

NEVADA INDIAN COMMISSION

STEWART INDIAN SCHOOL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NATURAL-BORN CAREGIVER: AN INTERVIEW WITH BEATRICE ALLEN

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5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, Nevada 89701

Natural-Born Caregiver: An Interview with Beatrice Allen

Beatrice (Little) Allen attended Stewart Indian School 1940-1948. She is of Paiute descent and hails from Owyhee, Nevada. She began at Stewart as a fifth-grader and graduated eight years later. She enjoyed her training in the Stewart infirmary. After graduation, she married her Stewart sweetheart, Andy Allen, and they moved to California while he served in the military. They returned to Nevada and Beatrice began working in hospitals, and eventually worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and then the Indian Health Service, at the Stewart hospital until 1983. She retired a year later in Schurz, Nevada, where she now resides.

My name is Terri McBride. It is Monday, April 17, 2017. We are at the Technology Center at Schurz, at the Walker River Paiute Tribal Reservation in Nevada. The interview is with Beatrice Allen, a former student and then, maybe an employee at the Stewart Indian School. We will be discussing her experiences as a student. The interview is being conducted for the Stewart Indian School Oral History Project for the Nevada Indian Commission and will be archived in the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center, the State Library and Archives, and the Special Collections Library at the University of Nevada, Reno. So, Beatrice, when were you born and where are you from?

I'm from Owyhee, Nevada.

And when were you born?

I was born October the 16th, 1928.

How many people were in your family?

Oh, my! Well, see my dad—my mother was remarried, married to another guy, and after he died, then she married my father and there is one stillborn, and I had a brother, myself, and a younger sister.

What language was spoken in the household?

Paiute.

Was there any communication gap between the parents and the children?

Huh-uh.

No. And before you went off to school, when you were growing up in your home, did you celebrate American Indian traditions? Did you go to dances, or do traditional Native activities?

Yeah, during, ah, they usually have—only thing I remember was during the Fourth of July, they had a big camping, you know. So, everybody moves their camp from the house. They move it to, ah, we usually got a—we got a car and a wagon. My grandfather takes all the, you know, the kitchen outfit and the beddings and stuff in the wagon and my dad and my mom takes the food in the truck. That's the only celebration that I know of that we ever went to.

Okay, so over Fourth of July.

Yeah, and it's seven days, so, it was just something to do, you know. We were small kids at that time, you know.

That's fun! Up by Owyhee?

Yeah, the name of it is, Shoshone and Paiute Tribe, Duck Valley.

Right, okay. Were any of your other family members educated at Stewart Indian School?

Yes, my mother's children that I know of, two, three of my sisters, and my brother. Then I don't know about the other three. I know my other brother, he didn't go.

When did you go? Like, how old were you when you first went?

I think . . . I was trying to figure that out. I think I must have been in the fifth grade.

Fifth grade. How many years were you there?

I was—you mean where?

At Stewart.

Eight years.

Eight years! Okay! So, you graduated?

Yeah! 1948.

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

Well, it's my brother that went to school there. He thought I would get a good education and talked my mom and dad into it. So, that's how I ended up in, uh, Stewart. Very unhappy, very lonely, homesick. I was homesick.

Yeah. So, we'll get into that in just a second. How did you get there that first time?

A school bus.

And so, maybe you just answered this: Well, did you know where you were going to?

No, I don't.

You'd never been that far away from home?

I'd never been out of the reservation!

Right, right. So, what was your first impression when you got off that bus?

Well, I had a niece that went with me on it. So, she's been there before. She'd say, "You're younger than I am." But I just stick along with her, you know.

Okay, stayed with her. So, you said at first it was hard! You were homesick, you were lonely, you were sad.

Yeah. Yes, I was so lonely!

Did you miss your parents, or?

I did and I'd think about them and I cried. At nights, you know. During the day I'm fine but nighttime, I cried.

That's when you missed them the most. Right, because during the day they kept you busy.

Uh-huh. But bedtime, you know, my grandfather is very traditional. He'd tell these, uh, bedtime stories and I miss all that.

