Data Sheet

Name of Interviewee: Doug Sam

Current Age: 56

Place of Birth: Isle, Minnesota

Date of Birth: 1936

Date of Interview: August 7, 1992

Person Conducting Oral Interview: Dr. Anthony Godfrey

Location of Interview: Grand Casino Building, Vineland, Minnesota

Vocal Clarity: Good

Biographical Data:

Born in Isle, Minnesota, at an early age Doug Sam and his family moved to the Vineland area, where he grew up. After graduating from Onamia high school in 1954, Doug worked in Aitkin for a while before moving to California under the federal urban relocation program, where he worked for several years before coming home fifteen years ago. He is a former Secretary-Treasurer for the band, manager of the Big Money Bingo operation, and he is currently a shift manager at the Grand Casino.

Major Themes Addressed:

Daily seasonal life in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly ricing, maple sugaring, hunting, and fishing. Discusses experiences in an urban setting of San Francisco, housing, business, and economic development on the Mille Lacs Reservation in the 1970s and 1980s, and also the development of educational programs on the reservation.

Related Photographs Donated:

None given.

Interview with Doug Sam
Date of Interview: August 7, 1992
Place of Interview: Grand Casino Building, Vineland, Minnesota
Interviewer: Dr. Anthony Godfrey

Begin Tape One, Side One

Godfrey: Okay, let's see. I'm talking with Doug Sam, and we're at the Mille Lacs Grand Casino. I want to thank you for talking to me.

Sam: Mm-hmm.

Godfrey: First off, I'd like to start off and maybe you can tell me a little bit about your background—when you were born, where you grew up, something about your childhood.

Sam: I was born many years ago in Isle, Minnesota.

Godfrey: Many years ago! Can we have an exact date?

Sam: Well, '36.

Godfrey: 1936.

Sam: Right.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: About 1940s we moved over to west side, where we lived until 1950. I graduated from high school here, in Onamia, in 1954. And I've been gone since—until 1975.

Godfrey: So you—what's your earliest recollections as a child growing up here?

Sam: Here? Is when we first moved, is watching the old people

walk by, you know, from our new house, and see people coming. We'd run inside and watch them from the window.

Godfrey: By the old people you mean like the elders?

Sam: The elders walk by, yeah. But then we used to—every time we seen them coming, we'd run in. And my dad would go out there and talk to them. It was pretty unusual because from what I could see, the old man walked about ten, ten or fifteen yards ahead, while ladies stayed behind.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: So when my dad went out to talk, she stayed back there. She never joined the conversation.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: See? How am I doing? It's kind of unusual, but I always remember that.

Godfrey: What other things can you remember from your childhood?

Sam: Childhood?

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: Not very much here. No electricity. We had to chop wood to keep warm. We had to rice. We had to do everything. But it was a good life. Of course, in them days you could leave your house open and not worry about it.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: One thing I always recollect is my grandfolks cooking a whole bunch in the morning. And that would mean we were going someplace, 'cause I stayed with them for a while, too. And they'd leave the food on a table, covered up, and go. Just

when somebody came by, if they were hungry, they ate.

Godfrey: Is that right?

Sam: Yeah. It's not done like that anymore, but I always remember that, too.

Godfrey: Do you remember going out ricing with them?

Sam: Yeah, with my folks. Me and my brother riced with our folks from very early age. We saved all our rice in them days. It would last us the winter. And we sold what we didn't need, we couldn't use, you know.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But we kept plenty for the winter. And we used to go right out to the rice camp and stay there the whole season, just in one spot. We'd either go to Bennettville or we'd go to Crosby, and we'd spend the whole season just on that one lake.

Godfrey: Crosby?

Sam: No, no, that's—they call that Dean Lake up in Crosby.

Godfrey: Dean Lake.

Sam: North of Crosby, yeah. And Mallard Lake over here in Bennettville. Or Swamp Lake. We used to, you know, just go set up camp, and we were here to stay until October 1st. That's how long the rice season used to last—the whole month of September.

Godfrey: Well, I'm a person that doesn't know very much about ricing, so maybe you could describe it to me.

Sam: Well, we used to—long ago we had rice boats, probably about fourteen feet long. They were made by, they were homemade boats, flat-bottom boats. A pole in the—my mother or dad sat

in the back. We poled from the front, and we picked with two sticks about thirty inches long to beat the rice into the boat. And I remember, a pretty little guy in them days, them boats got pretty heavy. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: They were hard to pole?

Sam: No, it's just we were small. We were little guys.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But we were out there. I guess we had to do it to survive.

Godfrey: Yeah. Do you do any ricing now?

Sam: Very little.

Godfrey: Very little.

Sam: Last time I went out was three years ago. That was for my own use. I still got that rice.

Godfrey: Do you?

Sam: Yeah. Just what I need—that's all I get.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: It's really dead now. Nobody prepares for it like they used. Many years ago, that was the highlight of the year, to go ricing. It's when all the people got together at the lake. They socialized over at the lake. There must have been twenty, maybe more families living at the lake just for that month. It was social event of the season, picking rice.

Godfrey: By prepare for it, what do you mean by? Is there any special thing you have to do to prepare for it?

Sam: Well, you get your boat ready. You paint it, get it waterproof. Then your poles—make sure your poles are ready.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And load the tarp, and away you go, and all your belongings, and set up camp, your pots and pans. They cooked outside.

Godfrey: At that time, was there any regulations on ricing?

Sam: That's—when we were growing up, that's when they were just starting, when they were starting to charge for a rice license.

Godfrey: Who was this, that was charging?

Sam: The DNR.

Godfrey: DNR.

Sam: Yeah. They started to put a charge on, I mean, a license. And as I understood it as a kid there at that time, it was supposed to be for upkeep of the lake and the landings and stuff. I don't know if it's ever been done like that, but that was the original idea of the license, is to create money for, maybe, preserving and maintaining the rice fields.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And also having a committee man on each lake when it open and closes, to make it last, you know.

Godfrey: Sort of someone to supervise?

Sam: Yeah, somebody to go out and check the rice to see if it was ready for picking. If it wasn't ready, they wouldn't go out, or if it rained, they didn't go out. And it lasted a whole month.

Godfrey: How would they know whether the rice was ready? Did someone go out there?

Sam: Yeah. They went out there, went around the whole lake, came in, and told them it's ready. We'll open tomorrow. The next day they'd go out.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And if it rained they didn't go out when it rained. I mean, just, I don't know if it was just—when it rained, they didn't. The stalk would break, and they didn't want to break the stalks. So they just didn't go out.

Godfrey: And ricing would take place, what, for most of the fall time?

Sam: September, whole month of September.

Godfrey: Besides ricing, what other things would the community be doing in the fall time?

Sam: Well, everybody had a garden.

Godfrey: Oh!

Sam: Yeah. We used to call them victory gardens in them days.

Godfrey: Okay, this would be World War Two, the time that you're talking about.

Sam: Yeah. Then right after that, everybody had their 4-H gardens.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm. And your family had?

Sam: We had three gardens out there.

Godfrey: Three gardens.

Sam: We had—there was no room for play. It was a lot of work. We did our own vegetables, and we got all our potatoes in the

root cellar, and carrots, cabbage, corn.

Godfrey: So most of what you grew was for yourselves?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: It was, yes. Self- maintenance is what it was. And I think just about every family did that.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Every house had a root cellar and gardens. And one thing I remember, when I got to be a teenager, we—these people used to go out ricing, you know, the elders. The rice they sold—you know, they kept their money. And what they'd do, they'd go into town at the Fairway store or Dahlgren's and then put maybe a hundred dollars in their account so they could draw from that all winter.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: I remember because I had a car in them days. They used to hire me to drive them to town, 'cause they'd go buy supplies under their account. That last them all winter.

