

# **NEVADA** INDIAN COMMISSION

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

### **BLOCKING THE STEWART EXPERIENCE OUT: AN INTERVIEW WITH CARLENE BURTON**

Interviewed by Terri McBride

Transcribed by Barbara L. Zeigler

Funded by:



Nevada Indian Commission ©

Funded by:



Copyright 2017  
Nevada Indian Commission  
5366 Snyder Avenue  
Carson City, Nevada 89701

## Blocking the Stewart Experience Out: An Interview with Carlene Burton

*Carlene (Jackson) Burton is a Western Shoshone woman born in Schurz, Nevada. She attended Stewart Indian School in the late 1950s for one semester, when she was fourteen. Her mom was a single parent and when she moved to Austin, Nevada for work, Carlene chose to attend Stewart instead of relocating to the Austin school. Carlene was familiar with Stewart because her two older brothers attended the school.*

*However, she immediately regretted her decision, and did not return to the campus the next academic year. She worked a variety of jobs her whole adult life, including waitressing, health care and working at mines in Nevada, finally retiring from the Nevada Department of Transportation. She currently resides in Battle Mountain, Nevada.*

*My name is Terri McBride. It is February 21<sup>st</sup>, Tuesday, in 2017. We are at the Battle Mountain Indian Colony Community Center and the interview is with Carlene Burton, a former student at the Stewart Indian School. We'll be discussing her experiences as a student. 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, and at Special Collections at UNR.*

*So, what is your name?*

Carlene Burton.

*And when were you born and where are you from?*

I, I was—when was I born?

*Yeah.*

I was born on April the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946 in Schurz, Nevada.

*And how many people were in your family?*

I had four brothers and myself.

*And what language was spoken in your house?*

Shoshone.

*And . . . okay, I'll leave it at that. Did you celebrate—before you went to school—did your family celebrate American Indian traditions, like pine nut harvests or the round dance or anything like that?*

My mother was a single, single parent.

*Okay.*

So, we didn't go anywhere.

*And were any of your other family members at Stewart?*

Oh, yeah! I had two brothers over there.

*Older brothers? Younger brothers?*

Mm-hmm, older brothers.

*So when did you go to Stewart?*

I can't remember! I think it was like 19—I was tryin' to think about that this morning. I think it was like in 1958, '57, somewhere around in there.

*About how old were you?*

How old was I?

*Ten?*

No, older . . .

*Twelve?*

About fourteen. Think it was fourteen.

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

I was going to school in Fallon (Nevada) and then, um, then I went on ahead and my mother was going to move to Austin and, uh, so, then instead of me goin' to Austin High, I wanna go to Stewart! So, that's how I end up in Stewart. So, it was like half semester. It was like in, um., you know, second semester going in like, January?

*Okay.*

Yeah, so I finished there.

*Okay. So, you did want to go.*

I didn't, I wanted to go but my mother wouldn't want me to go but she said, "Well, you go ahead and you go this time," she said. So, that's how I went.

*And so, how did you get there? How did you travel?*

Well, my mom went on ahead and took me up there.

*Okay, in the car?*

Uh-huh.

*And so, you knew where you were going?*

Uh-huh.

*What was your first impression when you got there?*

There was too many kids there! (laughs) Somebody I don't know, anybody I don't know.

*And, in general, did you enjoy being at Stewart?*

Did I enjoy being in Stewart? No, huh-uh. It was an experience though, to be by myself and how to get along, try to get along, yeah.

*Living away from home?*

Living, yeah. It was different. You had to get up and do things yourself and whatnot and, uh, you know, all, things that need to be done. You had to clean yourself and get ready for school and, you know, stuff like that, so, be on time in school and . . .

*When you went to Stewart, did you take anything from home with you?*

Yeah! My clothes and my personal belongings. That's what I took, but I missed a lot of things when I got there, too.

