



*The
Little
Earth
Oracular
History
Project*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ORIGIN OF THE LITTLE EARTH ORAL HISTORY PROJ	5
<i>by Dan Trudeau, Assistant Professor of Geography, Macalester College</i>	
INTERVIEW WITH JOLENE JONES	7
<i>Conducted by Hayley Koenig and Shivaun Watchorn on April 2, 2008.</i>	
Reflection by Shivaun Watchorn	25
Reflection by Hayley Koenig	26
INTERVIEW WITH JANE WILSON	27
<i>Conducted by Callie Thuma and Claire Reuning on April 16, 2008.</i>	
Reflection by Callie Thuma	37
INTERVIEW WITH THERESA DUNKLEY	39
<i>Conducted by Liz McCreary and Hannah Gelder on March 29, 2008.</i>	
Reflection by Hannah Gelder	51
Reflection by Liz McCreary	52
INTERVIEW WITH MARY	53
<i>Conducted by Andrew Graham and Robert Heyman on April 30, 2008.</i>	
Reflection by Andrew Graham	65
Reflection by Robert Heyman	66
INTERVIEW WITH LORI ELLIS	67
<i>Conducted by Claudia Leung and Kim DeLanghe on April 14, 2008.</i>	
Reflection by Kim DeLanghe	89
Reflection by Claudia Leung	90

ORIGIN OF THE LITTLE EARTH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

by Dan Trudeau, Assistant Professor of Geography, Macalester College

This project started with a simple conversation. In October of 2007, my assistant, Claire Reuning, and I sat down to talk to Bill Ziegler about the history of Little Earth of United Tribes. We were working on a neighborhood history of Phillips and we learned that the archival records for Little Earth are sparse. So we went straight to the source in Little Earth to learn about its history. The conversation with Bill was enlightening; it provided a wealth of information that answered our admittedly basic questions and sparked new questions. Bill also noted that his knowledge of Little Earth's history was mostly second hand and that much of the history could be learned through talking to many of the long time residents. At that moment we all saw an opportunity: here was a chance to make history. Documenting the history of Little Earth would both enrich the history of the Phillips Neighborhood and provide a record for the current and future residents of Little Earth. Hence, this project was born.

I decided to make an *oral history* for several reasons. The most straightforward reason is that the history of Little Earth is relatively recent. It thus can be learned from people who are currently living and whose lives have been spent there. But there are other idealistic and practical reasons too. On the idealistic side, oral history can be democratic. Many history books are written by privileged individuals who ultimately speak for their subjects. In contrast, oral history allows people to narrate their lives and experiences in their own words and from their own perspective. Related to this point, oral history is authentic. People literally make their own history in terms that are meaningful to them. For these reasons, oral history is interesting. It is interesting to do and it is interesting to read and listen to. And that is one of the practical benefits of oral history – it engages the very people whose lives and experiences are documented in the historical record.

In December of 2007 I received permission from the Little Earth Residents Association to begin the Little Earth Oral History project. And in February of 2008, ten students from Macalester College joined me in the process of conducting an oral history of Little Earth. The students and I worked over the course of the semester to lay the groundwork for the project and recorded the first five interviews.

This booklet documents the transcriptions of these interviews and the students' personal reflections on the interviews they conducted. The attached compact disc has the recordings of the interviews. These materials are made available by permission of the interviewees and by the hard work of the interviewers who have faithfully transcribed the recordings.

Including the interviewers' personal reflections may at first seem odd, but I hope you will come to see that as an important part of the oral history. In the spirit of making history democratic, it is important to include the interviewers' voices too. The interviewers are already present in the interviews—they are the voices to ask questions and give prompts to evoke richer answers. But the interviewers are not identified nor are their lives explored in the interview in any substantive way. In order to acknowledge their participation in making history, I wanted the student interviewers to contribute in a notable way. The students have thus written a reflection that makes public their thoughts about their interview and what they learned from the interviewer. I hope these enrich your appreciation of the other voices in this oral history.

This booklet marks a beginning. The project has documented the perspective of individuals who have lived at Little Earth for 20 or more years. There are certainly many other long time residents whose voices can contribute to the history of Little Earth. I will continue the project to record their voices. As the project grows, I expect to make digital versions of the interview transcripts and recordings available through Little Earth's website. Furthermore, I also expect to make paper and CD versions of these materials available through the Hennepin County Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH JOLENE JONES

Conducted by Hayley Koenig and Shivaun Watchorn on April 2, 2008.

HAYLEY: Okay, so starting the interview with Jolene Jones. The first question is what is your full name?

JOLENE: Jolene Lee Jones.

HAYLEY: When were you born?

JOLENE: 1962.

HAYLEY: And where?

JOLENE: In Minneapolis.

HAYLEY: How would you describe your ethnicity?

JOLENE: American Indian.

HAYLEY: Are you affiliated with a tribe?

JOLENE: Yes.

HAYLEY: Which tribe?

JOLENE: Aloseh band of Ojibwa. Lac Courte Oreilles.

HAYLEY: What are your parents' names?

JOLENE: My mom's name is Harriet Williams and my dad's name is Raymond White.

HAYLEY: And what were their tribal affiliations?

JOLENE: My mother's from White Earth, Minnesota, and my dad's from Elseo, in Wisconsin.

HAYLEY: And then I have some questions about the family you grew up with. Where did you live when you were growing up?

JOLENE: Mostly South Minneapolis.

HAYLEY: Can you tell me anything about your siblings and parents? Do you have any siblings?

JOLENE: Yes, I have a lot of siblings.

HAYLEY: Okay. Did your parents work?

JOLENE: Yeah. My dad worked. My mother had a master's in social work. She was a student when I was young. She went to the University of Minnesota.

HAYLEY: Where do your siblings live now?

JOLENE: Most of them live in Minnesota.

HAYLEY: Are you married?

JOLENE: Yes.

HAYLEY: Do you have children?

JOLENE: Yes.

HAYLEY: How many?

JOLENE: I have one son.

HAYLEY: How old is he?

JOLENE: He is 29.

HAYLEY: Where does he live now?

JOLENE: He lives here in Little Earth.

HAYLEY: Who do you live with now?

JOLENE: I live with my two grandchildren and my niece.

HAYLEY: What languages did you speak at home as a child?

JOLENE: English.

HAYLEY: How many years of formal education have you had?

JOLENE: Some college.

HAYLEY: Where did you go to school?

JOLENE: High school, I went to Heart of the Earth. For college and that, I went to OIC for the training stuff, training for [inaudible] and that. For regular college I went to MCTC [Minneapolis Community and Technical College].

HAYLEY: Do you work?

JOLENE: Not currently, no.

HAYLEY: Have you worked in the past?

JOLENE: Yes.

HAYLEY: Where have you worked?

JOLENE: Little Earth, Indian Health Board, the Indian Center.

HAYLEY: What did you do at Little Earth?

JOLENE: I was the resident service advocate.

HAYLEY: Now we're going to focus more specifically on your experience at Little Earth. Where did you live before moving to Little Earth?

JOLENE: The last place we lived before moving to Little Earth was Cedar Square West, down on Cedar. I don't think they're called that anymore, I don't know what they're called, but they used to be called Cedar Square West.

HAYLEY: Where else have you lived? All over Minneapolis?

JOLENE: Yeah.

HAYLEY: How did you hear about Little Earth?

JOLENE: My mother moved here when I was like, 11 years old.

HAYLEY: Can you tell me a little about your day to day life when you first moved to Little Earth?

JOLENE: I was probably 11 years old. It was mostly playing outside. They used to have swings in that in each cluster, like their own mini-parks. swings, tire swing, and that. Picnic tables. Mostly played outside, went to school, played basketball. Just the basic kid stuff, teen stuff.

HAYLEY: Do you have any specific memories of any important Little Earth events from when you first came here?

JOLENE: I know, I think they, maybe a year or two after we started living here, they went in... There was a lot of stuff going on at that time. I mean,

they had pow wows, and I know they had, I think they were managing it themselves at one point in time.

HAYLEY: Can you describe a day in your life at Little Earth now?

JOLENE: Sure. On Mondays, I come over here, check my emails, and take care of business. Then I go to the elders' room and we sew. We make dance regalia for the kids. I do that on Mondays and Tuesdays. Then basically go home, cook dinner, get the kids ready. But it's wintertime too. In the summertime I spend a lot more time outside, walking around, visiting with neighbors, saying hi, "How'd you do through the winter?" You know. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: Are you close with any of your neighbors?

JOLENE: Mmhmm. Yeah.

SHIVAUN: Do you have a lot of neighbors who have lived here a long time as well?

JOLENE: Not as many as I did about a year ago, but yeah, a lot of neighbors. And when you've lived here a long time, you know who's lived here a long time. You're like, "Hello," and you know their kids and you've watched them grow.

SHIVAUN: What happened a year ago to change that? Is there an event that changed that?

JOLENE: No. People are moving away. They're moving somewhere. They're moving to their own housing. Some move back to the reservations.

HAYLEY: A few years ago, in 2003, Little Earth had the 30th anniversary celebration. Can you describe anything about the celebration?

JOLENE: I thought the celebration was cute. It was really nice. They blocked off Cedar Avenue, they served dinner, they had a drum, they gave away awards. But the coolest thing I thought I seen was they had a puppet show. There was this Indian guy who brought puppets. Well, they weren't puppets puppets, like that, but they were good. One was a little Indian guy with a feather. They had dance

outfits. He had all kinds of things. I thought it was kind of cute because we had balloons all up and at the same time 25 1/2th [street] was being changed from that to E.M. Stately Street and we did a big presentation on that, but when the guy was doing his little puppet show, it was very cool, you had to be there, you had to see it. He had this little Indian guy who had a cowboy hat on with a feather in his hat, and he was talking, you know, telling jokes, and two of the balloons went “Boom! Boom!” and the puppet turned and looked and said, “Is someone shooting at me?” So that was kinda funny. I enjoyed that. Plus they had a silent auction, and the whole community was invited out to the silent auction and a big dinner. They had a comedian out there too, Charlie Hill. He was funny. It was really really nice. I really really enjoyed it.

HAYLEY: Was it supposed to honor specific people or events?

JOLENE: Yeah, because it was the 30th anniversary it was supposed to honor how we got to where we at then. I believe we honored Elaine Stately because we changed 25 1/2th but that was more something that LERA was supposed to do on theirs. But they added some people from HUD, they asked Henry Cisneros to come, he couldn't come. It had more to do with the lawsuits and the people who helped us become Little Earth again. So that's what that was about, and [in whisper] I'm saying um a lot.

HAYLEY: Do you think the celebration honored any particular values of Little Earth?

JOLENE: I think it did. It valued don't forget to say thank you to the people who helped you. We said thank you. It was a long hard struggle, and it was a nice celebration because we were able to do it. Thirty years, you're still standing and I think it did do a lot of our values by having a big dinner for everybody. It was our way of saying thank you to a lot of people who stood by Little Earth's side.

SHIVAUN: Are there going to be any celebrations for the 35th anniversary? Is that a big anniversary?

JOLENE: I have no idea, but I know that this year is LERA's 25th anniversary, and I don't know if LERA's doing anything, but they should because

they have a lot of people to say thank you to too.

HAYLEY: Looking back on all the years you've lived here, does Little Earth seem like the same place that it was when you first moved in?

JOLENE: No.

HAYLEY: What's changed? The biggest changes?

JOLENE: The biggest change? It's the gangs. When I was a kid growing up, when I moved in here, we didn't have gangs. We had families, some of them were awful big and could be a gang, but they didn't have gangs and they didn't have as much violence. Most of the fighting was done with hands, and arguing, and that. That's the only thing. Actually, the gangs ain't as bad as they were either, a few years back. So it is getting better.

HAYLEY: Any other changes that you want to note?

JOLENE: I think they've done a lot of construction. It's nice. That's very nice, to have grass. I lived here when we didn't have grass, when we had dirt for a very, very long time, many years we had dirt when we were in receivership. It's not nice.

HAYLEY: Going back to the gangs, you said it's a little less of a problem the last few years. Are there any specific people who have pushed for that change? Why do you think gang activity may be reducing a little bit?

JOLENE: I think it's influencing through the city. I don't know who I can credit. I give a lot of credit to our community itself, because they came out a lot, they complain, they call the police, and they did it. They had meetings and they told them, “Do you want to live this way? Do you want to be responsible for a child being killed on our property?” If you don't you need to make that call, because if you don't you're just as guilty. So I think it's the residents themselves who wanted the change.

SHIVAUN: At what point did gangs become a really big problem? At what point did you notice them coming out?

JOLENE: I don't know. It was just like, they slowly

were here and they just became a part of our community. It started years ago, I mean, when they first, when we first heard of the gangs, they thought, “You know, the Indian community is so small, we should be able to control their gangs.” Yeah right, you know? We are a small minority but we aren’t that small where you can control something, especially when you’ve got reservations in the state too, where they can go to. So it’s like a back and forth, jumping from the reservation back down to Minneapolis. Whether we realize or not, a lot of people do say we’re like a little reservation. We’re not a reservation, you know, but we are the heartbeat of the Indian community in Minneapolis. This is where everyone comes when you want to know something. Even if you’ve never been to Minneapolis in your life, you come to Little Earth because you want to know does so and so live here, do you know this person? And because we are small but we ain’t that small, most of us do know something.

HAYLEY: Do you like living at Little Earth now?

JOLENE: Yes. I’ve always liked living at Little Earth. I love Little Earth.

HAYLEY: What do you like about it?

JOLENE: It’s home. Where else could I live where the people by me understand my culture, the way I parent, the things I do, the smells that—like when I burn sage and sweet grass, I don’t have to worry about my neighbors saying “That smells like drugs.” Because they know. And I like the feeling of family, and it does feel like a family.

HAYLEY: Is there anything you dislike about living at Little Earth? Anything you’d want to change?

JOLENE: [Long pause] I think they do too much politicking and not enough action. Too much talk, and not enough action. Let’s put it like that. That’s what I’d change. Less talk, more action.

HAYLEY: Is there any particular event or struggle that makes you feel that way, or just in general?

JOLENE: Just in general.

HAYLEY: Again, looking back on the years you’ve lived here, does the Phillips neighborhood feel like

the same place as it was before?

JOLENE: Oh no.

HAYLEY: What do you think the biggest changes to Phillips have been?

JOLENE: First of all, they’re very high crime, and you know we’re on the edge of the Phillips neighborhood. I think we used to struggle a lot more with the Phillips neighborhood than we do nowadays. I mean, whether people want to admit it or not in this day and age, there is a lot of racism and there are a lot of stereotypes out there. You see a black guy standing on a corner, oh he’s dealing drugs. You see an Indian stumble and fall, it couldn’t have been because the sidewalk is crooked, it’s because they’re drunk. And they’re alive and well in this neighborhood. When they were doing spear fishing and having problems in Wisconsin and all of that, you’d go up to the SA [SuperAmerica, a convenience store], there were signs up at the SA that said, “Save a fish, spear an Indian.” So I mean, it’s changed a lot since I first moved in here, but there’s still stereotypes, we’re not viewed—we’re viewed as good neighbors now because we do so much, but it’s still a struggle. But Phillips, Little Earth here, on this side of Phillips we were one of the few minorities. It wasn’t until—I’d say in the last 8 years, maybe 9—that the Somali and Hispanic community has moved in towards us. This area here was mostly just us and whites. I’m just being honest. It was mostly us and white people. When you got up towards, past Chicago and that, you hit a lot of apartment buildings. On this side was single family dwellings. So most of these were non-minorities.

HAYLEY: How do Little Earth residents interact with the surrounding community? Do you guys interact with the surrounding community?

JOLENE: Yeah, we do. LERA does, and you know, that’s their job, the residents association. They participate in events with the community. We do National Night Out, and we don’t limit it to just our residents. We get people all the way from 27th and Cedar who come on down and have fun.

HAYLEY: Do you think that these interactions between LERA and the surrounding community

have been changed?

JOLENE: Yeah, I think it's gotten really better. I think we're not viewed as such a threat. I think they think we still are. I think Little Earth is still viewed as a threat. I think people still view us as dirty Indians. I don't know if you're going to get anyone else to say that, but I will because I believe that. I believe that some people look at us like that still, but I think it's improved a lot because we get out there and we participate in the community at large. Besides just participating here in Little Earth, we have to participate in the community at large to survive. And sometimes that hasn't always gone good.

HAYLEY: Do you have an example? What do you mean by hasn't gone good?

JOLENE: People in Phillips—one time we were actually buying the school across the street and we had our architect go over to the People of Phillips meeting and explain what we were going to do with the school. And the architects came back and said, "Please don't send us again." And we were like, "Why? What happened?" They practically attacked our architects and treated them like they were taking advantage of us and we were the ones who sent our architects. Maybe we should have went with them, we weren't thinking, but I would think you could send somebody to represent and explain something without them being verbally attacked. And they were told, "Does Little Earth know how much this is going to cost them? Do they know this? Do they know that? Do they blah blah blah?" The next meeting they held—People of Phillips—we went to, and we just explained to them first of all, "We ain't poor helpless stupid Indians who need your help. We know what we're doing, we know what we want, and we sent our architects here out of respect so you would know what's going on at Little Earth." We made them apologize to them, because they never should have treated them like that. But they had our architects—they actually came back and said, "They think you guys are stupid." It was like, "What?" They thought that our architects were doing what they wanted to. I said, "Do you really think our architects wanted to make the front entry a canoe upside down? I don't think so." So stuff

like that. It has improved. But people viewed us like that, that we were stupid. A lot of us are very intelligent, most of us.

HAYLEY: Do you feel like Little Earth is connected to the city of Minneapolis? Do you feel a part of Minneapolis?

JOLENE: No. [laughter] No, I don't.

HAYLEY: Why do you say that?

JOLENE: Well first of all, they never—they would talk us about us like we're not part of Minneapolis. Like if something happens on the corner over there, they'll be like, "Happened by Little Earth," like we're a whole other country or something. Happened by Little Earth, at Little Earth. Where them Indians live. And it's like, "Jeez." Even if it's by us, it's "Near Little Earth," like we're a whole other country or something. I don't feel like we're a part of Minneapolis, I really don't. Not only that, at the last zoning meeting, they tried to split us in half. We had to go down there and argue with them. They didn't even notice that they were trying to divide us into two separate wards. Their ward line went right down Cedar Avenue and Little Earth into half. We would have been in two separate wards. We had to go argue. But now—what ward are we in? I'm trying to think. I don't know, but we're with Gary Schiff, and that ward is actually—we're on the other side of the freeway, we're in that ward. This ward right here, on 17th Avenue, we're not a part of. And to me, they did that to try to divide up their minority vote. So I don't feel a part of Minneapolis. I think Minneapolis feels threatened by Little Earth, and they don't want us to be a part of them anyways.

HAYLEY: Do you pick that up in personal interactions outside of Little Earth, or is it mainly political and media?

JOLENE: Yeah, political and media. You've got like, Gary Schiff, he's our ward leader. He's pretty cool. Peter McLaughlin. He's... he's okay. [laughter] You know, like the chief of police. He's nice. There's a lot of nice people up there. It's just, politically the way they act. Not them guys, the other guys.

HAYLEY: The changes on Franklin Avenue that

have been happening for the last fifteen years—have you noticed the changes on Franklin Avenue, and do you think they’ve had any effect on you and other at Little Earth?

JOLENE: I gotta think. Fifteen years, that’s a long time to think back. What changes happened in the last fifteen years? Did the bars close in fifteen, or was it more than fifteen years ago?

HAYLEY: The bars closed? Can you tell us about that?

JOLENE: There used to be bars on Franklin that were mostly Indian bars. There used to be three bars down there. Yeah, there’s been a lot of changes on Franklin through the years, a lot of changes. Most of them good, too. The Indian Center’s been there for as long as I can remember. That was always the place to go, but now they have—they call them Many Rivers, the two new buildings down there. I love them two buildings. You want to know why? Because if you go down there, and you look at them, there’re designs on them buildings that’s all Ojibwa. That’s all Ojibwa design, and I’m like, “Ah yeah!” That’s all an Ojibwa design. They have a lot of things down on Franklin that they didn’t have when I was young—H&R Block, they have the Wolves Den, they have Snyder’s. They have a lot of things. I think it’s changed a lot for the better—a bakery, all of that stuff, it’s really nice to have in walking distance too. I’d have liked it when I was walking, when I didn’t have a car.

HAYLEY: What about the construction of Highway 55? Do you think that’s had an effect on Little Earth?

JOLENE: Well yeah, Little Earth—55? You mean—yeah, 55’s that one. Yeah, we gave up some land for that freeway, and in return they gave us some back. We traded land for that corner lot over there. We were the last holdouts too. We were the very last holdouts.

HAYLEY: Why do you think you held out for so long?

JOLENE: Because we wanted that big retaining wall you see out there on Ogema Place. It’s a very

tall retaining wall, and they were talking about putting a six footer up, and we said no. We have too many children on our property. We also argued about the foot bridge and where it was going to go. We wanted Ogema, when you got to the entrance, to be a one way, because of our school buses. So we were the last ones. 24th was the last area, I believe, that they were signing contracts on when they were still signing.

HAYLEY: Since the construction of 55, do you think that’s had an effect on Little Earth? The physical presence of the highway...

JOLENE: I don’t know. Yeah, yeah I think it has. I think the light rail’s had more of an effect on us than—the freeway’s always been there. Whether it’s moved more towards us or not, it’s always been there. It’s nice to have 24th Avenue closed off. It’s took a lot of getting used to to not be able to shoot across, but there’s a lot of accident on 24th. It was very scary. That was a very high risk zone. And with it being closed off, we still get cars that come down Cedar at freeway speeds, but not quite as bad as they used to when they were coming off that side—the side entrance they could come off on 55 into Little Earth. So I think there’s some things that have been good about it. I don’t know about the soil on the other side, even with that big wall, you know how it’s holding up with all that gas fumes and lead and all that, but...

HAYLEY: You mentioned the light rail. Do you use the light rail?

JOLENE: Yeah, once in a while to the mall when I don’t feel like driving. The kids love it. The kids love the light rail. They think it’s the bomb.

SHIVAUN: So Little Earth residents get good use out of it?

JOLENE: Oh yeah. I’d say yes they do.

SHIVAUN: What do you think was the big effect that the light rail had on Little Earth? You mentioned that it had a bigger effect than the freeway.

JOLENE: Well, because it was something new. Because it went two ways. It not only went to

downtown Minneapolis, it also spun around and went out to the Mall of America, where when you ain't got a car and you have to catch the bus, you know. The kids and all of that. I don't know if it's faster, but to me it seems faster than the bus to go out there on the light rail. But it's a lot more relaxing with the kids, because they're looking out the windows. It's like being on a train and going somewhere, and then to be able to turn around and go all the way downtown Minneapolis, go to the Dome, go to Hennepin County [HCMC], it goes right by the hospital, to be able to go down to Hennepin County itself, you know, the courthouse, for different things, for birth certificates, all of that. You know, it's just terrific to have it.

HAYLEY: Okay, so in the early 1990s, Minneapolis started the Neighborhood Revitalization Program—

JOLENE: NRP!

[Smoke break]

HAYLEY: So we'd asked about the NRP in the 1990s. The first question is are you are familiar with this program?

JOLENE: Yep. I know what the NRP is.

HAYLEY: Do you think this program had an effect on Little Earth?

JOLENE: I think Little Earth had an effect on the program. I remember when they held their NRP meeting for South Phillips neighborhood, and they held it here. Actually in this room, only it would be combined with the outer room too because it hadn't been redone here yet. We held it here and that's when they decided they were going to need an Indian NRP, because everywhere they held their NRP meetings they had minimum turnout until they came to Little Earth. We packed it. We had over 200 people in here for the NRP meetings. We packed it like you wouldn't believe. I don't know if it had a big effect on the community at large. I'd say it did because it made people stand up and notice that we had the biggest turnout. The Indian community turned out in droves for it here at Little Earth, maybe not anywhere else, but here at Little

Earth we did.

HAYLEY: Why do you think that was that so many people from Little Earth came out for the meeting?

JOLENE: Because we wanted grass. We were tired of having dirt for long. We wanted our neighborhood to be a better neighborhood. And we were here to stay, and we wanted to improve not only Little Earth. We wanted to improve the community at large, because Phillips has a bad reputation for being a high crime neighborhood.

HAYLEY: Do you think that process of community engagement, where all the people from Little Earth came, do you think that had an effect on Little Earth at all?

JOLENE: We always come out like that though. We always did.

HAYLEY: Do you think that's changed since then?

JOLENE: We ain't got nothing big to come out for hardly anymore. The burner now. That's next.

HAYLEY: You mentioned that the people who came out at Little Earth wanted to affect not only Little Earth but the community at large, the Phillips neighborhood as a whole, and its reputation. Do you think the NRP had an effect on the Phillips neighborhood?

JOLENE: I'd say yeah. I don't know really a lot. I know they did a lot of improvements to prevent graffiti, a lot of lighting, that kind of thing. But I don't know everything they've done.

HAYLEY: Were you involved in the process of working with NRP officials?

JOLENE: No. I just turned out for the meeting.

HAYLEY: What happened at the meeting?

JOLENE: A lot of talking about what we thought would be best and how the money should be spent, and that the Indian community should have their own chunk of it because we don't have the same

goals that they did. They wanted to improve single family dwellings, we wanted to improve Franklin Avenue itself and Little Earth. The parks. It was just easier for us to do Franklin and that with our own share of the NRP money.

HAYLEY: So people from the community came out to the meeting, and did everybody get to talk?

JOLENE: Oh yes, everybody gets to talk. It was a forum. Everybody got to talk. There were presentations and then you got to ask questions. You got to state your opinions, what you thought, and all of that. Why you felt it was important.

HAYLEY: Do you feel like the people from the NRP were respectful?

JOLENE: Oh yeah. Yes I do.

HAYLEY: The changes you wanted to have made on Franklin Avenue and in the parks, did those—

JOLENE: I believe they went through. Franklin Avenue looked nice when they redid it. It looked really nice. It still looks nice down there. So I think they've done pretty good on certain areas.

HAYLEY: Is there anything that you would've liked to see the NRP come through with that didn't go through?

JOLENE: Not that I can think of at this time.

HAYLEY: Is there an ongoing relationship with the NRP?

JOLENE: I would be unsure if they still have that. Oh no, we still do, they still have a relationship with NRP. They do. I know they do, because I heard it come up one time.

SHIVAUN: What context did it come up in?

JOLENE: I think I was at a board meeting and it came up in a board meeting.

HAYLEY: And then the legal struggle between Little Earth and the Department of Housing—HUD—in the late 1980s and early 1990s. You're familiar with the legal struggle?

JOLENE: Yep.

HAYLEY: Did this legal struggle affect your life at all?

JOLENE: Sure. I think it affected all the residents. Like I said, we had dirt forever. We were in receivership when they started to foreclose, and we went into receivership, right? And the people who—I believe it was... I can't even think of their names. It's Westminster. And they came in and they said, "Well, we're going to redo all this and that," and they started on the 18th Avenue side, that's this side of the street, and they tore up all of our grass. They didn't just do one part at a time, they tore it all up. They tore it all up to the soil and that. And then HUD put a stop to it, so we sat here with no grass, with our soil tilled for like ten years. You know the damage that did to our ground? Unbelievable. When we finally did redo it they had to take off the top six inches of soil here. We sat here with dirt for ten years because of that. Because of being in receivership and then HUD saying, "No you're not making improvements to this and that." You know, anyone who lived here—dirt in your house, you open your doors, and you had to back then, we didn't have central air. Everyday you'd have at least a half inch of dirt on your tables, and I'm not talking dust, I'm talking dirt, black dirt. That's what our kids played in. It was gross. And then on top of that they tore down all of our patios, so we had no personal space. What do they call that? Defensive space. Somebody could walk right by your kitchen window and look right in. They were right there. Now we have our patios back so when people walk by they're further away and you have your personal space, but back then it didn't. So I'd say it affected every resident here, just for them grounds alone. I think it affected me more because I knew a little bit more about what was going on. When it first started, I wasn't involved and that, because I was young. I had other things I want to do. And as it got steadily worse and worse, I was older and yeah, I got involved. Lori Ellis got involved. Linda Wabasha was involved. There was a lot of community members that were involved with it.