Yeah. Did it get any better as you got older?

Well, my dad gave me until December to stay there, you know. But he told me that in my—my mother can write, you know. My dad didn't write. So, my mom said that my dad would want me to try it out and if I didn't like it, I don't have to go back. I came home for Christmas. When I came home at Christmas I was glad to see my family. I was fine! I want to go back! And there thinkin' about my friends I made over there. So, I went back. There was no problem after that.

That's a big decision for a fifth grader to make!

Yeah. That's what I did, you know.

Okay. Did you take anything from home with you when you went to Stewart?

Just my clothes.

How did your family feel about your leaving?

No, it didn't seem to—they helped me. You know, get ready. My dad didn't say anything. My mother didn't either. They took me to where I was gonna get the bus.

You think they missed you though?

I think they did, but I'm not sure. My grandma did, though.

Oh, uh-huh. She would tell you?

Uh-huh.

What was living in the dorms like?

The dorms, oh, they were okay. You know, you gotta follow some rules and there's—you know, I was, at that age, I was in the small girls' building. I spent three years in the small girls' building.

Okay. You told me the building number.

Yeah. They call it the small girls' dorm.

Uh-huh, okay, for three years. So, did you have more privileges in the big girls' dorm?

Uh, what?

Did you have more privileges?

No, we stay away from the older kids.

Right, right.

We weren't allowed to be communicating with them, you know. So, we just stick with our own bunch.

Okay. And then when you moved over to the big girls' dorms, was that different? Did you girls have more responsibilities or did you have more freedom?

Yes, we did.

Both? So, you had more responsibilities.

Yes, because we have our own, we had our own rooms. But at the little girls' [dorm], it was like a big hallway, shaped like this, and then it goes around, all the way around. And the beds were set and the only thing that we had was our closet, you know, where we can go change our clothes. But, going over to the big girls' building, you know, you had your clothes there with you and whatever.

But you still shared a room?

Four girls to one room.

Four girls, okay. So, the dining hall, what was the food like?

The food in the dining, well, it was okay.

It was okay?

Mm-hmm.

And, just, just having lunch and dinner in there, was that social? Did you sit with your friends?

Yes, we did.

Okay, did the boys and girls have to sit . . . ?

Separately.

Were your friends part—were your friends from your tribe or did you make friends from other tribes?

They were my tribe but from different areas. I had two of the girls that—they were from Ft. Bidwell, California and one, I don't know where the other one was from. And myself.

Did you buy things at the student store?

The what?

Did you buy things at the student store?

Not very much because you don't have that kind of money.

Was it called Novake then? Was the store called Novake?

Yeah.

Okay, where was that on campus? Was it over by . . . ?

Well, you know, when I was in the small girls' building, there was no—no stone houses then. They started to build that, you know, older girls, they stayed in a white building, but this was this other side, you know. But then, that was just like an empty lot. So, they had the laundry here, and there was a little candy store there.

Okay, next to the laundry.

Next to the laundry. Then, later on, that store moved over where the [1970s] high school is now.

Right, okay.



Beatrice Allen, Schurz, Nevada, April 17, 2017.

That's where Novake is. But, we had money to spend when we got older.

Right. And did you have a favorite class?

Um, not really.

Tell me a little bit about vocational training.

I liked my vocational training.

You liked it?

Uh-huh.

What kinds of things did you learn there?

Well, I worked at the hospital.

Okay, and what'd you do there?

I was, you know, makin' beds and serving trays and serving, and getting the kids to do the bath and combing their hair, or whatever they needed. Getting them some water.

So, you were like a nurse's aide?

Uh-huh.

And you liked that work!

I did! When I went back, that's where I went.

Right, right. So, what other things did you train in while you were at Stewart?