Godfrey: This is where, Onamia?

Sam: Mm-hmm.

Godfrey: And you mentioned a store's name, Dahlgren's?

Sam: Dahlgren's and—

Godfrey: You'll have to forgive me. I'm not from around here.

Sam: But they did. It's just the markets that were in town. That's where they—and the Fairway. They used to give me a

dollar's worth of gas. That was a lot gas in them days. I used to love doing that for them. But nobody does that anymore. That stands out in my mind that they always helped maintained you.

Godfrey: Yeah. Did they used to go to the trading post?

Sam: Yeah. They had their accounts there, yeah.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: That would be closed in the winter.

Godfrey: Oh.

Sam: 'Cause the Ayers went south.

Godfrey: Did you know the Ayers?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: I almost stayed with them.

Godfrey: You almost stayed with them?

Sam: Yeah, my folks—they wanted my folks to let me stay with them.

Godfrey: Did you ever work for them?

Sam: No, I never did work for them. Never.

Godfrey: I know they used to hire people to do some raking and some other things around the trading post.

Sam: Yeah, my mother worked there probably many, many years.

She must have worked there twenty or thirty years.

Godfrey: Oh, now your mother is ?

Sam: Maggie.

Godfrey: Maggie. Okay.

Sam: Many years. But I never worked for them.

Godfrey: Okay, what other activities would be going on in the fall time besides ricing?

Sam: In the fall?

Godfrey: And harvesting the garden?

Sam: People would go out and pick beans for farmers in Mora.

Godfrey: In Mora?

Sam: Potatoes.

Godfrey: That's pretty far away, isn't it?

Sam: Yeah, but they would set up camp out there and pick beans and work for these farmers.

Godfrey: So, seasonal employment?

Sam: Yeah. They saved all their money, of all people. You know, they maintained those people. I wish we could be more like them.

Godfrey: Well, they didn't have casinos around, either.

Sam: Well, no, that's—I guess it's changed quite a bit since them days. You know, when everybody, everything had a purpose.

Now I think we're losing our purpose in life. Maybe we're just floating along on this big old island.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But you don't see that anymore. You always think of ricing as a gay time, you know, because it's—well, everybody's getting ready, everything ready to go, which lake we going to. The men would go out and check all the lakes and see where they're going to go, and they'd go there to camp. But that's lost.

Godfrey: Were there certain lakes you couldn't go to, for instance, because there was somebody, like Sandy Lake's territory, or Lake Lena's territory?

Sam: No, no. There was so many private lands, you know, where you couldn't get in.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Well, the government bought certain lakes. They bought campsites for Indians to go to, see. Like Dean Lake had one, and most of the lakes had in this area.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: There was a place to land your boat and a place to camp. That's all they—they had ??? on that lake, see. Them other lakes are wide open to anybody. But it got to be such a—it really got commercialized, you know. For about a few years there, really, the price went up, and the demand was great, and everybody and his brother out there. The miners used to take their vacation at ricing time. You could see them come across the lake. You see poles coming up, like—you know, you ever see the Roman shows and the Greek shows?

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: You see them guys coming for attack. You see the poles coming in, and they meet. Well, the rice is finished. It was completely demolished—one sweep.

Godfrey: So was it overharvested, then?

Sam: No, it was knocked down, broken down.

Godfrey: Broken down.

Sam: So people started getting their ??? from lake to lake.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Till the staying in one lake was done.

Godfrey: Well, so, the time period you're talking about, they really needed the rice for personal purposes.

Sam: Yeah, until they started commercializing it, like people, Chun-King got involved. Big companies started getting involved, outbidding each other for the rice, you know.

Godfrey: Oh, really?

Sam: Yeah. Like that rice used to go for a dollar something a pound, you know. In them days that was—

Godfrey: A lot of money.

Sam: —probably about ten bucks a pound. People bringing in four hundred pounds was nothing.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Those were the glory years of ricing, but the big business did do the rice in. Right now, you go out there and get rice, it don't taste like it used to in them days.

Godfrey: Why is that?

Sam: I don't know. Don Wedll had a theory here, about ten years ago. He figured the ducks and the geese go and graze in the corn fields at night and come back in the morning and have the fertilizer stuck to their feet. It probably—that's what his theory is, and I kind of believe him. I think maybe he right. I think maybe the—

Godfrey: So the phosphates or whatever it is that got into there?

Sam: Yeah. That might have changed the whole thing, the whole natural growth.

Godfrey: Well, I hope to interview him, so maybe I'll have to talk about that.

Sam: Yeah, because I think some of the new things that—should leave some of this old stuff alone, you know, 'cause it's not. You can cook this rice, and it don't taste that way. I was talking to an elder out here the other day, and I told him, remember we used to cook a pot of rice, I mean a cup of rice? You could eat it just like that.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: It had that flavor. You didn't have to add nothing. Now you got to add ingredients and stuff. It's funny how big industry destroyed that. You know, where you raise these big gardens with the fertilizers.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: When you talk to Don, he'll probably talk about that. I believe him.

Godfrey: I don't know if it can be corrected, but it sounds like—

Sam: No, I don't think so. I think it's gone, like everything else is.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Except on the wayside, unless it never—even whites. You don't see them out there on the lakes anymore, like they used to be. When the mines were really running in Crosby and Ironton, that's when the guys came out in full force.

Godfrey: Full force.

Sam: Yeah, not anymore.

Godfrey: Of course, they didn't do it right—the harvest.

Sam: No, they just come down for the money, you know—no regard for tomorrow. Just wipe it out today, get all you can, and—big bucks.

Godfrey: Right.

Sam: And then they would—they had roadside stands in the summertime, you know, at the—where they hung baskets, birchbark baskets.

Godfrey: This is along the highway here?

Sam: Highway 69, yeah. And they used to camp anyplace. Nobody cared if they stayed there or not, you know.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: State land. I know my grandparents had their stand over by Sherman Holbert's there, just past there. And I know there was another one about a mile down the road, and then there was a bunch of them through here. And my other grandfolks had it just at Wigwam Bay.

Godfrey: At Wigwam Bay?

Sam: Mm-hmm. And they made money. They gathered their birch bark, their basswood, and they made their baskets, sat right by the road making those. People come and take their pictures, and—

Godfrey: This is like summertime or falltime that they'd be doing?

Sam: Spring till fall, yeah.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: In the spring months, that's when you had the maple sugar.

Godfrey: Mmm. You're making me hungry, [laughter] talking about ricing and maple sugar, but go ahead.

Sam: But the seasons were there, see? And I guess I was lucky enough to live them all, 'cause my grandparents used to go to Swamp Lake and do it there, because everybody had their areas, you know.

Godfrey: So Swamp Lake was a sugaring area?

Sam: It was a rice and sugar area.

Godfrey: Rice and sugar area.

Sam: And they would camp there until their sap dried up. But they—I know the hard work. We used to go out there with yokes. I was just little kid, too, getting the sap, you know, getting it ready. It was hard work, but, you know.

Godfrey: Well, once again, I don't know very much about sugaring, so maybe you could describe that to me.

Sam: Well, that's when you get a maple tree, and what they used to—they used to use woodchips, come along with a hatchet.

Uh, I dropped it. [Trouble with the microphone.]

Godfrey: That's okay.

Sam: They'd come along with a hatchet and go to the—there's a tree, see? And Grandpa and Grandma come along with a sack, and a sack of chips, and hit that right here, and they'd put the chip in there, and then a birchbark basket underneath it. It'd drip right in there.