HAYLEY: How were you involved?

JOLENE: I was just a board member, just participated. Went to meetings and that.

HAYLEY: So board members go to meetings and—

JOLENE: Yeah, just contribute. Actually I think the person who they started it—I think the person who did the most for the court hearing, besides the lawyers that LERA had, and it wasn't the owners who owned Little Earth who fought the battle, it was actually LERA. That's the residents association. They're the ones who fought the battle for Little Earth. They fought, and they fought hard. And they lost. A lot of people think we won. We lost! For the record, we lost. We lost. But Henry Cisneros signed Little Earth over basically to us. Not to us, to the LEUTCH board, because we deserved it. So we didn't lose the battles, we lost the war, but we won in the end anyways, because we still got Little Earth and we're still standing. But I think the person who did the most for that, who made—I don't know, it was a lot of people who did a lot of things and made a lot of sacrifices for that, but I'd say Lori Ellis as a resident did the most. Because as time went on, the residents who were originally involved in it got older, got tired, some of them even passed on. And by the time we were in federal court—it took ten years, you know—by then there were new players, like Lori Ellis and all of that. So it was good.

HAYLEY: So was Lori Ellis on the board as well?

JOLENE: Lori Ellis was actually the last four or five years when we were in receivership was the actual president of the LERA board, not LEUTHC, the LERA board. I think LEUTHC existed until the last year of the lawsuit.

HAYLEY: How did she get that position as president of the board?

JOLENE: She was president of LERA. LERA is the Little Earth Residents Association. They don't own the property. They're the residents association. They represent the residents of Little Earth, and they're elected. Each member is elected by their cluster or their apartment building. And then they have a regular board meeting and they elect their president, their vice president, their secretary, and their treasurer.

HAYLEY: Is that the same board you were on?

JOLENE: Yeah.

HAYLEY: And so you were elected from your—

JOLENE: Cluster. Cluster 2. Right over there. This is Cluster 2. But yeah, I think Lori Ellis did the most on that. In the end. In the beginning, there was a lot of a players, and like I said, it was a long, drawn-out battle. It was a long drawn-out battle. Long enough that when it was over with, Lori didn't run for reelection. She took some years off. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: Is she still at Little Earth?

JOLENE: Mmhmm.

HAYLEY: Do you think that just that process of that legal struggle has had any effects on—I mean, besides the grass and the porches and those changes, just the emotional process of the legal struggle—has that had any effects on Little Earth?

JOLENE: I think it was draining on a lot of good people. I think it was very draining, it was very hard, and I think that it was very tiresome. It can be—what do you call when they grind you down?—very grinding.

HAYLEY: Part of the legal struggle is the battle over whether or not Little Earth can be only open to American Indian residents.

JOLENE: That's not a struggle. That's not a battle. That's a done deal.

HAYLEY: But I mean back in the 80s.

JOLENE: Yeah, Indian preference. That was a mini-battle. You'd have to ask Lori Ellis about that a little more. I know that we're the only people who have that right, and you could've knocked us over with a spoon when the federal judge agreed with us, when he said that he agreed that we should be Indian preference, because yes, the United States federal government does owe something to the American Indians. You could've knocked me over with a feather when he said it. It was nice to have it.

HAYLEY: Do you think that federal decision was important to Little Earth?

JOLENE: I think it was a landmark decision for Little Earth. I think without it we wouldn't be Little Earth. Little Earth is made up of 99% Native Americans. Without that decision, we wouldn't be.

HAYLEY: A little bit forward in history. So, about 1995, some of the housing and grounds of Little Earth were rehabilitated. Can you describe some of the changes? That's ten years ago.

JOLENE: They planted sod. They planted some trees. Got new cupboards, got new windows, got new kitchen windows. And I believe they replaced our sliding glass doors that year too.

HAYLEY: Did the changes affect your life in any way?

JOLENE: It was nice to have trees. It was nice to have the patios, like I said. It was nice to have patios. It was nice to have trees. It was nice to just have your own space again. I don't know what else to say.

HAYLEY: Looking over the history of Little Earth, it seemed to us that there had been a lot of community programs and activities and pow wows and events. Are there any programs that strike you as especially significant to Little Earth?

JOLENE: The Mother's Day feast and pow wow. Even though they say it's their 7th year, it's actually been going on for over 25 years. The only reason it says the 7th annual pow wow is because 7 years ago when we did it, we hadn't done it for two years. I don't know why we didn't do it for two years, but we took a two year break to—I believe we were in something else. I believe we had to do—it might have been when we were reconstructing so we just couldn't pull off a pow wow on the property, and we couldn't figure out how we could do that and do everything else at the same time with so much going on. But it's actually—that Mother's Day feast and pow wow has been around for almost as long as Little Earth has been here. And to me, that's very important, that pow wow. It's very significant to me.

HAYLEY: What about that pow wow makes it more significant than...?

JOLENE: Because it was a way to honor the mothers. Over 80% of these heads of households here at Little Earth are mothers. It's a way to honor them and that, and we have a lot of little kids on property. The majority of Little Earth's population is under the age of 8. That's their biggest population group. And the little kids can't cook and buy stuff for their mommies and that, and it's nice to have a feast and a pow wow where their mothers can come eat and enjoy their dinner, watch their kids dance, because we all love to watch that. That's the way I view it.

JOLENE: You'll hear heavy breathing now. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: We're talking about the Mother's Day Powwow, right? We know you were on the board and you mentioned a few other things, but have you been involved in any community programs or activities over the years?

JOLENE: What do you mean? I participated in the Mother's Day Powwow a few times, helped set it up and all of that. I was chair of the LEUTHC board, they're the ones that owned the property when we combined all three boards into the partnership.

H: What did you do as chair?

JOLENE: A lot of stuff. [Laughter] Whatever a chair does I did. Helped with the Powwow, went to the meetings, participated in the construction stuff for this 18th Avenue side of the street, hired a management company, hired security, all of that stuff I participated in. As a board, not just because I was chair, but as a board we did.

HAYLEY: Do you think your level of involvement with the Little Earth community has changed over the years?

JOLENE: Yeah. Like when I was younger, I wasn't so much involved. I was more involved with my own self. [Laughter] A lot of involvement for a while, and then tapering off now that I got grandchildren. I spend more time with them. Different way of involvement. Now I'm involved more with the kids programming, and making sure my children participate and go to the Ed. Center, get involved in

their School for Success program and all of that.

HAYLEY: When did you start becoming more involved in the community programs?

JOLENE: I don't even know what year it was. My friend asked—Linda Wabasha—who was president of a board, asked me and Lori Ellis if we would participate. She wanted our help. And we said “Yeah, sure, not a problem.” All you had to do was ask.

HAYLEY: Why do you think she asked you?

JOLENE: Because we were her friends. And because I may be soft spoken right now, but I'm very outspoken. If I think I want something a certain—when we want something I don't give up. Neither did Lori. We just keep going and going. A little Energizer Bunny—back then. Very bulldoggish. Is that what you say? Get it between your teeth and won't let it go.

HAYLEY: You mentioned the Schools for Success program, and there was another education thing...

JOLENE: I think they call it the technology center. I call it the Ed Center.

HAYLEY: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about those things?

JOLENE: The Ed Center and the Technology Center are the same thing. They have a lot of computers, they do tutoring, they participate in all of that.

BZ: I thought Meredith was in here.

JOLENE: Kitchen!

[Laughter.]

HAYLEY: All right, so at the Ed Center they have tutoring...

JOLENE: Tutoring, and they help the kids with homework. They help if you don't have a car ride. They took me to my granddaughter's parent-teacher conference. They help you stay involved, because if you're more involved in your child's education, it's more likely they will graduate. So they do that, and plus they give our children access to look up

reports. Things that some of our homes can't offer. I can't offer. I don't have a computer in my house for my grandchildren.

HAYLEY: And Schools for Success?

JOLENE: Part of the Ed Center. They give you the rides, check on the kids' progress at school, reward them, do good things with them.

HAYLEY: When was that started?

JOLENE: Maybe about two years ago.

HAYLEY: Is that a part of... who do you think is responsible for that?

JOLENE: LERA. Anything to do with social programs is LERA. Anything that tracks services to residents is LERA.

HAYLEY: This is just something we were wondering about when we're in this room. Do you remember when this timeline was made or when it came in?

JOLENE: I remember it. I remember participating in some of it.

HAYLEY: Do you have any reactions to it? Does it seem like...

JOLENE: There is a lot of stuff missing. The other day, there was me, Theresa Dunkley, and there was another resident in here—I can't think of who it was. And we were going through this timeline and we were stopping in certain spots, and saying “This is missing. That's missing.”

SHIVAUN: Do you add stuff to it?

JOLENE: No, not any more. Like the Aabinoojii Center, we brought that up. I brought that up, because I don't even think a lot of people remembered that until I brought it up. Aabinoojii means child in Ojibwa, and it used to be a drop-in center when I was a teenager across the street. And part of it was a drop-in center and the other part was... I don't really know what it was but it was run by Dr. John Redhorse, out of the University of Minnesota. I think it was just at first just his program, and then he enlarged it to include where we could come in and have a drop in center. It was really nice to have

somewhere to go, something to do. They had pool tables, foosball tables—it was a drop in center. It was very nice.

SHIVAUN: Is there other stuff on there that particularly strikes you as missing?

JOLENE: Well, that did. That they had to put Elaine in there. That should have been in there. Elaine Stately. First of all, we found out about our foreclosure in the Star Trib. We didn't even receive the notices about that. That had to be written in. And when all of that started, Elaine Stately, she went door-to-door to get residents to organize, because even though AIM at the time kind of owned us, without the residents participating nobody had a leg to stand on. And it was our homes. And she's the one who said "This is your home. This is where you live. Are you just going to sit idly by and watch it go away? Or are you actually going to step up and participate and be a part of this?" My mother was a part of it at the time.

HAYLEY: You mentioned AIM. Do you remember anything, or know anything about Little Earth's relationship with AIM?

JOLENE: They were really close at the time. They ran us, you know. In the seventies, AIM was very popular. What else is missing on here? I'd have to look. Like I said, what you guys really need to do, is get like three or four of us together, because you'd get a lot more information. You'd have one of us make a comment and the other ones would participate. That might be something you want to do at the end, is just grab like three or four of us.

HAYLEY: That would be cool.

SHIVAUN: That would be excellent. Do you know other people that are participating? Are your friends participating?

JOLENE: I have no idea who is participating. [Pause] Is our NELC on here? Where's our NELC? Oh. Right here. [Pause] Neighborhood Early Learning Center. That was one of our residents. And this, it says 1998, but it started way back here, in the 80s. That was her dream. The NELC building was her dream. And, like I said, we couldn't just be on the

foreclosure, we had other programs we had to run and do too, and it was like, at that point in time... people chose. Lori chose to be a part of the... she had to be, because she was the chair... a part of the lawsuit. And Debbie Peterson's dream was the NELC. And it was like... if that's your dream, then you go for it. You find us a way where we can buy that building from Holy Rosary and make it your dream. And that was her baby. She was a resident here too, a longtime resident. She is also the board member of South High Housing Board, and she's the one who cast the deciding to hand Little Earth over to AIM at the time. She cast the deciding vote on that. But I'm sure there's a lot of things missing up here. They talk about "Elaine goes door-to-door," but it doesn't show on there when Elaine passed. And when she passed... LERA is the social programs, and they're the ones who did most of this. It's not LEUTHC. LEUTHC wasn't created until the lawsuit was almost over with, as a board that would own Little Earth. Elaine's passing had devastating, major effects on... and it was in the middle of our lawsuit that the effects happened, when Elaine passed. It took a lot of LERA, it took a lot out of the residents, because she was like our rock at the time. She had cancer, and was dying, and was still coming over here. That's not dedication, that's called love. Really, it's called love. She loved Little Earth. I don't know if she loved Little Earth, but she loved the residents. Let's put it like that. Very intelligent woman. And that's something that should be on there, when she passed. Because I believe LERA went through 5 or 6 years of trying to find an executive director, you know, or 5 or 6 directors, and then they got a young girl, fresh out of the U, Lesley Kirkoff. And she was just a tremendous support system for the LERA board. Tremendous.

HAYLEY: Is she still involved with Little Earth?

JOLENE: I don't think Lesley is. See Debbie Peterson from time to time. She works for Prior Lake. [Pause, looking at photographs] See there's part of the 30th anniversary pictures. This is when we broke ground over here. This is our ground breaking ceremony. That's right over here, right in front of these houses here.

HAYLEY: Who are the people [in the picture]? Are they board members or...?

JOLENE: That's Julie Ortiz. She's a board member. That's me. That's Gordon Thayer, he's a board member. That's Alan Arthur, he's chair of the LEUTHC board right not. That's Evelyn Vasquez, she lives across the street, she's still here. [Points at vandalized photograph] Who did that? That's not nice. And some of the other people are construction people.

HAYLEY: Okay.

JOLENE: Maybe they should put names on there so they know who people are.

HAYLEY: Yeah. And that's the celebration there, the 30th anniversary that you were talking about?

JOLENE: Down here no— up here is [Points]. This is. Where you see the two signs, 25 1/2th and E.M. Stately Street. That's the celebration here. We had a stilts program. We had pictures of our kids on stilts. [Pause] They were really worried about a tribe being one of our owners, because they were scared we'd put our land in trust. And when your land is in trust, you can have a casino. That would be nice. I want a casino here. I want to be able to be a millionaire. [Laughter] See, this is our old patio [points]. See the stucco? This was solid stucco. These are our old patios.

SHIVAUN: Your patios now are...

JOLENE: Are fencing. That's still private space.

SHIVAUN: What do you prefer—did you like the stucco better?

JOLENE: No. I like the private... I like it now because I want to be able to see [inaudible]. Very nice lady. Where's the stoplight on [the timeline]? Do you see it?

HAYLEY: It is on here. Here. You wrote about it, or someone wrote about it.

JOLENE: That was a big thing. That happened in '76, and it was just, I believe, two years ago that they put in a permanent stoplight. For almost 20 years, we had a temporary stoplight, and if you go out

there right now and try to cross the street, as young as you are you wouldn't make it across. Because that's how fast that light changes.

HAYLEY: I think Bill Ziegler was telling us about that.

JK: Yep. We had an elder... our children get hit out there a lot. That's why we protested for the stoplight. But this one's no good. We've even had an elder hit out there recently. And if you look at some of these old pictures, you can see that that's not grass. You see that?

HAYLEY: Yeah.

JOLENE: It's dirt, and you can tell it's been tilled. You can tell we didn't have no grass, that they tilled us and just left us hanging! See, that's the way we looked before they put the grass. See, that's all dirt, for years, we sat there with dirt. This was the middle of this courtyard over here. And if you walked over there right now and looked at it, you wouldn't even believe it was the same one. Honest to God, you would not. And then they don't have on here either... I'm looking... I don't see when the 99 building caught on fire.

HAYLEY: Can you tell us about that?

JOLENE: That was awful. I believe it was in '86.

HAYLEY: What's the 99 building?

JOLENE: You're underneath the 99 building right now. So the above part is the 99 building.

HAYLEY: Oh...

JOLENE: Actually, you used to be able to walk through this space. The Indian Health Board moved out of their place—I believe they were on 25th and Nicollet, and they needed a new space. And they came here to Little Earth, and they redid this whole under part of this building. We were actually the Indian Health Board Clinic, before they moved into their new building. Well, it's not new anymore, but it was new back in the day. And the JTPA came under here, Job Training Program came under here. And I believe it was in '86 there was a mini gas leak in a resident's house, and it ignited, or blew up, whatever.

It was a sight to see. First of all, the firemen couldn't get enough water pressure to put the fire out. They had to run hoses all the way up to Bloomington Avenue, because they couldn't get these ones to put out enough water. We didn't have an elevator in here at the time, not that it would have mattered. But a lot of people were bailing out the windows, and dropping their children out the windows. We lost... This was the only building at the time, thank God, that had a fire wall in the ceiling, in the middle at the L right here. So they lost the whole South end of the 99 building. The roof collapsed and went in. They lost that whole part. This, the East-West part of the L... lot of smoke damage from that, but no fire damage to this part. But they lost this whole side of the building, I mean the roof went in and everything. Flames were shooting... you could see them for miles. It was bad.

HAYLEY: How long did it take to rebuild that?

JOLENE: I don't think it took them that long, I really don't.

HAYLEY: Was anyone hurt in the...

JOLENE: Nobody was hurt, thank God. It just so happened that the security guards had just come through the building and they were just leaving the East exit over here, right here. And as they got there, they heard an explosion, and turned around and went back. And the guy whose apartment it happened in, they took him out and they started hitting all the doors as they were going through, saying, "Fire! Get out, get out, get out!" You know. But still, it was like, at 11:00 at night. A lot of people were sleeping. You've seen a few of our residents... held their older kids out the windows and dropped them. It was snowy out, so there were snow banks to drop them in. We had a couple elders that lived up here that were in their seventies. And they were running around trying to find ladders for them. But no, nobody was seriously injured. We got lucky. We got very lucky. That should be on there, that's not on there. Because that's part of our history too.

HAYLEY: Has anything been done to change the water situation?

JOLENE: I have no idea. I'm assuming they have.

I'm assuming. But, maybe I shouldn't. There's a lot of history missing up there.

HAYLEY: Do you know who made the timeline, or how it was made?

JOLENE: I don't. I just came in and looked at it when they had the mini one, before they did the big one. And then when we came in, they had pens, and we talked about it. We talked about some of the things that were missing. As you can see, see right there. Who's that standing there? That must be one of the young girls who did that. But that's me. That's Lori Ellis, and that's Theresa Dunkley. I think it was us three who were in here. So all these little things that are written on here... we wrote some things in before then, because that's what we did. We came in, and I don't know if they did it without residents, but I think we're the three longest residents. Theresa's lived here the longest out of anybody, and then me. And I believe we all came with pens and added stuff, and then when we came back and there was still stuff missing, because you don't remember everything until you see it, you know.

HAYLEY: Yeah.

SHIVAUN: Do you think a lot of people know about this timeline?

JOLENE: I think a lot of people have seen it. I don't think so. I'd like to see them take it outside during their powwow. So that people could look at it.

HAYLEY: Do you feel like the Little Earth Community is pretty aware of its history? Is it talked about a lot, all of the legal struggles?

JOLENE: I don't think that they're so aware of it now. I think I am in my generation, but I think the ones who moved since that happened don't really know. They know that Little Earth had a problem, and that's why I said a lot of people assume we won, because we have Little Earth. And it's like we gotta tell them, "no no no no no no," because they don't know that we didn't win. So... I'd say a lot of our residents, at least 50%, if not more, don't really know our history any more. I think our kids

probably know a little bit because they come in here more. And they're like, "Who's that? Who's this?" I would like to see more names up there. Because when they said Little Earth of United Tribes, our name, nobody could remember how we got our name. I did. But the only reason I remembered it is because Allen Monroe's grandma reminded me. You know so it's like there's other people that were here that you still run into, that know a lot more than you do. Like where the stoplight is, I would like to see them... there was a picture in the Star Trib at the time, that had a picture of the residents standing on the grass on Cedar Avenue, and the SWAT team standing in front of them. And the Star Trib took a picture like this, right down the line of them all lined up. And I would like to see that up here. People don't think that stoplight was much, but it was. It was a battle, especially when we had a bridge up there. They said "Well, you got a bridge." Well, you convince a four-year-old to take that bridge, you know. You convince an eight-year-old, that says, "I'm a big girl, I can walk across the street. I'm not gonna get hit. I can run." You know. Kids do crazy things. Even adults do. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: Yeah.

JOLENE: I really would like to see more names up there, though. I'd like to see Lori Ellis be recognized for the things she did. I'd like to see Debbie Peterson recognized more for the things she did. I'd like to see the LEUTHC board, like Gordon Thayer and Alan Arthur recognized for some of the stuff they did. And Lesley Kirkoff should be up there. She was a very, very gifted young woman who helped us a lot. And Lori Ellis can vouch for that too. Lesley Kirkoff was a very gifted young woman. She was a very tremendous help to LERA. There's a lot more struggles than what's up there. We had the big struggle, and we had mini struggles with other things. Because it wasn't all about the lawsuit either. It was about our little battles. We're fighting HUD in court, and then we're fighting for a stoplight, too? We're fighting HUD in court, and we're turning around and arguing over NRP money? Well, I mean, that's just an example of things. We got a food shelf. I don't even think our food shelf is mentioned up there anywhere.

HAYLEY: Little Earth has its own food shelf?

JOLENE: Yes, we have our own food shelf. We have our very own food shelf for our residents.

HAYLEY: Do you remember when that came in, or has that always been a part of...?

JOLENE: No, it's only been here since... '87? '87 or '88. And that's not up there and it should be.

HAYLEY: Is that part of the Residents' Association?

JOLENE: And that's a part of the Residents' Association, that they started. So even though they were doing all of this with HUD, we still had programs we had to run here and do. We had to have a food shelf, we had our Powwow to do, we had our children to make sure they're taken care of. We had to have a place for them to play, and we had to battle with Park Board over the park—how come everybody gets nice parks but us? Why are we always last on the list for something nice? Argued about being able to get speed bumps on Cedar Avenue—they'll never give us them, but it still comes up occasionally. Can we get speed bumps? Can we make Cedar a one way? You know, something. Argued about the incinerator, the burner thing is coming up again. That was a battle we fought during the lawsuit battle. It comes up every five to ten years, a new burner thing comes up. It's like, "Come on!" That's an ongoing battle because of the zoning. It always comes up, I'd say every 8-10 years it comes up again, you know. That battle we already fought once. Fighting with HUD just for the little things, besides being in court. Having to fight with them to get lighting, having to fight with them to get money to do different things. Never did get our grass until after the battle was over, so we never won that one. But why are you gonna plant grass? And that was one of the things too, what we noticed was when HUD was foreclosing, and I don't see it up there... When they originally showed the designs of 55, the construction they did that you just asked about, that they just completed, we were downtown at City Hall when they were doing that, and we were still in court with HUD at the time. And we were standing there and I leaned over and I was looking at them

and I was like “Hoh!” And they were like, “What?” And I spun them around, and I said, “Look at this, you guys. 55 runs right through the middle of Ogema.” They have 55 going right through right through across the street. Tell me they didn’t know we were being foreclosed on. How are they going to put a freeway right through the middle of us if they didn’t know? Because the City of Minneapolis was saying “We didn’t know that that was going to happen.” “Really? Then how come you got your freeway going right through...?” Because it was supposed to go like this, but it’s more further over [gestures]. And that’s not up there, and that should be up there. That we happened to look at design plans while we’re sitting in court with HUD, and it’s like, “Do you guys know something we don’t know? Because you’ve got a freeway running right through us.”

HAYLEY: Okay. Wow. So, it seems like from everything you’ve said, the Residents’ Association plays a really big part in the lives of Little Earth residents.

JOLENE: Yes.

HAYLEY: Do you know when it was formed?

JOLENE: ‘83? ‘82? Right in there. Wherever Elaine Stately goes door-to-door. Oh. There’s our food shelf right there. So the food shelf started about the same time, or right before it. ’82 for the food shelf, ‘82 for LERA.

HAYLEY: So did Elaine Stately form LERA then?

JOLENE: She went door-to-door, she’s the one who got them going, yeah.

HAYLEY: Cool. Do you think its role has changed over the years since it was formed? Does it do different things?

JOLENE: I think they took on more. I think it was always designed to do what it’s supposed to do. But I think in the beginning they ended up fighting lawsuits, because we were the only ones left standing when the dust settled. When the dust settled it was LERA or no one. And it was actually LERA’s lawyers who battled for residents. We were in court

so long our lawyers got married. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: Wow. Okay. And then I guess we’re kind of coming in on the close for today, at least. But what do you think Little Earth has meant to the American Indian community of Minneapolis/Saint Paul?

JOLENE: I think it’s meant a lot. It’s like home. I mean even for home... most Indians who come to the cities come to Little Earth, because they don’t know where else to go. And everybody hears about Little Earth. And it’s weird because we’re the only urban-owned Indian housing project in the Unit... in the world. They say the United States, I say the world, because the only Native Americans live in the United States. You won’t find two city blocks like this, and when people need something who are Native American, they come here because they assume we know how to do everything.

HAYLEY: How do you think people hear about Little Earth?

JOLENE: Word of mouth. “Go to Little Earth. If you ever go to Minneapolis go to Little Earth. That’s the place to go to find so-and-so, or look for so-and-so.” And we are. We get people who come in and will ask us, “Do you know any of my relatives? I was adopted when I was a baby, and this is the last name, and this is who I heard I’m related to.” And we’re like, “Okay, let’s figure this out. Let’s try to help.” And LERA is always willing to try to help anybody.

HAYLEY: So, thinking ahead to the future, do you have any hopes for Little Earth?

JOLENE: I’d like to see Little Earth become more of a pit stop for us. I’m a long time resident so I’ve really got my nerve. But I sit and I think it would be a good start into home ownership. To live here and work your way to home ownership. I’d like to see that become the goal. To get everybody into their own homes, owning their own homes. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t, but we don’t. I don’t want to move, because I love it here. And it’s scary out there. It’s scary out there. It really is. I don’t want neighbors I don’t know. But that’s really what I’d like to see Little Earth become. Is more of pushing

out younger ones out into the world of home ownership.

HAYLEY: Do you think its moving that way at all?

JOLENE: I think it is. I think Bill Ziegler has plan for that.

HAYLEY: Can you say anything about Bill Ziegler's role in the community? Do you remember when he first...

JOLENE: I remember when he first started.

HAYLEY: When was that?

JOLENE: About four years ago. He came in about 2004.

HAYLEY: And he's president of the...

JOLENE: He is the Executive Director of Little Earth. Of all of Little Earth. Everything. He's the head man.

HAYLEY: Do you think that people in positions like Bill, is there a strong connection with the community? Do people know him?

JOLENE: Yeah people know him. He's a pretty friendly guy. People know who he is.

SHIVAUN: Does he live here?

JOLENE: No, he doesn't live here. I don't think you could actually be the Executive Director and live here. It's a very hard job.

SHIVAUN: Does he live in the neighborhood?

JOLENE: I don't know where he lives. Never asked. But he's very, very outgoing. And most of the residents do know who he is, because he does get out there and walk around, he does. He has fun. He likes Little Earth. You can tell when you look at him. He like's talking about Little Earth, his eyes light up. He wishes he lived here. [Laughter]

HAYLEY: Okay. Thinking about the interview... do you have anything you want to add at all?

JOLENE: I probably do, but I probably can't think of it right now. I'm a little tired, too. I think we've

come a long way. I think we have a lot more road to travel, too.

HAYLEY: How do you feel about being interviewed?

JOLENE: It was nice. I wish I would have been able to have somebody here who has lived here as long as I have, to be able to talk with. Because you remember more things. Because I know that when I was coming here there was a lot of things I wanted to remember and tell you, and I know half of them already flew out one of my ears. There's so much more I'd like to get on record. And it's easier when there are a couple other people who have lived here for years, because you're like "Oh, do you remember when this happened? Do you remember when that happened?" And that happened the other day, when I was standing in there with Theresa Dunkley. And I was like "Hey, I do remember that." And I talked to her about it. And that was one of the things I was going to tell you and I can't even remember what it was now.

HAYLEY: Yeah, we'll bring that back to our director.

