it does. In those days, kids get out early, May. The first year I was there, it was even a little bit earlier than that because they didn't even go home for Christmas. They stayed right through. I think it was 180 days you had to go to school just like the public school. They did change that so they'd go home for Christmas. Some of us would chaperone the busses that took them to Sacaton, Salt River Pimas. Ernie Rucker and I, we took—he was another black fellow, the counselor, a good man—we took the kids down to Papago, down near Tucson. They changed their name.

*Tohono O'odham.*

What is it?

*Tohono O'odham.*

Yeah, because Papago meant “fry bread” or something. They were great kids. Most of them were pretty jolly. One of my boxers, Hector Rios, would come across the border and get on the bus. He was a Yaqui, really.

*I wanted to ask you specifically, Robey, about girls' sports, because I couldn't find many articles about girls' teams.*

They had them.

*What teams did they have?*

I'm pretty sure they had a basketball team. There were great cross-country teams for boys and girls. They'd win the State championship. Not track in the spring, but fall was cross country. Most, some, but not all, like Adrian Dennis, James Burrell, I'm gonna miss a few, Dennis Quillici [?] and a few of them were

really good runners and then they'd come right into boxing in really good shape, in winter. Girls' cross-country teams did really good. There was one girl, who I'm pretty sure won the State [championship], named Cynthia Perela. She went on to UNR and then she married a guy up there, and they went on to get further degrees at Notre Dame.

*Softball? Did the girls play softball?*

I don't think so. They might have. The baseball field, where the boys played, and I helped Max out one year, was the worst baseball field I'd ever seen. No grass and there was no fence. Max would take a harrow out there and smooth out the field every day before we'd practice. I'm sure they ran track.

*There's just not a lot of articles about the girls. Back then, that was before Title IX.*

There were girls' sports, though, but just not all sports.

*I wanted to ask you specifically since you were on the coaching staff.*

Yeah, I was trying to think who would have been the coaches. The P.E. teacher was Rhoda Fisher. She may have coached them. I think she had Parkinson's or something so she wouldn't be here to talk about it.

*Getting back to the interracial relations, how did the Anglos and the American Indians get along during the time you were there?*

Well, it was a time of upheaval. I got there in '69, and '69 to about at least halfway through the 70's, every once in a while, a group would come up from San Francisco like AIM [American Indian Movement] or something and try to stir the kids up but it didn't work. The kids were pretty mainstream kids even though a lot of them had come from the reservations. As the school got smaller, as they were building schools closer to the reservations that they could go to, like the Hopis and some of the other tribes



Judge Robey Willis' retirement photo. Courtesy of Robey Willis.

that were there started getting to go to public schools, then we started getting kids that had been in trouble other places. You know, have one foot in reform school. Coming in from San Francisco and Oakland and places like that. So, the last few years, some of those kids came with a lot of baggage. It didn't mix . . . and Phoenix, downtown Phoenix. It didn't mix really well and it got some of the other kids in trouble. Anyway . . .

*As a staff member, did you have a lot of interaction with the larger community, like the Carson City community?*

I was fortunate because football practice had started in 1969. . . .

[Recording paused, dog barking]

Oh yeah, in the fall of '69, we hadn't even had our first game yet. A group came out from town. They were going to form a Carson City Booster Club and they wanted to include Stewart. There were people like Marv Texiera, who became the mayor many times over, and John Gamble, who was State Director of Education, and two or three others that came to see Bill Whipple while I was over there probably putting the kids through their calisthenics. I could hear him telling them, "No I can't serve on the board, I've got too much to do running this place. Tell ya, Robey over there, take him. He doesn't know anybody!" This was like August or early September, so away I went with those guys on the board of the Carson City Booster Club.

The kids from Stewart got awards, both boys and girls for different things. It wasn't just Carson City High School. It was Stewart, Carson High, the Rodeo Club, whatever in town the kids were involved in, got awards. It lasted about ten years.

Then when we'd box, because of your point there, about interacting, when we'd box, different teams, we'd have them eat together afterwards. Danny Murphy was the first coach of the Carson team and we'd get them all together. Later on an insurance guy named Merv Matorian took over, but we'd get those kids together because a lot of those kids from the reservation hadn't been around to socialize with too many white kids. They weren't just white kids, some Indians, but they were local Indian kids on their team. So, they got to know each other through sports, through that way. You're right, as far as the kids from Stewart going into town to socialize with the kids from Carson High otherwise, it didn't happen because they didn't have cars, they didn't have this . . . I think they ran busses downtown on Saturdays and so on. There wasn't much socialization except for Roger Sam and the 4-H, us with boxing, and with other stuff, other sports.

Some of them stayed here, though, not many, but some did stay. Billy Benali and his wife, Rose. They were Navajos that had been here under the Navajo program, that was gone when I got here. One last Navajo was Betty Kee, when I first got here, they were brought here. You probably heard about that so I don't need to get into it.

