

Transcript of Oral History Interview of Arleen Henry
Interviewed by Carol Tonnie at USU Brigham City on March 24, 2012
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Carol Tonnie: I'm Carol Tonnie, and this is March 24, 2012, and I'm interviewing...

Arleen Henry: Arleen Henry

CT: ...who attended Brigham City Intermountain School. And what were your years of attendance?

AH: 1978 to 1980.

CT: Why don't you start by telling us why you made the decision to come to Intermountain School?

AH: I was raised by my grandparents and just felt that they were overwhelmed with responsibility and everything, so I decided to come to school here. I originally was going to go over by Carson City with another friend, but then a couple of my sisters were going to come here, so I thought okay, so I came here.

CT: And what was your first day like when you got here?

AH: It was scary because I'd never really been away from home. I'd been a little bit away but it was just different. I wasn't impressed with the way the school looked. I was kind of like "Oh no, we're going to a prison!" [laughs] But it was nice. It was good after the first month; it was more relaxed, kind of fitting in with everybody.

CT: Can you describe what the dorms were like: the food, the classrooms?

AH: The dorm life was alright. My two sisters that came with me – they were actually in another dorm because they were freshmen and so I was stuck out there by myself. I didn't have any problems or anything. It was alright. It just kind of felt like you were ...

We went to summer camp years ago over at Chemawa Indian School. It kind of reminded me of the dorms there, so I was alright with them. Over here we had chores to do – we called it a detail. Just like being at home you had a responsibility for keeping your room clean, do your own laundry, things like that at the dorms.

The ladies that ran the dorm – they were nice. Most of the time they were pretty pleasant to talk to if you got a little bit lonely. I enjoyed working in the cafeteria. Each of us had to work in the cafeteria for a week. That was interesting because in the morning and the evening times we had to work and the classrooms also picked up for two lunch times. I got to experience the kitchen. So it was kind of like at home.

CT: Was the food different at home?

AH: Yeah, some days there were things that we didn't really care for. Most of the time it was alright. There were some things that you couldn't eat [laughs]. You just starve.

CT: Tell me what you didn't like of the food and what you did like.

AH: I'm not a morning person so I didn't really eat breakfast too much but some days you'd go, when you're hungry, and they had mush and things like that (oatmeal and stuff) and it's like "Oh." We grew up on this stuff. You wanted better things that you don't usually get. Most of the time it was alright.

CT: Did you have a particular dish that you did like?

AH: No, not really. We had pizza and things like that.

CT: Did they make the pizza themselves there?

AH: Yeah, they made everything. It was amazing to watch them in the kitchen with all the big bowls and everything. It was neat. It was a really good experience.

CT: What about friends? What kinds of friends did you make here? What kind of things did you do?

AH: At first I didn't really have anybody – just my two sisters. There was a few other people from my Reservation. We were all in different dorms and had different class schedules and were in different grades. Some of the girls in the dorm were really nice. They were laughing all the time and they were easy to get along with. Some of them were ornery like they were at home but one girl, every morning I'd pass her room, and she'd always have her door open and she would get ready for school and stuff, and she always had this really mean look. And she turned out to be my best friend. [laughs]

CT: She wasn't as mean as she looked?

AH: No, but she was a grade ahead of me so she graduated a year before me. She was from Colorado, so not the same Reservation, but we kept in contact through the years. I don't see her as often as I'd like. We talk from time to time.

CT: What sort of things did you do at school together?

AH: We did cheerleading. We were on the cheer leading squad. I did drill team too but she didn't. We went to games together and pretty much did everything together. We went to our meals together, went out in the dorm watching the TV or just talking and laughing. She had different classes than I did so I didn't have any classes with her. We didn't have much free time - we were either at cheerleading practice or . . . we always had something to do.

CT: There was always plenty do here?

AH: Yes.

CT: Was there a charge for any of the activities that you did?

AH: No, just when we had dances or the movie theater. If you were doing well in school, if you were doing good work, there were tickets called “merits” and that paid your way in to the activities.

CT: And on top of that did you do any work?

AH: I worked just for a little bit at the rec hall. I worked behind the counter just selling cheeseburgers, hamburgers, and fries. We served pop, and candy, and things like that.

CT: What did you get paid for doing that?