Godfrey: So it sort of comes over the chip and out?

Sam: Put the chip in there. Didn't take much, you know? Then a little later on, my grandfather finally got a drill bit and he had that sumac, where he used the iron and burned a hole through it.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Sumac—it's got a soft middle, just like that. From the side view, it looked like ??? it looked like. There's a little ridge here, see?

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: This went into the tree. I can drill that in, pound it in there, and out come the sap.

Godfrey: What did you call that, a sumac?

Sam: A sumac, a sumac branch.

Godfrey: Oh, sumac. Yeah, okay. I understand.

Sam: They burned a hole through it 'cause it's the pulpy middle, and—they'd last for years, those things, you know, and dry up. Even made rice pole, the forks on them. They'll last forever when they're dried. These just last forever. Grandpa

in the spring would start washing these up, cleaning them up, and reburning them through, and use them again.

Godfrey: Interesting.

Sam: That's the way they did. The top view—that hole all the way through it—right into the bucket.

Godfrey: Interesting. And then, once you got the sap, what did you do with it?

Sam: Well, we boiled it. We had about three kettles going. All day long they'd boil. All we did was keep the fires going. Then, just before evening, we'd go out and get all the trees, put all the sap and store it. We'd start putting these into one container because all of a sudden, you just had that little bit, you know, from all that sap, and then you made syrup and then with the balance you made the sugar and the cupcakes.

Godfrey: Cupcakes?

Sam: Yeah, round sugar cakes, they called them. That, there were—they all know how to do it. It was good. They used to make taffy. If you were by the lake, ice is breaking up. You got out there and get the ice, pour this syrup on it, turns to taffy.

Godfrey: Wow!

Sam: Treat of the day. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: Sort of like licking the spoon.

Sam: Yeah. My kids will never experienced this, but, you know, it was something.

Godfrey: I take it you don't do any sugaring.

Sam: No, heck no. Since I come to work here, I don't.

Godfrey: Don't have any time?

Sam: Today's my day off, see?

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: I was called in for a meeting today, so that's—

Godfrey: Interesting. Well, how would they learn this?

Sam: Well, the school—the school's starting to do some of this stuff. And then the seasons, they have elders come in and teach the stuff, and the kids do it.

Godfrey: They do?

Sam: So it will be fall here now. The kids will be going ricing and finishing their own rice. In the spring they want to make their own sugar. Early we used to go, we used to—the fish used to run. We'd be out in the sugar bush, well, what would you like to eat. Well, I think we'll have fish today. We'd go out there and spear a fish and bring it back and clean it, put it under the coals, let it cook, just the way it is.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: In the evening, pull him out. He's steaming hot, and we ate him. You never took more than you needed. You just took what you wanted, you know. You want a meal today, well, that's what you got. Or people used to go deer hunting. About four or five guys—they just put the deer up and boom. Everything was for substance, you know.

Godfrey: Were there particular areas that you hunted or fished?

Sam: Yeah, right back here.

Godfrey: Back here, you mean. Maybe you can describe where you mean.

Sam: On the west side of the reservation here, west side of the highway, because even this area where the parking lot—I used to hunt back here where the parking lot is.

Godfrey: That close to home, huh?

Sam: Yeah. We lived on this side, and they used to come over and sit. The guys used to chase deer this way.

Godfrey: Chase them in to you?

Sam: Yeah, but the Casino parking lot took the hunting spots.

Godfrey: You had to pick some new ones, huh?

Sam: Yeah, you have to go farther out, but that's—reservation don't go that far. Only about another half-mile or mile.

Godfrey: Well, you don't have to answer this, but did you do any poaching?

Sam: Poaching?

Godfrey: Yeah. I mean off the reservation, and, you know.

Sam: Oh, I guess we always poached for something. Nobody ever bothered us.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: ??? everybody know you did it. You hunted for substance, not for—

Godfrey: For your own self?

Sam: Yeah. I think that Indian always believe that the game was his to take for his substance, you know? That's just the way we took it. Nobody ever—

Godfrey: Said anything or questioned it.

Sam: No.

Godfrey: Let's see. What about fishing?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Did you have particular areas that you went out?

Sam: Yeah. We used to go out here and get whitefish by the barrels in them days and smoke them or salt them for the winter. Used to have big barrels full of salted fish to last all winter. But not game fish, just mostly whitefish, you know?

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: You smoke most of them. And early spring there you go put a little tepee out there and get a golden northern or a walleye. That was your meal. You didn't get a whole bunch. You just got what you needed for—

Godfrey: Well, it sounds like a pretty good lifestyle.

Sam: It was a good life. It was a good life. I don't know. Big—the more it grew, the more the tourist industry—when I was young here, there was no resorts in the area. You could move around freely around the lake.

Godfrey: Along the shores?

Sam: Right. But it's—it was all lost through the population moving in and new laws coming out, conflicting laws that bans, bans cultures, and just—I don't know. I guess it's progress, but this progress will probably wipe out a culture.

Godfrey: Uh-huh. So you think things have changed too much?

Sam: Oh, yeah—so quickly, you know. 'Cause when I moved to California, I remember sitting out there fishing through the ice, you know, in the spring, spearfish. You could see the bottom. You could see everything down there. When I got back, we went fishing, illegally. This time we had to watch for snowmobiles or the DNR to come. That's how much it changed, you know. And you couldn't see the bottom. It was all murky. I was gone about seventeen years to California. That's how long it took to pollute that lake, where you couldn't see the bottom anymore. It would be just clear. You could just—

Godfrey: What was the last year that you were here before you moved to California?

Sam: I was here—let's see, I graduated here in 1954, '55 I moved to Minneapolis, 1950—was it '58 or '59 I moved to California? I was living in Minneapolis.

Godfrey: So you moved from Minneapolis to California?

Sam: No, I moved back here, and I was working in Aitkin. I lived on the reservation here. I'd drive back and forth, but that was getting—I was burning more gas than I was making. So the relocation program came along, so we put in for it, my wife and I.

Godfrey: Well, I'm going to hold you there, because I want to talk to you about that in some greater detail. I thought I'd finish up with this.

Sam: Okay.

Godfrey: As far as seasons goes, what about social occasions like dances?

Sam: Yeah, there were. Well, we weren't allowed to go to them. My folks didn't let us go, you know, but we could go to our Grandma's, or Grandpa would take us along.

Godfrey: Why weren't you allowed to go?

Sam: Well, you would disturb the ceremonies and stuff.

Godfrey: Oh, okay. Children weren't—

Sam: When you went, you sat by Grandma. You never moved. You stayed right there.

Godfrey: And watched?

Sam: And watched and picked things up.

Godfrey: So, were they more frequent than they are now?

Sam: No, they lasted longer.

Godfrey: They lasted longer?

Sam: Right. They used to start Thursday and quit Sunday. Now, they're just Saturday now.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So that's—it's being lost slowly, but, you know I don't know if it's—probably cross-culturization is what I think is changing it, you know. The fear I always had since I moved back here was—is an elder and a young elder. The young elder is cross-culturized. I want the best of both worlds.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: Kind of sticks in his mind. That's just my own opinion, but, you know. But in them days, it was a sacred thing. And you

went down there. If you were lucky enough to go with your Grandma, you sat by her. She told you to sit still and observe. But that's the way it was in them days.

Godfrey: These are drum dances we're talking about?

Sam: Yeah. They was our ceremonies. They were held more sacred then. It was probably the most traditional reservation in the State of Minnesota.

Godfrey: Why do you think that is—that that tradition has been maintained here compared to other places?

Sam: I don't know. Maybe because—

Godfrey: You would think the opposite because we're so close to Minneapolis really.