*Like what?*

Like my shoes and clothes and my shampoos and stuff like that. That's what I missed. Right away, it was taken, but then, yeah.

*And, so you left some things behind that you wish you'd brought. Were there other things back at home that—that was hard to leave? Difficult to leave behind, like your little brothers . . . ?*

No (laughs). I worry about my mom all the time, yeah, 'cuz, yeah, 'cuz she was single, being a single parent and then she had one younger, I have a younger brother and he went to school too. So, but . . . yeah.

*So how did she feel about you being over there?*

Oh, I think she missed me a lot, you know, 'cuz I was the only daughter . . . yeah, uh-huh.

*Regarding campus life: What was living in the dorms like?*

I went on ahead and I was roomed in with what? When I first went in I was roomed in with, I don't know, about six girls, maybe. 'Cuz it was kinda open, open dorm. The first one, you know, you didn't have no, no; you have to share. I mean, you know, we were all in bunks there, yeah. So, that's what it was like the first go around. And then I was there, oh, maybe like three weeks or somethin' like that and then I got transferred to another building so, in there I

think there was only like two of us there, so it was a little different then.

*So, were you in the big girls' dorm?*

I was in, I was in the big girls' dorm. Mm-hmm. I started out with a small group and then I ended up, yeah.

*So what was eating in the dining hall like and what was the food like?*

Well, food, yeah, it was okay. Um, gee! It, it—the food was okay, but then you have to, you know, they put you to work there too, you know. You either had to go into the kitchen and help, you know, settin', you know, give out trays or whatever, you know, you have to—I know I did all of that. Then at the end, too, you have to clean up. Yeah, so, that's what I did, Mm-hmm.

*Was the student store there when you . . . ?*

A student store, at that time, was in that white building right where the dining hall is, right there, that building. That's where the store was at, uh-huh.

*Did you buy stuff there?*

Yeah! You know, like candy and stuff like that, yeah, or chips or whatever . . . 'cuz Sunday, that's what I was tryin' to think too, what was we doin' Sundays? I didn't think they had the, the, I mean the dining room was open all the time but did we eat there? I don't think I did. I didn't think they cooked that day. I mean, you know, you have—I was thinkin' about that this morning too. That was a long time ago! (laughs)

*Maybe they had sack lunches or....*

Yeah, somethin' like that, yeah! 'Cuz I remember goin' to the . . . to that store all the time, yeah.

*Did you have a favorite class?*

Favorite class . . . no, I didn't have no favorite class but I did, I did really good at—'cuz I went from a public school to a boarding school and

my grades were really good, but, I did that because, I remember that teacher's name. I will never forget, Mr. Tyler.

*At Stewart?*

At Stewart, and he was a math teacher and we got whipped and you know how boys are. They don't, neither, well, then, Mr. Tyler asked, well, I was gonna go ask for help but I got carried away and what not and I was asking for it so I didn't finish my work 'cuz I didn't know how so, then I, I, went in and Mr. Tyler said, "How many of you guys didn't do your homework?" So, half of the class didn't do their homework. He says—so they all know what to do; they all lined up but you know how boys are. They fight, you know, they fought back and, uh, yeah! Ask you why I didn't do my homework. So, you had to tell him why. So, you get wham, wham, wham, just like, you know. It was a big paddle like this [shows roughly three feet between her hands] and that thick [shows roughly 1/2-inch between her fingers]. Yeah, mm-hmm.

*On your backside?*

Oh, yeah, just hit! On your hands, wherever he could, where—yeah! Just not one hit, neither. It'd be different if it was one hit but that's the way I was treated over there. So, when I go into his room, you gotta be prepared.

*So I imagine he was not your favorite teacher.*

No, he wasn't.

*But you do remember him well.*

Oh, yeah, well, 'cuz he's the guy that's—oh yeah.

*Did you do any vocational training like the Home Ec, the Home Economics?*

I went into Home Ec. We did a lot of sewing, at that time they were all doing sewing and, uh, yeah.