AH: Oh it was real mean[?]. I don’t even know if it was over a dollar. Really little.

CT: So less than a dollar an hour?

AH: Yeah, it was something. It was fun to work and just enjoy everybody that came in and played card games, or played pool, or the mechanical bull.

CT: Now, did playing pool or the mechanical bull, did those cost as well?

AH: Yeah.

CT: Could you use your merits for those, or did you have to use money?

AH: No, we had to use money for those. I don’t know if the mechanical bull cost but I know pool did. It was low cost – it wasn’t very expensive. Back then it seemed like it was.

CT: So, a little bit about the money you earned while you were working there – what did you spend it on?

AH: Mostly just when we wanted to go eat a burger or something different other than the cafeteria.

CT: The cafeteria on campus?

AH: Yes.

CT: So, were there certain meals that you paid for and certain meals that were free?

AH: No, all the cafeteria meals were free. Whenever you ate at the recreation hall or they called it the campus shop, you had to pay for that.

CT: Oh, so the cafeteria was free but the campus shop or rec you paid for?

AH: Yes, so if you wanted a pop you had to buy it. There were machines in the dorms. Very seldom did we have to buy shampoo and soap because our friends always sent us care packages with all those things. We always had those.

CT: And I didn't ask you, how old were you when you came to the school?

AH: Let's see . . . I think I was 15 when I came.

CT: And then how old were you when you left?

AH: I was 17.

CT: Then you said you finished school in Arizona? Is that right?

AH: Yes. At a public school in Globe, Arizona.

CT: And did you feel that when you went to the public school in Globe, Arizona, that you were well prepared from what you had learned here?

AH: Yes. I was kind of scared to go back to a public school. Even though I really didn't know anyone there, I did pretty well. I finished out the semester. I had my credits from Intermountain. I got the credits I needed to graduate from Arizona. Yes I graduated.

CT: So what do you think was one of the best things about coming to school here?

AH: Just taught you how to be respectful. You have to always be respectful at home and even though we're away from home and around _____ and everything – it was good. You just need to grow up faster. You had to do your own laundry. You had to make your bed every day because they marked you for those things.

CT: Is that how you got your merits or demerits was from those sort of things?

AH: Yes. Everyone had a detail to do in the evening time. We did them and so we kept on cleaning and going to school every day, getting yourself up and moving and going to school. Good learning experience.

CT: So you thought it was a good learning experience and you learned responsibility? Those were good things?

AH: Yes.

CT: Was there anything about the school that was hard or you wish could have been different?

AH: Just being away from home was hard at times, certain times of the year was hard.

CT: How often did you get home?

AH: Just at Christmas time and summer break.

CT: Just those times?

AH: Yes. But we were always looking forward to get back to school too. I think those were the only hard times I had. Was just missing family and friends, old friends from home. Just not being there for the day, activities at home that were going on.

CT: Now, you know that early on before you got there, there was a riot there at the school. And there were some tensions between the tribes and things. Did you feel any of that by the time you got to school? Did you feel like you were safe at the school? What was the general feeling?

AH: No I didn't. I just thought because we were all from different areas because I was so amazed how many different tribes were there that we just all had to learn to know each other. But nobody ever went out of their way to be mean to me or anything. I didn't ever have any problems with that. Most of the time got along with everyone.

CT: And how about language?

AH: My grandfather spoke fluent Nez Perce because of the way he was raised. He would be, how do you say, punished for speaking the language. And so he never spoke it to us. Although I'd hear my grandpa and his sisters, the older ones, speak it real fluently. But he never really spoke to us so we never learned. There were certain words that we knew and we'd listen and learn those words. Especially at the dinner table there were certain things he would say and you had to figure out what he was saying. That's how we would learn. And then when we were in grade school they had resource language in the grade school when I went to school. So I knew some if it but just don't know how to carry a conversation with all the words together. It's just certain words that we would know.

CT: So English was your first language and Nez Perce was your second?

AH: Yes. And it still is today . . . still the same. Even though they do have other things going on to try to teach the language again.

CT: And after you left the school, what kind of employment did you find?