Sam: No, I don't think it's that. You got White Earth there, where you got the half-breeds. You have the half-breeds—and so on Leech Lake and every place else. Here you had the full-bloods. Maybe that's why.

Godfrey: I see.

Sam: That's only opinion again, but, you know, just things I've noticed.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: But it might be, because the government always did something. Then they outlawed the religion. They're not allowed to do at the ceremony, when they outlawed the religions. And they had the boarding schools where you couldn't talk English in the schools. A lot of people lost their identities—trying to put them in the mainstream. But for Mille Lacs, I think it was just because they were full-bloods there, all full-bloods. I'm fifteen-sixteenths, you know, and my

mother was full. But they were always here.

Godfrey: Well, what about your education? Where did you go to school, Onamia?

Sam: I went to Onamia, graduated there in '54.

Godfrey: Did you experience a lot of prejudice when you were there?

Sam: No.

Godfrey: No.

Sam: In fact, the principal used to take me and ask me why I got along so well. I don't know, I said.

Godfrey: You're a nice guy.

Sam: Well, I played in the band, and I played all the sports. Maybe that was it, too. All my brothers and sisters played all the sports.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm. 'Cause later, there apparently was an incident or something at the school, and that's when they broke away in the '70s.

Sam: Yeah, uh-huh. Well, we didn't experience it when we were, you know. Maybe it was there. We just ignored it; we had so much fun with the extra-curricular activities, the band. I joined the letterman's club. I had a good time. I was even here when they walked out, so I could tell you about that later.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: But I had a good time in school.

Godfrey: Did you have any problems with language at all when you went to school?

Sam: No. I had to learn to talk English when I went to the first grade here, at the Indian school. I kept running away, going home crying because I couldn't understand anybody. But that was true with everybody that went to school. They had to learn the English language. I still don't know it, [laughter] but—.

Godfrey: Well, are you bilingual now? Do you speak two languages?

Sam: Yeah. I speak both languages, yeah.

Godfrey: Are you passing on that language to your children?

Sam: No. They won't—

Godfrey: They won't listen?

Sam: My kids never had no interest in to learn it. Now that they're older, they want to get back into it, and it's twice as hard to learn it.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: To practice the religion's twice as hard if you never gave it any, you know. [Long pause.]

Godfrey: Okay. Well, maybe we can move on to relocation here.

Sam: Mm-hmm.

Godfrey: Maybe you can sort of tell me what made you decide to move away from the reservation.

Sam: Well, in 1954 I moved to Minneapolis, right after I graduated, and I went to work at Minneapolis-Moline, where I worked in the core room.

Godfrey: Where? I'm sorry?

Sam: In the core room, in the foundry.

Godfrey: Oh.

Sam: Core room.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: I was kind of lead person in there, an eighteen-year-old kind of supervising some older people, you know.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: I got it by accident, but I did that. A few years after that, I got a job at Standard Ironworks. Art [Gahbow] and I went to work there.

Godfrey: Standard Ironworks. And that's in Minneapolis?

Sam: Mm-hmm. Art was a welder, and I was a spray painter. There was a bunch of us that went down there to take tests, and I passed the test. So I got job as spray painter. I don't know why I took all the tests to just be a spray painter. [Laughter.]

But I stayed there until—I must have worked there a couple years. Then I quit and moved back here. I got a job in Aitkin at Land O'Lakes at a turkey plant. I drove back and forth, and life was tough. I got about a dollar something an hour. If the car would break down and didn't have a starter on the car, had to find a hill to park on. Finally, a guy named Dan George, came by one time. He said, "I got an opportunity to go to Chicago, Minneapolis, or San Francisco, or L.A." What is your choice? I said, "Well, I'd like to go to San Francisco." So we filled it out and forgot about it. In the meantime, I went and applied for a job in Brainerd at that human service center there, as a laundry supervisor, work in the laundry 'cause I

had experience in laundry. And I passed the test. So about the same week the papers came from Brainerd that said I was accepted civil service job, all the paperwork was done for the relocation to San Francisco.

Godfrey: Oh! Mm-hmm.

Sam: So the choice was San Francisco. I don't know if was good or bad, but that's—

Godfrey: Now, Dan George—was he a government official?

Sam: Yeah, government. He worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Godfrey: So he actually sort of recruited you?

Sam: Yeah. He went to every house, trying to find people to send out into the mainstream of the dominant society.

Godfrey: Okay, uh-huh. This was during the time of termination and things like that.

Sam: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Godfrey: Who was tribal chairman at that time? Do you remember?

Sam: Uh, might have been Sam Yankee—no, not Sam Yankee. It might have been Fred Jones, probably.

Godfrey: Fred Jones?

Sam: Probably. Maybe Fred, I'm not sure.

Godfrey: Did you have any connection with the tribal government at that time?

Sam: No, it was pretty nil. There was—it was just—it was run by Bureau of Indian Affairs. All the affairs and the tribal

government was kind of put down, you know, with no authorities.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But we chose San Francisco.

Godfrey: Okay. Well, let's go back just a little bit to when you went to Minneapolis.

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: You went there because you needed work, is that right?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: What did your parents and relatives think of you moving away from the reservation?

Sam: They really encouraged it.

Godfrey: They encouraged it? They didn't object or say you shouldn't do it?

Sam: No, they told me I better get out and make a living. There was nothing here.

Godfrey: Did you feel that you were like an economic burden?

Sam: No. I figured I better get out there because times were tough once school got out. We know we had to get out because—we did. My brother left; he never been back. He left in '52.

Godfrey: He left before you did?

Sam: Yeah, he never been back here, never lived here. And I left in '54 till '75, probably just a few months there in '59, but there was nothing.

Godfrey: So was your brother one of the first people to move?

Sam: Yeah. He went on that training program, doing an apprenticeship in Milwaukee for a machinist. And they had those programs where you can go someplace and train, you know. But I never got into that myself because I got married right after high school.

Godfrey: Oh, you did?

Sam: I had to go to work for a living. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: What was your wife's name?

Sam: Kristine.

Godfrey: Kristine?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: So then both of you moved to Minneapolis then?

Sam: Yeah. She went to work, and she was a part machine operator in one of those sweat shops. I worked on various jobs but never one for long because it was—

Godfrey: Well, were you prepared for what you found there?

Sam: Minneapolis? Yeah.

Godfrey: You'd been there before?

Sam: Oh, yeah, 'cause my folks during the war moved to Duluth.

Godfrey: Oh.

Sam: And we lived there during the war. My dad went in the shipyards.

Godfrey: This was war industries that he was working in?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: So you had been to Duluth when you were, what, seventeen, sixteen, somewhere in there?

Sam: No, less than that.

Godfrey: Less than that?

Sam: Must have been nine or ten.

Godfrey: Nine or ten?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: — city. Duluth was our playground. We'd just go all over, you know, and just do things. We used to go down to the docks, go down to Inger Tower, all over, you know. Nobody ever bothered you. It was just big, big, big adventure.

Godfrey: Well, now—okay, your parents moved from Duluth. Was that the first time they had left the area?

Sam: Yeah, that's first time they left.

Godfrey: And as a child, you—did you find that hard to move into a big city?

Sam: No, it was no problem at all, just fit right in where we moved no problems. Even the school was no problem.

Godfrey: Was there a particular area of Duluth that Indian people lived in?

Sam: No, they lived all over.

Godfrey: Lived all over?

Sam: Yeah, some lived on Mesabi Avenue and on Fourth Avenue, Fifth Avenue, all the way down, east, you know. Some lived way down on the west end. It would make no difference.