*Was that new for you? Was that something you didn't know before or you already knew?*

No, I already knew.

*And were you involved in all in the school agriculture?*

No, no. Didn't go for that.

*What about the sports at Stewart?*

No, didn't go for that neither.

*You didn't play?*

Hmm-mm.

*Did you go watch games?*

Yeah, I watched games, but . . .

*What kind of games?*

Oh, they had basketball games and them boys playin' out there in the field and whatnot, yeah.

*Did you go to the basketball games in that old gym?*

Basketball games, yeah, in the old gym, oh, yeah! Mm-hmm.

*You know they used to call that Moccasin Square Garden?*

(Laughs)

*Any other events or activities that you did like after class was over, were there clubs or . . . ?*

Just walk around. No, I didn't go into any clubs either, just being with, with the girls and talk and . . . put Stewart out of my mind. I didn't want to think about Stewart.

*Regarding the actual buildings at the school, are there any experiences in a particular building that stand out to you, um, that stand out to you?*

Well, all of them do! There's all them dorms and the boys' dorms and all, the lunch hall, and post office, and the auditorium and gym. Been all through there. Mm-hmm.

*Did you—what kinds of things did you participate in, in the auditorium?*

Oh, we used to go—I didn't participate, just go watch all them other . . .

*Were there movies, plays or . . . ?*

Movies, plays, yeah.

*What about musical? Did the band, the school band play in there?*

I used to see them. I didn't really care for them so I didn't go.

*Okay, so did you get sick at Stewart? Did you ever have to go to the infirmary?*

Umm, no . . . no.

*Okay.*

I can't remember. Hey, oh, to the dentist!

*Okay, yeah, there was a dentist's office.*

Yeah, there was a dentist there, and I was sorry that I went there too! I'm sorry, but yeah! I think they worked on my teeth when it needed to be not, not to, uh, when I have good teeth, so, sorry about that!

*And, so, did you go to church while you were there?*

Did I go to church? No, I didn't go to church, nope.

*And did you leave campus? Did you go into Carson City?*

Carson City? Yeah, we went to Carson City, did a little shopping or whatever things that I needed, yeah.

*Did you go with other girls?*

The other girls, yeah.

*So, you were maybe too young for this, but did you work a job during the summer or after the year was over?*

No, I didn't work a job. No, hmm-mm. My job was cleanin' the dorms!

*Oh, during the school year!*

During the school, during the weekends or whatever! You gotta keep that clean! Keep your sheets clean, keep your floors clean, clean, you had to work!

*Ship-shape.*

Yep!

*So, I know that students were responsible for cleaning up their own little areas but did you also work?*

Yeah, own areas. Yep, did that.

*But you worked mopping floors?*

Floors and stuff, yeah!

*Okay.*

Keep clean!

*What about your classmates? Do you have any memories of any of them?*

No! (laughs)

*No?*

No, I don't! Goodness! I was tryin' to think who all was with me, but I remember some boys from—well, they were all different tribes there, you know, like them Navajo boys and some Hopis and, and some from the Reno area. I mean these boys and girls, you know. I can't remember who all was in my class. We're talkin' about what? Fifty, sixty years ago?

*Right, right, I know.*

Can't remember!

*So, you didn't keep in touch with any of those people because you were there for a short time.*

No, short time, yeah.

*And you didn't keep in touch—did you keep in touch with any of the teachers or . . . ?*

No, hmm-mm.

*Were there any other friends from home, from Schurz there that you knew from, you know,*

*before you went? Did you know any people from home that were at Stewart?*

Yeah, but they didn't pay attention to me. (laughs) They were doin' their own thing.

*(Laughs) And, so were you a shy student?*

I think I was, uh,-huh . . . kinda wanna stay away from everybody, yeah.

*Mischievous?*

No.

*Were you sad while you were there?*

I think so.