JOLENE: It really is something to think about, because I think you're going to miss a lot of our history, and that's what happened with this. Is you miss a lot of our history, and it did better when they got us together. It does do better when you can get a couple of us together to talk. I ain't saying fill the room, because that would be too much. But maybe three people...

HAYLEY: Who have lived here for a long time.

JOLENE: Yeah.

HAYLEY: Well, we'll leave you with our contact information too. And why did you decide to participate in this project?

JOLENE: Because I think it's very important that Little Earth's history be remembered. And like I said, there's a lot of people here that don't know our history, and the rest of us ain't gonna live forever, you know. And we're gonna get old and forget things! Like I'm already doing. So it's like,

you've gotta get it out there. Nobody knows more about losing your culture and your history without writing it down, than Indian people. Because if you don't remember your past it might repeat itself, God forbid. Don't want to go through the court again with HUD.

HAYLEY: Yeah. So we've talked about meeting with more than one resident at the same time, and those things. But is there anything in particular you'd like to see come out of this oral history project?

JOLENE: I want a copy of it. I'd like to see like a little book, you know. Like a little book to give out to people. Not only to residents, but to our neighbors, that live by us. So they know we are. Welcome to the neighborhood, here, here's your brochure on Little Earth, before somebody tells you we're something we're not. This is who we are and these are the battles we've fought.

SHIVAUN: I think we're planning on publishing...

JOLENE: I would really like that. I'd like to see a little timeline thing like this, with all the other stuff added, and the names added in it. Larry Leventhal, you don't even see his name up there. And he played a major role in a lot of stuff to do with Little Earth. Our children were very important. They showed up for every protest. [Laughter] They loved being loud, they loved yelling. Clyde's barely mentioned up there, and he should be mentioned a lot more. He did a lot more than what's said up there. It just ain't AIM. You assume it's all AIM, but it was mostly Clyde. It was mostly Clyde. He actually lived here back in the day. Like a lot of people, if they don't come in here, they don't know we had a swimming pool in here at one time.

SHIVAUN: What did you do with the swimming pool?

JOLENE: We filled it in and made a playground. [Laughter]

SHIVAUN: The one over there?

JOLENE: No, the one across the street. It's the round circle one. Underneath that was our pool. [Laughter] I got thrown in the pool many-a-time.

Long history.

HAYLEY: Okay. Well, if you have nothing else you want to add...

JOLENE: Nope.

HAYLEY: Then we're set. Thank you very much.

Reflection by Shivaun Watchorn

I was initially drawn to the Little Earth Oral History Project out of curiosity about oral history and documentation. Moreover, I was excited about the opportunity to publicize a counter-narrative to the story of progress and improvement presented by Minneapolis' official history. I was excited to portray the city as a site of struggle, shaped by the power of people traditionally maligned, neglected, or silenced. Little Earth is one such site. In Phillips, a neighborhood hailed as an area of urban transformation or, alternately, maligned as a slum struggling with social ills, the urban landscape exists as it does because of its committed residents and their struggles, for better or for worse. Little Earth has seen this process of struggle occur again and again, in larger battles against HUD and smaller ones for improved porches and new stoplights. This project provided me a unique and intimate look at those who have made the improvements possible and their continued struggles.

As a student interviewer, I wanted to be an enabler of Little Earth-based projects to promote the history and memory of the community within and without. In many respects, the Macalester Little Earth Oral History Project fell short, for lack of time and other reasons, but the project has the potential to blossom into a powerful tool for sharing the history of urban American Indians in Minneapolis. The project's output should start to fill a sorry gap in Minnesota's official history: Little Earth's stories have not been told outside its walls, but oral histories can bring to the public a rich history of community and civic life.

Towards the end of our interview with longtime Little Earth resident Jolene Jones, she says, "Nobody knows more about losing your culture and your history without writing it down than Indian people. Because if you don't remember your past it might repeat itself, God forbid." Her words are a call to action for anyone interested in helping to make this request a reality, be it residents themselves or outsiders interested in learning from history to make history useful in the present.

Reflection by Hayley Koenig

When I heard about the opportunity to participate in an oral history project at Little Earth of United Tribes, I was interested for a number of reasons. This project is part of an urban social geography class, and the perspectives of individual city residents are an essential part of understanding urban policies and structures. Moreover, Little Earth is a unique place with a fascinating history, and I could think of no better way to get to know this history than through the voices of its residents. Too often, history is recorded from the view of an outsider. Because of my belief that oral histories form a key tool in the preservation of our lived experiences, I was excited to gain experience collecting these histories.

Through the interview that my partner, Shivaun and I conducted with Jolene Jones, I learned much more about the history of Little Earth than I could have from a book. The stories that Ms. Jones shared demonstrated how hard Little Earth has always had to fight, both in and out of court. While some community members focused on keeping Little Earth open, others worked on crucial community programs and issues such as the installation of a new stoplight. Ms. Jones also stressed the tremendous impact that individual residents have had on Little Earth. The immense strength of this community has encouraged me to appreciate the power of community engagement, even in the face of incredible adversity. On perhaps simpler level, Ms. Jones' experiences impressed upon me the complexity of the relationships between communities and city governments, as in many ways, the City of Minneapolis has treated Little Earth as separate from the rest of the city.

Two particular threads of our interview with Ms. Jones particularly struck me as significant. On the one hand, Ms. Jones told the story of a motivated, united community that has mobilized time and again to protect itself and make new gains. Residents such as Elaine Stately, Lori Ellis, and many others have put immeasurable effort into the support of their community at Little Earth. On the other hand, Ms. Jones also told the story a community under siege, as various governmental agencies have continually disrespected the Little Earth community. In particular, her description of the ten years Little Earth spent without grass, as well as the repeated battle Little Earth must face against the imposition of the burner, attest to the disrespect of Little Earth by outside forces. With these stories brought together, Ms. Jones has painted the picture of a strong community that isn't done fighting yet.

INTERVIEW WITH JANE WILSON¹

Conducted by Callie Thuma and Claire Reuning on April 16, 2008.

- THUMA. Okay, so it should be going. I want to start by asking, “What is your full name?”
- WILSON. It’s Jane Wilson.
- THUMA. And when were you born?
- WILSON. Do I have to tell you? (*Laughing*)
- THUMA. (*Laughing*) No, not if you don’t want to.
- WILSON. Well I’ll just tell you May eighteenth. I’m not giving the year. (*Laughs*)
- THUMA. Okay. And, how would you describe your ethnicity?
- WILSON. I’m Native American.
- THUMA. Are you affiliated with a tribe?
- WILSON. My family is, but I’m not enrolled. And we’re from White Earth.
- THUMA. White Earth, okay. What were your parents’ names?
- WILSON. Laurie Wilson.
- THUMA. And they were also members of White Earth?
- WILSON. Yeah.
- THUMA. So, I have some questions about the family that you grew up with. And I was wondering, could you tell me about your siblings and your parents? Did you have any siblings?
- WILSON. Not until I was almost ten years old. I lived here with—well, we moved here in Little Earth with my grandmother. And probably eight of my aunts and uncles and probably five, six cousins.
- THUMA. Wow. So like the whole family?
- WILSON. Yeah, we were all in one household.
- THUMA. Where did you live before you moved to Little Earth?
- WILSON. I do believe we lived on Eleventh Avenue and Twenty-Fourth Street, I wanna say.
- THUMA. So here in Minneapolis?
- WILSON. Yeah, in Phillips neighborhood, Yeah.
- THUMA. Okay. Where are your parents and the rest of your family now?
- WILSON. Um, we’ve multiplied here in Little Earth. We all live here pretty much. Except for the extended family’s all up north.
- THUMA. Okay. And are you married?
- WILSON. No.
- THUMA. And who do you live with now, at Little Earth? By yourself?
- WILSON. I live with both of my children.
- THUMA. Okay. How old are they?
- WILSON. My daughter is going to be eleven and my son is going to be turning nine soon.
- REUNING. You must be busy.
- THUMA. Yeah! Wow.
- WILSON. It’s challenging. (*Laughs*)
- THUMA. What languages or language did you speak at home while you were growing up?
- WILSON. English. But I can recall from memory Ojibwe from—I can’t remember if it was my grandma’s grandma, but I kind lost it over time, but I do recall her speaking Ojibwe quite a bit.
- THUMA. How much schooling have you had? Where did you go to school?
- WILSON. I’ve got some college, not much, but some. I attended mostly alternative schools in

¹ This is a pseudonym we use to respect the privacy of the interviewee.

Minneapolis, like Heart of the Earth, Center School...and then Holy Rosary, the Neighborhood Early Learning Center.

THUMA. Oh, okay.

WILSON. So I attended school there.

THUMA. What was school like for you?

WILSON. At Holy Rosary it was probably my most challenging because I learned a lot there, but at the alternative schools it was just like a social gathering. I wasn't really learning anything.

THUMA. Yeah. Did you enjoy school?

WILSON. Mmm. To some extent, yeah. I mean, I'd go to school, get my work done, and then the rest of my days were just left to socialize or do whatever.

THUMA. So where did you work? I assume you work here...

WILSON. I work here at Little Earth.

THUMA. And what kind of stuff do you do here?

WILSON. Oh jeeze. I do a little bit of everything. I run the LEERA office.

THUMA. The LEERA is Little Earth—

WILSON. Little Earth Resident's Association, yeah. Bill would say I'm the office manager, but I just do a little bit of everything. Kind of like support to the staff, as well as being the receptionist.

THUMA. So, now I guess we're going to talk a little bit more specifically about Little Earth. Why do you think your family chose to move to Little Earth?

WILSON. Mmm. You know, that never was a question that I had asked. I guess it all had to do with housing and the way the housing was hard for people, Native people, in the early 70s and late 60s.

REUNING. How was it hard?

WILSON. Because families were doubling up. Like for instance, when my grandmother first moved down here, her and two of her cousins, I do believe, lived in a two bedroom house with eleven to thirteen

people. It was my grandmother and her kids and then her cousin and her kids. So it was—the living situation was pretty crowded.

THUMA. Where did she—when you said, “moved down here,” where did she move down from?

WILSON. She moved down from White Earth reservation, from Ponsford.

THUMA. So, when Little Earth opened up that was a better solution than where your family had been living?

WILSON. My family had been living all over here in Minneapolis, but I'm guessing probably mostly in Phillips neighborhood at the time. And, I don't know what brought my grandmother to move her, I really don't. You know, I've never gotten a chance to ask her.

THUMA. What made you want to keep living here?

WILSON. It was a just being comfortable with knowing my neighbors on a one-to-one basis. And the comfort of the community, you know, just—it was like a comfort zone for me, so I just decided to stay.

THUMA. Do you have any specific memories from when you were little, when you first came to Little Earth?

WILSON. Not really. Just little tidbits here and there, but not much.

REUNING. What kind of tidbits?

WILSON. Well, we used to have playgrounds in every cluster.

THUMA. Oh wow.

WILSON. And that's probably one of the things that I probably remember the most, other than that, I'd have to jog my memory to remember everything. I remember certain things. And I remembered that so much because there was so many things that my cousins and I got into as kids, and...it was quite... fun. But it all had to do with just being in the playgrounds in every cluster. And that's probably

one of my memories that I can—that's at the top of my head, but everything else, I'd probably have to jog my memory.

THUMA. Well, so...what was it like back then? And what was a typical day like for you growing up in Little Earth?

WILSON. A typical day? I don't know. It's pretty much the same way today as it was then. You know, just—I just feel like I'm here to pass time.

REUNING. Well, what's typical day like now then?

WILSON. Go to work. Go home. Go to work. Go home.

THUMA. Have you noticed any changes? You mentioned that there were the playgrounds in every cluster. Have there been other changes?

WILSON. They've done landscaping, I do believe, in the mid-90s. Early 90s, something like that. And it didn't work out too well. And this is probably the second time I've send this makeover, you know, with the landscaping and security systems and all that stuff. So this change that they made a few years back was like...oh, what would you say?...geez, I'm so lost for words here...this is probably the biggest change that they've made over the past thirty-five years that Little Earth has been open.

THUMA. Was it a positive change in your opinion?

WILSON. Actually, yeah. Because, you know, things were getting really bad around here and once they put in the security system and they did landscaping and I noticed that crime has died down a lot. Trouble people don't hang around as much,

REUNING. What kind of changes did they make in the landscaping?

WILSON. For instance, there used to be a parking lot out here. This—in front of these row houses. And there used to be a little hill that led down to the parking lot. So they threw up these cement walls and iron fences. And it actually looks really nice.

REUNING. So, in 2003, Little Earth had its 30th anniversary celebration. Can you describe what that

celebration was like?

WILSON. It was kind of chaotic. We closed down part of Cedar and we had a stage on Cedar. We had...oh, what was the guy's name? I forget the guy's name but there was a guy here who was a puppeteer. And during that time, they changed 25 and a half street and renamed it E.M. Stately for Elaine Stately. And, at time that they had changed it, they did a...oh, geez I can't even find the words for it. But they did a ceremony in her honor as part of naming that street.

REUNING. What values did the celebration honor, do you think?

WILSON. Um...I don't know. I really didn't—I didn't really pay attention to it when we went to the celebration itself. Cause, we did have a celebration at the Thunderbird Hotel. And we invited community members...Geez, there was probably a bunch of bigwigs too, but I can't remember. But the celebration that took place that evening, they pointed out people that have lived in the community, that did a lot of work for the community, and they honored Elaine Adler at that dinner, the celebration that we had that evening. I do believe they honored AIM for the work that they did here. Laurie Wilson's work for getting, for helping Elaine—well, her and Elaine were working side by side to get Little Earth Residents' Association started. Elaine got sick and died, so my mom just kinda carried it out. And that's kinda where the Residents' Association is now. Today, because of my mom. So...

REUNING. What did the celebration mean to you personally?

WILSON. Made me realize that I was getting old. (*Laughs*) But it was nice, and hopefully we're going to pull something together to celebrate Little Earth's 35th anniversary this year.

THUMA. Oh cool.

WILSON. And this year is the Residents' Association 25th anniversary also. So I think they're going to do something to collaborate both.

THUMA. Wow. So do you like living at Little

Earth?

ELLILS. I good majority of the time, yeah.

THUMA. What do you like about it?

WILSON. Like I said, the comfort of knowing your neighbors on a one-to-one basis. I need something I can just walk down the block and can either go to my mom's or my aunt's...I just like the sense of community.

THUMA. Is there anything that you dislike about it? Or things that you wish could be different?

WILSON. What I dislike about it? I guess I dislike the fact that a lotta parents don't... really keep an eye on their kids that well as far as...the kids that are in gangs. There's parents that'll just turn their head and it's—and these kids are causing a lot of stuff, you know, a lot of things going on at night...where it's hard for me to sleep and it can get irritating at times. But other than that, I can get past just about anything.

THUMA. So looking back to all the years that you've lived here, does the Phillips neighborhood itself feel like the same place that it was thirty years ago?

WILSON. No. Uh-uh. No. See, let me give you an example here. Fifteen, twenty years ago, well yeah, maybe even fifteen years ago, you could walk down the street to the store and...you would say, well actually I am going say, you could do illegal activities and you wouldn't be bothered. And now, you can't even walk down the street without being bothered. You know, you could just be going down there to go to the store and you got drug dealers bothering you or prostitutes or johns, and it's to the point where most people—for myself personally, I will not walk up to SA [Super America] once it gets dark. Just for the simple fact that all these people come out and night and I don't want to be bothered. It's definitely changed a lot. I mean you could sit in the park in the evenings. Like when I was my late teens I could sit in the park out here at night, all hours of the night just watching what's going on. Today, you can't even do that...I guess it has a lot to do with, not only cause I'm getting old, but I

probably wouldn't do it today cause of the simple fact that there's too many little gang bangers around here and you never know what there's carrying on them. It has a lot to do with safety issues now.

THUMA. Do you have any idea how or why?

(Ms. Wilson's cellphone rings. Laughter and pause in conversation.)

WILSON. Mmmk. Go ahead.

THUMA. Do you have any idea how or why those changes have taken place?

WILSON. It could be a number of reasons. It could be because parents are abusing drugs or doing alcohol why we've seen these changes over the last ten years. I have a foreign example. I have a friend that, she had lived here for probably fourteen years. And she was still working at the same place that she's at now but she was working so often that her kids had so much free time to themselves from time they were twelve to now. And with her being at work all the time, it never gave her time to be with her kids. With all that free time, her daughter ended up having a baby at fourteen and her son got wrapped up in gangs. Now he's in jail, he's been in prison for four years now and this kid is twenty-one.

So her just not being able to be there with her kids, and not guiding them, or having the time to because she had to work, it affected the way that they grew up. And I see that happening a little too often. And it's kinda scary...but as long as I do all the right things with my kids I won't have to worry about them too much. But I still worry a lot.

THUMA. Do you worry that they'll fall in with a gangs or other...

WILSON. It's just more worried about, you know... when my son gets to a certain age, are these boys going to be trying to pull him into the gangs? But my son's a smart kid. I don't think he would go that route.

REUNING. Can you describe the way Little Earth residents interact with people in the Phillips neighborhood?

WILSON. Geez, most people don't interact too well. There's...there's too many people—I pretty much stick to myself because there's too many people here that are always watching you, always gossiping, and there's a lot of negativity within a lot of people here. So I just try to stick to myself cause I don't...

REUNING. When you say here, do you mean Little Earth?

WILSON. Mmm-hmm. I could sit here and tell you probably half of my neighbors are always in somebody else's business and they're really negative and I just don't like to interact with people like that.

REUNING. Do you feel like Little Earth is a part of Minneapolis?

WILSON. Yeah.

REUNING. In what ways? What makes you feel that way?

WILSON. Well you can be in California and have somebody sit there and tell you, oh Little Earth this and that. And right away they'll be like, "Oh isn't that that little reservation in Minneapolis? Or Minnesota?" So yeah, it's...I feel like it's definitely a part of Minneapolis. I think it's like the *heart* of Minneapolis. For the Indians it is.

REUNING. Do you think the changes on Franklin Avenue in the last fifteen years have had an effect on you and others at Little Earth?

WILSON. Yeah, I see a lot of positive changes. They're building—all these buildings have different—there's stores—there's just more things that are popping up for people to utilize. For instance, there's the Indian Center and that's been there for quite some time. Next door to the Indian Center used to be...oh geez, it was...it was a free store, I'm not sure what it is now, but across the street from there in that business center, there's numerous things in there that Natives have access to. Probably everyone within the community have access to it. I've just been seeing a lot of good changes all along Franklin, all the way up to probably

Chicago Avenue. But I usually don't go past that, so I don't...I don't know if they got any changes up there either. I mean the overall appearance of Franklin Avenue looks nice. It's catching up to Lake Street, that's for sure! (*Laughs.*)

THUMA. What about the construction of Highway 55? Do you remember that having an effect on you or others at Little Earth?

WILSON. Yeah, I still get really irritated when I think about that. Beause in their original plans, they were supposed to make 26th an overpass specifically for people in Phillips neighborhood. It irritates me for one because a friend of mine that had lived here, her husband was killed by a train on 26th. Now had they made that an overpass, maybe that could have been a situation that could have been avoided, but I really do think that was his destiny, his time. But just the things—it's hard to get over that street. And every time that I cross it, I get really irritated and mad about it. Because I feel like the city wasted all this money on this bridge on 24th. Nobody in Phillips neighborhood hardly uses it and then they go and waste a lot more money on another bridge two blocks down. So it's like—I just get so irritated thinking about it.

THUMA. Can you talk about your memory of that event? How did that happen? When did you first hear about the plans? Or what was your initial reaction?

WILSON. My mom was talking about it. And the first thought that crossed my mind was, "Good, we're not going to have to hear these trains go by every night." And then she got into detail about, well this is how it's going to look, this and that. And then to see the changes that were--these changes happened slowly over time. I got adjusted to it but then once it came to that overpass that isn't there, I just get really upset thinking about it. Beause there's so many people that cross them streets. And it's dangerous for a lot of people. But in a way, I think the changes were there for the good.

THUMA. How did your mother talk about it when she spoke about it?

WILSON. I don't remember the conversations

we've had but that's how she pretty much said, "Oh, well they're gonna widen 55 corridor right here," and that was pretty much it.

THUMA. Did she sound excited about it? Or unhappy about it?

WILSON. Well, initially she was, "Okay, well yeah, this could be a good thing." But then once the city started making these changes with that overpass, I think she kinda changed her feelings about how she felt about it.

THUMA. Do you use the light rail?

WILSON. Occasionally. Yeah.

THUMA. Does it have any impact on your day-to-day life that it's there?

WILSON. Yeah, it's a lot quicker and a lot easier to get to places.

THUMA. So, in the early 1990s, Minneapolis started the NRP, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program to help improve neighborhoods across the city through grass roots community participation. I was wondering, are you familiar with this program at all?

WILSON. I've heard of it but I never really paid attention because I wasn't interested.

THUMA. Do you have any ideas of the effects that it had on Little Earth?

WILSON. I don't.

REUNING. So, as you may know, there was a long legal struggle between Little Earth and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Did this legal struggle have any effect on your life at all?

WILSON. Yeah. It took a lot of time. It took a lot of time away from—it took a lot of my mom's time away from me and my siblings. There were times when I'd get so frustrated because I was their main caregiver while she was attending meetings and all this other fun stuff.

THUMA. Was she very busy with it?

WILSON. Well, yeah, cause she helped jumpstart the residents association so she's got a passion for it. I don't know where that passion comes from in politics but it can get pretty boring. But yeah, she spent a lot of time organizing, getting people together to protest so we wouldn't lost Little Earth.

REUNING. So what was that time like for you then?

WILSON. Difficult. Cause I would rather have been out doing what *I* wanted to do then be at home taking care of kids.

THUMA. Do you remember what life was like at Little Earth, in the community as a whole, at that time? How were people feeling?

WILSON. I don't recall. I was too focused on just taking care of my siblings so my mom could do what she had to do.

REUNING. How many siblings do you have?

WILSON. I have five.

THUMA. So was it kinda up to you to make dinner, take care of them when they came home from school and stuff?

WILSON. Well, I've always had an adult around with me, but it was just whoever was with me with the kids, helping with the kids, it was always just her. Or me and my aunt. Or me and one of my aunts. But I did the leg of the work.

THUMA. How old were you at the time?

WILSON. Um...I think I might have been in my late teens.

REUNING. Do you remember any specific incidents from that time?

WILSON. I remember we marched down to HUD.

REUNING. Tell us about that.

WILSON. Geez, I must have, I don't remember how old I was but I know I was probably in my early teens? I don't recall.

But yeah, we marched down to HUD headquarters downtown, which was kind of exciting. We had a crowd of people and we marched down...geez, I'm trying to remember the streets now. Okay, we came up 24th. I don't even remember the route! This is crazy. But I know we went somewhere by the dome. It was pretty exciting because I'd never seen our community get together like that. And to this day, I still have yet to see our community get together like that.

THUMA. How many people would say there were?

WILSON. I'd probably say over two hundred. Beause it was families here and their kids...yeah, it was probably two hundred, if not more.

THUMA. And how were people feeling at the time of that march?

WILSON. There was probably a lot of mixed feelings. I know people didn't want to lose their housing so that probably what reeled them in to, "Okay we gotta fight to keep our housing." Cause a lot of people here then had a lot of struggles with housing when they first came to Minneapolis, and I think that was what made them fight because they didn't want to lose their housing.

THUMA. So the legal struggle, as you know, resulted in a decision to allow to Little Earth to be only open to American Indian residents. Can you tell me whether this decision had an effect on the community of Little Earth?

WILSON. I really don't think it did. I don't think it had an effect on the community at all.

THUMA. Did people feel—was there a sense of—How did people feel when the decision was announced?

WILSON. I do not recall. I know it was a good feeling for my mom because she felt like she's accomplished her goal. That gave her the strength to say okay, "Well let's do this and do that now."

REUNING. How did you feel?

WILSON. I don't know. I don't recall. Cause I

didn't really pay attention to what we were doing at the time anyways. I was like, "Okay, well I'll just join in anyway." (*Laughs.*)

THUMA. It seems like there have been a lot of community programs and activities at Little Earth over the years, and I was wondering if you could tell me, are there any programs that have been particularly significant to you?

WILSON. Not to me personally. When I think about it.

THUMA. To the Little Earth community?

WILSON. To the community, yeah. I could sit here and tell you all the things that we don't have no more that, that, you know...well, anyways.

THUMA. You could tell me that too.

WILSON. The programs that we have now, they're beneficial to the kids but I see a lot of the kids pulling back because they don't want to participate or for whatever reasons. But I would definitely like to see sports programming in Little Earth again.

THUMA. Were there ones in the past?

WILSON. Yeah, we've had a softball team. We had a hockey team, basketball...and our current ed center staff was trying to get together a lacrosse team. I don't know how well that's gonna work out, but...

I'd like to see more sports teams and I'd like to see this ed center more focused on education. Beause it gets really—you know, I explained this to Bill that, "Yeah, it's nice to sit here and dream and dream and then to see this dream come alive." I said, "And then to see these kids sitting on the computers playing games when they should be using these computers for educational purposes." I said, "That's really disappointing."

I mean he actually sat and listened to every word I said because it's like, look: they're not setting our standards high enough for our kids where I think they should. And that's all the staff across the board that work in that ed center. And I don't really think that education don't mean that much to them because if it did, these kids would be on

the computer learning something everyday instead of playing war games. That really gets irritating for me. I just got to the point where I just shut up and quit saying stuff because I felt like nobody was listening.

THUMA. You said Bill listened. Did you feel like they'll be any changes in that?

WILSON. I gave up on that because there hasn't been no changes. It's been months since I said something to him and I was *constantly* saying stuff to him about it, but...I just gave up because I felt like it was going in one ear and out the other.

But then again, I know how busy Bill is. He's focusing on a lot bigger things, so I kinda understand after being mad at him for feeling like he hadn't been listening. I actually sat back and thought about what his purpose here is. He's got bigger plans for Little Earth than just the little small stuff that he would probably think is small.

THUMA. Education seems big to me.

WILSON. Yeah. Well, he's focusing on getting... *(Turns and gestures to layout maps of Little Earth behind her in the conference room.)*...this land here. It's crazy the way he's dreaming because I slowly see them dreams coming true.

THUMA. How does that feel for you?

WILSON. It's a good feeling.

THUMA. About the sports teams, what do you think the importance of having them would be?

WILSON. The importance?

THUMA. Yeah, why would you like to see them come back?

WILSON. Because the diabetes epidemic is getting out of control. I feel like it's spiraling out of control. A lot of parents in Little Earth here don't know enough about diabetes. There's a lot of families here that don't have the resources or the money to eat healthy and exercise more. That's when the diabetes falls in. Is where, "Okay, let's go to the corner store! You guys want something to eat? Here we'll buy you a bag of chips and a sandwich." And

that's probably a thousand empty calories that—I don't know, I just think with that diabetes epidemic we need to get these kids out more and get them running around and doing things instead of sitting in front of the TV all day playing video games. Or watching TV.

REUNING. It seems like the Residents' Association plays an important part in Little Earth. Can you tell me about the role that the Resident's Association plays?

WILSON. I think the Residents' Association is the backbone of the three entities.

REUNING. What are the three entities?

WILSON. That would be the Little Earth and United Tribes Housing Corporation, and the Little Earth Neighborhood Early Learning Center, and then the Little Earth Residents' Association. So I think we—our—this organization is the backbone of all three entities because we bring in the money. We do a good leg of the work of things that need to be done. In this office here we deal with residents more than the main office or the NELC.

THUMA. Can you tell me why the Residents' Association was formed?

WILSON. I don't even remember. That would be a question for Laurie. *(Laughs.)*

REUNING. When was it formed?

WILSON. Geez, how many years? I don't even know... '83?, I wanna say. Cause we are celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary.