Godfrey: What about Minneapolis?

Sam: Minneapolis?

Godfrey: Were there Indian neighborhoods?

Sam: No, there was none when we went up there, 'cause we lived in southeast, by the university. We stayed there. Then from there, we got a house on northeast. There was never communities till later, I guess.

Godfrey: Okay. Well, can you remember anything about, like your first experience in the cities? I mean, you had to come from, like, an isolated area here, and so something had to seem pretty strange when you first went there. Can you sort of recall your first view or maybe buses or, you know, dealing with other, you know, modern conveniences?

Sam: No, we loved it. Yeah, we loved what we were doing. We liked getting away from here and getting out on our own and just, you know, just doing things, doing things. We had the money, and good credit. No problem. Bought a brand new car.

Godfrey: Right away?

Sam: Uh-huh. That's how good my credit was.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: I used to go to Third Northwestern Bank and just tell them, "Can I have fifty dollars till payday?" Sure, sign right here.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But that's one thing our bookkeeper teacher used to do this in high school. Always maintain good credit. No matter what you do, how much you make, always maintain good credit. She was right. It worked.

Godfrey: You sound like my wife. [Laughter.]

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: I'm not very good at maintaining good credit.

Sam: Yeah, well, I did in them days. I'm not too good at that anymore. But there was no real big challenge in Minneapolis.

Godfrey: Well, I'm sure it's no surprise to you that some people did find it hard to adjust to.

Sam: Yeah. Well, I guess it depend on how you let it affect you, you know.

Godfrey: And it's a different pace of life.

Sam: Yeah. Most people went up there with no education. I had gotten along well in high school. Treated everybody the same—everybody treated me the same. But if you held back and get in your little corner, people notice, so, you know. I never did that.

Godfrey: I see. Okay, let's see. So there wasn't any—did you come home to visit very often, to the reservation?

Sam: No, we were just glad to get away. I just stayed down there and enjoyed the city, went to the zoos and picnics and stayed

down there.

Godfrey: 'Cause, I think it was this morning when I was talking to Marge, talked about coming back on weekends, visiting with family almost every weekend.

Sam: Yeah, we never did that. We stayed right down there. Well, her folks lived in Aitkin so that was quite a drive anyway until we moved them down to the Cities with us. We took her father down there and got him a job, and he retired down there.

Godfrey: Oh, really?

Sam: So we helped him. [Laughter.] But there was no problems, got along well. No majors. I don't know, I can't even think of any problems we had.

Godfrey: What about interaction with non-Indians? Did you ever feel segregated or discriminated against?

Sam: No. I'll tell you, we had one heck of a time because Art and I worked in the same. We just socialized in there like crazy. Everybody liked us in there. We had a great time. We had company parties, company picnics. We had fun in that Standard Ironworks. We were just the boys.

Godfrey: The boys, huh?

Sam: Yeah, even our bosses, some of them. We went places with our boss? We even ??? with the bosses.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: It make no difference.

Godfrey: Well, I want you to hold that thought 'cause I got to flip my tape over.

Sam: Okay.

Begin Tape One, Side Two

Godfrey: Let's see. How about in California? When did you move out to California?

Sam: Moved there in 1959.

Godfrey: And you were there for a long time?

Sam: Yeah, came back in 1975.

Godfrey: And what was your occupation out there?

Sam: Well, when I left here, my trade was at Standard Ironworks. Eventually, I was a painter. Then I went to structural steel fitting. When I got out there, I found out I wasn't qualified because of the advancement in metalwork. So, I tell you about the Bureau of Indian Affairs got us out there. And we had to report to the bureau office every morning, eight o'clock, sit there, while they went through the paper looking for jobs we could call in. And this was a line I wanted to get in, as a fitter, you know. And how incompetent the Bureau people were. They sent me out to Levi Strauss as a fitter. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: Really?

Sam: Yeah, they took me in the office there. Levi Strauss is down here. You take bus 15 down here, down to Mission Street, then you get off on Fourteenth and then you walk down two blocks. You'll come to Levi Strauss. Now when you get on the bus, they had that little miniature where you put the dimes in, and be sure to ask for a transfer. And here's the way the transfer looks. [Laughter.]

And I was sitting there, "Oh, my god." What do you think I am, you know? Then when you come back, you can use the

transfer or walk two blocks down because that, that's around back, and you can use the transfer.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: I went to Levi Strauss. And I felt kind of foolish going down there, but I had to bring back the referral slip. They went put me down there as a structural fitter, as a fitter at the Levi Strauss. But they were, they were really incompetent. They gave us no aptitude test or nothing there, just took down that you were a fitter and—. Finally, one day I broke away. They find me a job down by Hunter's Point, Hunter's Point job, down by the wharfs working at cutting grill bricks. Paid two bucks an hour.

Godfrey: Cutting?

Sam: Grill bricks. You know, grill bricks, for the grills?

Godfrey: Oh, okay.

Sam: At two bucks an hour. In those days, rent was two hundred-some dollars a month. And the Bureau sent me down there. So, and they paid us, when I first got there, they paid us thirty dollars a week to live on. And then they bought your groceries and here. It wasn't nothing. And we complained. They said, "You can't have steak every day." You know, well [laughter]—but like a steak, we'd cut it up to last the week, you know. But they were really bad.

Godfrey: So your expectations were to find different jobs?

Sam: Yeah. There was a great big building about big as a block, you know. It was about five stories high. We had Indians from all over the country in that building, that come on relocation. You met Navajos, Mohawks, any tribe you want to think of who lived in that building. And there's just—I don't know.

Godfrey: Did you interact with them and talk to them about it?

Sam: Yeah, we used to have monthly meetings in there. The Christian group started a, kind of a group meeting—Episcopalians, Presbyterians.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: They got together. I think they were in the plains more, and they used to go. So I used to go up there and listen to them talk, you know. They'd preach for an hour and then have socializing, just go listen to them. But we lived there about a year, and it was one big happy place here. People drank in there.

Godfrey: This is the building, huh?

Sam: Yeah. It was a big building on Church and ???, right by the Twin Peaks. Finally I got tired of working at that grill brick.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And I saved enough to buy—I bought a little car. So one day, I just didn't go in. I took off. I went down south San Francisco, stopped at United States Steel, went in, filled out an application. I got back, the landlord told me I was supposed to report to work the next morning.

Godfrey: Really?

Sam: Mm-hmm. I worked there all those years.

Godfrey: So you had to go out and find your own job, then?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: They didn't help you.

Sam: Uh-huh. But I couldn't be a fitter. They called me a fitter-up,

you know, almost a fitter. So I had to go to school in Oakland and study metallurgy and blueprint reading at night—worked on days, went to Oakland at night and went to school and take welding. I had to learn all the—I finally made it. I finally—I'm finally a fitter. Then we went on strike. I went to work at Bethlehem Steel. We made that tube across the Bay, and we built all the pipes for that pipeline in Alaska.

Godfrey: Is that right?

Sam: Yeah, so I'm a pipefitter, shipfitter, structural steel fitter. That's my trade. It's a boilermaker-by-trade is what they call it.

Godfrey: Uh-huh.

Sam: But I worked there for years. And used to come back here on vacations every once, every two years or so.

Godfrey: Oh, you did come back when you could?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: As you came back, did you notice changes in the community?

Sam: Yeah. I noticed new houses going up, and more resorts, more crime, more drinking, you know. Just everything was changing. It just wasn't the same anymore.

Godfrey: Yeah. Well, do you think your urban experience was a positive thing or a negative thing?