AH: I didn't go to school right away or work right away because I had a little boy. And then, I think it was '83, I finally decided I need to work and support my son. So my mother lives over on the Yakama Reservation so I went to Yakama's college. Went to school for a year and received my accounting certificate. So when I went back to the Nez Perce Reservation I just worked wherever I could. I worked at the bullet factory in Lewiston, Idaho, for a summer on an assembly

line. (15 min) And then later in the fall I was hired by the tribe as a CO worker, a clerk typist, because I had learned how to type. Worked with our BIA probate office, land descriptions and everything. In January of '84 I got a job with the tribal finance office. I was just filling in for somebody that went on maternity leave. There was some changes that went on with the tribe that we were . . . I actually ended up being employed there and still employed there, 28 years now. And I've just worked my way up from the bottom and working different positions, accounts payable clerk, accounts receivable clerk, property clerk, purchasing clerk. And then up to the accounting position. So I've been doing accounting for the tribe _____.

CT: So how well did you think the school here prepared you for the future?

AH: I think it did a lot. I mean because of the responsibility, knowing what I had to do every day and I had to do it because I didn't have my grandma or grandpa telling me to get up and do this and do that, I just have to do it. I always thought about my son first. And I had to do everything to make it work. I just made up my mind one day I was going to be employed and just learn the responsibility to do what I was told to treat people the way you want to be treated and to always be responsible for your actions. That's what our grandparents taught us and I have.

CT: And you felt like the school supported that same idea?

AH: Yes. Oh yes. Because I think there was punishment for things, doing bad things.

CT: You think? So did you never do bad things?

AH: Well I tried not to. I'm not perfect but I tried not to.

CT: Sounds like you never got any of the punishments.

AH: Well one of my sisters did. She was kind of being crazy and got into trouble. So I knew the consequences were there.

CT: So what did she do and what was the consequence for that?

AH: Drinking.

CT: And what was the consequence for that?

AH: She was...I have never been there so I don't know what it was called when we were there _____ or something.

CT: And what was that?

AH: It was kind of a juvenile facility or something. And I don't know too much about it.

CT: It was from the Intermountain school?

AH: Yes, I think she just got into trouble.

CT: Here at the school?

AH: I don't know whether it was off the campus or on it.

CT: Then she got sent to a detention center?

AH: Yes.

CT: For very long?

AH: No, not very long. She had consequences to pay for that.

CT: OK so I have one last question for you. If the Intermountain school was still up and running, would it be someplace you would want your son to go?

AH: I would. Yes. I actually have three children and I think my second oldest, I think he would have really liked to come here. He's always been, he's the middle child, and he's always been the stronger one to get out and do things. He went to high school actually and he did really well. He's just the one that would get out of the house and take off and go live somewhere. You know all on his own. He's more independent that way. And I think my daughter Latoya would have really enjoyed coming to school here. I don't know about Isaac. He's too close to me and I don't think he would leave. I think it would have been really hard for him. Although I think he would've learned to fit in and enjoy it. I thought that I did wrong not coming back my senior year. I wish I would have. I missed everything about the school. I thought it was a good environment. Never had any trouble and the sports were there just like at the public school. We were raised in sports when we were growing up and even though we didn't play on the team we played the inter-murals which the dorms played each other and I think that where I made the most friends. Being on different teams: volleyball and softball and basketball.

CT: So where you came from on the reservation, what kind of school options were there besides coming to something like Intermountain School?

AH: It was probably the same. They had sports. When I went to school on the reservation they didn't have the volleyball until later. So when I came here they had everything, track, cross-country, basketball, softball, football. On the reservation we didn't have track or really....the football field was little; it wasn't very big. They were big into football and baseball but none of the other sports were really that big back then. So it was really interesting to come here and see all the different things that they had available for the students. And when I was in my junior year how if you had time in your schedule that you could come do the post-high, I don't know what you would call it _____?

CT: Yes.

AH: Yes all the different things that they had. But I didn't have time in my schedule; I kept pretty much to my general studies.

CT: So general studies would be more of your academic classes. And then if you had time you could the _____ and stuff.

AH: Yes. Yes. I started to do it in the day care, the child care. But it just conflicted with some of my class schedules, I couldn't do it all. I thought that was pretty neat that they had offered that to the students.

CT: So it sounds like compared to the reservation school, that there was more vocational, there was more activities going on. What about, can you compare the academics at all as far as just your regular general classes?