THUMA. Yeah, you did say that.

WILSON. Yeah, so '83.

THUMA. Has its role in the community changed since '83?

WILSON. You know, I never really thought about that, but I'm sure it has. We're definitely getting stronger as the years go by. And we're definitely learning more about everything.

THUMA. Do you have a strong relationship with—

would you say that you have a strong relationship with the community of Little Earth?

WILSON. Yeah, I believe I have a strong influence over quite a few people here. That's probably because I have been here most of my life but, yeah.

THUMA. Just curious, do you know a lot of the people who live in Little Earth?

WILSON. I would say about ninety-five percent.

THUMA. Wow. Yeah.

REUNING. What do you think Little Earth has meant to the American Indian community?

WILSON. I don't know. I've never really thought of that either. For me it means having stability. Having to look out your door and see your neighborhood and you guys don't even have to say nothing and you acknowledge each other and stuff like that. That's really important to acknowledge, you know, your neighbors on a day-to-day basis. Whether you get along with them or not.

For instance, I have a neighbor that lives across from me—I can't stand her but I'll just wave to her, just to let her know that I acknowledge she's around. But, you know, I think, I don't know...*(Laughs)*

REUNING. Well I know earlier in the interview you said it was the heart of the American Indian community. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

WILSON. The heart of the community?

REUNING. Yes.

WILSON. Well, you can be clear across the world and you run into a Native person that'll mention Little Earth. "Oh, I wanna go there and check it out," if they've never been here. It think this community in some sense is a lot stronger than any community outside of Phillips neighborhood.

You know, you could have a family that's got a tragedy and we all come together to help that family regardless of what they need.

So to me that's like—well, I don't know, I feel like

it's a way of life. But then again, we are the heart of the community of Phillips neighborhood.

THUMA. So thinking ahead to the future, what are your hopes and dreams for Little Earth?

WILSON. I just hope we can...get some money to build a community center for the kids. Get these kids off the streets and get them into books and try to teach these kids that their education is valuable. It's an opportunity for them that a lot of kids in this world don't get.

And that's what I'd like to see. For a community center to be built—specifically, a community center/drop-in center.

THUMA. What would that look like in your dream world?

WILSON. We definitely would have a sports program. One program specifically set aside for sports, one for tutoring, and then one to focus on education and post-secondary education. And that's what I would like to see happen in Little Earth.

That would probably be the coolest thing.

REUNING. Thinking about our interview, how did you feel about being interviewed?

WILSON. Mmm. I don't know. Kinda sluggish today. *(Laughs.)* Wasn't too bad.

REUNING. Why did you decide to participate?

WILSON. Cause I got tired of my mom riding me and putting the pressure on me! I said, "Okay, Alright." *(Laughter.)* I just got sick of hearing it so I said, "Okay, I will go."

THUMA. What would you like to see come out of this project? For you or for Little Earth?

WILSON. I would like to see this oral history spread across Indian country. To get the word of Little Earth out across the United States a little more.

THUMA. Is there anything else you would like to add? We're going to wrap the interview up.

WILSON. No.

THUMA. Thank you.

Reflection by Callie Thuma

“Sometimes anthropologists act as if they were fishermen. They select a location, position themselves as observers and then throw a net, thinking that they can catch what they look for. I think the very premise of such an approach is illusory. If I pick up that metaphor again and apply it to myself, I would have to be the net myself, a net with no fisherman; for I’m caught in it as much as what I try to catch.” --Trinh Minh-ha²

“...when we pretend there is nothing going on inside of us that is influencing the research and interpretation, we prevent ourselves from using an essential research tool.” –Valerie Yow³

As a college student/interviewer/scholar, it is vital that I include myself in this Little Earth Oral History project. I refuse to play the role of the traditional historian—objective, detached, extracting an account from a distant and elevated position. I am part of this story. My perspectives are caught up, tangled with and coloring the work that has been done. This is as much a record of me as it is a record of the Little Earth community.

From this understanding, critical self-reflection becomes an essential part of the project. I must interrogate myself before, during, and after I ask questions of another person.

Why did I chose to participate? For one, I believe in the radical possibilities of oral history to reorient the relationship between the historian and the community through creative and collaborative engagement. By presenting multiple viewpoints, oral history can disrupt the established account of events and allow new voices to emerge. Inspired by the writings of Paul Thompson and Alessandro Portelli, I joined this research team because I hoped for a two-way relationship with Little Earth that would yield a more democratic history.

As a white female of European descent, I am acutely aware of my connections to the ongoing legacies of genocide, colonialism, and racism against Native Americans. It was my ancestors who first stole this land from its indigenous inhabitants and initiated this history of violence and oppression. I must own my privilege, acknowledge my whiteness. What does it mean for me to enter the Native community as a researcher? Am I re-enacting the role of the colonizer? How can my work confront and contest this narrative?

I do not want to write an ethnography. I am not interested in presenting a master narrative of the Other. I strive to be ever more aware of the hazards of representation, ever more critical of my methods. I am listening, really listening to myself and to my interlocutor? How?

Looking back over the interview I transcribed, my own agenda stares back at me. I can read my own biases and preconceptions about life in Little Earth. I can see how I tried to frame Ms. Wilson’s experience, and how she corrected and reframed my representations. Although I am striving to listen, I notice the moments of failure—the foolish questions and missed opportunities to unpack meaning. There is much for me to learn. Still, what has already been recorded is valuable. This is about a process, not just a product.

I do not pretend to live up to the model of Trinh Minh-ha—I fear that despite my best intentions, I often played the fisherman in Little Earth. In writing this reflection, I seek to implicate myself in my net and

² Minh-ha, Trinh T. “Film as Translation: A Net With No Fisherman.” In *Framer Framed*. New York, Routledge, 1992. p. 130.

³ Yow, Valerie. “Do I Like Them Too Much?: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa.” In *The Oral History Reader*, 2 ed. Edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. New York: Routledge, 2006. p. 63.

recognize the myth of my own objectivity. I want to examine my subjectivity in this research, which is integrally connected to my identity as a white, female, middle class, elite liberal arts college student. My hope is that my self-exposure can deepend the meaning and interpretation of this project.

As my role in this work draws to a close, I am left with unanswered questions. What can I give back to Little Earth, besides this reflection? Could this ever become reciprocal relationship I originally imagined?

Will this project continue? In what way?

INTERVIEW WITH THERESA DUNKLEY

Conducted by Liz McCreary and Hannah Gelder on March 29, 2008.

LIZ: What is your full name?

THERESA: Theresa Mattie Dunkley

LIZ: When were you born?

THERESA: 1932

LIZ: Where were you born?

THERESA: Redby, I don't know if I was born there or not, but my mom lived there for a long time.

HANNAH: And what was the name? Red Lake?

THERESA: Redby, Red Lake is just a little, they're just about five miles apart, Red Lake and Redby. Redby was where I lived.

LIZ: And that's in MN?

THERESA: Yes.

LIZ: Redby, MN, okay. How would you describe your ethnicity?

THERESA: What?

LIZ: How would you describe your ethnicity?

THERESA: How would I describe living in a city or what?

HANNAH: No, your ethnicity. So you're origins. Like I'm Caucasian or European American.

THERESA: Oh you mean....

LIZ: It's like when you have to check the box.

THERESA: Oh yes, of my own kind. I like it very much, um, there's a lot of people that's my, you know they're the same as me, they're Indian. And I like it here, at first, when I first moved here I was kind of like an outsider, I felt like I didn't belong or whatever. But as the years went by my children, they loved this place and they were pretty small when I moved in here.

LIZ: Okay, are you affiliated with a tribe?

THERESA: Oh, my own tribe? Oh yay, I get to see them once in a while when I go to there outings and whenever they come here you know.

LIZ: And what tribe is it?

THERESA: Chippewa

LIZ: Chippewa.

THERESA: Yes, I'm a Chippewa Indian.

LIZ: What were your parent's names?

THERESA: Ummm, my father's name was George, um and my mom's name was Pauline. I don't remember my father at all because I was quite young when he died.

LIZ: What were their tribal affiliations.

THERESA: Same as me, Indian.

LIZ: Chippewa?

THERESA: Chippewa Indian, yay, sorry I didn't say Chippewa.

LIZ: Oh no, no, just clarifying.

THERESA: I just said Indian. (Laughing)

LIZ: Now I have some questions about growing up with your family, can you tell me about your siblings and parents?

THERESA: As a parent?

LIZ: No, when you were growing up did you have any brothers and sisters?

THERESA: I was second to the youngest, my little sister was a lot younger than me, and we didn't really associate with anyone growing up because I was a little older than she was growing up, she was always the baby, I didn't like it every much but...

LIZ: What about your older siblings did you hang out with them at all?

THERESA: My older sisters? No, I did not.

HANNAH: How many older siblings did you have?

THERESA: I don't remember really, I know I had about 2 older sisters and I don't know if I had any brothers, no I don't think I had any brothers.

LIZ: Okay, where did you live when you were growing up?

THERESA: Where did I live?

LIZ: Um-hmm.

THERESA: I lived in Redby, that's about 5 miles from Red Lake.

LIZ: Okay, where do your siblings live now? If you know.

THERESA: They live in Minneapolis, some of them live in Hinckley. I think two of my older daughters live in Minneapolis. One of them is a 911 operator and the other one works for the government.

LIZ: Are you married?

THERESA: No.

LIZ: How many children do you have:

THERESA: I have 8.

LIZ: And with whom do you live now?

THERESA: I raised 3 of my grandkids, so one boy is left with me and the other two flew, they flew. He's still with me, my boy, he was in the army, he went to fight in Iraq, he just got back. I raised some beautiful children, all by myself you know. I had to grow up fast really to take care of my family.

LIZ: What language or languages did you speak at home as a child?

THERESA: Just what we're speaking now.... ummm what we're speaking.

LIZ: English?

THERESA: Yay, English. I tried my language, but I just couldn't, I wasn't in it you know, I just couldn't

get the words out of my mouth you know to speak my own language. I know some words, well I know all of it, but I can't speak it. I don't know why.

LIZ: Okay, how many years of formal schooling have you had?

T: I graduated.

LIZ: From high school?

THERESA: Yes, I went to three years of college, I was going to be a nurse, a registered nurse, but my grandkids started coming so I quit. I raised three of my grandkids, you know.

LIZ: Where did you attend school?

THERESA: Red Lake, MN, I think I finished here, I'm not sure, but anyway I had, I went into nursing and that was my, you know that's the way when you grow up, you know you want to be something or somebody and that's what my wish was, to be a nurse and stuff. And I did, you know, I worked, I worked at this one hospital over here, not very far from here, I don't know what the name of it was... well anyway I was there about three years and then my grandkids started coming and I put that away and raised some of my grandkids. I raised three of them I think. Tina, Matt and Lee, Lee, Tina, Matt.

HANNAH: What did you do at your work at the hospital?

THERESA: Just ordinary um cleaning and stuff like that, taking care of patients, I wasn't qualified to do the thing the registered nurses do, you know give them shots and stuff. I just cleaned their rooms and stuff like that. I was going to nurse's training when I quit, I had to quit, because my grandkids were coming. I had to quit.

LIZ: Okay, um, what other kinds of work have you done in the past?

THERESA: Nothing much, just kind of been here, worked here, since it started, you know.

HANNAH: Do you serve on the board?

THERESA: I've been on the board for a long time. I'm kinda useful I think. (All laughing and smiling)

LIZ: Well, now we'd like to focus more specifically on your experience at Little Earth, so that's a good seg-way. So where did you live before moving to Little Earth?

THERESA: (long pause) Just around near here I think, I'm not sure just where I lived. That was quite awhile ago. Ah, I can't think.

LIZ: All right, where else have you lived?

THERESA: No place else but here.

LIZ: Here and Redby?

THERESA: Redby was sort of my younger days, you know when I was growing up that's where I lived, and after my mom died we kind of separated, so I was about, no, my younger sister was the youngest one, she was younger than me.

HANNAH: Where did you move after Redby?

THERESA: Here.

HANNAH: To Minneapolis?

THERESA: Uh-huh.

HANNAH: And then you moved into Little Earth?

THERESA: Umm, I moved around for awhile and then this place came up and I moved in here. I was the first one here. That was quite awhile ago.

LIZ: How did you hear about Little Earth?

THERESA: Oh, you hear things, I don't know how I heard about it, but I signed up right away and I got in right away too.

LIZ: Do you remember what you heard about Little Earth, when you first heard about it?

THERESA: Well, I don't know just how, what I heard about it. I heard it had nice, um, places to live and then the rent isn't as high as I was paying before, so it was kind of like, well I don't know if it still is like the same way, but I know they go by the money you have and they go from there, something like that. I really don't know, really how much... much about the paperwork on it, you know what I mean

that stuff. But it's been my home since it opened. My older children, I have two older daughters, one works for 911 and the other one works for the government, well I told you that, and they never moved in with me, they had found their own places cause they were older.

LIZ: What made you want to live here? I think you touched on it a little bit, but were there other reasons that made you want to live here?

THERESA: Mmmm, I looked around for a while, in here, and I found out it was really a nice place you know, perfect for children cause I had, I was raising some of my grandchildren and I have yet one boy that's at home yet, but the other ones just kind of flew, you know. I ah. I raised three grandkids while I was here. My first one is, she works downtown and then my second one was, she had a good job too, umm, they kind of moved away from here after they got older, my granddaughter Tina works for the casino in, where they're living, I can't remember what the place is called, I don't even remember. Hinckley! That's where they lived.

LIZ: Okay, can you tell me what your day-to day life was like when you first came to Little Earth?

THERESA: Oh, I can't remember just cleaning and taking care of your home, watching your kids grow up, and making sure that they have everything they need like food, clothing and all that, pretty good.

LIZ: Do you have any specific memories of people from the first few years you lived here?

THERESA: Umm, yea, umm well not really. Oh gosh, I don't really remember. (Long pause) I'm like the kind, you know, like by yourself all the time. But once you get to know a person and you're chummy with them, you begin to have a lot of friends. But I'm the kind where I don't go right up to somebody and expect them to...oh wooo (hits microphone on accident) oops.

HANNAH: You're okay.

THERESA: Anyway, I liked it though, I still like it here. I don't think I'd ever move. You know my children are like oh why do you live there? And I

said because it's a nice place to live you know. It's reasonable. And I've been here a long time and everybody knows me. So that's about it. I just love this place that's all, I just don't know what else to say, I raised all my children here and it's been nice to me and it's, I just love it.

LIZ: Do you remember any, or have any specific events from the first few years you lived here?

THERESA: Important what?

LIZ: Events.

THERESA: Umm, what would that mean, like...

HANNAH: Was there anything significant that happened either in the world or here at Little Earth or in the country? In Minneapolis, anything big that people talked about a lot?

THERESA: Just, I don't know, I just can't say because, umm, I just was really happy for that fact that I raised my children here, people have been good to me, they've been good to my children and as they grew up they learned a lot here. And moved on out into the world, and I raised three grandkids here so and they're gone, I just have one lazy boy sleeping over there yet. You know he was in Iraq. He just got back. They got bombed in the tank they were in and he got thrown out, he spent the day, overnight in the hospital but nothing really was wrong, he just got scared you know flying out of that jeep or whatever they were in cause they, I think they ran over a mine, I'm not sure what happened. But anyways, he spent an overnight in the hospital and was okay.

HANNAH: That's good.

THERESA: Yay, he's back home now, he's the one sleeping (laughing)

LIZ: You've kind of touched on this, but I'm going to ask it again, what is it like living in Little Earth for you now? And could you please describe a day of your life at Little Earth?

THERESA: Well, it's not very different than what I've had before, I know I see a lot of new faces, but everybody says hi to me and talks to me and I

like the employees, so umm, every day living I mean that you come across all the time, I'm relaxed here and I like my home, nobody bothers me and I guess being the very first resident here I get a lot of "hi there" this and that and you know, nobody knows, I mean, throws anything at me, you know, I mean, they all I suppose respect me you know for who I am and I don't show no or say nothing bad about anyone here either. I say hi and talk and you know there's a lot of friendly people here.

HANNAH: What do you do every day here?

THERESA: First of all I clean my place... (laughing), is that what you wanted?

HANNAH: Yay.

THERESA: Then I either go to meetings wherever I'm at or wherever I'm wanted at, I'm wanted at the safety council meetings, umm, I can't think of that name

HANNAH: That's okay.

THERESA: It will come to me, oh I'm on the board of directors, we have meetings, then the housing board. And that's about it I guess. Oh and about safety council, I go way out here some place, away from Little Earth because they hold their meetings there. You know I'm not really an at home person, you know.

LIZ: Ok, well, a few years ago in 2003, Little Earth had its 30th Anniversary celebration and can you describe what that celebration was like?

THERESA: Well, it was mostly like powwows, you know they have their own way of showing people that you know, through powwows and stuff like that and that's it. You know they do a lot of other stuff too. I don't know just how or cause I'm not you know I'm not the one fixing out the things, but I do know they celebrate quite a lot.

HANNAH: Can you describe a powwow to us?

THERESA: It's where people gather and the powwow singers sit around a drum and they sing and the people that are there either dance or you know they have their own outfits and they dance

around in their outfits... you've never seen a powwow before?

HANNAH: Not in person.

THERESA: Oh really, oh, you should come to yours.

HANNAH: I would love to.

THERESA: It's really ah, really pretty. You know because some of these dancers have such nice mikalahs, you know like shawls and stuff like that. They have stuff like that, it's really something to see. You've never been to a powwow?

LIZ: No, I would love to.

HANNAH: Sounds lovely.

THERESA: They hold those in Hinckley too a lot. All over Indian country, I don't know how you describe something so beautiful, it really is a lot of color in what they do with their powwows.

LIZ: What types of event or people did the celebration honor?

THERESA: Well, it's mostly their own, they have their own way of honoring whatever, you know like their home or their family or stuff like that you know.

HANNAH: But for the 30th anniversary celebration of Little Earth what was, who did they honor in that celebration? (Interruption in the laundry room) We were talking about... sorry there's a lot of commotion. We were talking about the 30th anniversary celebration for Little Earth, do you, was there anyone in particular that they honored at that celebration or during those events?

THERESA: I wasn't there really

HANNAH: Oh.

THERESA: But they do have, sometimes they do, celebration like that is just a way of letting their people know that they celebrate certain days you know and whatever they have you know, I wouldn't really know how to describe you know, it isn't just for, they have a reason for all they have and to me

that's sort of like a symbol of giving thanks to God that you have everything in your own world that you need, something like that I don't know just how to describe somebody else's feelings, you know what I mean, it would be somebody that would know how cause a lot of these people wear outfits and they have a story behind every outfit and I wouldn't know because I don't have an outfit. But probably just their own life and stuff as they grew up or something, it was, it means a lot to them, that's all I can say because I really don't know each and every person that dances and all that, they have different ways of being thankful.

LIZ: Do they make all their own outfits?

THERESA: A lot of them do, oh yay. And they're such pretty outfits.

LIZ: Well, what values do you think this celebration was honoring?

THERESA: Pardon?

LIZ: What values did the 30th anniversary celebration honor?

THERESA: I guess the 30th anniversary of Little Earth.

LIZ: What did that celebration mean to you?

THERESA: It meant a whole, it meant a lot to me because of the accomplishments we have and of the care we've put into everything that we own here and take care of every home and stuff like that. It means a lot to a lot of people you know, not just to me but it does mean a lot to me too. I raised all my children here and that means a whole lot, without Little Earth I would have been.... I don't know. It means the world to me.

LIZ: Well, looking back over all those years that you've lived here at Little Earth, does it feel like Little Earth was the same place 20-30 years ago?

THERESA: More than likely, it was but the construction around this community made this place beautiful. Other than that the families and everybody has just been the same and I value that. I would have you know about this place.

LIZ: You already answered this one for us, but do you like living at Little Earth?

THERESA: Yes, I do.

LIZ: What do you like about it?

THERESA: Well, everything. Everything. That's, that's, that's here. There's certain people that work here that I like a lot which means so much to everybody here because you know they've been helped through their own life as they lived through you know. I wouldn't know about other people you know but I imagine they do because they're still here you know.

LIZ: What do you dislike about Little Earth?

THERESA: Well, really that's a tough question. I love everything about it. But some of the crimes that happen here you know, it just doesn't go right sometimes, it just.... Well everything works out for the best when something like that's going on. And we live through everything, we struggle and we live through all the problems we have sometimes.

LIZ: Why have you stayed at Little Earth?

THERESA: Because I love it. It's my home.

LIZ: Looking back on all the years you've lived here, does the Phillips neighborhood, the neighborhood around Little Earth feel like the same place it was 20-30 years ago?

THERESA: I don't look around that much to other places like that so I wouldn't even know how to say or answer that. I'm pretty much around here all my life. I don't go any other place you know.

LIZ: Well, have you felt a different influence from the neighborhood right around Little Earth has that changed?

THERESA: Not to my knowledge.

LIZ: Umm, if you know, can you describe Little Earth's resident's interactions with people from the surrounding neighborhoods?

THERESA: That's a tough question because I don't know anybody else that thinks the way I think

you know. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't even know who to answer that one.

LIZ: That's fine.

THERESA: They have their own, how do you say that? You know, their own priorities on what they think and feel about Little Earth. Same way what I would do, you know, I don't know though questions.

LIZ: Do you feel that Little Earth is a part of Minneapolis?

THERESA: Sure, why not?

LIZ: Do you think the changes on Franklin Avenue over the last 15 years have had an affect on you or others at Little Earth?

THERESA: Oh why, I don't know about anybody else. For me, I don't know it just doesn't have anything to do with Little Earth or the neighborhoods around us. We just live here, nobody bothers us and we're okay you know.

LIZ: Do you think the construction of highway 55 has had an affect on you or any others at Little Earth?

THERESA: I don't know that.

LIZ: Do you use the light rail?

THERESA: what's that?

LIZ: it umm

THERESA: oh that rail that goes by...

LIZ: train that goes ...

THERESA: never

LIZ: does it have any sort of impact on your day-to-day life?

THERESA: not at all

LIZ: well in the early 1990s Minneapolis started the neighborhood revitalization program known as NRP to help improve neighborhoods across the city through grassroots community participation, okay? Are you familiar with this program?

THERESA: no... we got programs all about shit what is that all about?

LIZ: it's called the neighborhood revitalization program and it's about uh going into each of the neighborhoods in Minneapolis and um helping revitalize them through community participation of people living in those communities so those people working to make change within their own neighborhoods.

THERESA: haven't heard about that

LIZ: Mokay, well as you may know, so this is going back, there was a long legal struggle between Little Earth and the US Department of Housing and urban development in the late 1980s and early 1990s, do you remember this legal struggle?

THERESA: Ain't gonna remember anything, but it did cause a lot of, how do you say that, was that one day when almost took the res away from us, is that what?... yeah that. We lived through that.

LIZ: Did it affect your life at all?

THERESA: Not in any way. Just, we were just, probably just scared they'd take this away from us, which never happened.

LIZ: Do you remember any specific incidents from that time?

THERESA: not really, you know I'm not into anything that, like that, you like um going into... I'm not even interested in like when they go out and do something for Little Earth. I don't join in because you know I let everybody else do that, you know. I'm alright where I'm sitting.

LIZ: Well can you remember how other Little Earth residents responded to the legal struggle?

THERESA: Ummm, when they almost took it away from us? ... we all thought like ick, um yeah, it was really a big struggle there for a while.

HANNAH: were you on the board of directors at that time?

THERESA: I've always been on the board of directors.

HANNAH: ... oh since you were the first resident. Can you describe how they responded to this?

THERESA: I don't know just how they responded to it, but lot of them was really, I don't know just how to put it, but ... we lived through it. I mean you know just. I don't know how to answer that one. Its like we fought and we lived through it or something like that.

HANNAH: How did you fight?

THERESA: well not with fists, I know. Well maybe by, I don't know how, but we stood where we were and we just never let go of anything.

HANNAH: Were there protests in community meetings?

THERESA: probably, I never join anything like that.

LIZ: well the legal struggle resulted in the decision to allow Little Earth to be only open to American Indian residents. Can you tell me whether this decision had an effect on the community at Little Earth?

THERESA: I don't think so. ... Before you mean? How do you state that again?

LIZ: Can you tell me whether this decision had an effect on the community at Little Earth... the decision to only allow native Americans to live at little earth.

THERESA: That's always been, it's never changed. Nothing has ever changed. If it affects somebody or other, then, you know here, then I don't know how it would affect

LIZ: so before this decision there were only American Indians living here?

THERESA: mm-hmm

LIZ: Okay, a little more than 10 years ago, in 1995 some of the housing and the grounds at little earth were rehabilitated. Okay? What was the rehabilitation like? ... Do you remember this?

THERESA: I don't know. They what? How did you

put it?

LIZ: They rehabilitated the housing and grounds meaning they went in

THERESA: oh yeah, I remember now what you're... nice I mean it looked really good, that's what everything was done and all that

LIZ: did the rehabilitation affect your life in any way?

THERESA: No.

LIZ: so there was no construction that got in your way, or...

THERESA: No. We like the way it was coming you know coming up, you know, I know I did. I mean I watched them remodel, did all that, they put those two apartment buildings side by side over there by where I live, great big apartment buildings. I watched them, I used to go out there and sit in on the sidewalk and just watch those guys work. They'd be carrying a board and stuff like that. I watched those two apartment buildings being built. I even watched the office being built.

HANNAH: was your house built during that time?

THERESA: Yea!

HANNAH: So where did you live during the construction?

THERESA: Right where I'm at.

HANNAH: the same house.

THERESA: I grabbed that one right away. It overlooked everybody's place. I remember because when I came out my doorway, I spotted this guy looking at me from across you know, from across the way, and he still lives there. And he was going like this [waves hand in air] and he was..., black guy, ya know? I waved back at him. He said, "how do ya like it?" I said, "Fine!" and then he said, "I like mine too" he said. So... and that's the last time we spoke. [laughs] No we say hi to each other sometimes.

LIZ: do you remember any specific events from that time? Specific things other people were doing

other than just building things. Was there more community activity?

THERESA: Well not right away. They were just in process of building the two buildings I was talking about. There was just only us there in that one area. Even I watched the house across from me being built. That was something to watch, ya know and uh, this one guy waved at me. He lives kitty-corner from me and he says uh, "How do you like your house?" and then "yeah fine," I said. That's all we said and we still don't speak to each other. [laughs] he's sort of like um, I don't know, he's got a different um like, I think he's Asian or something? Or something else, I'm not sure just what it is, but... yeah we just wave at each other and start...

LIZ: how did other little earth's residents respond to rehabilitation?

THERESA: Well they weren't quite all in at that time. We had dedication of uh little earth. We were about the only ones. A few of us that were there. Because I used to go and watch those two buildings being, oh I already told you about that, watch those two buildings being built. I even watched the office being built.

LIZ: well it seems like there have been a lot of community programs and activities at Little Earth over the years. Are there any programs that strike you as especially significant to the Little Earth community?

THERESA: well the pow-wows and all that. It really gets people together so that they you know they're not strangers. There's a lot of them that don't know their own neighbor. I know I didn't know mine until you know everybody start saying hi and all that you know. I saw them once a month.

LIZ: have you been involved in any community programs or activities over your years at Little Earth?

THERESA: I've always been on the Board. They were, very first board they had formed I was on. I was only off two years being on the board because this woman that took over as director had her two daughters take over... one my place and then

another one at another place. So see how something like that strong can pull all these things apart. But I've been on the board since the very first, and I been on there since, just the two years I was off because that girl took over my job, ya know? Her daughter, the director, she was the director for two years and she had placed both her daughters on.

LIZ: What kind of activities are you involve with on the board? What does the board do?

THERESA: we just go through meetings, like uh, somebody brings things to the board that need to be taken care of, ... just (48:40) ... like if there was something wrong in my unit, where I live, if there's something wrong I bring it to the board and we work it out or whatever.