I took this, uh, sewing and I worked in the laundry. I worked in the bakery and I worked in the dining room. The kitchen, I didn't care for that too much 'cuz me and the cook didn't get along. So, I asked to be moved and he—I told them I didn't like it here and I told him to my face, he says, "Why you don't like this detail?" I said, "Because I don't like you!" Because they had a long thing, you know, that you make cocoa in. You know, you had to stir it with a big thing and then you get down there and then you put 'em in the pitchers, you know, and put it on a cart and then you take it out to the door and then then somebody else come and pick 'em up. And you have to get on this ladder to stir the thing and we wore dresses, and he

would stand there and look at us like this (rolls her eyes upward). So, that's when I didn't like him. That's the only place I didn't like in my days. So, I never went back to the kitchen at all. I told the people, you know, what it's like, you know. It was because, you know, wear dresses and I kinda felt strange about this guy!

Yes! So, did he last long? Did he end up . . . ?

Uh-huh, he did.

Okay.

But I don't know if the other girls . . . they would talk back to him, you know, but I just didn't. I told them I wanted to be changed, you know, and then he says, "Why you want to change? You know, this is your detail here." I told him, I said, "To tell you the truth, I don't like you."

So, he let you go.

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, best to be honest.

Yeah.

Because if you just made something up, then he would have made you stay.

Yeah, well, --he didn't ask me why but he musta known, you know, and the other girls, they didn't care. You know, you have to stoop over to do that, you know, so I didn't like that and we wear dresses.

Right, 'cuz that's what girls wore. Did you have a favorite teacher over the years?

Not really. I think I liked all my teachers.

Did you ever have to do any agriculture there? Like chickens or anything?

Yeah, I did, in the Home Ec.

Okay, so in Home Ec.

Uh-huh. They had the little farm. They had rabbit and they had a sheep, and a cow, and of course, chicken, and a pig! Our pig used to

squeal around so much, you know, and get mad at that little pig, you know. I think they call him Gertrude. I don't know whatever happened to Gertrude.

Probably not a happy ending!

I don't know.

Gertrude the hog.

I remember that our milk cow got bloated one time. We had to get her out, go down to the farm and they'd tell us how to do that, you know, by pushing her stomach and stuff like that. So, it was kinda hard to do that but the cow was good, but we just had to laugh about it (laughs). We'd wear coveralls then and wear old shoes and stuff. We'd change into our regular after we'd get through, you know. But the boys were real mean to us. They would take our rabbit and put the male with the rabbits, with our lady, and then we'd keep having little babies but we'd keep records on it, you know. So, they was thinking that we were just mating them all the time, but they found out the boys were doing that. So, they put locks on them, kept the males to themselves, you know.

Right, right. What'd you do with all those extra bunnies?

I don't know what they did with it 'cuz, you know, you're there just certain time, and then somebody else go in.

Right, right.

Well, I liked my Home Ec., I like sewing and I like cooking. We made noodles or, what do you call it? Egg noodles. We made crackers, different things, you know, that . . . each stall was, you had your own little kitchen and they'd tell us, you know, and we'd have to follow the direction. So, I liked it. I liked the cooking, you know.

Was the Home Ec.—were the Home Ec. classes taught in one building on campus? Where was that?

That was right next to the, you know where the clinic used to be, right there? That clinic is still there. It was right next to it. I don't know, it's been destroyed. That's when that gym came in there, you know, right behind it. And then they used to have little cabins back there and you kinda—different ones assigned to that, you know, so we have—you know, how to keep house.

Right. So, they were little cottages to just practice your . . .

Yeah. About four of them, I think.

And the sports at Stewart . . . did you play sports?

No.

And did you go to some of the games, though?

Yeah, I did.

Yeah, and what was that like?

Well, it's okay.

Were they rowdy?

Huh?

Were they rowdy?

No.

No? What kinds of games did you go to?

Basketball, and the football, and I think there's the boxing. Boxing, I didn't really care for it but I got to the place where I liked it.

Because you were cheering on your Braves, boys.

Uh-huh.

Yeah. And, then, what kinds of things did you do in the auditorium?

Auditorium?

Yeah, with the stage and the seats.

We didn't do too much of anything.

Did you see movies?

Huh?

Movies?

Movies, yeah.