Sam: It was positive. I enjoyed working out there 'cause when I was working in Bethlehem, I worked seven days a week. I never knew what day it was. Eventually I bought two houses. I bought one house in ??? and one in San Jose. Then I rented one out.

But like everything else, everything—I got to drinking. Everybody drank in the shipyard. Everybody just, you know—everybody carried a bottle of Jack Daniels. Even I carried a bottle of Jack Daniels. So we'd sit on break with a bottle, you know. Get off after work; bars open at two o'clock, you know. Get off work, we had two hours in the bar. Go to sleep in the car, go to work at six again, have a drink on the way to work 'cause the bars open at six.

Godfrey: Well, that's got to catch up to you sooner or later.

Sam: Well, the family life started to deteriorate. That's one reason why we moved back here. My wife had enough of the good life, I guess, or you know. But she's—we separated out there. I was living in the hotel next to where I work 'cause she got a restraining order for me not to come home 'cause I drank too much. But I used to go out with the bosses, you know. We'd go out, the bosses ??? living in that hotel. They were all so brave. But I fell right in with the mainstream, see?

Godfrey: Uh-huh.

Sam: And one day she come. Me and my boss just got home, and there she was in my room. People were selling both houses. Will you sign?

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: "Oh, yeah," I said, "I'll sign," 'cause I thought she'd never get, she'd never do it, see?

Godfrey: Mm-hmm. [Brief interruption by unknown person.]

Sam: You know, so I signed them. Two weeks later, she sold them. Two weeks later she was over at the door, you know, "Can we, can you pull the trailer back to Minnesota for us?" Well, ??? I'm barred from the house. I can't come over there, and I said yeah. The next week she was back again. We're leaving on what was it, on the Monday before Thanksgiving. She

says, "We've got to use your car," 'cause she had a Toyota and she couldn't pull the trailer.

Godfrey: Oh, no.

Sam: I had a Ford. And the more she talked to me, the more I thought, oh, man, I should go back and visit. Finally, she talked me into it. I pulled the trailer back, the U-haul. Stayed.

Godfrey: Is that right?

Sam: Yeah. We got here Thanksgiving Day.

Godfrey: What year was this?

Sam: 1974.

Godfrey: '74? [Brief interruption taken.]

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Well, let's see. So if you came back then, how long did it take you before you got into tribal government?

Sam: Well, first, when I got here, I thought I was going back, you know.

Godfrey: Back to California?

Sam: Yeah, 'cause my job was still there. But, I didn't have the money, and my wife wouldn't give it to me. She wanted me to stay here, so I stayed. So I went to work in Minneapolis, to Crown Ironworks.

Godfrey: Where? Indianapolis?

Sam: Minneapolis.

Godfrey: Oh, Minneapolis. Okay.

Sam: Yeah. I worked there till I hurt my shoulder one day. Must have worked there about three months. Everything was different there, you know. The union was different. In California if you were a fitter, that's all you did was fit. You didn't touch a torch or welding or nothing or you'd get fined.

Godfrey: They had strict rules about what you did?

Sam: Yeah. Here it was wide open. You had to get the metal, prepare the metal, put it together, weld it, and send it out as a finished product there, yourself. I had to weld it, and I was no welder. But I did alright?. One day I was making a—you ever see those walkways in the city, connect a building to building?

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: I made those.

Godfrey: Oh!

Sam: That's what I was making at Crown Iron. One day the thing slipped, and I grabbed it, you know, and it tore my shoulder. So I was on workman's comp, and I came down here and layin' around, and a job came up here, as a counselor in the high school.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: I went and applied for it. And they asked me what activities I had with youth. And I said, I used to be a Boy Scout. I had a Boy Scout troop in Hunter's Point, California, and also I had a softball team called Blackheads.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: They said, oh, you got experience with kids. So they hired me. So I went to work in the high school as a counselor.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And they got the Title 7 program.

Godfrey: This is here at—

Sam: Mm-hmm.

Godfrey: I'm trying to think of the name of the school.

Sam: Onamia.

Godfrey: Okay.

Sam: That was Onamia High School. I went to work in the high school. Then they got some other federal programs in education, and they made me—I was the human relations specialist. And what I did was, I got human relations training for the school teachers—Indian cultures and stuff, cross-cultures. Then the director went to Minneapolis one day and never came back. So the man that offered me the job was the director, so I was director for a couple years.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: And then, during that time, we had counselors, we had curriculum developers in the school, and we had mostly counseling, tutorial programs, math and English. That's when Don came to work for us.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Don Wedll. So he came to work for me first.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: He was the tutorial teacher. My kids started school here, and they said, "What's wrong here," you know? Everybody looks down on us here. And I told them to never mind. That's just the way it is here. You know, it wasn't like that back home. Back home we had black, white, orange, green in one block, and nobody paid attention to what color you were.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But back here, it's first thing they notice, and they were outspoken, because they were born out there, see. They came out here in high school and the teacher asked him, somebody would answer, one of my boys, especially. They'd ask him a question, he didn't answer. And that teacher got mad at him, and he called that uppity Indian, you know, that loudmouth Indian, and he slapped him.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: My wife heard that. She went a-tearing right into the school and "You, you, you, you, don't hit no kids," you know. Well, the principal ??? said—well, he's German. He's kind of a high-strung German. Well, ——— bull shit ——. He don't hit nobody! I'll hit him back, too." Well, she just, she was, really—my wife was—she was really high-strung. She was just really. She was really something 'cause when we left California, she was a night manager for the airline facilities down there, for air mail. She was the night manager.

Godfrey: Really?

Sam: She gave that up to come back here. In them years there, she was getting $25,000. That was a lot back then.

Godfrey: A lot of money, yeah.

Sam: And she left that to come back here. But we both worked.

Finally she went to work one of them programs, and we worked in the school. And the kids would come in the office every day, you know, tell me their problems. We'd go in the principal's office. I'd be kind of a liaison, you know. And I remember things were getting pretty tense. My kids were leaders of it, you know, because they spoke their minds, you know. I used to work in there, and I'd have to tell them to kind of cool it, you know. No! We're not going to be like these kids here, you know, and let people boss us around and stuff. And my wife told them, "Just stick by your guns," you know.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So they did. They got the other kids to see that they were being discriminated. And one—I remember a Monday. It was a holiday. We didn't work, but the school was on. The band policy stated that we couldn't work that day, so we didn't go to work.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Well, all hell must have broke loose in the school that day 'cause nobody was there from Title 7 program, the Title 4 program, and the Johnson O'Malley program were all home for a holiday. So we went back on Tuesday, just opened the office, walked in. The whole place was filled with Indian kids, saying, "We want to walk out of this school. We're not ever coming back here." I called the reservation. I called Art, and I said, "Guess what, Art? The kids just walked out of the school, and they don't want to stay here no more." He said, "Sit tight. I'll send a school bus." [Laughter.] School bus. We started a school across the street. I was first principal.

Godfrey: You were first principal?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Yeah? Huh!

Sam: Well, we had professional people on board, you know, in Title 7 programs, so they became the teachers. I was kind of the first principal, so I took lesson plans for the week and recorded a lesson plan for the week. We ran like that. That's why the alternative school started.

Godfrey: That's an interesting story.

Sam: Uh-huh. And a lot of things come into play about civil rights and how the school was violation of civil rights or they'd lose all their federal funding.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And also their 874 money is where each kid that went to school got $874 per year for each Indian student going. You pulled out three hundred students, you know what, [laughter] you know how the school board went.

Godfrey: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Sam: Well, they finally compromised and started the alternative school, which went well first year. All of a sudden, two years later, it was all integrated, all white, mostly white. The Indian was back, discriminated in his own alternative school. So plans were made to start this school out here, the Nay-Ah-Shing school.