H: How often does the board meet?

THERESA: Oh gosh, I don't know. Once a month maybe. I don't know. Yeah, probably once a month. But I've been on the board ever since then.

LIZ: Well it seems that the Resident's Association is an important part of the Little Earth.

THERESA: It is.

LIZ: Can you tell me about the role that the association plays in the community?

THERESA: The role?

LIZ: Its job.

THERESA: Well its job is, they have a meeting, or see like I take care of cluster 3. So I'm on the board there. And then whatever happens in Cluster 3 I take it before the board, which I never had no problem with.

LIZ: so if there are problems in cluster 3, people tell you and you take it to the board?

THERESA: mm-hmm, I take it to the board.

LIZ: how many board members are there?

THERESA: well one fore each group, that's, see, I take care of that whole area there. You know, its cluster... what is it now? [laughs] I don't even ... 4! Three. Yeah. I take care of that. And each

meeting, I go around and I ask my uh... the ones that live there, ya know. I ask them what I can bring to the board, ya know, for the meetings things like that. Someone said, "Noooo nothing." So um, sometimes I take just a blank paper to the meeting, to the board. No I always think of something, ya know, that need to be taken care of.

LIZ: Can you tell me why you think the board was formed?

THERESA: Uhhh that I do not know. I think it was formed to take care of the residents or have their heresy spoken to me so that I can take it to the board. There's board members at each and every group, so whatever they have trouble with or if they have any kind of uh, what they don't like to see or hear or whatever, they bring it to me or I go around just before the meeting and I ask them what they want me to bring to the board. They say, "nothing." Ya know.

LIZ: Has its role changed at all since it was formed?

THERESA: Quite a bit. Ummm, mostly, well I don't want to go on paper. [chuckles] Ummm, the ones that sit on the board. I don't think they do what I do, ya know, go to each family. Maybe some of them do, but I don't... some of them don't. Ya know. They just don't say anything at the board. Or they don't care to... well if there's something really awful, wrong there taking place, they'll bring it to the board, but mostly its just, it would be like... ya know.

LIZ: And that's been the role of the board since it formed?

THERESA: Yeah. Things like, if a person, like me, I go from door to door, you know when there's a board meeting and I ask them what they want me to say or 's there anything wrong with your home, or whatever or somebody bothering you. These kind of things, you know?

HANNAH: Theresa, when a new resident, when a new family wants to move into Little Earth, who decides if they can move in?

THERESA: That's a tough question. Okay I think the board. I'm not sure. I'm not sure about it, but I can get to that because I really don't know if it's the president, or you know the one that takes care of everything. I think that's where they go first and then if their history, or whatever, their uh, they look over their history. If they're, if they get a place to stay then they move in. I think that's, uh, that's the head honchos at the desk that decide that, ya know. You know what I mean. We're just like, uh, we're just like alternates, you know like, we take care of, like, like me I take care of Cluster 3.

HANNAH: you're the representative.

THERESA: Yeah, yeah. And uh, that's the only place I take care of. I don't go all the way and say what's this and that, you know, I don't... just my area. That's what the board members are for.

LIZ: what do you think Little Earth has meant to the American Indian community?

THERESA: What? Say that again?

LIZ: What do you think Little Earth has meant to the American Indian community?

HANNAH: [pause] Has it been significant?

THERESA: Oh nobody's bombed us; nobody's trying to kick us out or whatever. I think we kind of hold on to our own. You know what I mean? Nobody comes in and bothers us. Nobody asks us anything. We're just left alone.

HANNAH: And what has it meant to the Indian community, to have a place, a housing, a place to live, a community to live in, in Minneapolis?

THERESA: That's a tough question too. I have never thought about that. I don't know how other people think about the community. I just, I'm just by myself and take care of my own business, ya know, like my cluster.

HANNAH: what does it mean to you to live in Little Earth compared to the other places you lived in Minneapolis?

THERESA: Okay, when I first moved in, the very first one to move in, the very first. I thought

wow, wonderful, I'm going to have a new home. Anyway... you know, a new house over in here, ya know. I thought that to myself for a long time. But then I seen people come, moving in. but that question you asked. What was it?

HANNAH: What has it meant to you to be able to live in an Indian community compared to other neighborhoods.

THERESA: it mean a lot to me because when I first move to Minneapolis, I was shoved this place and that, you know? And when I found out that they were opening Little Earth, I signed up right away. And I got in. And it has been a really nice place to live, for me anyway and my family. I raised my children here and they're all gone now.

HANNAH: Has it been significant to live with other people all of your cultural group... other people who understand what a pow-wow is and other traditions. Has that been important to you?

THERESA: Oh yes, uh-huh. It's always important when Indian put pow-wows. I don't know how, why, or how. I can't, I can't explain that because I've always done a pow-wow ever since I can remember, growing up. I don't know. It's just a way of, kind of like a rejoicing idea to, to see stuff like that. I don't know just how everybody else feels, but my, my feelings for that pow-wow is sacred to me. It means that my life as an Indian, who's sacred. Just like somebody White, you know, who goes to church and Catholic Church or something. That's sacred to them. You know? This is the way this is. Pow-wows and we enter, cuz there's a lot of prayers that are said that we....

LIZ: You said your children growing up here at Little Earth learned a lot of good lessons, were these cultural lessons that you think um... Well do you think they would've had these lessons if they didn't live at Little Earth?

THERESA: I couldn't say, really, because people are different, you know. There's not anyone that's saying what thinks they're saying or has uh the ability to raise your children the same way as somebody else does. You know what I mean?

LIZ: Yeah. Do you think you could've raised your children the same way if you did not live at Little Earth? ... If you lived somewhere else in Minneapolis.

THERESA: I don't know because I haven't been there.

HANNAH: Are you aware of the Indian culture in this community at Little Earth.

THERESA: Oh yeah.

HANNAH: In what ways?

THERESA: In what way?

HANNAH: Yeah, in what ways are you aware of the Indian culture here?

THERESA: In what ways do I...? How is that? How am I gonna answer that?

HANNAH: I don't know.

THERESA: That's kinda a tough question because I don't know what you're getting at here.

HANNAH: I'm just wondering if you, in your day-to-day life, are aware of Indians in the sense of culture.

THERESA: Oh yeah, uh-huh, I do. Yeah. Every day.

HANNAH: every day.

THERESA: I don't do what everybody else does, but I-I know of them. You know, I follow whatever I think is right. You know? My kids grew up the same way. Most of my children don't have, uh, they weren't baptized, like Whites do. You know what I mean. But they follow their own way, their Indian way.

HANNAH: Do your children identify as Indian and as Chippewa?

THERESA: What?

HANNAH: Do they call themselves Chippewa, your children?

THERESA: Noooo, nobody does!

HANNAH: What do they call themselves?

THERESA: I don't know. Their names! You know, their-their-their names, that's what they go by. You know. They don't say, oh there's a Indian there, ya know. "Hello, Indian." No.

HANNAH: No, I understand that. But they understand their Indian heritage?

THERESA: Oh yeah! A lot of 'em.

HANNAH: That was my question, sorry.

THERESA: Oh okay, I didn't know how to answer that one.

HANNAH: I'm sorry, I didn't say that very clearly.

LIZ: how do you think an outsider coming to Little Earth would know that this is an Indian community?

THERESA: Gee I don't know that either. I've never even seen anyone... that, like that. [chuckles]

LIZ: Well, thinking ahead to the future, what are your hopes for Little Earth?

THERESA: Well, the things I always say that its... I hope it never falls apart. The way people always talk about we're ... but they're strong. They're fighters. Same way as anybody else and I go for that. We hold strong to our heritage.

LIZ: Thinking about our interview, how do you feel about being interviewed?

THERESA: Well I've had this done before and it's kind of like, uh, taking a risk. [chuckles] Like if I say anything wrong, my Indian friends might choke me. [chuckles] No I'm just saying that. I don't know, it just, I don't know, just how to state that.

LIZ: Why did you decide to participate in this project?

THERESA: I did it before, that's why. And, I'm still alive. [laughs] No I always get asked like this because, I suppose because I was the first one at Little Earth and they think I know the, the whole thing about Little Earth. You know, every day life is different. The next day is different. The time

changes, you know like, you see one thing another way and then you go on with, you're still trying to make everything else fall into place or get better or stuff like that. You think ahead like that. I know I do.

LIZ: Well what would like to see come of this oral history project?

THERESA: Oral history project?

LIZ: Yeah, what would you like to see happen with the stories you're sharing?

THERESA: Well actually, I wouldn't know just what would become of it. What do you mean by that, what you want to know.

LIZ: Why do you tell your story? What do you want to be done with your story?

THERESA: Because I want people to know what ...um... Indians are all about. They're not the, they're not like the ones they picture in the movies. You know, like, they're hostile and ready to fight somebody. And no, we're entirely the same as Whites. We're all... we're not different. God put us on this earth. We're not any different than any other being.

Reflection by Hannah Gelder

I was initially attracted to the Little Earth Oral History Project because of my strong belief that everyone has a story to tell. This was an incredible opportunity to let people tell their stories. I also wanted to hear these stories in order to learn about the history of the Phillips neighborhood, as well as the different lived experiences of my fellow residents in the Twin Cities. I was also interested in learning about the Little Earth community, as it is a unique housing venture in the Twin Cities, not to mention the rest of the country.

The importance of recording people's stories and experiences speaks particularly to my Jewish identity. As survivors of the Holocaust get older and older, it has become increasingly important in our community to listen to and record their stories. Jews, especially Holocaust survivors, have received a lot of attention. This project was an opportunity for me to give someone else the chance to share their story. All stories are equally important.

I was happy to be able to participate in this project. I enjoyed my interactions, few though they were, with the residents of Little Earth. It was nice to be able to combine my studies in the classroom with a project beyond our campus borders. In addition, it was satisfying to know that I was able to contribute to the county and state's historical record, as well as that of Little Earth.

From my interview with Theresa, I learned that the American Indian population in the Twin Cities values the Little Earth community and housing option. It is important to hear to amongst others with whom she shares a common heritage. For her, it was a great point of pride that she was the first resident of Little Earth.

Despite the intense legal battle Little Earth endured, I am heartened to know that they won the right to maintain the Indian preference for applicants. I think it is important to create these spaces to foster social organization in urban locales. Too often the story is not so positive and you hear, instead, of the marginalization of minority groups. But in this case, the urban American Indian population, maintained their rights to preside over this housing complex, providing innumerable benefits to its residents.

Reflection by Liz McCreary

Stereotypically and often realistically, life in America is fast-paced and future oriented. There isn't a lot of time for slowing down and remembering the past nor does that seem to be valued to a significant extent. This doesn't mean however that people don't tell stories. People tell stories all the time, and those stories represent lived experiences that deserved to be shared. This is what I see as the purpose of oral histories and what really excites me about this project.

I believe that everyone has a right to share their story, and from the beginning, I saw this project as a catalyst through which the stories of Little Earth could be shared and preserved. My intentions from the start and through the process have been to create something that can be of use to the Little Earth community and reflect the wishes of community members. I want this to be a living project that engages a variety of community members and continues to expand and take on different forms as the community sees fit. Whether that means, community members begin doing interviews themselves, or people start to record or write down their experiences. Whatever form it takes, my hope is that these conversations continue and the stories never stop being shared.

Stories create history, and history is important to every person, every community, every culture, etc. Our histories define who we are today. Shared tales of lived experiences allow us to relate to and learn from each other. It sounds simple enough to tell stories, but one thing this project has really taught me is that it can be hard to remember stories from our past. Control of our memories is something precious and something we often take for granted. All of us could potentially reach a point where we can't remember many of the fine details or even the general events of our life, but with some luck we'll still be able to remember how we felt. And that becomes enough.

In the end, those fine details don't matter as much as the feelings that you associate with the events of your life. This is something I really started to think about after my interview with Theresa and something I hope to be aware of in my own life. Theresa shared that she felt good about raising her grandchildren at Little Earth, and she loves calling it home. Theresa's passion for Little Earth is steadfast. She really cares about Little Earth, and she has put a lot of herself into this community. As it seems many members have.

Little Earth is a community that has been through a lot, but it seems to be a strong community that overcomes. From my conversation with Theresa, I have come to view Little Earth as a place that exemplifies the progress that can be made when people work together towards a shared vision and the importance of remembering the contributions of all members. For these lessons, I thank Theresa and all the residents of Little Earth for opening their doors and their memories for the benefit of everyone lucky enough to stumble upon the rich history within these transcripts and recordings.

INTERVIEW WITH MARY¹

Conducted by Andrew Graham and Robert Heyman on April 30, 2008.

ANDREW: When were you born?

MARY: September 8, 1950.

ANDREW: And where is that?

MARY: Red Lake, Minnesota. Red Lake Reservation. I have a lot of relatives up there, but I'm here.

ANDREW: Do you have any tribal affiliation?

MARY: Red Lake Ojibwe.

ANDREW: Now we're going to ask about your family a little bit. Now you grew up in Red Lake?

MARY: Well, we lived in Red Lake until I was about six, and then we moved here to Minneapolis and I've been here in Minneapolis ever since. We moved to a place on 15th and 8th Avenue. It's right across from Madison Steel Square. They had an apartment there that most of the people were coming off the reservation. On the side of the building they had a sign that said "AFDC Welcome". A lot of the people, no matter if you were coming from Red Lake or White Earth, that seemed to be the place that they first went to. After they stayed there for a while, then they went out, they found a home elsewhere in the city. There used to be a thing about the Northsiders and the Southside Indians. That where we came to and I lived in South Minneapolis all my life and grew up around the Phillips neighborhood and lived in that area for quite a number of years.

ANDREW: Now your siblings. Do you have siblings?

MARY: I had three sisters and four brothers. I have one sister and one brother and myself left and the rest all passed just within the last couple years. The sister lives down the hall from me here and the brother lives in a highrise down on Franklin Avenue. So we're all still here.

ANDREW: Are you married or have you been

married?

MARY: I was married but he passed away. We weren't together at the time, but I was still married to him.

ANDREW: Did you have any children?

MARY: Him and I, we didn't have any children. I do have a son, but he's not the father. That's the only child I have, Rick. He grew up in Little Earth. He'll be 35 in June. When we came here, the only thing I remember after we moved here was that – he had long hair – I told him that if he wanted it cut when he got five he could cut it off. He was tired of people calling him a little girl, with all these wonderful curls, so he cut his hair. We've been here, in June, probably thirty-one years.

ANDREW: Do you work over at the Early Learning Center?

MARY: Yeah. I'm the evening receptionist. I worked in the Indian Center in their Congregate Dining Program, I worked for the University Agricultural Extension Program when I was much younger, and just doing odd jobs, childcare, in between those careers.

ANDREW: Now we're going to move on more specifically to your experience at Little Earth. How did you hear about Little Earth?

MARY: We heard about this being built, and I didn't think it would. It was called South High Projects at that time, then when my mom lost her housing and this was a place she was able to come, even if she had bad credit, she could get a place here, so she was the first one to get a place here and then I moved in with her.

ANDREW: Was there anything when you heard about it being built that appealed to you?

MARY: Actually, no. I was happy being out there. There were Indians in here, but there weren't the numbers like they have now because we have Indian

¹ This is a pseudonym we use to respect the privacy of the interviewee.

Preference now. It was blacks, and whites, so it wasn't just Native people at that time.

ANDREW: Was there a big shift after you were allowed to do the Indian Preference?

MARY: Actually, Indian Preference didn't come in for a while. There were just a lot of Natives moving in. I think that happened when Clyde and them were here, back in the day.

ANDREW: Now, I'm gonna take this over to Robert now, for the common questions part of it.

ROBERT: Alright. Umm, first off can you tell about what day to day life was like when you first moved here?

MARY: Oh wow. It, uhh, I had my, well I lived with my mother at that time, my son and I lived with my mother. And when she would move, like when she first moved into the apartment building, the 34 building and we lived with her and then she moved into a town house and we moved in with her there too, but, uhh, I think that was after the time when Clyde was here and stuff, and they were getting more Indian people to be like manager, site manager, whatever, and then there were a lot of Natives in here, a lot of Indians, and it seemed like everybody knew each other, and everybody knew, knew, it was kind of like that apartment building again, because we all knew if you were from White Earth, you know, we were learning to meet people from there, or Leech Lake or whatever, but, when we first started living in here we knew everybody and everybody's children, like when this tornado was coming and I went running outside to find my son and I couldn't find him, but I knew he was alright because someone had taken him in, you know and you could see some kid doing something wrong and you could say you gotta stop doing that, that's not right, and the parents didn't mind that you said something.

ROBERT: I mean, do you, are there any specific memories of individuals that stand out from those first few years you were here?

MARY: Individuals? I don't know, I was young and I didn't really pay attention to much. My mom was

here and she was interested in what was happening with the entire, and Little Earth didn't even get their name, and I can't even tell you when it was they got their name, they just had a contest, and there was two people that said Little Earth, and the other half was there so they put them together and it became Little Earth of United Tribes. My mom was the one that was, and mainly I just lived here, and was interested in what was happening.

ROBERT: Were there any events that stood out to you those first few years?

MARY: Well, the first few years no. But then we had the protests with the lights.

ANDREW: What was that? Can you tell us more about that?

MARY: Well we had the bridge, but the kids wouldn't always go over the bridge, so we had, we were protesting because we wanted a light there. And, umm, mom lived in that apartment building over there, the 34, and we were standing, that black gate wasn't there yet, and we were standing there and all of a sudden I said "Mom, here they come!" The riot cops, they were coming. And we gotta run, so we went running back to the apartment building, she beat me back to the apartment building. So then, another time, she, they, they came after us again at different times, you know, because we were out here and we wanted that light.

ANDREW: What were the protests like? Would they just be along the side of Cedar?

MARY: Umhmm. It'd just be the people that lived here protesting that we needed a light. Because, you know, people had been hit and killed on that cross way at different times.

ROBERT: So, why were the riot cops called in?

MARY: I (laughing) don't know. I have no idea why. We weren't a rowdy group, I don't think so.

ROBERT: Was that the only time they were called in, or did this happen more than once?

MARY: Oh, it happened more than once, but it didn't last like a month or any thing like that. The

cops just came those couple of times, and they had all of their riot gear on, and they trying to be impressive.

ROBERT: Certainly seems like a lot of effort over a, to suppress a protest over a traffic light.

MARY: Umhmm, (laughing), well we didn't mind. I think that was after AIM started, you know, and things like that, so and then you know we had been on the AIM patrol, and my mother and my sister, Joann, they were, well I was even an AIM member at one time when I was younger, and so when we had that AIM patrol and things, the police weren't strangers to us.

ANDREW: So did you feel that they were more closely monitoring Little Earth because of peoples' membership in AIM?

MARY: No I don't think it was anything like that. I don't know what they were afraid of, because it was mostly mothers out there and their kids. So I, I really don't know, I can't say, maybe Jolene would, and I keep thinking of different people when were talking that you could talk to for different times and the have probably a better memory of things than I do.

ANDREW: That's fine, we want to talk to you.

ROBERT: So, what's it like living in Little Earth now?

MARY: I love Little Earth. I tell people I could tell you all the positive things, all the good things about Little Earth and, but then there are some people who could tell you all the bad things, and maybe it wouldn't be that much, but it would probably scare you. But it has gotten better, it's, we had a time here a couple years ago when crack cocaine was so bad here, you know, that it just, it was crazy here. Elders were afraid to take their garbage out if they lived in an apartment building, and they would over, it was just scary. Now, now it is all a lot better. Course before, when I was younger, I used to be a person that would be outside, you know, in the evenings, and stuff like that, but now, when I get up in my house I don't come out really after dark. I'm not afraid of anything, I'll walk to S.A. by

myself at night, just because I know the people in the neighborhood. (Sirens)

ROBERT: I don't think it would be too practical to try and talk over the siren (laughter).

MARY: Yeah, I know, I know.

ROBERT: But as you were saying...

MARY: But I think it's better now. I think there's a lot of us that have that feeling like I had when I was telling you I ran out to find my son, but I knew he was safe somewhere, someone had grabbed him and taken him in. And, um, it's kind of like that now, but I think it'll get better. But it's good here. I mean, I love Little Earth, I'm not going anywhere soon. When they tear down that building I'll be in it (laughter).

ROBERT: A few years ago, back in 2003, Little Earth had its 30th anniversary. Can you just talk a little bit about what that was like?

MARY: Just the anniversary part?

ROBERT: The anniversary, the celebration...

MARY: We closed off that street, Cedar Avenue, from 26th to 24th, we were able to do that, and then we had tables out on Cedar Avenue and chairs. And there was a stage up there with this guy, with these puppets, Native puppets, and they had like an auction, a silent auction. I don't know, it was nice, but...

ROBERT: What did it mean to yourself and the community for Little Earth to turn thirty?

MARY: Wow, it's great, it means we've been here a long time, cause I heard from a person that they looked at, the looked at the future, at a map of Minneapolis, like, and Little Earth wasn't even on that map, but we're still here.

ANDREW: Back when it started, like when you heard about it, and when you moved in, what did you think Little Earth would look like 30 years from then?

MARY: Oh, I never picture it, I never pictured this. I didn't even know that I'd still be here, I didn't

think I'd even be here.

ROBERT: So, I mean, looking back, does Little Earth seem sort of like the same place it was twenty or thirty years ago?

MARY: Well, I don't think that anything stays the same, but, umm, I don't know, people just, I don't know, it might just be me, but people just live here, they go along with the rules and regulations and... (pause)

ROBERT: Have there been, I mean, I know there was a renovation a few years back, um, have there been any, like, really big changes over that timeframe?

MARY: Changes as far as what?

ROBERT: Changes as far as the people, the structures, the community.

MARY: Well this building here had a fire in it so it was shut down and re-renovated, after that, I think my mom was the first tenant back in there then. And I, see, I don't remember when it was, but I know my son was we sent him across the street, he was always the one we sent around to find out what was happening. And, I don't know, well, Elaine Stately was such a big part of Little Earth, and she was, she was the one, her name is on that avenue over there, it was 25 and a half street, now it's E.M. Stately. And, um, Elaine came here and she was kind of like the director, whatever you call it, and she started the Residents Association, and she loved the people of Little Earth, from kids to everybody, we all knew who she was and she always had time to talk to us, no matter if we were a kid or a grandmother or what, she was always here. And so, she was a big part of Little Earth, and even when she got sick she still wanted to, she was still worried about us, and she was a big part of Little Earth. But I meant we've gone through managers time after time, site managers time after time, some were good, some were bad, some were terrible, but uh, I don't know, all in all it seems like we get better, and then all of a sudden we take a couple steps back or, but I don't want to ramble on so...

ROBERT: We're here to listen to what you have to

say, I mean, talk as much as you want to.

MARY: Oh, well, I just, I don't really have that much, I thought I would have more to say and then I kind of didn't want to, I was going to call this morning and cancel, but you're lucky I slept in. (laughter)

ANDREW: Okay, good thing (laughter).

MARY: And um, I don't know, it's, and as far as people, I meant we had Native people here that were patrols at different times, and we've gone with different security patrols, and we've gone with the police, and we've had all Native police here at one time, and nothing works all the time.

ROBERT: So, you, you've said you like living at Little Earth...

MARY: I love living at Little Earth, not like, I love it. This is my home.

ROBERT: I mean, what, what do you love so much about it?

MARY: I love the people. I love people. I do, I love just going outside. At one time, my son was standing there with my grandson, and he was looking at him, and I was going to leave to go to work, and he said "Grandma don't need 20 minutes, she's just going across the street." And then he looked at my grandson and said "Now wait, you never know who mom's going to run into. It may take her twenty minutes to get to work." (laughter) So that's what I like about Little Earth and I like about, and I like coming out and being able to see different people, and even you guys, this is something too, and I think this is great.

ROBERT: What do you, what do you dislike about it?

MARY: What do I dislike about it? Oh gosh, I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. I guess I can't really say too much I don't like about it, it's just different times that the residents have had a say in what's happening and sometimes they don't have a say in what's happening, and I think we're in one of

those times right now. And then we're supposed to be celebrating our 25th anniversary as far as the Residents Association comes, so we'll be having that celebration this year.

ANDREW: Now you said that sometimes the residents had more say and sometimes they don't. Who do you think has the say now?

MARY: I think the director and the management, I think they have all the say right now. We used to have like a management relations committee and um, now that's not here no longer so we're not really heard.

ANDREW: Why do you think the directors have done that?

MARY: I don't know, I don't know. I have feelings in my mind, I think of things, but you know, that's what I didn't want to bring up in this, I didn't want it to be so negative. But, you know, it could get better, and, I always say you wait around long enough it changes again, but it's good in Little Earth, and, but I think we need a little more say in what's happening with us... (pause, followed by laughter)... This is the point I don't want to talk.

ROBERT: So what are the issues you don't feel you have enough say in? (pause) I mean if you don't want to answer we can just...

MARY: I don't think I want to answer that because, you know, that's politics.

ROBERT: So, um, you said you originally didn't envision yourself staying at Little Earth. Why have you stayed at Little Earth?

MARY: Because of the people. And, actually I feel like this is my reservation, you know, I mean I could go home to Red Lake and I wouldn't feel comfortable there. I mean I go out of town and I want to, take me back to Minneapolis, let me hear all that noise, I'm just so used to being here that I'd rather be here than on the reservation, you know, back home. This is my home.

ROBERT: Umm, looking back does, I mean not only Little Earth, but all of Phillips, how does that feel compared to how it was 20 or 30 years ago?

MARY: Uh, I don't think there's enough Natives living around in Phillips neighborhood, or maybe they are but I just don't see it cause I don't get out of Little Earth that much, I mean my life is here. I get to the Indian Center and people say what are you doing so far from home, and then its not that far. At one time the Indian Center was mostly, you know I worked there, so I lived here but I worked over there so I spent a lot of time at the Indian Center.

ROBERT: So in the past did Phillips used to be more Native?

MARY: Umhmm, yeah.

ROBERT: So that's changed over the past...

MARY: Umhmm, but I think the whole city has changed, you know, different sections have changed, and I mean its even changed as far as who's living here now. I mean, I can walk down that street and I know who's down there. But you know there was a few years when I could walk down that street and I wouldn't know what the dealer's name was but I knew he was there and they didn't bother me. But it changes, Little Earth, the neighborhood is always changing. But I don't see a lot of the, I just see Little Earth, I don't go out and see the Phillips neighborhood.

ROBERT: Um, have, have you always just sort of been sticking close to Little Earth or did you used to have more interaction with the surrounding neighborhood?

MARY: With the neighborhood? Not really. No. I mean, when we were kids we used to go to the weight house, we would, that way, we used to go to the weight house and they go to the summer camps, and as children. And I, I don't know when we lived, when we were young and lived across from that park, I meant we spent most of our time outside and in that park. And, I didn't get out of that area much either. And then we used to spend a lot of time downtown, but you know they changed that all, so we don't get downtown now.

ROBERT: So, has the relationship between Little Earth and Phillips changed?

MARY: I don't know they had a relationship. I don't know. I meant, we have different groups that are in here like EPIC and I don't know what other groups they have out there. But, you know, I meant I would know, you know, if it would involve Little Earth, otherwise I don't really pay attention to it, like we got that burner thing coming and there are other things that are happening now, but...

ANDREW: How close would that burner be to Little Earth?

MARY: Right over there. (laughter) A few blocks on Hiawatha, over there by the Green Institute, do you know where that is?

ANDREW: Yeah.

MARY: So it would be close.

ROBERT: How connected do you think Little Earth is to the rest of the City of Minneapolis?