Did you have . . . is that where they had the school assemblies?

Uh-huh.

Okay.

They have graduation there, too.

Oh, okay. And what other kinds of social things did you do on campus or entertainment-wise. What did you guys do for fun?

We took up square dancing. I did, anyway, and of course, I wasn't much on going out, you know. I went out to the square dancing and we had to dance for different things in town, Carson City. And most of the time when different girls went different places, I just stayed in the dorm. But they had something that you do, crocheting or just anything, you know, to stay. So, we did that with our matron. So, that's what I do, a lot of my crocheting. Of course, we went to movies and stuff, you know when there was movies . . . and the dancing.

Right. Well, so, was that a club that you were in, the square dancing? Was that a club?

Uh-huh.

Okay. Were you in any other clubs?

No, just that one.

Just the dancing. Square dancing.

Square dancing.

And then, regarding buildings, the buildings on campus, do you have memories of a particular building that stand out in your mind?

That what?

Do you have memories of a particular building where something happened to you while you were there that stands out to you?

No. Uh-uh.

You know, the gym, the dorms, the dining hall, shops, the campus grounds themselves. Did you, was it a nice place, the grounds?

Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

Did they have gardens when you were there?

Did they have what?

Did they have gardens when you were there, like for flowers or vegetables?

The farm did, you know, I guess, but, uh, grow potatoes and stuff.

Okay. I know you worked at the clinic, did you get sick and have to go to the clinic when you were at Stewart?

Yeah.

What happened?

Pneumonia, I was in the hospital.

For probably, what, two weeks or something?

A month!

A month?

I had double pneumonia. My parents were called in because they didn't know if I was gonna, have a . . . had a fever of a hundred and five and it took a while and the doctors from Carson usually come in and see me and all. I didn't even know they were there.

Right, right. Wow, so, you missed a lot of school then, that year.

A month.

Yeah. But your parents came, and then so you got better, and were able to go back to class.

Uh-huh.

Okay. Were they nice to you when you were there?

Yeah.

And did you go to church?

Yes, lotta times.

Okay, which one?

The Baptist church.

Baptist church.

And it's still there.

Sure is. So, did you go more than once a week? Did you go on Sundays or . . . ?

Sundays and then they have certain things and then we have a Bible study and then we were in the choir, church choir.

Right, so you had practices.

Uh-huh.

So, did you leave campus, when you were older, like when you were in the big girls' dorms? Did you go over to Carson City?

Yeah.

And did you work in Carson City or just go over there to shop and go to a movie?

We went to shop and went to a movie and, of course, get a hamburger or something. That place over there is still there. I can't remember what the name of it used to be. I think it belonged to a Heidi? It's right there between—it's Main Street and Washington, I think. There was a little café there. Everybody used to line up in there, you know.

Uh-huh, they have a lunch counter?

They didn't have the regular tables. You just have to take turns in eating there and then you just eat there and go on your own. Kids keep track of when the movie's gonna open.

Was that called the Dutch Mill by any chance?

Yeah! I couldn't think of it, yeah.

Evie [Cook] brought that up in her interview.

Yeah.

That's why I asked. It's the only reason I know!

I couldn't think of it right away, you know.

And you say the building is still there?

No, they got a restaurant there now.

Heidi's?

Uh-huh.

Where Carson Street and Highway 50 [meet]?

Yeah.

Yeah. Okay, great! Walk-in, drive-in thing. And did you work a job in the summers? Did you stay over there to work or did you go home?

No, I went home and I worked in the hospital there.

Okay, oh, at Owyhee.

The nurse had reserved where I went to work over there. I just worked day shift, you know. That's making my own money to buy my school clothes. My dad was the boss of my money.

Uh-huh, okay. So, you gave your paychecks to him?

Uh-huh. We cashed it and he kept the money and then when he'd buy my school clothes. Of course, my brother and sisters buy my clothes too, and then the rest of the money, they sent it to the school bank so whenever I wanted extra money, I'd usually get it, you know. But I'd usually get money through the mail from my brother and sometimes my sister would send a dollar, two dollars, five dollars. You know, just for spending. I know a lot of the girls went to work. They gotta find a summer job for them but I didn't do that. I went home.