Godfrey: What year did Nay-Ah-Shing actually get built?

Sam: It must have been about '77.

Godfrey: '77?

Sam: Yeah, '78, somewhere around there.

Godfrey: Uh-huh.

Sam: And my mother was on the board then. She was the secretary-treasurer of the band. I used to go see her every Sunday morning. She'd tell me the week's activities and the government, what was happening. She was a CHR besides—community health representative. So somewhere along the line, she contacted hepatitis, and eventually it killed her. So the position was open in the band for secretary-treasurer. And people asked me if I wanted to run for the position. They'd back me. And I said, "No, I've no interest in that." Finally they talked me in. I ran, and I won the election, so I became the secretary-treasurer, 1979.

Godfrey: '79?

Sam: '78 or '79. I don't remember dates anymore. But in them years the funding sources were starting to go down, and the government was getting more strict on audits and reports. The Department of Human Resource, out of Washington—the commissioner or whatever he was over there got a press release out that only those tribes that had their government together, had their accounting together, would be the tribes that would be funded.

So the first thing I did, I centralized all the accounts. We used to be in the old school. I knocked some walls down, and I brought all the bookkeeper stuff over. I brought them out and centralized the accounts, and I hired Jay ??? from the tribe. I requested of the tribe—he worked on the band as EDA coordinator for the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. I asked the Tribe, "Since EDA is not operating, you know, there's no funding for it, could I use him?" I went and set up a chart of accounts and all that on the band. They said, "Sure." So I told Jay, "I want you to start a chart of accounts, check registrars and that whole sheebang. That's all you'll do, and you'll answer to me."

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So he did. We centralized all the accounts, got it going. And

then we started thinking, "You know, we got to be more receptive to our people." And there was no money to pay the salaries of the government officials. So they put us in different programs, you know.

Godfrey: That's where you got your pay?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: From the different programs?

Sam: Yeah, 'cause I forget where Marge went, under some—oh, the Elder American Program. I went under tribal government contract with the Bureau. I forget where George went. Art worked under—indirect costs. And we got ??? under indirect costs. So the government project, tribal government contract, you know, all the other reservations—they were paid from that. But they had no goals, no objectives, so they come and told us here. The superintendent come down from the tribe and says, "These programs, you've got objectives you got to meet. You got to have a program." So we did. Sat down, we wrote the development of this government resolution in 1981. March of 1981, I presented the resolution to the tribe or to the band, that we go on separation of powers.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: The band voted for it, and we've been in that system since. But that took a whole, probably two years of constant meetings to set up all these laws. I was the speaker, Marge was District One rep, George ??? District Two, District Three was what-do-you-call-'er. Jeeze, I know her well. I can't even think of her name. Julie Shingobee.

Godfrey: Julie Shingobee.

Sam: And Art was chief executive.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So we had our band assembly where we met every single day, five days a week—just developing laws, reviewing laws, doing laws. It was a lot of work. [Laughter.] But that was how we came about it was that tribal government contract from the Bureau, where they wanted goals and objectives.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm. And what were the goals and objectives?

Sam: To develop a tribal government for your preservation.

Godfrey: And once you developed the tribal government, what goals did you set out for the tribe?

Sam: Yeah. Then we did that the first year. We developed the government. We completed it. What was next now was the development and the money to operate the government—which there was none, no money.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But we got by, and we must have put on about thirty-six chapters. I ran two terms. In 1984 I said, "I'm not running again." I was burned out. I was burned out. And my wife was working for St. Cloud in the abuse center, you know. She started that center here.

Godfrey: The abuse center here?

Sam: Yeah. The woman house. St. Cloud has a battered woman's program. She was also the international member, international or national member, and she was the chairman of the Minnesota chapter. But she was big in that stuff. But she passed away. She died of cancer about three years ago.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But that's the way it started, and that was a lot of work to

develop that. That's a lot of work we put into that.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: And we had the appropriations and that court. We had to put the court together, you know, all those—had the courts. It got pretty trying. Probably Marge told you it was pretty, a lot of work.

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: It was work!

Godfrey: Do you know much about the business activities of the band during this time period, the '70s and the '80s?

Sam: The '70s, we had two resorts. But they went down the tubes.

Godfrey: They were the marina and—

Sam: The Drift Inn.

Godfrey: —the Driftwood Inn?

Sam: See, what happened there—it was a thriving business when they first opened the doors 'cause we were right on the lake. But the Indian patronage of the place knocked it down because the whites wouldn't come in when a bunch of drunk Indians were in the place, see? That's what was our downfall.

Godfrey: Uh-huh.

Sam: And also the local kids would steal out of the cars parked along the lake. It just, you know.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: But we had a construction company that built houses, and it employed a lot of men, carpenters.

Godfrey: Construction company?

Sam: Built roads and—

Godfrey: Is that still functioning?

Sam: No.

Godfrey: No.

Sam: No, that went down the tubes.

Godfrey: What happened there?

Sam: Well, under the HUD, they were figured they going to make a million dollars building all those houses. Right out of onset, the guy from HUD said nobody ever made money, any profit on HUD contracts. And he was right.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So what's more, he built a unit, ??? unit to build it $57,000 each unit with the manpower we had.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: In the final analysis, it cost you $75,000 to build that because of the manpower. He built houses in Sandy Lake, fifty miles from here. Got his boat there. Well, on the way, "Well, let's go hunting." They'd go hunting. Wasn't nothing done with the house; the guys were out hunting. When they got done hunting, they went and did their couple hours work, and come back.

Godfrey: So it was hard to maintain?

Sam: Maintain control, yeah. Now I told a guy one time—we had a—then we had a white group building houses in Hinckley area. I wanted a comparison of what it cost. Well, these guys were on line, except for that Indian labor was at that, see?

Godfrey: Was the difference.

Sam: Yeah. So you figure profit; it was gone, see?

Godfrey: Yeah.

Sam: There was none.

Godfrey: Goes quickly with those figures. [Laughter.]

Sam: Nobody gave a dang. Nobody cared as long they were working and building. But nobody was watching the downfall of the funds. There was a crisis point nobody gave a darn about. So it came and went. All of sudden you owed maybe $500,000. You were in the hole, so what are you going to do.

Godfrey: Well, what about here at the casino? I mean, there's a lot of Indian labor here now.

Sam: Yeah. Well, after I got out of office in 1984, we had a bingo going here, bingo operations. And they hired Barb Grove. Barb Grove is the chairman of the Minnesota Gaming Association. She ran our bingo first—couldn't make a go of it. We started it with all volunteer help. Me, Marge, and everybody volunteered to run the bingo. It was getting so big, we thought we'd hire a director and people to run it, but it started to go downhill. So we hired another manager, where he started to come up, and then all of a sudden he started going down. Then that's when I went out of office and I started my woodcutting business.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And one day Art called me over to the office. He says "Doug, you want to run my bingo?" "Oh, chief, I don't think so," I said, "I'm doing good in woodcutting." Woodcutting business is great business, and I was doing a lot of business. He said, "I need somebody to run that. We're going in the hole fast." "Well, I hope you find somebody." I went back cutting, and he called me back again, "Please run my bingo." "All right, chief, I'll do it for you." So I run the bingo.

We had fifteen tables with pull tabs. Two years later, we had thirty slot machines. We ran the slots, we run the pull tabs. It was—people say we didn't make money, but we made money, because we operated the band—the band taxed us five percent across the board.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And they took the profits. Left us with minimal operating fund, but we operated. We maintained our reservation. We sent money over here every week, we keep their accounts operating. Oh, a lot of people will say we didn't make money. We were making money. We were operating in the red, but not in the volume you see now.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Then we met with Stan ??? and Dan, Steve Anderson, and we just started talking about building a big bingo hall here, and at Hinckley. And that was the plan, to build a big bingo hall and in Hinckley, you know, maybe a two-thousand seater. So I started negotiating with the big wrestler. What was his name? Larry Henning.