MARY: Ohh, goodness...Well I think its gotten better in different times and different situations. I didn't pay attention to what Little Earth and Phillips Neighborhood was about, and I was just living my life, and, um, I don't know, I've always just lived in Phillips but I've never thought of it as politics or anything like that. (pause) Now Bill, he's the one you talk to about what's happening with the city and, you know, he, he sees all that, we don't see it. A mean we hear about it if you're a board member, but if your not a board member you ain't hearing it, unless they call you to go protest something.

ROBERT: Do you think sort of recent changes, over the past decade or so, on Franklin Avenue has had much of an impact on...

MARY: Oh, we used to always be on that Franklin Avenue. That was part of growing up, you know, we had that theatre there, and we all went to Phillips, we went, you know, I grew up at St. Stephen's school. I was there from first grade until I was in eighth grade, and I meant, and Franklin Avenue changed, I meant they closed things down and they wanted all these liquor stores closed, you know, and I don't know, I like what Warren Thayer called it: Gentrification of Franklin Avenue. And you used

to be able to go there, and used to run into "Hi, how you been?" and you know you hadn't seen someone for a while and you don't have that spot any more, you don't have that place, unless maybe you're sitting here and you see me waving at people and stuff like that, but that's here, and, um, its just, so I think that's what's changed too. And if we meet anybody its always like at powwows or some kind of event. Now this month, May, is going to be Indian month so there'll be a lot of things going on this month and with Indian month that draws people into that wouldn't normally come around here cause they live out and...So it's changed, you don't have that place where, like Gray's Drugstore, you go to Gray's Drugstore and get your, cash your check, and get your money orders, and then you saw everybody. And we don't have that anymore.

ANDREW: Now that Franklin has changed so much what do you think, can it offer anything?

MARY: Well, they have that...that giftstore that's Native and very expensive, they have the Nat Clinic there and they have all these and all that. And I like that the Nat Clinic is there because that kind of keeps us back on Franklin, because I can go into the Nat Clinic and sit in there and see people, like when I went for my blood sugars, they make you drink this stuff and sit there for two hours, and you can come back or whatever, but I just sat in there visiting people cause that's where you see people. That's kind of like where people would be on Franklin Avenue. So this month there'll be powwows and different organizations will be celebrating, like they'll have a feast and things are going on. So May is a good month for us cause then we can get back to that, to where we see people again we haven't seen for a while.

ROBERT: Do you think the construction on Highway 55 had an impact on Little Earth?

MARY: We can't see anything over there anymore (laughter).

ANDREW: Yeah, that big wall.

MARY: Yeah, that big wall. Well we only had a little chain link fence there for years, you know... even when Elaine was here she was asking for a wall

to be built and...who, what was that guy's name...a politician, some politician, and we were promised a wall over there years ago, years ago. So, and he, and its, I don't know, I don't pay much that much attention to what's really going on the outside, unless it involves my grandchildren, and things like that.

ROBERT: And do you use the light rail line that's over there any?

MARY: I don't even use the city's bus system, I walk. I always walked.

ANDREW: Can you hear it from where you are?

MARY: Oh yeah, you can hear the horn, yeah, you can hear it. You can hear it go by. And that, that is strange too, I meant, they took the 22 bus line away from us that went through the neighborhood and, well of course we have that, I don't know, I don't really take the bus, but its just like they put the light rail there and take buses away from the neighborhood, and especially me, I don't drive, I don't drive a car, I've never driven a car, but I've always walked, I meant, like the Indian Health Board has always been here, closer. It was once on Nicollet Avenue years ago, and that's where we went, but now they have the Native American Clinic and we have the Health Board close, I meant really, if you wanted to go anywhere here it would be walking distance and you wouldn't have to take a car or a bus. (long pause)

ROBERT: In the early 1990s the City of Minneapolis started the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, better known as the NRP, which was designed to improve neighborhoods throughout the city through grassroots community participation. Are you familiar with this program?

MARY: No I'm not.

ROBERT: Okay.

MARY: I mean, is that, which, is that where like a neighborhood gets money to put in, like, lights or...

ROBERT: I think that's part of it.

ANDREW: Yeah, I think it can cover a lot of things that would go into a neighborhood. That would be one of them.

ROBERT: Yeah, I mean, but it's not a program...

MARY: I mean, we've heard of different programs here for years and some are still here and some aren't here depending on what they are.

ROBERT: But this isn't one that, a name that rings a bell?

MARY: What's it again?

ROBERT: The Neighborhood Revitalization Program.

MARY: NRP, (pause) No, not really. I know there's money there, because I heard somebody say there's money there (laughter). It might have been Sherman, who lives down the block over there, he's into the neighborhood.

ROBERT: Well, we'll skip the rest of that. The legal battle between Little Earth and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, did that affect your life here at all?

MARY: You know, actually, I didn't even, I knew what was going on but my mom and my, my mom was more into stuff like that than I was. I was into other things. I guess it didn't impact my life any. I meant, I heard about it, and that was with, when Elaine was around yet also. But, and then, but no.

ROBERT: So, I'm, alright. Now the outcome of that was the Native preference. And how has that affected the community here at Little Earth?

MARY: I think it gave us just a better...I don't know, I shouldn't say better, but it made it that we would be Native people. The majority of the people living in here would be Native people and that we finally really did have a community that we could say that nobody else has that community, unless you are on a reservation, and I don't think any other city has it.

ROBERT: The rehabilitation, the structural rehabilitation back in 1995, what kind of impact did that have...

MARY: 1995? Is that when we got new fences?

ROBERT: Yeah, I think that's when they did a lot of, like, the renovating the apartments.

MARY: Well, I don't know. Let's see, '95, gosh, where was I then? That was only a few years ago. God, I've been here so long and I can't remember. Well, I meant, you deal with it. As Native people we grew up waiting in lines, and it's just, you know, and I think other nationalities have this kind of stuff too, but, I meant, you just adjust. I meant, we live here and then they want to come in, HUD wants to come in and do an inspection, MHFP wants to do an inspection, and then they want to do this, and they want to do that, but you adjust to it. I mean, where else can you live and you don't have to pay gas, and you don't have to pay water, and you don't have to pay for your garbage, and then it's subsidized, I mean, God, it's, it's heaven. (laughter)

ROBERT: Has the housing quality improved over the time that you've been here?

MARY: The housing quality?

ROBERT: Yeah...have the apartments gotten better, more comfortable, bigger?

MARY: I don't know that they did anything with it. What did they do? (laughs) Oh, they put in a different window.

ROBERT: Was that an improvement?

MARY: Well the other window, I didn't know was bad. (laughter) It was fine in my bedroom.

ANDREW: How many places have you lived within Little Earth?

MARY: Well I lived in the 34 building, apartment 209. And then moved to 2416 Ogema place, and I can't remember how many years we lived in there, and then we moved to the 21, or the 2400 for maybe, like, 4 months, and then we moved to 24-Sixty, what was it, 62 and we stayed there for about 4 or 5 years. Then my son left out on his own, and then I moved in here. And we celebrated my granddaughter, my first granddaughter, we celebrated her first birthday in here. So this is how I keep track of time I've

been in this building. So I've been in here, now she's 18, so I've been in this building for 17 years. But my grandkids are being raised in Little Earth, and my oldest one will be graduating from high school this year, and then I have a 16 year old, and they go to South, I meant, they went to Cooper, they went to Anne Sullivan, and now they're in South. The middle kids, they don't have Cooper anymore so, they started the kids out, one was over in, they were both at Seward, and then one couldn't adjust to the way Seward cause it was like kind of Montessori. So the girl stayed there and the boy moved to Cooper-Longfellow. And then I have two younger grandkids and this is by the same parents, they're 3 and 2, and they attend this preschool here, so, I meant they're, they're growing up here in Little Earth. I don't know, you should talk to Rhea too, you should get a hold of Rhea, she's been here a while, they moved out for a little bit, but they came back.

ROBERT: Where was I? Here. Okay. Seems like there have been a lot of sort of community activities here for the Little Earth community, over the years. Have there been any that struck you as particularly significant or worthwhile?

MARY: Hmm. Well I think anything we do for our kids is worthwhile, anything we do for our elders is worthwhile, sometimes they're forgotten, especially our, sometimes our teenagers are forgotten a lot. We have the Ed Center here, they have this Ready, Set program, and they have so many kids that are in that program, Ready, Set, Go. But then we still have a lot of kids that are out here that don't have anything to do. And, my grandkids, they went to Golden Eagles at the Indian Center from the time they turned five years old, and then, when they got into high school, of course, they thought, they didn't, they stopped doing that, but the middle ones are in Golden Eagles, and the younger ones will probably go into Golden Eagles when they turn five.

ROBERT: What is Golden Eagles?

MARY: Yeah, it's for Native kids. And they do certain things with them, and if you need like tutoring, they'll tutor you and it's been around, and it's a great program. And my middle kids, I call

them, couldn't wait to get on that white bus, they wanted to ride that white bus and go to Golden Eagles.

ROBERT: So have there been any programs that you were particularly involved in?

MARY: Within Little Earth? Well, I've been a board member...and...I don't know, I don't know that I've been in very many programs. I've attended things, but I don't know that I've really been into anything.

ROBERT: Well, what did you think of your time on the board? What was that experience like?

MARY: Well, I don't know. I got on the board because I didn't like what was happening at the time and I figured that you know, hey, if you don't like it, the only way you can get it changed is be a part of it. And I've seen that the change was good, cause the things that I saw that were happening no longer happened. So it's been a good experience, like we are just having elections again for representatives. And I tell you, I went and nominated myself, but yet I know everybody in the building will come out and vote for me, so I'll still be on the board. Some time some day, there has got to be a younger person that'll take my place and then I don't have to be out here, or be around here saying anything.

ANDREW: How much of the board is younger?

MARY: Not many. I'm telling you, no. There's Wayne, and the three, four, five, almost five elders. We need some younger people. If you count the people here, we got 212 units, we got 7 clusters, they call 'em. So first two are over here, and 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are over there, plus you have that 132 building that is so big you figure they need two representatives from there, and 34 you got a representative, and 99 you got a representative, and then we just got another elder representative. So... it's been interesting.

ROBERT: So, umm, do you feel like the young people aren't as connected to Little Earth?

MARY: Well, I don't know. I think they are, but (pause) well, my grandkids go to South High and

they have their All Nations program there, so they all know who's who and where they're from and there's different ways that they're meeting each other like the Indigenous Task Force and things like that so I don't really know much about what's going on as far as the young kids, but I see a lot of them hanging around and they should have something that they could do.

ROBERT: Okay, I will turn this back over to Andrew.

ANDREW: Okay. You were talking about Elaine earlier and the Residents Association. What kind of role does the Residents Association play in Little Earth?

MARY: They represented the residents. Each of us knew who lived in our clusters and right now I couldn't tell you who lived where. I mean, I know the people that have been here for years and I can tell you where they live. But then, Little Earth has always been turnovers as far as residents are concerned. You can live here in the winter and then in the springtime you find out who's moved in because then you see. You're out here and you see who's moved in. The Residents Association was because there were problems with management, you know, of course, and some of their rules and did they ever forget that any landlord has to give you twenty-four hour notice before they come into your apartment. So it was just different things like that and just to be there so that the residents would know that they have somebody listening to them and representing them.

ANDREW: Who were they people who were big in forming that?

MARY: Elaine! I was on the board years ago and if you didn't get to the board meetings, she was [knocks on table] knocking on your door saying, "What's wrong? You're not sick. Come on." So she would get you to the board meeting. She was very instrumental in keeping people interested and involved. Then I got into other things, but my mom was involved here.

ANDREW: Without Elaine has the Residents Association changed?

MARY: Well, it always changes, it's always changing. It's just sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. You know, everything is like that too. [Pause] I just don't think we're represented right now.

ANDREW: Do you any ideas of what it would take to have that be different?

MARY: I don't know. I've been asking myself that, too. With the elections I think we're going to get a couple of younger ones on the board. I think three. I haven't seen the nominations and who's nominated yet. But I know there's young ones coming. In the building I live in here we've got fourteen apartments and they're moving a lot of the elders into this building. But yet we have a younger girl living in here with her son, but they've been here for years and they adjust to us. She wants to move out into a two bedroom townhouse. As I'm aging I don't know what's happening out here unless I hear what's going on from people.

ANDREW: Do have any feeling what Little Earth has meant to the Native Community here and in Minneapolis and in a larger sense?

MARY: The thing about Little Earth is a lot of the tribes and where people come from. Like my daughter-in-law, her mother and them came from South Dakota. We went up to a meeting up in Bemidji and we met with Red Lake people, Leech Lake people, White Earth people. And then I guess we went there representing Little Earth. When we stood up there and talked, because everybody was able to talk it was a matter of saying, "You know, we're still a part of you. But we live here. You've got relatives that live in Little Earth." The thing that came out of that is they apologized to us for forgetting about us. They do, they have relatives that are living in here and they should be concerned about what happens with Little Earth. I think things like that and now Red Lake in Minneapolis they only counted you if they counted you on your roles on the reservation. And now we've got an urban office here. Twice a year they have this big to-do with the Red Lake people. In summer they have a feast, and in the winter they have a feast just to get the tribal members together. And now it's more. I'm going on a trip with the Red Lake Elders,

I'm going to Red Lake tomorrow and they're taking us up there on a bus and providing our food and everything. Some of the tribes that are able to are doing a little bit more. Bill and Buck, they know each other. Buck is chairperson for Red Lake and Bill is president here. President! (Laughs)

ANDREW: What kind of things do the Red Lake Urban Office do?

MARY: That's what they do. They do the feast, yeah, but if you're doing job search or something like that they help you with the bus card and well, of course at Christmastime you can sign up and get toys for your grandkids and things like that. I don't know what else they do. I just said I'm going with the Elders this time, which is pretty cool. They asked me how old are you and every time I turned around I'm being called a Baby Elder. (Laughs) But that's all right, you're an Elder and I'm just learning how to be an Elder. I've had this white hair for a long time so I've been able to get into these feast lines a lot quicker and nobody questions how old I am.

ANDREW: Now, next month in May, what kind of things are going to be going on beside the powwow?

MARY: Well, Little Earth is here, you should come! We're going to have Mothers Day powwow the tenth and the eleventh, Saturday and Sunday. That one time everybody came to eat and there were a few dancers and there were kids and now it's getting a little bigger, like on Saturday we'll be having some Buffalo meat and wild rice and the feast is free. The powwow's free, you just come sit and observe and I just sit and watch people. I just love that then I can see people and sit around with my grandkids. It's really nice.

ANDREW: Is Red Lake doing anything during this month?

MARY: Red Lake, they'll have an open house at their urban office and they're actually partnering with Little Earth this year. They're going to have a Princess Contest for the Red Lake Urban Indians. So there going to have a contest of a princess and a brave that would represent the urban Red Lakers.

ANDREW: I'm going to take it to a new set of questions. If you look ahead to the future, do you have any hopes for Little Earth?

MARY: I want that building gone, I want it bigger. I want a gym in there, I want a pool in there. This has been going on for years. We dreamt about a laundromat in there and we got a laundromat finally in there and there used to be a little Day Care in there and Mary LaGarde used to be the person, she grew up with us, and then Mary LaGarde lives over here at the Nelk and we have two Day Cares in there. But yeah, want that building bigger and they're talking about elders being someplace somewhere, but I'm not moving out of my building. But we need a Co-op. I think a Co-op would be good for us. Because the local store on the corner over there rips our kids off. Sometimes you pay a little more, you've got to watch the dates on the things that you buy. It's not good. And they want to close the SA over there where a lot of us do go. I would rather go over there than over to this store to spend my money. So, we need a Co-op. We wanted homeownership at sometime, too. So that's in the future.

ROBERT: What's currently in that building?

MARY: Currently there's a gym in there, there's an Elders room, and there's a management office. There's also the place where they sit there and answer the phones on weekends and after hours. Dispatch, that's what they call it. So, that's what's in that building, but we want something bigger and better. And after we're done, this spring there'll be making cluster six and seven getting in their central air this year and they'll be getting new black gates on the outside part so it looks like the rest that's been done so far. And I hope Little Earth is here forever. I hope it stays as long as I'm here (laughs) because I don't plan on going anywhere.

ANDREW: Where do most people get their groceries?

MARY: Cub. Cub or Rainbow. It's just Cub or Rainbow. There are some people that'll go out to Wal-Mart and out that way too that have cars. But it's usually Cub or Target. Well Target now is in a change. I think they're trying to get food in there.

A lot more food and stuff in the Target up there.

ANDREW: Do you go down to Lake Street much?

MARY: Actually I don't. I used to, but I don't anymore, I'm lazy. I don't go too far anymore. I go to the Indian Center and I don't even go there as much as I used to to visit because there are so many around here to visit. My grandkids are here and my sister lives down the hall. It's just nice to be here.

ANDREW: Why did you want to be interviewed?

MARY: I don't know. I really didn't because I was at the board meeting when Dan came. I was kind of interested, but really I was more interested in what other people are saying. And I guess I want to be part of it, too. But I just felt that I was being so negative right now that I just, and I didn't want to answer some of the questions. And I don't want people to look at Little Earth as someplace bad or something like that. I love Little Earth, I'm so happy here. So then when I met those two young girls I thought, "Maybe I will do it then." Then I got you two. But that's fine!

ANDREW: What would you like to see come out of this project for Little Earth?

MARY: Did you see the little history thing, the timeline? You saw that. I guess I would like to see it for Red Lake, too. I would like to just see it for Minneapolis maybe. Just a history of it as far as Native people. I know we've lost a lot our Elders that were here, like my mom. My mom and a lot of that first group that moved here into that AFDC building that we called it. I would like to see a history like that. You can't get that now because a lot of them are passing.

ANDREW: Do you think that before that kind of history has been left out or ignored?

MARY: I think it has. I think it has. Because I haven't seen anything like it. When they did that timeline, I thought that was really neat. And just to see the people that we part of it, that's what's fun, to see who was involved at different times and may have pulled away like me at different times

and then come back and got interested in what was happening again as far as the residents.

Timestamp: 01:08:22.0

Reflection by Andrew Graham

The story of Little Earth is what is lived and created by the residents of Little Earth. Being the best informed, most connected to, and most heavily invested in that community, this oral history project creates the space for the people of Little of Earth to tell their own story. A sociologist jumping into a history and a community made up of many people and relationships isn't able to recreate or fully describe in figures and dates what this unique place means to the people who compose it and what it means in its larger urban context. That person wouldn't be more qualified to give definitive word to what a place and a people are, and neither would a group of college students. What I wanted to participate in was opening up ways for the people of Little Earth to assert their own claims to their history and be able to share in ways that engage the rest of community in that reflection and celebration. The narratives that have been projected on to Native people too often follow the lines of depictions of powerless and removed from the mechanisms that form their lives. Instead, the dignity and pride of this particular story should be what is allowed to tell the history of Little Earth. This is a living history, of people who are still here, living their own lives, not one that an academic assigns them with a label or generalization. In a fascinating and complicated story like Little Earth's more than thirty-year journey, the Native people who were part of it provide the most compelling and personal account.

Mary wasn't certain at first if she wanted to join in the oral history project. She was "more interested in what other people are saying" and wanted to see what came of it. She told us what she thought of a history of and by the people of Little Earth and decided that she too would be a part of it. Her time at Little Earth stretches back more than thirty years to when she and her mother moved in. Her story raised the theme of what it means to be an American Indian in the city, having left Red Lake Reservation more than fifty years ago. That identity, one grounded in a Native community in Minneapolis and still belongs with her relatives north in Red Lake was interesting to look at. She was in fact part of the contingent representing Little Earth at a meeting in Bemidji where they called on Red Lake to remember their urban relatives. Just as it is sometimes complicated for those who no longer live on a reservation to still find ways to connect their tribe and their history, there are a number of things Red Earth and Little Earth have had to do to ensure this connection is acknowledged and strengthened. The day after we talked with her, Mary was leaving on a trip with Red Lake Elders to the reservation of her birth. While ties of family, history, and geography all inform and are affected by one's identity, it is also interesting to look at what role the tribes themselves and urban American Indian organizations can play in that dynamic.

Reflection by Robert Heyman

Too often Americans are exposed to versions of history that focuses solely on the tales, exploits, and lives, of the upper crust. Voices of the common person are lost, and their experiences, which say much more about the composition and state of our society as experienced by most people, are ignored. This project, as with other oral histories that aim to help tell the stories of non-elites, is an opportunity to help change that. Work like this helps us build a bigger, fuller, better picture of what life is and has been like for the average person in this nation. Little Earth, in particular offers a unique setting for this work as it is one of only a few urban Native American housing complexes, if not the only one explicitly so. The opportunity to participate in a project with such aims as this one, and to listen to the people whose stories we have heard, was one I could not pass up. Not only do I feel like I have gained proficiency at doing interviews from this, but more importantly, I feel as though I have come out of this project with a better understanding of the history of Little Earth, and the experiences of that community. It was a wonderful, deeply intriguing story, and one I am grateful to have had a chance to hear.

This was not a simple, or easy, process, taking serious dedication on the parts of researcher and interviewee alike. For our part, it would have been easy to have done archive research, but that would not have painted the same picture these interviews have. For the interviewees, it would have been easy to ignore the flyers and not participate. But what stands out is that both sides thought that these stories were important, important enough to dedicate the time and effort to being interviewed, transcribing those interviews, and creating the materials you see before you. Indeed, this is a triumph of dedication and willpower, with everyone involved committed to seeing it through in the end.

And, indeed, this level of commitment, of dedication to a larger cause, in this case the Little Earth community, is what shines through in these stories. This commitment goes well beyond the strong desire they have to see, and hear, their history recorded, preserved for future generations. In the course of the interview, I heard a repeated affection for Little Earth, not just, that our interviewee enjoyed living there, she “loved” living there. I heard strong praise for the other residents. That what makes Little Earth so worthwhile, and its community so strong, are the people who live there. I heard passion, and concern, for the community a desire to reach out to as many people as possible. There was a desire to try and do more, that the future can hold a brighter promise. I got the sense that Little Earth would do whatever it could to help its residents succeed, so long as in return, the residents were doing their part for the larger community.

Little Earth, its residents, its accomplishments, its history, and its future, should be an inspiration to us all. The perseverance, dedication, and compassion the people of that community have for their fellow residents was simply wonderful. This was an incredible experience, and I am deeply grateful to have been a part of it.

INTERVIEW WITH LORI ELLIS

Conducted by Claudia Leaug and Kim DeLanghe on April 14, 2008.

CLAUDIA: So I'm going to be the lead interviewer and just ask you some questions, and then Kim is going to help me with some follow-up questions and making sure we don't miss any of these.

LORI: OK

CLAUDIA: So, first question is: What is your full name?

LORI: Lori Ruth Ellis. I was born on August 15, 1960, in the town of White Earth on the White Earth Reservation in Northern Minnesota. I belong to the Pillager band of Ojibwe, a Minnesota Chippewa tribe. My mother's name was Adrienne Boswell, my father's name was Vincent Sheldon Ellis. And they're both from the same reservation as well.

CLAUDIA: Can you tell me a little bit about your siblings, if you have any, and their names and relative ages to your age?

LORI: Well, I don't want to get *too* detailed with you, but I have nine brothers and sisters. I have five brothers - I mean five sisters, four brothers. Since ten is an even number, I would be one of the two middle siblings. I spent the first part of my life on the White Earth Reservation in the town called Pine Point, also known as Ponsford, Minnesota.

CLAUDIA: Ponsford?

LORI: Yeah.

CLAUDIA: How is that spelled? P-O-N-S-F-O-R-D?

LORI: Right. I was born at White Earth Hospital because that was the nearest hospital. Well, Park Rapids was close, too, but the Indian Hospital in White Earth was the one I was born in.

CLAUDIA: And what year was that?

LORI: 1960.

CLAUDIA: When you were growing up, did your

siblings and your family all live together?

LORI: Yes, we did. Actually, because of the size of my family and the lack of resources on the reservation, my father wasn't able to find work often enough, because there were few jobs available, with no training whatsoever. Even though he spent eleven years in the military he still had a hard time finding work. The reason they moved us to the city was because they didn't want us to starve [laughs]. Basically, with that many children it was really impossible to survive on the reservation without resources, so they moved us to Minneapolis. My mother's uncle was one of the first Native Americans that had a construction company in Minneapolis. They did steel work, they helped build the IDS building downtown. For some odd reason other ethnic groups don't go beyond a certain level in stories, so the native crews would get hired to do the work further up in the buildings.

That's what my father was doing, but he was diagnosed with diabetes, early after we moved to the cities. We moved here once in '64 and went back and then we came back again. Then we lived in the middle of the section of 23rd and 12th, right across the street from the old Phillips Junior High School. There was four quadruplex apartment type of buildings there that were all really close together, and they were all inhabited completely from people from my reservation. Not only were those four fourplexes, you know people from my reservation but some of the houses surrounding that part of the community were where we lived.

When we first came down we had to stay with my aunt, my great aunts, who had a really big family too. Those apartments only had one bedroom in them, so there was like 23 of us crammed into one of those apartments until my dad was able to secure employment, and then we got into a duplex right across from Phillips there, and he was diagnosed with diabetes. Also, I don't know if diabetes contributed to it but he had a heart problem, so

he ended up dying of a heart attack in 1967, just a couple years after we finally moved to the city, which left my mom with the ten of us to raise and it was really, really, really difficult.

Fortunately, on the reservation we didn't have running water, electricity was only used in the winter time for lighting, otherwise we had to use kerosene or candles; that type of thing, wood-burning stove for cooking, heating. We had a well, a pump. That was how we drew water to our house, because we lived really close to a river. It was really nice. My mom used to do the laundry on a scrub board so she was, really, really, physically a strong, strong woman, just doing all that physical labor. Raising us physically for her was pretty hard work. But I think emotionally, it was really draining for her having my father pass away so young. He was only 31 when he died. And then uh - [clears throat]

CLAUDIA: So you were seven years old when he died?

LORI: Uh huh.

CLAUDIA: Were you in school at that time?

LORI: Right, yeah, I went to Greenly Elementary school over on 26th and 12th. That's right around the same area where Hans Christian Andersen School is right now. Let's see, it was really hard. After he passed away, my mom wanted to move back up north because he was there, you know, that's where his grave was, she just wanted to be closer to him, so we moved back up there, but we lived in Park Rapids in a modern home at the time with electricity, plumbing, the whole works. But it got really hard to live up there, so we ended up moving back down to the city, '68 - '69. Yeah, '68.

We didn't last long up there, it was too hard, because he didn't drive and getting to the store was a challenge. Keeping food on the table was a challenge without transportation and it was just too hard to live there. So we went back down to the city and we pretty much stayed around the same area in Phillips. Mostly duplexes and fourplexes, real crowded conditions. By then, my oldest sister had started having kids, so my youngest sister and my oldest nephew are all about a year apart. [laughs].

We generate rather quickly in our society.

CLAUDIA: Can you talk a little bit about, first of all, how many years of formal schooling have you had, and also, along with the elementary school you mentioned, where else did you attend school and what was that experience like?

LORI: Okay, we lived in the Phillips community up until about 1970, and then we moved onto 39th and 12th. We didn't live there very long because my older brothers and sisters wanted to be around other Native kids so they kept coming back to the neighborhood so my mom just gave up the house and moved back into Phillips so she could be around more native people, my family could be around more native people. We ended up moving back here. When we lived up there we went to Bancroft Elementary for a little while; me and my brothers and sisters. The other ones I can't remember what school they went to, Falwell, I believe, or Roosevelt, I'm not sure. And then, after we moved back into the neighborhood most of us went to Phillips, Phillips Junior High School.

And then, South High. I didn't like South High, it was overcrowded then. It was originally built to have less than a hundred student capacity. I mean - *a hundred* - a thousand. [Laughter] And for me it was really intimidating being in that really, really large setting, because during elementary school I was a little bit alienated by the system because I didn't realize I was Native until I was in the third grade, when they were teaching us about Thanksgiving, and studying us. I was like, looking at the pictures, and that day after school, I went and looked in the mirror and I said, "I'm not a *pilgrim*!" [Laughs.] I must be native." Then, that was when my mom started - when history started unfolding for me.