Because you had a job!

Uh-huh.

Yeah! And do you remember some of our classmates?

Uh-huh.

Like who?

Evie [Cook] was ahead of me and there's a guy that lives in Pyramid Lake, his name is Roger Sam, and I think another boy, that—he lives in Bishop, but he's in the nursing home.

Uh-huh, is that Rolf Brown?

Uh-huh. And then, I'd kinda like to see him sometime. Evie and I talked about it, you know. It'd be kinda nice to—I don't know if he would remember us.

He's very nice and he does have a good memory. Yeah, he's doin' fine! Tiny little thing.

Oh, he's real small?

Uh-huh.

Mmmm.

But he's doing fine! Yeah, I saw him in December. So, Roger Sam, Evie, Rolf Brown . . .

And Sarah Crutcher, or Sarah Harney. She lives in McDermitt.

So, was Crutcher her maiden name?

Yeah, her maiden name is Harney.

Harney-Crutcher.

Her maiden name is Harney. Her married name is Crutcher. That's all I remember. I don't—there's a lot of the kids—oh, Julia Dominguez. She lives in, what's the name of that place over there? What is the name of that National Park there, in California? Yosemite!

Oh, right!

And she's into the, what do you call it? Basket-weaving? She learned from them, over there. She didn't learn that at Stewart.

Oh, okay! Right.

She's still around and my other friends, they're all gone. I don't have any.

So, you've kept in touch with some of these people, some of your friends from Stewart?

Well, not, not . . . not lately.

Okay, but you did when you first left school?

Yeah.

You said you arrived at Stewart with a niece. Were there other friends from Owyhee that were at Stewart when you were there?

No.

And what kind of Stewart were you? Were you shy? Were you happy? Quiet?

Probably quiet. You know, when we came to—on that bus—that bus picked us up in Owyhee, then it goes to Elko and it picks some more up there from Elko. Then we come down to Beowawe, we pick some up there. We come along to Battle Mountain, we pick some up there, and then we go to Lovelock and pick some up. So, we got a busload by the time we get to Stewart.

Right.

And some of them kids are going further on to Riverside.

Oh, okay. So, it's just a BIA bus.

Yeah.

Boy, that must have taken a long time then, by the time you stopped at all those places.

It took a whole day. Um-hmm.

Yeah. So, what were your goals or your future plans when you got out of school? What did you think you were gonna do?

I wanted to go to a nurse's training school to be an LPN but that was in Lawton, Oklahoma, but I didn't make it there.

Oh, right. So, then where did you go when you left Stewart?

When I left Stewart, I was in love.

Okay.

And I did get married.

Did you meet your man at the . . . ?

At Stewart.

Okay. So, you met your future husband . . .

Yeah.

What did you two do?

What?

So, what did you two do? You were in love.

We got married and then I worked at the hospital again and he was the bus driver in Owyhee.

Okay, got married and moved to Owyhee.

And then he went there for two years and then he went into the service. That's when we left Owyhee and came down this way and he was in . . . I stayed in Carson there and I worked in the motels or just anything to make money, you know.

And then later on, I went, I joined him, I guess, over in California until he got discharged. Then we came back and then I was still lookin' for a job. He was lookin' for a job. Tried to go to Stead Air Force Base for his, you know, thought he would get a chance to get back into the service, you know, but he didn't. They didn't hire him, so he went to work for the State in the city of Carson City.

Oh, okay, right!

Then I went and found a job at the hospital, Carson-Tahoe?

Yes!

And I worked up there for a while and then I got a call. I got called in the office and I thought,

“Oh my goodness! I’m probably going to get fired!” And then they were saying that they needed, they wanted me to go to work in Stewart. So I went back to this lady and then we filled out papers and I came employed there!

Okay! And so, you worked for the BIA then.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And then they came in the Indian Health Service later.

Right, right. Okay.

And that’s where I stayed until I retired!