*A little sad?*

Yeah. Still that way when I'm among a crowd. (laughs)

*Mm- hmm. And so, what were your goals then, as a teenager? What did you think you were going to grow up and do?*

What was I gonna do? I don't know but I became everything! (laughs) You name it, I did it! But I think, I think mostly my goal was being a nurse and I did that.

*Oh, okay.*

Uh, huh, but I did other things. I would—everything.

*We all do what we have to, to get through.*

Yeah, then.

*So, did you feel, when you were on campus, when you were going to school there, did you feel like there was a sense of community amongst all the students there, like we're part of this . . . ?*

Um, no, not really because there was groups. Some were better—they think they were better than others and whatnot, you know, so, it was that kind. It was—they were kinda in groups. And there used to be fights, too, you know, and that's when you get punished! When you're,

when you, um, get caught and get whipped and sent, sent—and matron, your matron would come and put you to work or whatever. Oh, yeah, you get punished for that!

*So when you got punished, did they make you do extra work?*

Extra chore, you, bet! Make you scrub that floor on hands and knees on that floor and either you, you do that, uh, huh. You don't go anywhere. You stay there and you do that. I remember that. I remember, yeah, mm-hmm. You have to polish that, polish that floor and the windows and stuff like that.

*So, you talked about this—there were kinda, cliques or different groups on campus, so my question is, what was it like for so many people from so many different tribes to be there all together? Were there factions?*

Mm-hmm, tribes. Well, it wasn't real, it all—you know friends, see, because like I said, there's a lotta different, different tribes, you know, so it has to be, be—you know, among, you know, you're just their friends.

*So, where did you go after leaving Stewart?*

Oh, I came back, I went to Austin.

*Okay, and you finished school there?*

Mm- hmm.

*Did you graduate from high school there?*

Mm-hmm.

*So, then what did you do? What did you do for a living after school?*

Oh, I went down into L.A. I went to L.A. and I went to cosmetology school. And when I came back, well, I had about what, two more months to receive my license, but then my mom got sick. So then they came after me so then I came home. That was in L.A. so—but my mom was really sick and nobody was taking care of her.

*In Austin?*

No, they transferred her to Reno. She was in the hospital there. So, that's when I came home. So, I didn't finish!

*Right.*

So, then . . .

*So, then what?*

So, then I start working! (laughs) I worked in motels and not, no, no, no! I take that back, it wasn't a motel. I worked in a restaurant, yeah.

*In Reno?*

No, in Austin 'cuz my mom came back then. You know, that was like, how many months later? She came back so, yeah, so I did that.

*Okay, so then when did you start nursing? Did you have to go to school for that?*

Oh, and then, and then I got married.

*Okay.*

Yeah, and then we all, we moved down here, down to Battle Mountain, uh-huh.

*You married in Austin?*

Yeah. So, then, when that happened, I moved my mother with me and we all came here. So, I've been here since.

*Was your husband from Battle Mountain?*

His mom and dad was so, yeah, we all came down, mm-hmm. So, then I went on ahead, like I said, and I went from that school, then I got workin' waitress, then I become a cook. I became—then a little later on I did go into nursing. It was, it was like a home health, home health aide. That's when I went in.

*Here in Battle Mountain?*

In Battle Mountain. I did that for like, ten years, I did that and then I went on ahead and I got, then I went on ahead and I went into, um, the secretary. So, I was Nevada Home Health secretary. I did that for a couple years, and then my ma, she was being transferred to Carson City



so that was the end of my job. Then I went back into restaurant business. Then I went back into waitin' table again. Then I was hired at the mine. I went to work out here at the mine as a laborer.

*Which mine?*

Out here to, well, at that time, it was Dubois. So, I went to work at the Dubois. As a laborer. Laborer means labor! You go to work!