AH: I liked the teachers here because they didn't judge you. On the reservation I felt that even though you're on the reservation and where I come from I think we live in the most racist area. And they judged you a lot. They didn't treat you very good at times. I got along with most home teachers.

CT: Where did the teachers come from for the reservation?

AH: They were from around the area; most of them are farmers. I don't know; I just could feel some of the distance between the people. A lot of the farmers there used to laugh at our tribal members because we have a lot of _____. So some of the farmers were good to you and some of them weren't. Most of the time though it was alright. I just, I really wished I could have taken my kids somewhere else because they'll finished and graduated _____. My son, my second son, he went to Boise for a few years. My sister lives there. He was so advanced when he came back to Blackfoot that he was already taking like the senior classes in Boise when he was still like a sophomore in Blackfoot.

CT: Did it feel the same way to you when you went from the reservation school to the Intermountain school that they were a little behind there compared to what was offered here?

AH: Yes. I just don't feel like they prepare most of our students on the reservation, and get them prepared for college. Because my daughter, I was hoping she would go to college. She just wasn't prepared enough to get into college where she'd feel comfortable and succeed. So she probably would have to take some of the classes to get her to that point.

CT: That's good to know. Is there anything else that you can remember about the school? Any stories, things that you did, did you participate in Peach Days, did you go on the town, how did the town people treat you, any of those things come to mind?

AH: Yes, every time we'd go into town we were treated alright. It was very seldom that we would go up to Pizza Hut and have a pizza or something. It just depended on who had money, and if we could afford it. We never really had to go to the store really because our parents or our grandparents always sent us care packages, we always had some things. I never really remember having trouble there. It was just, some days were kind of slow, and I was kind of bored. But really it wasn't because there was always something to do, like small trips to Lagoon or somewhere. I was in the Upward Bound program and that really helped me get through school too. And that was through Logan. If I remember they took us to my very first hockey game that I got to see in Salt Lake City. That was really something unique that I always will remember that was great to me.

CT: I'm not really familiar with the Upward Bound program. Can you explain that a little bit to me?

AH: I just remember them coming in once a week. And they would just kind of assist you -- like tutoring to help you get through your classes if you needed help. And so they helped me. I was having a hard time with English. My math wasn't too bad, and I really liked the teachers because they always took the time talk to you. It seems like they were really busy because there were so many of us. If you really needed help they'd help you. And then if you had friends that could help a lot too.

CT: So how many kids were in the classrooms that teachers were pretty busy?

AH: Like this size here, full all the time. [Editor's note – this was recorded in a classroom at USU's Brigham City extension.]

CT: That's pretty big.

AH: Yes. Yes. So you always had a big class. I liked it in home-ec. We did a little bit of sewing and cooking. That was the first time I ever made a pie and things like that. They were just little tiny pies but they were neat. It was fun. I didn't participate in Peach Days. My sister did because she was nominated for homecoming and so she got to ride on one of the floats. I thought it was really nice to see all the different cultures, the different reservations that were representing their cultures in the parade. We always had a really good time at homecoming. We had a homecoming week and all the different activities. We always participated in things like that. And at the end of the school year we always had a big pow wow. So that was always fun. And my dad was someone who actually came to school for the pow wow. So it was kind of neat to have your family with you at school and meet some of your friends.

CT: So for the pow wow did you dress up for that and where did those clothes come from?

AH: I did. One year I did. We had those like parents always took us all over the Northwest to pow wows. That was for our cultural education, traveling to pow wows. And most of it, we either had friends or family that made our outfits. Pretty much we tried to learn and do our own tools. We often had something somebody made for you or helped you make it.

CT: So did you bring it from home then?

AH: Yes. My two sisters and I were actually on one of the year books in our outfits. They had _____. So that was pretty nice.

CT: I'd like to see that picture. What year was that?

AH: Let's see that was in '79 to '80.

CT: So if we look at that yearbook we'll see you on the back?

AH: Yes. Yes.

CT: Well, thank you very much for your time. Do you have any people that you know that might be interested in...?

AH: I'm thinking LeAnn[?].

CT: Is that your sister?

AH: Yes. She's the one that stayed with me in the dorm when she did come here.

CT: Is she the one that was in the Peach Days?

AH: No my sister Debbie was in it.

CT: Oh your other sister.

AH: Yes.

End of recording.