And that was in?

No, I left there in 1983, I think. I went, I needed a year to retire on 30 years. I only had 29 years so they said that either you go to Phoenix or you can go to Schurz. So, my husband says, “We got a home in Schurz. Why don’t you just go over there and work in, at the hospital?” So, I came and worked in there. Instead of working one year, I put in three years.

Okay, so three more years.

Uh-huh. So, I retired on, ah, what is it? Thirty-three, thirty-three years, I guess, in 1987.

Uh-huh, 1987. So, you just stayed in healthcare the whole time?

Yeah! I like it.

Except for that short time when you worked at the motels in Carson City.

Yeah!

Okay, okay! And so, did you two go, did you go steady at Stewart Indian School? Were you an item on campus? (laughs)

Uh-huh. Yeah! We went for three years.

Really!

Uh-huh.

Wow, so, you met, you became boyfriend and girlfriend when you were a sophomore?

Uh-huh.

Oh, okay! Beatrice, do you think attending Stewart affected your life after you left?

What do you mean?

Well, just being in a boarding school situation where you have to take care of yourself, and then the vocational training that you received there, do you think how that affected your life went after you left, after you graduated?

It’s kinda hard to answer that!

Yeah, I mean, did it affect you significantly or maybe just a little? I mean, all kids went through high school.

Uh-huh. Well, I did miss Stewart, you know, after I left.

Do you think that it helped you in your life, all that training that you got?

Yeah, uh-huh. Yes, I did.

And, can I ask you, do you have some bad memories of school?

No.

Not really? What about some of your happier ones? What were some of your better memories?

My better memories, like I always say, when I went back home, I’m always willing to come back. I was happy to be back and I think of all of my friends and they weren’t . . . you know, my classmates, and the vocational training. All that stuff I’m looking forward to, you know.

So, you missed your friends and you wanted to get back in class.

Uh-huh. I was surprised I came as an employee there too. (laughs)

Do you talk about your Stewart school days with family members or younger people?

Yeah, we do.

What do you tell them?

Well, just Evie and I; we talk about our, you know, experience we had at Stewart and she said, "I don't know why people say they don't like Stewart," you know. Maybe it's—well Evie was saying that maybe, they didn't like to follow the rules. There was nothing to follow the rules. It's just like everyday living, if you want to live it that way, you know. Well, of course, we had details and other things we gotta do like for our room and board, like? You know, we got to clean our rooms, gotta do that, plus we got other places we have to—assigned to, to do that. That's our responsibility. So, I never thought of anything bad about it. There's always people say, "Aw, that Stewart's no good," you know, but it isn't that way. They talk about, you know, they were too strict with them and stuff like that. I don't know. They put it on themselves, I think.

*Right! If you break the rules, you get in trouble!
Right.*

Yeah!

Have you visited the campus since you graduated?

Uh-huh!

When's the most recent; when were you there most recently?

Father's Day.

Okay, last year?

Yep!

Great!

They honored my husband for his story-telling and different things, they was on that [self-guided walking] trail. He participated in that, and . . .

Right.

So, I was there to get his thing that they were givin', you know, so I was there. When there it

was Thursday and then I came home Thursday I was there, Friday I stayed home, Saturday I had to go back because that's when they were honoring him at seven o'clock. Sunday I didn't go back.

Okay. So, you were there for a couple of days.

Yeah.

Yeah!

Yeah, I had you know, people that drove me over there and they gotta get back home, too. And they enjoyed it!

Good! I enjoy it! And my last question is: What, more than anything, needs to be told to visitors who aren't familiar with this, with Stewart or the boarding school system? What do we need to make sure that gets across to them when they come to visit the site? What about the student experience?

I can't answer that either!

Right. I mean, if you had to, if you had to write a big marker, a big sign, that told the Stewart student story and we put it up on campus, what would yours say?

I would like that! (laughs) You know, the memories and stuff. I got a lot of good memories of Stewart and they're there sometime in my dreams.

Really? Any other thoughts? Anything else you want to say?

Huh-uh.

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