*Wow!*

*Yeah!*

*With work boots and everything.*

Work boots, cold or no cold, yeah, that's what I did. So, I worked there and then . . . then I went on ahead and I left that job and I went to another mining job and I went out to Echo Bay and I did the same thing out there. So, then I was there for I don't know how long, nine years or somethin' and I came—I quit that job and I went to work for Nevada Department of Transportation. So, I did that and retired with that.

So, I did all around, but, like I said, being in Stewart, I blocked that off my mind. I did, because I came back to public school and I went to, 'cuz I was in public school before in Fallon and then when I came back I, well, I did good in Stewart but yeah, being there, I didn't. But Mr. Tyler was the one that I didn't care for.

*So, he's probably your worst memory . . .*

Memory, uh-huh.

*. . . of being there?*

Mm-hmm.

*What about—do you have any—what would be the best memory that you can think of?*

Oh, used to go to Home Ec! That!

*You really liked that?*

Home Ec. Can't remember where . . . I went to reading, science there. I don't know why I can't remember that. Must be somethin' there blocking me off.

*Maybe. So, the best memories you've got are hanging out with the girls, or going to Carson City to go shopping?*

Shopping, yeah.

*Well, so do you share your memories of your experience . . . ?*

No, I never talk about it.

*With your kids or your family?*

Hmm-mm.

*No.*

I don't think my kids—well, yeah, maybe I mention it but never really mention, mention. I also had a nephew that went to school over there. He only went half a year, too. He didn't last, he came back to Battle Mountain.

*So, he went later.*

Yeah, that's later, way later. That's in the 80's, yeah. I never did ask him neither why he didn't like it. Mm-hmm.

*And have you visited the campus since?*

Yeah, I went down there couple times.

*And what, more than anything, do you think needs to be told to visitors who aren't familiar with the whole Indian boarding school? What should we make sure that we tell them when they come?*

Well, I remember way back when my mom was tellin' me she was a little girl and she lived in Round Mountain. No, not Round Mountain, other side of Austin, Smokey Valley, and they were picked up by the lady's name of, uh, um, now I forgot! I was thinkin' about it this morning, too. Bowers.

*Yes, Alida Bowler*

Yes, what's her first name?

*Alida.*

Alida, yeah, her. And my mom musta been about like, my mom musta been about like, a ten-year old when she was—she says first go-round her sister was picked up and she was out in the open, and her mom went on ahead and hid the little ones, and she was picked up and taken and then the next year, she came by but they were out in the open. That's when she was picked up. They were forced to be picked up and they were taken there. My mom also said she was, she had from Smokey Valley to Stewart, it took them what, three, four days to get there.

*On a wagon?*

On a wagon or whatever. That was way back in, yeah, 1900's or, you know.

*1930's?*

No, 19, 19, 1915's, maybe or somethin', yeah, but she had bad experience. She, but then as she used to, I don't know why, but she used to tell us—but then she had bad experience, so she was whipped a lotta times, she said. And her whippin' days were like, where she can't sit down. There were welts on them. She said they didn't care where they hit 'em. Now, she was treated really bad, yeah, and then she said being treated that way, she, she ran away which, which even worse then. She said that last go-round she says, "I couldn't sit down," she says, "and I can't even lay down." There's welts all over her hands. She had bad experience. But she always, she always tried to make it sound good, you know, make it, but then she laughs. Yeah, she had bad experience.

*That's why she didn't want you to go.*

Yeah, that's why, mm-hmm.

*But she went longer than you, it sounds like.*

She, she, yeah, she was, she was the . . . they tell her that, "Your mom can't afford them," so they

take them to Stewart. When she was young she stayed there all the time and then she said she's always in third grade! She remembers that and then she'd laugh about it. "Well, I was in third grade all these years," that she grew up over there in Stewart. Yeah! But that's why, probably, she didn't want me to go. She says, "No, no, don't go" but I had that experience too where Mr. Tyler . . . yep. But the rest I block off, I can't even think! Yeah. But my brothers were out there too. One had to be sent home. I don't know the reason why but the other brother, he stayed there and from there he went into the service. So, yeah, so he did all right.