But going to South High School, that was really too intimidating for me. They were just beginning to be more sensitive to Native culture, and they were offering a social studies class that told *true* stories about Native Americans, because, you know when I was a child most of the stories weren't true. They were, you know, really, just false, a lot of them. I didn't really start learning about real Native American history until I started getting into Junior

High and High School. But, being that I couldn't - I was overwhelmed at South High because of the amount of students that were there then, but since then their capacity's doubled. So I went and dropped out of South and went to Heart of the Earth Survival School until I was in twelfth grade, then I dropped out. That was - I didn't feel like I had the basic skills to graduate, but they were going to give me a diploma anyway. And I just didn't feel that was right so I dropped out.

CLAUDIA: Have you ever been back to school since then?

LORI: I've gone for, I've tested for my G.E.D. a few times but, being that I had so many kids and I have a huge family, I've never really had the time or ability to complete it.

CLAUDIA: Can you tell us what languages you spoke at home as a child?

LORI: Well, it was primarily English. My grandfather or my great-grandfather was an Ogima, a chief from around our little section of the state, so I'm thinking just our band. He told our family and the people around us that it was best just to speak English, that society didn't want us to speak our traditional language because they didn't understand it.

My father was fluent in Ojibwe. He was raised by my great-grandmother who didn't speak a word of English at all. My mother, she was forced into a boarding school when she was growing up. Traditionally, she would have been taught Medewin, that medicine society, but because she went to the boarding school they beat her any time she tried to talk her language or talked about Indian medicine, tradition, or any of the culture at all. She was beaten; they wouldn't even let her draw. Her younger sister - 'cause she raised some of her younger sisters and brothers, she was the oldest of fourteen kids - so she raised a lot of them. One of my aunts was born left-handed, and according to the boarding school that was evil, so they beat her until she learned how to write with her right hand, which she did until the day she died. And my mother never - because of the trauma that she experienced through the boarding school - really never talked about the tradition or

culture because, having it suppressed inside of her or oppressed was just something she had grown used to over the years. She worked so hard anyways, she really never had time to talk about it.

CLAUDIA: So, then, did you ever learn to speak either Ojibwe or...

LORI: No, no. When I was a child, and my father, and my grandmother, and the older people, my aunties, my old aunties, would talk Ojibwe, I didn't have any problem understanding it at all. I always knew what they were talking about. I learned mostly through tone of voice, gesture, and just demeanor, how to interpret what they were talking about. And there're a big variety of words that I remember, because we have a language immersion project at the school where I work at, and one of the teachers left her flashcards on the table one day and I picked them up and I said, "Oh my God." I remember a lot more than I thought I did. [Laughs] Which is kind of... being without the language for that many decades it just kind of blew me away.

[Short interruption as Laurie's daughter comes in to the room and asks her about finding a sitter for her kids.

LORI: [Laughs] That's my daughter.

CLAUDIA: So can we ask you a little bit about where you work?

LORI: I work over at the Little Earth Neighborhood Early Learning Center.

CLAUDIA: And what do you do there?

LORI: I'm the building manager, slash receptionist... security guard, grounds, maintenance man. I do a little of everything there, but mostly man the front desk and manage the building, make sure the building's maintained, you know, help make sure there's no problems going on in the school. Just simply manage.

[Short interruption with interviewers stopping the recorder]

CLAUDIA: How long have you worked at the Early Learning Center?

LORI: About two and a half years.

CLAUDIA: And what kind of work have you done in the past before that?

LORI: Mostly I worked with kids. After I left Heart of the Earth, I started working there. I was a student one year and a staff person the next. I was tutoring kids with behavioral problems, and what they called slow learners at that time. I mean kids have a lot of reasons for not learning up to conventional standard, I guess you'd call it.

KIM: Sounds like you really like kids and have like, a big family. Would you like to tell us more about your family?

LORI: Yeah! That's one thing I decided when I was a little girl. Me and my mom were really really close, and she came from a family of fourteen, and she had ten kids, had one miscarriage, so there would've been more. When I was little, I decided that I wanted to have a big family too, and I ended up having six. I never married though... Things didn't work out between us very well at all. I think the most important, best thing that came out of our relationship was my children. And now I got grandchildren too, so that's the icing on the cake! [Laughs]

CLAUDIA: Do your children and grandchildren live at Little Earth or in the area?

LORI: Yeah, they all do, all my children, all six of them, and my grandchildren. Let's see, my family moved into Little Earth, July 1st, 1976. So, that one that just came by, I took her, that one that just came in the room - I'm really patriotic, I had to take her around, it was bicentennial year, so it was really fun taking her about, going to the parks and fireworks that year.

You know, after being crowded into the duplex apartments those years, moving into Little Earth, oh my God, we had five bedrooms. And we still had to wait in line for a shower because there were so many of us, but it was a lot better, it was a lot quicker than being in a one-bedroom apartment with a bathtub. It was, for us it was glorious.

Especially in the summertime. The first one who got up in the morning was the first one who was able to use the shower, and then we'd wait in line all day in the summertime just to get our turn. 'Cause me and my brothers and sisters were really active and played a lot of sports like football, softball, you name it - basketball, Frisbee, catch. We were pretty active. Kids in the community used to be really active back in the seventies and everything. We used to participate in drum groups - well, not *me* in particular, but they used to be available. We used to have a drop-in center right next door to us, I learned how to play pool there; foosball - I was pretty good at that. So they had a lot of activities and stuff for young people back in the seventies. These days it's a little bit more challenging to get the funding available to have teams and then we gotta worry about transportation and all of that too, so being able to provide the kids with structure, you know, athletic activities is a really big challenge right now.

KIM: You mentioned that you moved from...from the Duplex to Little Earth. How did you hear about Little Earth?

LORI: Yeah. Right. Well my mom used to work down at - she used to cook down at the AIM office.

CLAUDIA: So what year was that that you moved here?

LORI: We moved here in '76. But she worked - and back then they didn't have funding for that, so all the people that worked on that were all volunteers. But she would - I don't know if they had a daycare program or something of that nature because she used to cook for little kids. And then years later she did the same thing at Heart of the Earth, she was a cook there too. I mean, raising kids was virtually her life. And then I worked there tutoring the kids, and then in the summertime I would supervise teenagers, some were youth workers, and that was pretty fun, too. Learned how to do a lot of team building and teamwork and stuff like that. My crew was always picked out to do the hardest jobs because we were good at it [laughs]. And then, let's see. Well I'll just let you go ahead with your questions.

CLAUDIA: When you first were moving here, had you heard anything about Little Earth?

LORI: That's how... okay, that's where I fell off the train, here. [Coughs] A woman by the name of Teresa Pendegash (**sp?**), and fellow by the name of Harold LeRoe (**sp?**) and his wife Margaret, they were working on development for this complex out of the AIM office down on Franklin Avenue. They were raising the funds for the complex, so my mom knew about it long before they even started building it. And we didn't get in right away because there's only four five-bedroom townhouses. And a family our size, the one we would need, and because it's HUD subsidized, they have like, rental standards. There was a family that applied here one year that had *nineteen children*. And I was like, "Oh my Lord. We could put two of them five-bedroom townhouses together and they *still* wouldn't have enough room!" [Laughs] But that's how she found out about it, she knew about it through working at the AIM office on Franklin. And then she applied, but we didn't get in till '76, and it opened in '73.

KIM: I know you talked about that, as you were a child living here you played a lot of sports and foosball and different things. Are there any specific events that occurred in those first years that you remember?

LORI: Oh good lord. So many events at Little Earth. Well I think probably one of the more prominent events was the, okay, when they built this complex, they really did a terrible job. I mean the old South High School used to be right here on this block, and when they tore it down, I don't know if they even had to do that, but when they built Little Earth over it there was a lot of rubble underneath the ground so, nothing would *grow* here. Because it was just sand and rubble!

For years there wasn't even fencing on Cedar Avenue, so the small children would go out in the street and get hit by a car. And I don't know how many children had died or gotten hit by a car before the community stood up and started protesting. This is like, I can't remember what year, it might have been '77, but they had a protest on Cedar Avenue there, because the city refused to put in a

fence. You know, *children* didn't know better. Little tiny ones, they kept trying to cross the street, and it's a state highway, you know!

So the community finally mobilized and they started protesting in the middle of Cedar Avenue there. The city called out a riot squad, so they had a whole riot team out there that went up against the community. Most of the people that were arrested were women, children, there was even a Catholic Nun arrested from the church, from Holy Rosary Church. It made newspapers pretty big back then. So, all the money they spent on this riot squad... they ended up putting this street light out here which was a temporary light that sat there for over twenty years, maybe twenty-five. Then maybe about seven, eight years ago they finally put in a permanent one. Then the money they spent on the riot squad... they would have been better off just building a fence and putting it there which they ultimately did *anyway*, because it was so scandalous in the community that they were arresting young women and teenagers, and a Nun, and *children*, it was just you know, it was such terrible publicity for the city. They did *finally* do that.

The kids, you know, they're practical beings. The bridge has always been there, but when you see that there's no barrier on the street, they aren't gonna walk all the way over to use the bridge, they're gonna try to cross wherever they can. It was just, you know, tragic that all these little children had to get hit by cars and the community had to face a riot squad just to get a fence and a light out here. I mean, it was poor planning in the first darn place to put a housing complex with a state highway right down the center of it. But it's working out fine now. We have really good fencing, we have a permanent light.

The kids, the smaller kids still have to use the bridge, no matter what, because, some of the negative publicity over the years regarding Little Earth, some people drive through with the attitude that we don't matter and that it's okay for them to run red lights and do whatever. I ran through there one - I didn't run but I rode through there on a bike one time and one man got really mad and started screaming obscenities and called me a 'crazy wahoo' because

I crossed at that crossing when he wanted to gun through it. It was, you know, just bad.

Let's see. After the seventies, we started to realize that not only were the grounds just, built on nothing but rubble and sand, but the craftsmanship that went into building the townhouses was shoddy too. The runoffs in our bathrooms tubs; they weren't even hooked up, so if the tub got filled up too high, it would empty into the pantry right beneath. The furnaces were wired backwards, so our maintenance men were working twenty-four hour shifts just around the clock trying to keep up with that but they couldn't. They just kept working and working to correct all the problems and *meanwhile* ...

Let's see it was South High Nonprofit Housing for a while and then they turned it over to AIM, and AIM was managing it, and they were trying to get increases from HUD to help offset the costs of dealing with the shoddy workmanship, and that wasn't happening. It started falling into disrepair. HUD refused to put more money into the complex to correct these problems, so, at that time, management didn't have any choice but to withhold the money for paying bills, just trying to keep the housing units in a condition where they were *livable*. Gradually the units started falling into disrepair; the property was foreclosed on, somewhere in the early eighties.

It went into court and it stayed in court, around '82, about fifty percent of the units were empty. The unit I moved into, oh God, the carpet was so bad at that time, when I moved in, I didn't even, I wore shoes in my house. I wouldn't let my children play on the floor. Every time I'd let one of my children play on the floor they ended up getting diarrhea. I had to keep them either in a swing, in a walker, in a high chair, or outdoors. That was really, really a hard time for the Little Earth, when we were in foreclosure. Then uh, Little Earth United Tribes Inc. filed a lawsuit against HUD, and they stayed in litigation for eleven years.

Meanwhile, the judge, Robert Renner, he was really sympathetic, but there just wasn't enough physical proof to justify that HUD should have been responsible for helping put more money into

the complex to help offset the costs from the poor workmanship that went into building the units. So we were placed into receivership. We had a court-appointed manager, and then in '83 the Residents' Association was established, because there was virtually no native leadership at all. We were managed by an outside management company. Yeah, that was Elaine Stately, she was, back then it was called the 'community coordinator.' Their first project was a food shelf. That was LERA's oldest program, and LERA used to have a little cubicle about eight by twenty feet, eight by eighteen feet, inside the food shelf at the time. And it's grown considerably since then. Elaine got sick; she was diagnosed with cancer in the mid-eighties, so she had to leave the organization, so we just had an administrative assistant and a food shelf coordinator.

Then the Southside management company brought in a manger from New York that just came in and started kicking people around and that's when I got involved, in the mid-eighties. I was a member of the organization at first, then I became the Secretary and then before long I was the Chairman. Then I served as the Chairman for six and a half terms, or about thirteen years.

CLAUDIA: This is Chair of the Resident's Association?

LORI: Right. We kept fighting and fighting for ownership of the property. We lobbied every possible avenue; we tried different things. We developed an Indian Housing Authority that the city refused to recognize. We tried to place the land into trust, and that really made Federal politicians nervous. One of our congressmen had a rider attached to a bill that forbid the property from being put into trust. So we kept, we lobbied different tribes to take ownership of the property so we could maintain its Indian identity. We tried, Shakopee, Treasure Island, Lower Sioux, because of the proximity. Minnesota's Chippewa tribe is just located too far north, so we didn't even explore that avenue there.

We got wind that Jack Kemp was coming to Minneapolis; he was the Secretary of HUD. He was the keynote speaker for the Metropolitan Council Conference that they were having, a housing

conference. He was the Secretary of HUD at that time. Oh, I forgot to mention when they foreclosed on the property, Samuel Pierce was the Secretary of HUD at that time and he had a million dollar contingency fund set aside in the event that there were hostilities, because we're native. [Laughs]. Couldn't help us fix up the units with that million dollars but he was ready to fight us with that million dollars. That was so...ugh.

CLAUDIA: One of the things that we know about the legal struggle between Little Earth and HUD was the decision to allow Little Earth to be open only to American Indian residents.

LORI: Well, actually, it's a preference. It's not – what's the word – it's not exclusive. See, when Kemp came, we took a group of our leaders down to the Metropolitan Council where they were having their conference at the Hyatt Regency. He found out that we were going to go down there and protest so he called our lawyers the day before the conference and agreed to meet with us at Little Earth. So he came here to meet with us, and made a lot of promises: "Yes, we're going to find solutions, we'll do this and that, we'll help you work something out." You know, George Latimer was mayor of Saint Paul at that time, Don Frasier... can't remember all the public officials that were involved with helping us. But we went to Washington D.C. to meet with the Secretary at that time, Kemp, and when we got there he was just flat out like, *no*. [Laughs] He just made a lot of promises while he was here. Once he got back to his office in D.C. he just sort of turn-coated on us, changed his mind. So, in my eyes, he just basically lied to us, just to stall us.

CLAUDIA: So what were some of the outcomes of that legal battle, and how did that affect the community?

LORI: Well, ultimately after eleven years in court, we lost our case. We filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, and our timing was just, unbelievable. We got a meeting with Henry Cisneros who was the Secretary of HUD after Jack Kemp. We went to D.C., and we found out right after we got that meeting - or was it the meeting with Kemp - one of the meetings, I'm pretty sure it was with Cisneros -

once we got notification that he would meet with us, I think it was the next day we got notification from the Supreme Court that our appeal was denied [Laughs]. So anyway, we ended up flying out to D.C. and meeting with Secretary Cisneros. Our group talked to him, and at that time we were still, well, officials refused to recognize the Indian Housing Authority, but we still remained in formation, so to speak. That group, we went out there to talk to Henry Cisneros, and I pretty much told him my story, you know, as far as having so many people crammed into a one bedroom apartment.

He asked the biggest question: "Why? Why is this so important?" And it was such an enormous question for me; I was just dumbstruck [Laughs]. Fortunately, there was somebody else in my group that answered it to his satisfaction. He said if he could find a way he would do it, and I believed him. 'Cause when he looked in my eyes, and I looked in his, I seen something that - Kemp, when I met Secretary Kemp, he did everything to avoid eye contact, you know. But when we met with Cisneros, I *knew*, just by his ability to maintain eye contact and listen to this story, a *saga*, more or less, that he would. A few months later he sent a letter, saying that we would be able to apply Indian preference in Little Earth. That was in '94. And it isn't exclusive, you know. It's illegal to be exclusive.

CLAUDIA: Do you think that that decision to create Indian preference for Little Earth has had an effect on the community of Little Earth?

LORI: Oh God, I'll say. Yes. In many ways Little Earth was considered the hub of the Native American community. After Little Earth and the American Indian Center were built, it just became like the... I would say the Native American Mecca of Minneapolis.

After Little Earth finally stabilized, all of these other organizations started coming up and improving. It's just pretty much been a vital resource for the Native community. Over the years I've noticed that a good majority of the people who have lived in this neighborhood and are in this community, when they buy their own homes they live close by, in neighborhoods close by. So we do stick together

even, in the city. It was really difficult for us to do that, but it happened, and it was such a good thing. 'Cause, you know, for Native people the most important things are your family, your home, culture. Basically, this was our home, and taking that away from us would have just, I don't know, would have just devastated the Indian community completely. We would have been scattered all over this little corner of creation. We were very, very fortunate I believe. There were a lot, a lot of dedicated people that really helped over the years.

KIM: We also learned that in 1995, they were able to start rehabilitating the grounds. Did that come out of the same decision?

LORI: During the time we were in receivership, the compassion that Judge Renner, who was really adamant that our receiver should make every effort to improve the property while they were here. So, they were making attempts to improve the property. Unfortunately, though, they weren't taking advice from the people, so a lot of the money they spent trying to rehabilitate the grounds was just wasted money, they just wasted money. 'Cause we told them that there was too much rubble in the ground; there was not enough soil available to grow anything, and they just refused to listen to that. They would just put in inches of topsoil and try to plant sod, and it just was wasted. They tried putting sprinkler systems in. Wasted. Just wasted. They put millions in there, while we were in receivership. They put the old retaining walls, the wooden retaining walls, which didn't hold up either.

It wasn't until they started the current landscaping that they really... and the timing was just perfect, too, because I think that having all that rubble in the ground was starting to affect the foundations. Some of the foundations were, you know, starting to destabilize because the ground was so horrible. So when they started their rehab of the grounds, they dug deep and they cleared all of the rubble out, and they put real soil on there that was able to, you know, nourish growing things. So that's really, I mean, they spent millions and millions, but it really didn't work.

Part of the landscaping right now, I mean, it's been

termed by some 'semi-gated'. To some extent it really has helped improve the security on the property. You know, a lot of people, "All these little short fences aren't really going to stop anybody," and I said, "No they're not going to, but they're really going to slow them down." So it really has been beneficial. At one time there weren't even - they had patios that went out to a certain... probably to where they are now, but they were stucco, and wood. They matched, you know, the stucco there at that time there now, but they had grown so rotten and destabilized they had to take them out eventually so there was just nothing but concrete and dust for a long time. Then we brought in some people and raised enough money to get the patios put in. And then they started with the phased project, the phased rehab, and now it's just beautiful.

Because of the way the units are situated now, they're really miserable hot in the summertime, and with the central air conditioning it's just really been good, good for the community. People living in such close proximity, it's, for me, having an air conditioner, it worked out better for me because I got really super-sensitive hearing. Having an air conditioner in the house made me able to close my windows at night so I'd sleep better.

And more privacy. I got my own yard now, and I like to take care of it. Last week I was out there picking up trash, and someone was saying something to me about it, and I said, "Well, this is my yard." "Well, why don't you let wait for maintenance or groundskeeper to come pick it up?" I said, "This is my yard; I'm going to pick it up. I'm sure if they see something they'll pick it up," I said, "but I'm going to do what I can when I got time." I wish more people felt that way about it. And a lot of people do, you know, more and more people are trying to fix up their little spaces and plant things, and trees. It was really wonderful.

We started - geez, what year, I can't remember what year it was... late nineties - started planting trees over here. [Points out window to the north of the conference room]. We had ten white pines, but we didn't have the fences, and only two of those pines survived. Those were the ones that were in front of my house. And I was so mad, because when they did

the rehab, they transplanted my trees to somebody else's yard [Laughs]. But I still get to look at them, and that's a good thing. 'Cause as a child, my great-grandmother, her pine trees were so important to her. We weren't allowed to be... yeah, we could climb the other trees but we couldn't mess with her pine trees. She had nothing but pines planted out in her front yard and she had rose bushes. She was really a traditional woman.

CLAUDIA: When you were speaking earlier about the legal battle between HUD and Little Earth, you mentioned about the surrounding community and how Little Earth's Indian preference has changed and affected the community. I was wondering, do you think that the Phillips neighborhood feels like it's the same place that it was twenty or thirty years ago?

LORI: No, no. Growing up was, let's see... When my family, well, my grandmother and my mom first came to the city – this was before my time – they lived in those little brownstones up there on Chicago and 10th, up by HCMC, and then they slowly migrated into the Phillips community. That was the only community I've known since growing up. I read a lot of and watch a lot of history programs about Minneapolis, and traditionally Natives have inhabited this South Minneapolis portion of the neighborhood, mainly Phillips. I think it's changed a lot over the years.

There used to be some, and there still are, some really beautiful homes there that are really stable. Part of the neighborhood where we used to live is mostly inhabited by the Somali community right now. That would be the, what, northwest section of Phillips. The other section is pretty much stable and pretty much the same. This part of the community has become more Native, whereas Native people used to stay mostly on the west side of Bloomington Avenue until Little Earth came up and then we started moving slowly over to this neighborhood. And now, a lot of Native people live over on the other side of Hiawatha, over in Longfellow, Corcoran, just, close by, you know. A good lot of the professional Natives in the community live in nearby neighborhoods. In the early years, Little Earth, a lot of it was a lot of transitional. A lot

of people that lived here would either go to school here, or go to school while they lived here and then after they accomplished whatever they needed - the training or schooling they needed - they would move on, you know, start buying homes.

I don't know; I've always lived in Native communities my whole life. Maybe when I'm older, I would leave Little Earth, I don't know. But, for me, I'd prefer to be here. I mean, with the income in my house, we pay a lot of rent, you know. We pay pretty close to market rent, and market rent's pretty high in Little Earth because the higher the market rent in Little Earth is, the bigger the subsidy that's available. For my family, we don't mind because we've been here so long and it's worth it for us to pay that much rent to be here. It's all we know, it's all we love. [Laughs].

CLAUDIA: Can you describe a little bit how Little Earth and its residents have interacted with the surrounding neighborhood over the years?

LORI: Well, I think initially... My oldest daughter, she went to Holy Rosary School when she was a kid. Their school system, the parochial school system, was already suffering financial problems, so they had to charge tuition. But, you know, I found a way to pay her tuition, because I wanted her to be in a school nearby home. And, over the years I think we have developed a rather good relationship with Holy Rosary. They offer a Loaves and Fishes program there that serves the community at large, not just Little Earth, but they serve dinner over there every evening, and that's a really vital resource for the community.

There's a lot of people that live here that have zero income. They need to eat, and the food shelf is only accessible once or twice a month, and without transportation it's hard to get to other food shelves, and that's a really vital resource for the community. It serves a lot of people in the community that are either on zero income, there're handicapped people, elder people. Diabetes is a major killer in our community, so people are getting sick really young, you know, from diabetes.

Native people are used to traditional Native diets,

and introducing European foods into our culture is pretty, is killing our people. Heart disease, hypertension; The foods that the community can afford are not good for you. Like macaroni for example: it gets in your body, it turns into sugar. Diabetes now is almost, if not *crisis* levels in our community. Life expectancy for Native American male is only 42, 43 years old. So, you know, it's just really, really hard. I, my family, we're fortunate enough to be able to afford different items of food.

CLAUDIA: We have about 20 minutes before 5:30, and I think we didn't mention this at the beginning, usually these sessions go about 90 minutes, so if you would like to end at 5:30, that's fine with us, but if you'd like to continue going at that point, it's up to you.

LORI: That's up to you. My kids are all adults now; I have no reason to rush home. [Laughs] So whatever questions you have, we'll go over it, I have no problem with that.

CLAUDIA: I guess the next question for me would be: Do you feel that Little Earth is a part of Minneapolis?

LORI: Yes. Let's see, I used to be really active in the People of Phillips, an organization that brought people from the entire Phillips community together to address issues in their neighborhood. I was on their Executive Committee for a long time. Unfortunately, something happened within their organization and they were forced to fold. Then, Phillips has been split into four sections now, so it's a little harder to, you know, come together when you've been split apart like that. Politically it's really hard. When I first started with LERA, they, let's see, I can't remember who...

CLAUDIA: What is LERA again?

LORI: Little Earth Resident's Association. They were building a – well it is a transfer station now, but they were going to expand the garbage transfer station up on 28th, by the soldiers and pioneers cemetery. They were proposing – it was the Browning and Ferris or BFI, the big trash company based in New York at the time – they were proposing to move six to eight

hundred packer trucks into the community *every day*, okay. Right across from there, just yards away, is a foundry, and then the next block is the asphalt production site. So, putting six to eight hundred packer trucks a day into the community I think would have been just disastrous. So, we fought, we fought for a long time to stop that transfer station, and we succeeded, through working with People of Phillips, POP.

Right now, they're trying to – there's a development corporation called (*cannot determine word*) Development Corporation that's trying to open that same building and turn it into a biomass incinerator. I cannot imagine how these people think that is better than a transfer station! [Laughs] It just blows me away. But, you know, we researched it. They have an incinerator, the same type over in north Saint Paul. It's supposed to burn wood primarily, and other raw materials of that nature, but this other incinerator over in North Saint Paul, they already ran out of material and they had to bring it in from north, from outside the city. So, trying to open up one in here, God only knows what they're going to try to throw in there to burn it.

So, we've been struggling with that for months. For some odd reason, they failed to notify the community. I mean, other communities, other neighborhoods found out about it, they were notified, but they didn't let Little Earth know about it until they were getting really close to entering into negotiations with Xcel. So, myself, the CEO here, and other neighborhood representatives have gone to lobby against it. We've gone to the capital and testified in committee. One of the bills that we were hoping to get through kind of fell apart, and it has to be reworked, because Minnesota pollution control I see kind of seems to be dragging their feet out behind on these issues. I just, you know, with global warming and the world moving into a green era, I think that it's just *insane* to build, to even attempt to open an incinerator, right alongside the midtown greenway, the Green Institute. It's just, it's an oxymoron [Laughs]. So far, they haven't succeeded. I'm not going to count my chickens before they hatch but we're going to fight them with everything we got.

LORI: [even before we]...moved in, it was just the

attraction of being around so many native people and it was such a unique concept having a Native American housing complex right in the middle of the city. And it being that I only lived around Natives my whole life I was just so attracted to it. And thinking my mom probably got sick of me being gone all the time, so when we moved over here that was one way of keeping me home. [giggle]

KIM: [Giggle] Are there um, any specific people that you [re]member from Little Earth, like in your first few years of being here?

LORI: Oh, jeeze...there was a lady that used to live by my place. Her name was Belva Smallwood. She had muscular dystrophy. She had three kids and [I] used to hang out at her place with a couple of my elder sisters and a couple cousins and...see there was a fella that lived over here named Glen...or his sister lived here, Glen Blacksmith. He played in a band, really talented, gifted guitar player. He's played at some of the events around here. I used to baby-sit for his sister. ...uh, there were a lot of very notable people over here. Clyde Bellcourt and Peggy used to live right there by my house, where I live now. Uh...Harold Larrow was living, Harold lived over here, Harold and Margaret lived down on 24th and Cedar. Jeeze, there were so many. It was hard to imagine. ...Um, ...I can't remember what year it was, '76 there was a, there was kind of a odd experience. There was a friend of mine and me and him were walking from Belva's house and one of the brother's from the church came out onto the stoop. Apparently some of the little native kids were playing ding dong ditch at the church and they just kept ringing the bell and ringing the bell. ...and he got mad. He came out. Um...he came out of the building and he hit the boy across the face. And it was so loud, we could hear it on the sidewalk, over here on this side of the parking lot. That's how hard he hit him and the guy I was, the fella I was with said, um, "we should do something about this, we should go over there." And I said, "nah." I said, "Them kids are mad. They'll take care of it. ...or do whatever." And that same evening a bunch of the kids from Little Earth ...kinda...committed Sacrelige on the church. They um, stoned the church. All the, uh, stain-glassed windows, they

broke as many of them as they could. I don't know if the brother was ever reprimanded 'cause he was intoxicated when that happened. That was kind of a bad thing that happened, and...I think about it every now and then. It stays in my mind. But it's just typical of Native people, how they stick together, you know in the face of adversity. ...so it was uh... hard to say what, it was a bad thing that happened on all sides, but then...it was a bad thing that the kids did that to the church too. And I kind of wish that the parents would have got involved and would have gone over there themselves and talked to the priest over there to try to resolve it that way instead of it, it, uh, that violent act. It caused a lot of disruption.

