

## **Transcript of Oral History Interview with Paula Chee Tso**

Interviewed by Joann Penrod in Brigham City, March 24, 2012

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Joann Penrod: I'm Joann Penrod, and I'll be doing some interviews today with these wonderful students who have come back to Intermountain Indian School for the school's reunion. I'm speaking with a former student who is going to tell you her name.

Paula Chee Tso: My name is Paula Chee Tso. My maiden name was Chee when I went to Intermountain.

JP: What years did you attend the school?

PCT: I went to school there from '72 through '76 – most of my high school years.

JP: And you graduated from there.

PCT: I did.

JP: Oh, that's great! How old were you when you came?

PCT: I must have been about 16, 17, 18 – around there.

JP: Did you come with anyone you knew, or were you pretty well with strangers?

PCT: My sister had gone here a prior year, so she's the one I came back with during my 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

JP: Do you remember anything about the first few days of coming to the school? What were they like?

PCT: I remember we rode the bus all the way from Tuba City to Brigham City, Utah, and on the bus, I only knew my sister. After we got here, I finally met some of my cousins from back home. There was Alinda, Julia, Fred, Robert and Steven. We really didn't know anyone, so we were friends until we met other people. So the first day was spent getting settled into the dorm. We toured the dorm, and we settled in. We got our own little rooms. There were two people per room, and I kind of remember who were my roommates from year to year. It was very interesting because there were students from all over the reservation.

JP: And most of them you didn't know before?

PCT: Most of them I didn't know.

JP: Well, some new friendships developed. Did you make any new friendships while you were

here?

PCT: I had a lot of friends, and mainly they were the kids in my classrooms who were in the same grade as I, plus the dorm aides and the teachers. All the teachers were very nice and friendly. We had a great experience here. I feel like I learned a lot from this campus.

JP: That's wonderful! And one question that we have is: What were the teachers like? You mentioned Mrs. Pohmajovich.

PCT: Mrs. Pohmajevich was my English teacher and shorthand teacher. She was really nice. She was really firm, but she taught us a lot of words. We looked up words, and I probably actually got a bigger vocabulary from her. She was the one that really encouraged our education and made sure all our little English grammars and punctuations were right. I learned a lot from her, and I remember her to this day.

JP: What other classes did you take?

PCT: I've taken business-like classes like shorthand and English. I've taken a lot of classes over the years, like basketball and swimming. I remember the fun ones more than the hard ones, but we did have home economics and music, and we had social studies, English, math and science. Out of all the classes, I remember P.E. and home ec. I remember those classes thoroughly because we had a separate whole building for the swimming, a separate whole building for the gym and the weight room. Everything is separated, and you had to walk a long ways to get to those places. I just remember those are my fondest memories, the P.E.

JP: Did you participate in any of the sports?

PCT: The first year I did. The second year I got a part-time job on the campus. We had a campus shop where we sold hamburgers and Navajo tacos, and Lorena and I – the one I came with – worked together at the campus shop. She taught me a lot about making fry bread and how to preserve them. We'd make a lot and then sell them. We knew how to keep them warm, I guess.

Then she taught me how to count money in Navajo for little things like chips, gum, candy, and things we were selling. Most of the students spoke Navajo so they would come up and order in Navajo, and some things I didn't know, which I learned at the time. It was neat. Mainly I really treasured my friend, too, that had taught me how to count money in Navajo. That was an education within itself, too.

JP: That is absolutely wonderful! Was there anything you found difficult about the school that was hard for you?

PCT: No, I've always been a good student. I've maintained a high GPA. As a matter of fact, out of my high school class, I had the second highest GPA. So the person that was ahead of me was a guy. I think his name was Anson Yazzi, so for my 1976 year class, they wanted him to be the salutatorian. He didn't take it. I guess he didn't want to, so I was the next highest GPA, and I was

the salutatorian of the 1976 graduating class.

JP: Oh, congratulations! That's wonderful!

PCT: Thank you.

JP: You mentioned that you did use the Navajo language at school.

PCT: We did, yes. They emphasized it a lot at our dorm meetings. We would talk about what's going on. We'd have a regular meeting, talking about the dorm rules and our chores and what's expected of us or anything new, things like that. On top of that we'd talk about cultural stuff and help other people learn how to dance or sing. The dorm meetings weren't really like meetings. They were like a fun activity.

JP: Social time.

PCT: Yes, it was a nice social outlet for us.

JP: Who was still at home when you came to school, your siblings?

PCT: I have a younger sister and two brothers, so my mom was still taking care of them by the time I came here.

JP: Did any of them come here?

PCT: They didn't. Intermountain ended with me. An older sister graduated from here, and then my other sister that I came here with. So three of us came from my household.

JP: Did your older sisters tell you things about the school that helped you make your decision?

PCT: They had tons of fun, and they were telling me about basketball. Both of my sisters that were going here were on the swimming team. They talked a lot about that, and so it sounded like fun. I was begging my mom to let me come up here.

JP: Good choice. Did you have any interaction with the local people here in town?

PCT: From my work at the campus shop, Mr. Rawlins had recommended me for that job, so a little outlet place wanted to hire someone for auditing. Because of his recommendation, I was able to get a job at the little store. I forgot what it's called, but I worked there in town. I did a little bit of inventory. At other times I would watch students when they'd go shopping, just watch them kind of like a security to make sure they didn't shoplift. That was a nice job I think.

JP: Well, personally I'd like to mention our interactions with some of the students at the school coming into our home, eating with us and making fry bread with flour all over the kitchen. What a pleasure it was to interact, and Peach Days was my special holiday!

PCT: Oh, yes!

JP: I remember everyone that participated from the school in Peach Days. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience to see the floats and the costumes. It made Peach Days for me.

PCT: Oh yes. That was so fun! Every time I hear about Peach Days, I want to come over here.

JP: Well, you're welcome to come and join several hundred people for that. I really don't know how many people come. We're just happy to have you here, Paula. You enjoy the rest of your visit, and come back.

PCT: We had fun hiking and taking pictures of the campus, so it was really memorable.

JP: You got up to the "I"!

PCT: I went halfway because I came later this morning.

JP: That "I" is important. The eagle was important on the auditorium, too, and I was sorry to see it go.

PCT: I was, too. Bye.