

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Pat Smith

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford in Perry, Utah, May 26, 2009.

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Kathy Bradford: Today is Tuesday, May 26, 2009, and I'm speaking with Pat Smith at her home in Perry, Utah. First, Pat, I would like you to tell me where you were born, a little bit about your family and growing-up years and how you came to be working at Intermountain School.

Pat Smith: I grew up on the Indian reservation in New Mexico, the Northern part. I was born there at home. At that time they had just a midwife. I grew up there, and I went to what they called Day School on the reservation.

KB: Did that mean that you would go to school in the morning and come home at night?

PS: Right. When I was born, my mother passed away, and so my grandmother reared me, and my dad was around and helped support us. But I grew up with my grandmother and learned a lot of things from her as I was growing up.

KB: What is your tribe?

PS: My tribe is San Juan Pueblo. That's what we're called. We're one of the 19 Pueblos in New Mexico, and, of course, our languages are all different, too. I grew up not knowing English until I went to school. Then I learned English. After I got through elementary school, I believe in the 7th grade, I went to boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was about 35 miles away from home. We didn't go home until Christmas time.

KB: Were you homesick?

PS: Well, it makes you homesick on and off. You miss your parents and your relatives, but we stayed there and went to school. We were looking forward to Christmas time so we could get to go home and enjoy our families. After vacation, then it was time to go back to school, and we didn't get back home until school was out in May. I did that until the 12th grade – being away from home. You make friends with the other tribes that went to school there. We were all a mixture of different tribes.

KB: Did you all get along well?

PS: We did. Of course, girls always do. Back then it was a lot of fun. As we grew up, we did things. We did sports or whatever they offered.

KB: Was your school similar to Intermountain?

PS: It was similar to Intermountain School. We lived in a dorm and had dorm mothers. They were nice.

KB: Did you ever think you would be one?

PS: No, I never thought I would be one back then. We didn't know what we wanted to be until we grew up. I think most of us thought we would get married. I did get married, and I had a son and a daughter. I met my husband Earl Bird after I was out of school, and we got married later on, and I had two children – a son and a daughter. We moved to San Francisco where he took a job, and we lived out there for four years or so. Then when they had a job opening here, I put in for it and came out here. I didn't think I was going to stay. I thought, *I'll probably go back to San Francisco*. My husband stayed in San Francisco, and I came with the kids. I decided that since they offered me the job, I'd better take it. I did that, and later on he came. He worked at the school, too, for a few years. He was also Native American, and he worked on the boys' side.

KB: Was he doing the same thing you were doing with the girls?

PS: With the boys, yes.

KB: So tell me what you did in that job?

PS: I started out by working in the kitchen. It was a regular dining room for the whole school, the whole campus. I worked there when I started out. We didn't cook because they had some cooks already. We did more like waitress work, cleaning tables, cleaning up and serving kids.

I did that, and after that I decided, *Well, I'd better go to the dorms*. There was an opening there, and I liked that better. It was a girls' dorm that I worked in. I had worked on the boys' side, too. I worked with the boys for a while, and then after that was when I decided to go to the girls' side, which I think was much better for me. We did a lot of things as educational aides. We had to be at work by 6 o'clock in the morning. We had the early shift so we could get the girls up and ready to go eat their breakfast. Then they had to clean their rooms when they got back from the dining room. After they got their rooms all cleaned, it was time to go to school. We had to line them up and take them to the dining room so they could eat. Then we'd come back from the dining room and went back to the dorm to see that their rooms were made up and clean before school. Sometimes we had between 80 to 90 girls in one dorm.

KB: How many aides were there?

PS: Well, it was just one because there were three aides, one on each of the shifts. Our shift was from 6 to 3 in the afternoon. I got off at 3, and the next person came on at 3 and worked there until 11 or midnight. The kids would go to bed at 10 o'clock or 10:30, and then the aide would have to make the bed check to make sure everybody was there and then write up a report of what went on that day or night.

KB: Did anyone try to leave?

PS: Well, once in a while we would have somebody missing, but we'd kind of check around until we found them. The night people came on at 10 o'clock before the afternoon people went home. They had coverage for the night. I worked at night, too, sometimes. I didn't mind that.

Some people didn't like it, but I did.

KB: Then did you sleep in the morning?

PS: Oh, yes. You had to.

KB: Where were your children during this time?

PS: My children were home with my husband. We lived on the campus, and so it wasn't too bad. Somebody was home with them until I got off my shift. My mother-in-law worked there, too, so she had a different dorm and a different shift and took care of them while I was gone. The children were never alone. They were always with family.

KB: When you were on the early shift and got the students off to school, were you able to relax a little bit?