*Yes. One last question about life on campus. Is there a particular person, event, building, or memory of Stewart that really stands out in your mind?*

Gosh, I think I've gone through them all! Oh, one thing. This isn't something that would stand out in most people's minds at all. I taught up on the second floor and there was no air conditioning. You get into May and then August, the kids would come back toward the

end of August, it'd get up to ninety-some degrees in that classroom, and trying to teach and keeping the kids interested was tough! After the school closed, I understand the State did air conditioning and they used it for community college stuff, I guess, huh?

*Yes, and State training. Yeah, I've been in that classroom on a hot summer day and yeah, still no cross draft or anything.*

They built that school without going to a local architect. They took the plans from somewhere in Arizona. So, it's a flat roof; you don't build flat roofs where you get snow and so on. There were always problems with that building.

*Was it difficult to leave, finally?*

Well, I took that job as a juvie judge and that scared me to death since I'd never done it. The first day, I mean. . . As far as leaving there, I was working at the Nevada Indian Agency then . . . no, because the kids were gone. That three years just wasn't anything special. You know, I'd get money for the different kids that wanted to go to trade schools and colleges. I'd interact with them, but it wasn't like having a classroom full of kids, you know.

It was kind of interesting, though. The fellow from the Phoenix [BIA] area office, I've talked to him all the time, a fellow named Dale Guy. He took my job! He was my boss in Phoenix and he came up here because they did some slashes. When I left in December of '83, Dale Guy came up here and took the job that I'd had. I don't know how they did that because Dale was a higher GS ranking than I was. Wonderful guy from Oklahoma, an Oklahoma Indian. Have you run into him here in town?

*No.*

Dale and Joyce Guy. Dale is a good guy and a wonderful athlete. Interesting guy to talk to, too. I don't know if you follow baseball much but in the 70's, late 60's and 70's, the Cincinnati Reds had a catcher named Johnny Bench, an Indian from Oklahoma. Dale Guy told me that Johnny

Bench's dad was their coach as kids, probably through high school. Johnny Bench was pitching and Dale Guy caught Johnny Bench! Johnny Bench is in the Hall of Fame for catching! He's one of the better golfers in town here now, for the seniors, you know.

*That answers one of my last questions. So, you still keep in touch with some people from Stewart?*

Oh, yeah! Van Peters; have you ever talked to Van?

No.

He was superintendent. We were really close friends. Let's see if I can find Van's number here.

*Well, let's finish the interview.*

Okay.

*Do you talk to people about your job out there?*

It's been closed so long that it doesn't come up as much anymore; every once in a while it does. My grandsons played baseball—they play everything,—up at Incline [Village]. They were a smaller school than us in those days and I was telling my grandsons that Incline had pretty good sports programs, but they were smaller than us. They came down to play a game with us in baseball and we won. We weren't exactly terrific in baseball. I remember an Apache kid—I think his last name was Patton—came out for baseball as a senior. I was teaching him to play catch because they didn't have Little League on his reservation. Anyway, we won that day and I asked the coach, "You've usually got pretty good teams." I said, "What happened this year?" It was like this year, almost [in terms of heavy snowfall]. He says, just like my oldest grandson's playing on the team up there at Incline, now, he said, "All we could do was play catch in the gym before we came down and played Stewart and played you guys at Stewart." So, I was telling the kids about that the other day, this isn't anything new, they're snowed in,

can't practice, and have to go to a game without practice, except for throwing the ball in the gym. So, it comes up, it comes up, but just not near as often. Some of the new people in town don't know anything about it.

*My last question, Robey, is there anything about the Stewart history that absolutely has to be told to future visitors to the site that we didn't discuss today, that just really stands out as an important aspect?*

At Stewart? Yeah. I went to the Legislature when they were closing Stewart, due to lack of funding I guess, is what they said. I thought that we could go one of two ways with Stewart. I was on the School Board here in town in '81 and it closed in '80. I thought you know, this would be a great place for kids, any kids. We could set it up . . . my first thought was put it up for kids that had nowhere to go, that home life was bad but they weren't true delinquents. We could have filled the school with kids of all colors. That was just my thought. Then, one that was more concrete, as I went along was the one that I took to the Legislature, with the School Board Association to back it, the State, was to turn it into a trade school where kids could live on campus. I don't care if they came from Ely or Elko or wherever. Anyway, that's what I thought when they closed it. Jeez, this is a waste. We could have Indian kids of all kinds come up, you know. We had shops. Granted, they'd need to be updated but we had things that they could have started with, but it just didn't work out. The Legislature said, "That's nice," "Thank you," and went on to the next person and didn't even do anything about it.

*Thank you very much for sharing your memories with me.*