Godfrey: Larry Henning?

Sam: Yeah. He'd come in here and looked over, and he says, "Doug, what'll it take, what kind of permission would I need to come in here and just redo the whole building, put in about

300 machines and bingo." I said, "I don't know. You'd have to talk to your architects and accountants see what it cost you." The band was negotiating with ??? and those guys, they're going to build a big casino in Hinckley.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So Larry put in his proposal to the band. I don't think they took him too seriously at first, because all of the sudden, here comes Tommy and all those guys and looked over the building. They said they had first option, and they would do it. That's how it started.

Godfrey: Is that right?

Sam: Yeah. But either way, we could have had it. Part of it was up to the band. I don't know if the band wouldn't have allowed it.

Godfrey: Yeah. Well, in the past other operations had failed. And this—to me it looks like it's just doing gangbusters.

Sam: Yeah. The difference here is management. It's managed well. It's managed. I don't know. I got my problems with it, but I'm not going to say them. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: Okay. Well, generally speaking, it is providing a lot of employment to the tribe?

Sam: Nah. It's coming down every month.

Godfrey: Hmm?

Sam: It's coming down every month. I had—I run the slots service department. I got 115 employees, and I started working here last—when the first day it opened. I was bingo director. From bingo I come to slot services. And since November 1991—I just took a survey out yesterday—I've terminated one hundred people.

Godfrey: Really?

Sam: Indian and white. For attendance, various other reasons. But attendance was the main problem. They got to be taught punctuality. Every position has got to be filled daily. If you lose one, you got three or four people you're affecting. They got to learn that you just can't take off when you feel like it.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: There's so many things in there that happened, though, because of the culture. They can go to powwows, and they belong to that drum. They go, with no regard to nothing else. They do their culture first, worry about the job second.

Many of us got to recognize these things. And I wrote up an article for them to read, but I'm scared the elders will see it and turn it down. You can't write that stuff about the religion and about the activities, why we experience absentees in certain times of the year, certain parts of the year.

Godfrey: Well, it certainly makes it difficult to run a business.

Sam: Yeah, especially with Native American help. They see a powwow or something, they're going, you know. Loss of job is nothing to them. They'll go. They'll fulfill their spiritual obligation first.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: And the whites look at them and say, "We go to church Sundays. We still come to work."

Godfrey: On Monday.

Sam: Yeah, but this is totally different. These guys live their spirituality daily, most of them, you know.

Godfrey: Yeah. Well, Doug, how do you solve that?

Sam: I don't know. If I knew, I'd be a rich man. [Laughter.] With all the casinos going up in the country, I could. But even with that, this casino has the most supervisors, Indians and supervisor capacity in any other reservations at casinos in Minnesota.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: So that tells you something else.

Godfrey: Could you have a pool of floating non-Indians that fill these positions during certain times?

Sam: Well, you could, yeah. What I did to my department, I started a labor pool, where we train people between thirty, twenty and thirty people, that are in this labor pool, with the times, where they live, how long it takes to get to work, on what shifts they're available for. So when somebody's missing, we call one of them to fill that slot, see.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: That seems to help, but you can only allow so many. It's still a white man's world. They still got policy.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: If you miss so many days, you're—

Godfrey: You're out.

Sam: Yeah. So it's a tough—

Godfrey: Well, do you know what happened to the IBM electronics?

Sam: That went broke.

Godfrey: That went broke, too?

Sam: Yeah. They didn't have any—everything was getting modernized, the expertise in electronics, and nobody was trained for it in the building when the new things come out. They couldn't compete, so you couldn't bid projects that other companies had experienced people in. They couldn't bid those projects. Somebody else got them. Eventually, they didn't have nothing, so they had to close doors.

Godfrey: Hmm.

Sam: You couldn't get nobody to go to school for electronics, you know, pick up things. Even on bidding on certain jobs, federal jobs, any kind of jobs—there was just nobody trained for that. Nobody wanted to take time to do it because they wanted to be in the mainstream on the payroll right now rather than later.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: There's no long-range planning for that, see?

Godfrey: Did they also experience the same kind of labor problems?

Sam: Back then?

Godfrey: Yeah. People going off for powwows and not showing up for work?

Sam: No, because what happened there was, we had mostly whites staff.

Godfrey: Is that right?

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Huh. I thought this was— [Laughter.]

Sam: Well, that whole factory—I know we used to get on his case all the time, why he'd have so many Indians? Well, he got to have people to fill his contracts. He hired whites. One thing, the whites came to work. They didn't care about the wage, just the fringe they were worried about. You hire a rural Minnesota, ??? hospitalization, and they get it. They work for anything just to get that fringe.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: That's why it started here. People didn't care about the wages; it was the fringe. But now, after a year, it started to sting. They want the fringe, and yet they want more salary now. So it changes, you know. [Laughter.]

Godfrey: Well, we've talked about a lot of things here.

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: Is there anything, any areas that you'd like to talk about that maybe we haven't covered?

Sam: Well, it's just that you know, it's the responsibility of this place to the people. The one thing I don't like about this. There should be other things rather than just casino. What bothers me is when I go to any household, that's all they talk is casino—casino this, casino that.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: There's a lake here, a beautiful lake here. It's—you know, there's stuff.

Godfrey: You've got the old marina and the Driftwood still.

Sam: Yeah, but it's all—that's all it is.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: My boss just come in from New Jersey, and he said that's the way it was in New Jersey. But I don't think it is. This is a whole different ballgame here, 'cause all of a sudden you got a—what you got here? White Castles here in the middle of the reservation all of a sudden? I don't like the attitudes the Indians are taking. Everything's the casino—casino this, casino that. That bothers me.

Godfrey: So they should diversify?

Sam: Yeah, do some other things. Think of other things to do. Maybe it will change, but I don't know. It's—my little grandchildren go there. I'm going to the casino, they're playing. Drive over to the casino, they have little cars, you know, that kind of stuff.

Godfrey: Sure.

Sam: Maybe some people think it's good, but I don't. I think there should be other things than just this place, although it is my bread and butter here.

Godfrey: So it has some adverse impacts, you think?

Sam: Yeah. Like they should be thinking of other things. My little grandchildren said when he gets up, he's going to come to work here.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Well, better go to school first. ??? go to school, come to work here, go learn the trade. And I used to—when I was in California, when I was at Bethlehem—"Doug, you're going to take a crew out today, go around the Bay area, fix some ships." There were three crews. There was an Indian crew, black crew, and a white crew.

Godfrey: Mm-hmm.

Sam: Oh boy, I get that Indian crew. Come in the next morning, load all the trucks, and all the colored guys piling into my two trucks. I tell you, that was the worst.

Godfrey: Huh.

Sam: We went and fixed the Hancock in Alameda, and we worked for eighteen hours straight, just getting the ship ready to go. I lost a colored guy. He ran back up in the galley to buy cigarettes from a sailor, and the ship left. [Laughter.] I almost got the axe for that, see.

Godfrey: Well, I think maybe we'll conclude the interview here.

Sam: Mm-hmm.

Godfrey: I want to thank you.

Sam: Yeah.

Godfrey: It's been very interesting.

Sam: Yeah.

End of Interview.

Index to Doug Sam Oral History

General Subject Areas Based on Questionnaire Categories

People, Places, Organizations Mentioned