PS: We had to check all the rooms to make sure that they were all made up and in good shape and to see what kind of a grade they got. If everybody in the room didn't do their part, they all got a bad grade. There were four in a room, and they all had to work together. If one was messy, they made sure that they got onto her to get it cleaned. They also had a detail to do besides their room – like they had to clean a certain area. We had a little kitchenette that they may be assigned to clean and keep up with different areas that they were detailed. Saturday mornings they all worked to make sure they got all their things done before they could go anywhere. We had a laundry away from the dorms, and we had a certain day for the linens to be changed, and so they all changed their linens early as soon as they got out of bed and hauled their linens to one area. We got them all counted, what we had from the dorm. A couple of girls would count to see how many sheets we had to send out to the laundry. It was our job to make sure that the laundry went out. We had what they called carts to push and haul them to the laundry in another area away from our building. Later on during the same day, we had to go down and pick up the clean linens that came for our dorm and haul them back to the dorm. We did that, but sometimes the girls helped if they were out of school by then. We had to push the carts, but it wasn't too bad because it was inside. The ramps went from building to building.

KB: Did you get really attached to some of those girls?

PS: Yes, we did. It was hard for them when they went home because a lot of them wanted to go home to see their parents, but a lot of them wanted to stay, too. They had a hard time with that, and we did, too.

KB: Did they ever come to your place where you lived?

PS: Sometimes some of them would come. You'd have to check them out of the dorms and make sure that they were with you. You were responsible for them.

KB: Were you there when they had young children there?

PS: Yes, they were in elementary school way back then, and some of them became homesick. We had to mother them and tell them that they were okay. They'd get letters from home, and they'd just be so happy. They brought homework back from school sometimes. Most of the time they got it done at school, but sometimes you'd have to say, "Get it done!"

KB: Have you kept in touch with any of them?

PS: I used to, but in the later years I haven't. I guess they have families of their own, so they keep busy. Every now and then someone will say, "Well, I heard from this person or that person."

KB: So did your husband do basically the same thing?

PS: My first husband did, but he didn't stay with the job very long. My second husband worked with the Guidance. His name was Dickson Smith, and he was Superintendent of the Guidance Department there.

KB: Weren't the dormitories under Guidance?

PS: Right.

KB: Was he your boss?

PS: At the beginning he was, but after that, I had to move to another area because he had a different section. I went and worked in the dormitories called the Honor Dorms. That means the ones that were our most responsible kids and could fit in an Honor Dorm. They would be more trustworthy. Everything they did mostly on their own, and you didn't have to give their rooms and other duties so much attention like the other dorms. They were in the higher grades, too, like the juniors and seniors, and they were more independent.

KB: You mentioned about having a kitchenette in the dorms. Could they do some cooking if they wanted to?

PS: Well, just simple things. If they wanted to make fry bread for the whole dorm, they did. Or they made things like stew on their own. Most of the time they ate in the kitchen. They liked to cook whatever they were used to eating they wanted to try. We helped them.

KB: Did they bring their own clothing, or did they have some provided there?

PS: They brought their own clothing, and if they didn't have something, it was issued to them there. These were the early ones we had that they did that with, but the later kids that came had plenty of their own. We didn't do that for them. You know how kids are now days. They want the kind they like to wear. They're not happy with what you're going to give them unless they just don't have it.

KB: Did they like to go shopping in town?

PS: They did, and we used to take them shopping to Ogden a lot of times, too. We'd take 8 to 12 at one time. They had those big government vans that we used to take them in – just like they do with the Job Corps.

KB: Did you enjoy doing that with them?

PS: It was fun. It was nice to get away on your own and just visit with them, not like being in the dorm where everybody is.

KB: Were these all Navajos?

PS: In the early years, yes, in what they called the five-year program. The young people who came here the first time were older kids. They had the five-year program and had never been to school.

KB: Did they speak English?

PS: A lot of them didn't at the time, and they were learning. I was quite young back then, and so a lot of them were almost my age. It was kind of hard to be their dorm mother, but we got along. Those are the ones that graduated from here after they'd just been here five years. They got the training and the schooling and everything. I believe they have really done a good job because a couple of young people from town (she's no longer here, but I think her ex-husband still lives here) went to school there. I believe he worked at Thiokol for years, and he's retired now. As far as I know, he has a home in Brigham. But a lot of them like this couple went out into the world to get jobs – like him. He worked at Thiokol for many years, and she took a job as a dorm aide and worked here for years at Intermountain.

KB: Do you think they got a good education at the school?

PS: Oh yes, because they really put their minds to work. They didn't mess around or play around, so a lot of them got good jobs after they left school. They had a lot of vocational training here, and during the summer they got jobs throughout California, Colorado and different places – doing things they had been trained to do. During the school year while they were students here, they went to people's homes in Brigham City to do yard work, house work, baby sitting – things like that.