*Right. Was he drafted or did he just enlist?*

He probably enlist, yeah.

*So was he a World War II vet or Korea?*

No, he was, he was in the Marines. Uh, like, peace time.

*Okay!*

Yeah, so did that. Then I have another cousin too, Renelda was her name, and she was like five-year old and they took her in, and she said—but her mom, her mom don't have any—she was a single parent too. She didn't have any anything so they had to, they have to clothe her, yeah, and they did that to my mom, too. She said they clothed her. With, you know, shoes and clothes and whatever she needs at that time, mm-hmm.

*Because they were basically orphans.*

Orphans, yep. Yeah, that's what she said. And, and not so much me, but, yeah, but I still think Stewart was not, not a good place where we were sent.

And I also went to a different school and I had that experience too in that a flashback. That's also a flashback on my part, is that I went to school in Yomba and she was mean to us, that, I also remember her name was Mrs. Romero. She used to grab you by your hair when, when, when you speak Shoshone. She says—because when

we first start school and when we don't know how to speak English, and she used to tell us, you know, how to speak English, you know, and stuff like that and then . . . and then by the end of the school year or whatever, we're supposed to be speakin' English and whatnot and if not, well, then she'd make us sit down. "I will not," on a piece of paper, "I will not speak Shoshone," you know.

*Oh, a hundred times?*

A hundred times or whatever and if you keep it up and then she'll grab you by your hair, or whatever, or your ear or whatever, and then she'll yank you around like that. Oo, she was mean and then if you really keep it up and then she'll send you into the—we call our where we have dinner, you know—and either we'd be helpin' our cook or else moppin' the floor or something like that. She was crazy! We were all young doin' all that! Yeah, I remember her well, too!

*And that was just a day school, right? You went home at night.*

That was, yeah, I went home at night. Yeah.

*So the reservation schools, they were mean . . .*

Same mean teachers too. Yeah. Yep, mm-hmm. But that's the way I feel. I can't even—yeah, that's the way Stewart is too, I thought.

*But so, the public schools were a good experience for you then. Not the reservation schools but like the Fallon school and . . . was the Fallon school the Churchill County public school or was that on the reservation?*

Yeah, no, yeah, that was the public school.

*Right, right.*

Mm-hmm.

*I'm surprised that you weren't discriminated against.*

Oh, at that time, when I was goin' to the public school, no, no, um, no that didn't happen. But

the kids used to call us dirty names but, you know, just the kids, but the teachers didn't. They didn't. They were—but that was that, what I remember.

*So anything else you want to add, Carlene?*

No, no, just that my brothers were there and I, I, I can't say how they were treated but they're both deceased now, but when they both went and, uh, and then my mom.

*Do they have the same last name as you?*

No. They—my maiden name was Jackson.

*Jackson.*

Mm-hmm.

*What were their first names?*

Claude and Earl. Mm-hmm. And my mom's name was Mabel.

*Mabel. Jackson?*

Mm-hmm.

*I'll look and see if there's anything, photos or anything, where they're, they're in 'em.*

Probly, 'cuz, 'cuz, like I said, my brothers, they went there longest. They should be.

*Did they play sports?*

Oh, yeah! I think they did.

*Okay, so they might be in some sports photos.*

Sports or there's probably pictures taken of 'em, more or whatever, yeah. But I was only there for like, half a semester and then my mom was there forever! She said, "I'm always in third grade," she says get spanked for all of that. Mm-hmm. Yeah, like I said, I really don't have too much to give, and I'm blockin' some of it off.

*No! This is great, Carlene! So, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I don't have anything else unless you want to um, add to . . .*

Oh, when I go home I'll . . .

*So thank you very much!*

Mm-hmm. [Note: Carlene did not want her photo taken]