KB: That probably helped them learn to manage money to have jobs and spending money.

PS: Yes. They could put it in savings if they wanted to. Intermountain had a bank there, so they could put their money there, and they learned to write checks and everything.

KB: I understand they had an excellent nursery. Did you ever go there?

PS: Not too much since my kids never went there. Some of the employees had their kids going there, and some of the students also worked there. But I went there when I worked with the

Solo-Parent Program. It was related to my work as an aide. In the later years we had girls who were unmarried and had babies and applied to come to school here. They could bring their babies with them to school. They went to school while the babies went to the nursery, and so we helped them out that way. We were dorm mothers in that dorm. They had a special dorm for that. We had to teach them how to care for babies. If the babies got sick, they didn't know what to do, and we made sure that they went to the doctors who were right there on campus. They took care of them, and we made sure the mothers gave the children medicine for whatever was wrong with the baby. They learned those things so that they could do them on their own. We had to check with them to make sure that they were giving the medicine to the child. They had their own area where they could cook, too. If they wanted to go to the dining room, they could do that. The babies were in the nursery while the girls were in school, and then when they got back from school, they'd go get the child from the nursery and bring them home to the dorm. We were there to help them out.

KB: What a great program! Those girls having babies on their own at that age without that help didn't have much future, did they?

PS: No, they didn't. In a lot of ways, the school really did help them out. We got attached to the girls and the babies. After they left the school, we didn't have any contact with them. It's sad, but that's how it was. I'm sure they learned what they had to and made it on their own after that.

KB: The students had the academics and vocations training, but they also had a lot of recreational activities, didn't they?

PS: Oh we had everything. We had swimming; we had basketball games; we had dances – so many things going on. The students would play basketball games away from campus with other schools, and other teams would come here. They played baseball and they did track and ran, and we had movies every Friday and Saturday. Sometimes if they didn't want to go, they didn't go, but most of the time the students enjoyed that.

KB: I remember going to wonderful Pow Wows in that theater with the big eagle painted on it.

PS: Yes, that's where the auditorium was and where they had the movies. I'll show you some articles about Pow Wows in newspapers that I've saved. They did the display for Peach Days for many years. They displayed a lot of the nice things that they did.

KB: I'm sure that was a nice place to work.

PS: It was. I enjoyed all the time that I worked there. I worked there pretty close to 30 years.

KB: Were you there when they brought the other tribes in as students?

PS: I was, and they kind of had a time at the beginning because they were all different tribes. The Navajos felt that it was their school. They had been there a long time. They had little fights here and there. We mixed them up in the dorms and other places, and they made friends after that. It just took time.

KB: Change is always hard.

PS: Yes, it is. Even for us sometimes. We'd like things to stay the same, and it can't.

KB: I see that you have a beautiful woven rug. Tell me about the beautiful crafts that they did.

PS: They had classes in arts and crafts, and sometimes on their own they did paintings. Some of them are the best artists, the boys. We had a little arts and crafts shop. If they made anything, maybe they could take it there and sell it. Anyone could come there and buy these things. People from all over would stop at this little shop and buy what there was. Some of them were so good about making different types of things that their parents had taught them.

There were plenty of things for them to learn vocational-wise. The girls did homemaking, they did cosmetics and hair styles and nursing training. We had our own doctors and our own dentists there, and sometimes the girls worked there as assistants after they went through that program. We were out there doing our own thing. We had our own laundry and everything there.

KB: How did you feel when it closed down?

PS: Oh, that was the saddest day. For so long, I didn't even want to go to Brigham, and I knew I had to pass by there. It was sad for the students and for everyone out there. My husband felt bad, too. He was one of the last ones out there. The school closed in '84, and so I got out then, but after being the Head of Guidance, my husband was assigned to do different duties there. He went to take care of the closing of the school, and the other tribes went there to haul whatever they wanted to supply their schools on the reservation. They came by the truckloads, so they could take what was there that they could use in the way of furniture and stuff like that.

KB: Was that because everything there belonged to the Bureau of Indian Affairs?

PS: Right. My husband was there as the people came and was assigned to make sure that the items were on this one truck going to South Dakota or wherever on the reservation they were supposed to go to. He was one of the last ones there to close the school down.

KB: That would be hard to watch it taken away piece by piece.

PS: Yes, and some of the helpers along with him worked there to make sure it was going to the right area. So he was there until the end, and they finally closed the school and he got out.

KB: Knowing how it was, would you do it all again – go out and work with those kids?

PS: I would. I enjoyed all the years that I worked with the students. I thought about taking a second job, but at Intermountain it made you feel good to know you had helped the students – the girls that we had or the boys.

KB: Well, you did provide a great service there, and I thank you for taking time to tell me about

it.