KIM: Well, it sound like that's something that happened towards the beginning um, of Little Earth. Um...are there a lot of changes, um, that you feel have taken place, um, in the past twenty to thirty years?

LORI: Uh yeah, um...let's see, when we didn't have patios, people tended to stay inside there units a lot. There wasn't a lot of interaction. Very seldom did you see people sitting outdoors for any reason. Even when it was hot, people would stay inside unless, towards the evening they would come out to you know, cool off...in the summer time, but it was very seldom that people really associated then, because...they really didn't have spaces of their own. Everything was just so open, open and barren, that it just didn't feel like a community at that time. But then over the years that changed a little. There was a naming contest for, it used to be um South High Non-Profit Housing. ...And there was a contest in the community. And I, I'm not entirely sure... if it was...a combination of names, but there was a woman named Elaine Taylor, she called it Little Earth of United Tribes because of how many different tribes were represented here and...years later she passed away from cancer. Then they had another naming contest too, to um name Ogima Place, which is the Ojibwe word for 'chief'. Then Stately Street used to be 25½ Street and I guess there was a petition circulated to rename it Stately, although I've never seen it or talked to anybody who's seen that petition, but the street has it's name

now. Elaine was one of the founding people of the Resident Association. The reason they incorporated was to get the residents a voice in the community. In receivership we really didn't have that. We had management relations, but that wasn't very effective either. Where they brought in an, um, a manager from New York. I think I might have talked about that already. He uh, came in to start pushing people around right away, telling people they couldn't store their beds in the basement. Um...there were a lot of just stupid little things he did. Um...but we got a meeting together with some of the leadership in the community and we went and got a letter from the Minneapolis fire chief that stated that it was legal 'cause that manager tried to tell us that it was illegal to put, you know, store beds in the basements. And at that time people did have beds in the basements that they used. But there were windows in the basement at that time. And that was...one of the reasons, the reasoning behind being able to do it was because there were two exits. The fire department needs...that each room needs to have at least two exits. And after they took the windows out it only left one exit, but that issue was when we had two exits in the basement, so that, you know, he was. On all the issues that he really um, came down hard on people about he...there was no foundation for anything other than just to be a hard ass. (chuckle/giggle). And he was really good at it.

KIM: (chuckle/giggle) Um, you were talking about the Residents Association.

LORI: mmhm

KIM: Um...could you tell me a little bit more about that? Uh, how it was formed.

LORI: Well, when we were...when we went into foreclosure the um, AIM who was running the complex at the time. Some of their associates realized the, realized that uh, the residents needed a separate decision making entity, aside from that corporation...

KIM: mmhm.

LORI: ...that could help make decisions and represent the people of Little Earth. So that was the reason why it was formed. So that the people

in Little Earth would have an entity that would represent them.

KIM: And what year was that?

LORI: It was in November, uh, 1983. So in November it'll be our 25th anniversary.

KIM: Um...and so, through having this um, Residents Association, has um...have there been changes, um, in, uh ih, so like, how has this role helped, or changed um...(to Claudia) Can you (10:00-10:06)

LORI: Well, in the beginning after I had become chairman, I realized that in order for the organization to be more visible and to excel in the community at a higher rate that we would have to become involved in more issues than just Little Earth. So we started doing that. Um...by participating with POP, and then working with them with the garbage transfer station. Then we started getting involved in other Anishinabe Wakaigun. We support them and we got a drum group together, and some people and we marched down there to meet with the other organizations that were in support of the wakaigun. And so, we...you know as part of the, it because part of the organization's philosophy that participating in issues that regarded Native Americans as a whole was something that we would take on so that the organization itself would become more visible in the community and the political world and whatnot... the city level. And we've succeeded really really well. I mean we've, you know, we're pretty closely associated with city council, county, some federal. The lady that was just here was a representative for the house of representative at the capital. And then, um, we have our allies in the capital as well, so. And...making uh, political ties, I think was one of our most um, important, um, you know, one of the most important this that we needed to do, as far as Indian preference anyway, because without our political allies I don't know if we could have pulled that off. And I, you know Don Fraser who was the mayor at the time when...and part of the philosophy as well was to not only become more invisible as an entity wa, uh, we realized that we needed to focus on the community as well. And our priority, our number one priority was, and probably

always will be the kids. So we tried to bring in as many youth based programs and projects as we possibly could with what little funding we could make available. Um, Youth Care for example was our ol, longest standing youth oriented uh project that's been at Little Earth. They've been here since the mid eighties. So, they've been here with us for well over twenty years, and they're still have, they still have group at uh, at the NELT (13:17?) building, so. Doing whatever we could, bringing in outside resources was really, um, important to us, because we were struggling day to day with the lawsuit and all that. And bringing in outside resources was really detrimental for us, because without that we wouldn't have been able to provide anything.

KIM: mmhm.

LORI: Like I said, when we first moved in, um, there was a fella, John Redhorse. He was, worked at the University of Minnesota. Ah, they developed a program called avinoji. It's an Ojibwe word. I don't remember if it means child or it's something er of that nature. ...but um, he organized the project through the University and they managed to rent one of the town houses and have a drop in center for the kids that served children from, I don't know, infant all the way to adult and some even older than adult, you know.

KIM: mmhm.

LORI: So, you know, Mr. Redhorse was a pretty good asset to the community. There were so many. Over the years we haven't had that many resident managers. One of them, a lady by the name of Janet Stately who works out of Indian Ministries right now, was oh no, she was a manager, she didn't live here at the time, but the other one, um...Arshambol. I can't remember her first name. Sharon. Sharon Arshambol. She lived in one of the five bedroom town houses. She was...the only manager of Little Earth that I have ever known that lived in the complex. And these two women did really really good at their jobs. And uh people respected them because they were fair and objective and they did their jobs, so. Because it does become really challenging when you're....when you work here and live here. The it's, it's a lot to have on your

plate. And me, I work at the school and I'm on the board, two of the board of the directors, and I live here, so I wear a lot of hats.

KIM: uh...

LORI: Which is kinda challenging at times. I've had to dram lines. A lot of lines. Hm.

KIM: Um, you've begun talking about some of the different organizations and programs at Little Earth.

LORI: mmhm.

KIM: Um, could you elaborate on those? um, maybe talk about some more or different things with the school.

LORI: Oh, jeeze...well...there was a woman on the board of directors, LARA board (16:25) named Davy Peterson. She works out at Shakopee and Mdewakanton tribe right now and she is a licensed teacher. And she thought that it would be a good thing to open up the school, a school using the neighborhood early learning center model, because they had one in another neighborhood up here, I can't remember, Blaisdell. I don't know if it's even there anymore, but...we thought it was a good thing too, and so the board decided that we would do that. Um...for our children it was really traumatizing to pull them out of their environment every day and bus them all over the place, so...having a school nearby was one of the main reasons for opening that school and of course early childhood development. So...we uh, started bringing in, we brought in about ten different projects that were interested in being in that building and...we had them come in and give presentations to the board of directors. And the community had a large and...they picked which programs they wanted in there. Uh...when the...Holy Rosary sold the school, they wanted it to stay a school, because they had several people, organization that wanted to buy it, that were interested in buying it and when they found out that we wanted to buy it and keep it as a school, they gave us first right to refusal. So they gave us choice. And uh, MCDA under Don Fraser's leadership w (18:33) Rosemary Fargrilius, um, they helped us with some of the development there. And um,

MCDA purchased the building and kept it until we were able to work. We did a uh capital campaign that we had to raise I think 3.7 million dollars for the renovation to restore the building to its original, it's not ori, it..to it's original capacity because it has a distinct Native American, um theme to, you know the design, the interior, the floors, the fencing and everything is distinction Native. So... that was a, a really good thing for us. Um, we got two daycare programs in there right now. One's called Four Directions Family Center, and that's through Ruben Lynn Family Services. And they offer a lot of support for just sort of families. Other than just you know early childhood ed, they offer a lot of supportive services. Baby Space is a really good program too. But their waiting list is so, almost obscenely long that its sometimes really hard to get your kid in there. So they always have a waiting list there. Then Omnichie project is an um, partnership with Hennepin County.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm leaving, so you guys can just let yourselves out...

LORI: Okay. And then Alliance of Early Childhood Development, they do early childhood development, obviously. And they have a, a immersion project. They have uh, teachers that are fluent in Ojibwe and Lakota that the majority of them work at Anishinabe Academy. And we have one classroom inside the school...but they have what uh, a teacher that plays guitar that goes to all the classes and sings songs to the kids in Ojibwe. And then there is the winter months they have a mini pow wow. We just had one today. They have them on Fridays. When the weather gets nice I'm gonna kinda miss 'em because they like to go out in the park when the weather's good. ...um, then we have Domestic Abuse Project, which is kind of really important too. There were women in the community that were just getting abused and they didn't really have a place to go for resources or for advocacy, so we had them come in and we have an advocate over there now that does orders for protection and offers other services for their clients. So...and then uh, Four Directions through Ruben Lynn, they have family therapy. They do speech therapy, occupational therapy, play therapy, so they've got a broad range

of resources to provide for the community, so, it's all good. Yeah.

CLAUDIA: And do those programs, um, target mostly the Little Earth community or also the surrounding neighborhoods?

LORI: Well, it's a neighborhood early learning center, so we gladly accept other children that, you know non-Native children, because in reality we do not live in an exclusive world and mixing, I think, is a healthy thing for the kids, you know. Because if they start isolating into strictly Native American I think it would be unhealthy for them to mainstream in society. So yeah, we do have a good, a good range. Uh, PICA, used to be in the building. It was uh...Parents in Community Action, but we, uh... the building lost a grant that subsidized the rent, so PICA had to, had to, they left the building. You know, they had two classrooms in the building and that was probably the most diverse classrooms, or they operated the broadest ranges of racials. And... (clear throat), but the one problem with that thing was, you know, so a free project...but out of two classes I had only seen two or three Little Earth kids enrolled in their program. So...it just worked out that they couldn't stay in the building. And it was, well I can't remember what foundation was subsidizing that rents, over there, so...once we lost that subsidy, you know, it was be, you know some of the programs had to downsize their space. Um... which is kind of a good thing, because it made more room to bring in more programs to serve the community. So, it all worked out. It worked out pretty well.

KIM: Um, I just have a...it's...a technical question. Uh, what does MCDA stand for?

LORI: Uh, Minneapolis Community Development Agency.

KIM: Oh. Okay, thanks. Um...and so, then..um...

LORI: Oh and Don Fraser, he was the mayor at the time. He's still a member of the board of directors of Baby Space. Yeah...and he was such a great, great part for us. It was, without him I can't imagine how hard it would have been to have that building.

CLAUDIA: And what year was it in which that building was first, it was (25:15) first. Do you know?

LORI: Ninety-eight? I believe. Um, I don't really recall the exact date, but...because I left the organization in '97 after about six and a half terms. I was just exhausted. Wesley Kirkoff was the director that work for, at Little Earth then, and...she was wiped out too, so she, she left the organization and I left the organization. And...the rest is history. Then I came back in 2000, the end of '99 briefly and there was a lot of things that happened in my family, had a lot of deaths in my family that just... post traumatic stress compounded annually for ten years just caught up to me and I ended up leaving again. And, I ran for re-election back in...2002, 2003, I can't remember what year.

CLAUDIA: What's your current status in terms of the residents association?

LORI: I am the chairman. Yeah, I'm in my second term. And they changed the bi-laws while I was away. So, the, this, the chairman and vice-chairman have three year terms, whereas before they were two year term.

KIM: Um, another thing that happened, um, during the 1990s um is Minneapolis started the Neighborhood Revitalization program.

LORI: mhmmm

KIM: Um...and so we were wondering, um, do you think this program has effected, uh, has had an affect on Little Earth?

LORI: Oh, definitely. Actually Little Earth spearheaded the movement to create an Indian NRP, so, we hosted a forum here. We had a panel of people that came in, a lot of speakers, a lot of community members. We had tents out, out here. Uh cookouts. So, we had a really really good turn out. And then it came off so well that the city allowed us to have a Native specific NRP. So that worked out really well. I thought.

KIM: And so then, um...what affect has that had on the Phillips Neighborhood? Like...

LORI: Well I think it's helped physically, um... improve the neighborhood quite a bit. Uh, well let me go back to...we were in the mayor's chambers one day, Don Fraser, and there was a gentleman with me who had mentioned, he said, "Well the people around there can't do anything good with their lives because of their environment. Blah blah blah," and really pessimistic. And the mayor said, "Excuse me. I was brought up around an industrial neighborhood right by railroad tracks..."

KIM: (giggle)

LORI: "...and I'm the mayor," (laugh) So he kind of put him in his place a little bit there. Because I don't believe that an environment, I mean that to some level it does affect you, but if you have your head screwed on right, I can't blame your envi, you can't blame your environment for making you fail. Unless of course it's a volcano and you're right underneath it. (laugh)

CLAUDIA: Can you talk a little bit more about the Indian NRP, and um...kind of what that process was like of developing it and what were the outcomes?

LORI: Gee. That would take a lot of thinking, because it's been so long I can't remember what the main issues were that the community, there were, there was such a broad range of issues that the community brought up that uh, it's really hard for me to remember what they were. (30:00)

CLAUDIA: Anything that particularly stands out?

LORI: Um, Indian Preference of course. Uh... community building. Um...improving the neighborhood. Uh...of course there's always concerns about our foundry and asphalt plant over here. Um...I really can't remember all the details. I would, I'd have to sit and think about that for awhile and I don't know that we have time to do that right now.

CLAUDIA: We can, uh, go on to ask perhaps some other questions about the physical environment of Little Earth.

LORI: hmm

CLAUDIA: Um, so...

LORI: Oh yeah, they talked about all sorts. They talked about Indian Child Welfare Act. Um... chemical dependency...uh...health disparity. (3:12) Oh, such a broad spectrum of things. Things that I, I think have become...uh...typical as you know, ranking and as high concern in the native community. So, in general it's basically the same things that concern people now. I mean we had a community meeting last week and someone was talking about Indian Preference, and I'm like, "hu... we settled this fourteen years ago and you still don't know?" (giggle). Uh...we're not exclusive. We never can be, that's the law. As long as there are qualified Native Americans on the waiting list, then they would have preference over non-Native. And that's just the way it is in this complex, the only one like it in the country. So...I guess I just had to reinforce someone's...whatever, I just don't understand why these spheres keep popping up. But I imagine that when Native Americans and their history, you can see why.

[Lori waved to someone and Claudia and Kim gave questioning expressions]

LORI: ...my daughter.

KIM: Mmmm (giggle) Um...well we do have some questions, um more about um different um parts of the physical environment around Little Earth.

LORI: mhm

KIM: Um..do you think the changes on Franklin Avenue in the past fifteen years has had an effect on you or others at Little Earth.

LORI: Oh, yes, yes. I mean Franklin Ave. used to just be lined with bars. ...of course when I was young I had to go find out what that was all about. (laugh) But there were liquor stores, bars, all up and down Franklin, around our section of the neighborhood. And...uh, teenagers used to pay people to go into liquor stores for 'em. ...uh...I guess young people found it really fascinating to find out what was going on in all these places. ... um...they started closing them down because a lot of the violent situations that would happen there, either in the bars, or outside the bars after the closed. Um...when uh...the b, that serial killer,

Billy Glaze...I don't know if you know about that era, um...he killed a few Native American women in a really really terrible terrible way. Um...I hate to even talk about how he did it, but uh, that was his thing, and he was strictly, the women he killed were strictly Native American. One was found up by the Indian Center, one on the um, what is now the Midtown Greenway. I can't remember where the other bodies were found, but that uh, really struck up the AIM patrol. And me and my mom used to go out every weekend on AIM patrol. She had a CB. And that really prompted people to, you know really be mindful of what was going on on Franklin, because...one of the victims had apparently been in one of the bars that night she disappeared. The other one was known to be a drinker too. The...I believe there were four. I'm not entirely sure though, but...but that's how he uh got 'em, you know. He would...take 'em from a bar and murder 'em and leave their bodies where ever, and...that was one of the reasoning for AIM to be so prompted in starting the movie to close the bars down there. (clear throat) So...at, they circulated the names that, the name uh...the AIM patrol all of Franklin Ave, left phone numbers with the bar tenders and put posting up for people, well women in particular who needed rides at closing time. I mean it didn't matter if they were inebriated or... you know, whatever, we, we would give them rides...just to get them where they were going.

Jeeze, one night we were on patrol and we caught a, a fella broke into Walgreen's drugstore. My mom, (sigh), she jumped out of the car and took off running toward the drugstore. I said, "Mom! What are you doing?" I said, "What if he has a gun or something?" Then she (36:52) came back to the car and we called it in, well we had already called it in, but by then they had already contact the police and sent the police out. The police arrested him and took him to jail. Because he busted out the window and crawled in underneath the uh security, um, fencing. And the police said when they got in there he was sitting behind the counter eating candy bars. (laugh) That was odd. (laugh). So AIM patrol was, yeah, that was a pretty important thing then. Then, over here we had a, they used to call it the PIG center. (clear throat) I can't remember, it was

an acronym that was Police Involved with um... with kids. They used to uh, do boxing over there, take kids on athletic activities, like PALs do now. I can't remember, it was PAICAP (sp? 37:57) but I can't remember what the acronym stands for, but the kids called it the PIG center. (laugh) But, but that was a pretty good resource for the community for awhile. It used to be precinct way back in the old days. (drink water) But then the houses back there on that block where the park is now, um, after they tore those houses down, me and my cousin were sitting on the north end of that park at night and just, you know we used to just walk around the neighborhood and sit wherever whenever we got tired of walking.

That was before they sandblasted the church. The church looked black from where we were standing and it was so...the way the lights where positioned and the ah, the little arches on the um, um rail, on the uh front staircases, look like teeth. "The, the, that, church looks like a monster." And she was laughing, "yeah it does!" because from over there, from where we were sittin' it did look like a monster. It was black, and then there was a couple lights there that would of represented the eyes and then the, those little arches looked like teeth, so yeah it looked like a monster. (laugh) And there were some pretty big homes back there too. I remember them when I was a child. Um, when we first moved to the city, our dad used to bring us down the Mississippi River Parkway. That was his favorite place to go, probably what reminded him most of being home on the res. But that was...and he had to have his A&W rootbeer. We used to live in a, in Pondford, we would go all the way to Grand Rapids just to get a gallon of rootbeer and icecream.

KIM: Um, well, uh, back to, uh Franklin Ave, um, what kind of affect do you feel that it had um on Little Earth?

LORI: I think it had a positive affect on it. Instead of giving the Native People a place to go drink, they started building more positive, you know, like the Franklin Ave business center was more of a positive element for the community. I mean, offered a better resource as far as shopping, and drugstore, restaurant, um...(cough) Maria's, the

Ancient Trader's Gallery, the Indian Center was a pretty big Mecca in its day. When it opened up, it used to be called the Minneapolis Regional Native American Center. It used to host regional basketball tournaments there, you know how the, from the northern region there used to have Native American teams all the way from Montana, Nebraska, North, South Dakota, Wisconsin, so it was, it was quite the spectacle back in the days. It's still a pretty good group now. But I think removing all the bars and all that, those negative elements, just helped improve the community all together. It's a lot safer. It's quieter. People down there are more friendly and you don't have to worry like you used to back then. You know...you could go down to, there used to be a post office down there, go down to the post office goodness knows, you could run into somebody inebriated in the middle of the day, you know. Never see that anymore and that's a good thing.

KIM: There's another um large um change in road construction um that's happened around this area. Um Highway 55.

LORI: nmmm

KIM: Do you feel like Highway 55 has had an affect on Little Earth?

LORI: Probably, but I know there were a lot of people involved in the protest as far as it being built on a tribal burial site, but I really don't know that much about that. So I probably wouldn't be the one who would be able to answer your question on that. Uh, I was really involved on the Hiawatha Corridor Project Development. Um...a lot of Native people don't like to speak up in big arenas or large groups. So in a lot of ways I became their their mouthpiece and their representative obviously. And participated on it really well. I understand, um well Mary, our vice president, CEO, she's working on a grant right now to start a mural project on that wall back there on Ojima. And that, the initial concept, which was mine, because they wanted to put a rough, you know stucco white or a decorative facing on it and I told 'em not to do it. I said that we wanted to turn it into a mural project eventually and (cough) the concept was to paint the wall sky blue to create the

illusion that the wall wasn't even there. So eventually that's what's gonna happen there. I don't know what conceptual designs they're using on it right now, but um I'm, I'm confident they'll do a good job. Uh, they used uh, 24th street used to go all the way through. I understand our pedestrian bridge is one of the most elaborate bridges in the city. And it's you know, pretty functional. The people in the community that can't make it out of Little Earth mostly for transportation reasons, which is really typical here, they can go up on that bridge and they can see fireworks from all over the place. So that's pretty much a scenic overlook for a lot of the community members. You can see a lot from there. You can see so much. So that was a good thing. Um...they were gonna do an underpass on 26th Avenue, which would have made it more pedestrian friendly, but some millions got cut out of the final budget, so that got cut out as well. And there was a Native American man killed on that uh site about three years ago, hit by a train, one of the LRTs. So.

CLAUDIA: Has the LRT um made an impact on sort of day to day life of the residents here? Do people use them?

LORI: Yeah, yeah, it's, you know the 22 bus route used to be the most used bus, because it came right down Cedar, then turned on 24th and went downtown. And Park, or was it, Portland. Then it went down Hennepin County and then it crossed right by the government center. So it was really really convenient for residents. And now they go down to Franklin Ave station to the rail and it's a lot quicker and it's still convenient. And it's impacted, yeah, people use it, you know. It's important because, there aren't very many people in this community that own cars. That's, I heard one of our, our former board members was so optimistic about improving Little Earth, she mentioned one time that "Oh, we should have underground heated parking at Little Earth." And I said, "I think we ought to have cars first." (laugh) That was a little bit of Indian humor there.

KIM: Um, that kinda leads to the question, um like, what is it like living at Little Earth for you just on a day to day basis?

LORI: Me, it's really good. Um...when I leave the community it's generally either to walk to the bank, walk to the Indian Center, walk to Target, Cub, or whatever, and for me it's a good thing, because it's a good source of exercise for me, because I have arthritis in my knees and my back, so if I don't move around very much I get really stiff and sore. So that exercise is good for me. As far as how other people feel about it, I don't know, but we got the Hi-Lake Mall that's within walking distance, that's got a lot of resources. It has a Family Dollar Store, Savers, um...it has an um auto parts store, a rental center, laundry mat. We have our own laundry mat at Little Earth, so they don't have to utilize that very much. There's plans to build a co-op in Little Earth in the future, near future I'm hoping. Finding the funding for that is always the challenge with us. But that big brown build there would (points to future layout plan for Little Earth) representative of it. And that's on a lot that belongs to us right now. So that whole street, Ojima Place would, is going to belong to Little Earth. That lot there on the corner belongs to us. That whole strip between Ojima and the re, ah sound wall, that's all Little Earth property. Used to belong to the city, but it's ours now. It became an issue when uh, a lot of the tenants were getting their cars towed and to pay \$95 is, can break the resident really easily with low income. So, having it be...um...property of Little Earth is going to be a benefit to the community. Um, obviously if there's cars that need towing out of there then they're going to get towed out of there. So... 'cause we can't have cars that aren't running, you know, just sitting around for long periods of time. There used to be a gas station up there too...where our maintenance shed is right now.

CLAUDIA: Can you describe a little bit, um, like a day in your life at Little Earth.

LORI: Ah jeeze. I get up at 5:30 in the morning, get ready for work, go work at the school until three o'clock. And depending on what's going on, I either go home...ee, sometime I like to read a lot or cook for my family and clean, you know, just typical stuff. I like to read. It's a good way to escape reality. Sometimes I need that escape. (cough) I like sometimes read uh, romantic novels, because

they're so ah...useless that they kinda...a put me in a...you know, a more lighter mood. Yeah, I would say, yeah. Because I don't like to be serious all the time, because it's, it's not good for me.

KIM: Um...well...

CLAUDIA: Have you ever...have you ever thought about um, leaving Little Earth? And if so, what made you decide to stay?

LORI: Well, I've thought about it, but, God, I'm such a creature of habit. I just love it here. I just don't know if I could or would, I think if when I'm older, that might be a possibility, then I could work on some of the crafts and skills I developed when I was younger that I never had time to do with all my children and the grandkids. I try to do beadwork now and sew, and my grand daughter is just like into everything, so it's really hard to you know, apply my skills. Which is kind of for me, I believe in art and music as an outlet for, you know, for human being, you know if they aren't able to utilize those arts, it's kinda takes away from the spirit for me, I think. So...

KIM: Is there anything that you dislike about Little Earth?

LORI: Well I dis, what I dislike about Little Earth is there are so many people that have pessimistic attitudes. "Okay, I was born Indian and life is gonna be crappy and everyone's gonna treat me bad, and treat me like I'm stupid." I just don't, I think that's just a bad attitude and it doesn't help a person. And I think people get caught in that cycle. It's like a rut. They get caught in that form of thinking. Like, okay, a few years ago we had five people that were, that died on the property, that were killed on the property. And a lot of people that were interviewed, that's all they talked about was, "Oh it's so bad, it's so bad" and this and that and the other thing and. To me it felt like oh, they're just willing to cower in their corners and pity themselves, because it's so bad. Where it would be more productive if they just ah, you know got with the other community members and found ways to find solutions to the problems that caused people to get killed. So, that's the thing that bothers me most, is the amount of pessimism

with the residents. There's so many of them that have negative attitudes. It's just sometimes it's just really disheartening. But I don't let it get me down 'cause I don't think I would be here right now if I had an attitude like that. ...I wouldn't even be in this world if I had an attitude like that.

CLAUDIA: Um, what do you think Little Earth has meant to the Native American community? As best you can sort of describe that.

LORI: It's a symbol in a lot of ways. I mean one of the gentlemen in the housing corporation went around the table and asked the people how they felt, what Little Earth meant to them. The majority of the answers were, oh, I love the community, it make you feel like you're at home and it's like a little neighborhood in a neighborhood. I said all of the above, I said, but to me, it's an ideal. It's a symbol of what Native Americans can do if they set their minds to it. So that's how I feel about it, symbolic. Am I, I'm an idealistic person. So...

CLAUDIA: On the note of idealism, if you were thinking ahead to the future, what do you see as the next step for Little Earth, or what are your hopes for Little Earth.

LORI: Well, we're moving on to our next step, single family housing. That's a concept plan right there. Uh, the city of Minneapolis is already buying houses on our behalf. Uh, the CEO, Bill Ziegler, is working with American Indian OIC. They're gonna be training individuals in construction and carpentry. So they're gonna be fixing these homes up. And they're working with Wynona LaDuke. Have you ever heard of her?

KIM: Maybe.

LORI: Ah, White Earth Reservation Environmentalist. Well she's going to be using some solar paneling and that kind of stuff that would help off set some of the costs for families to more into home ownership and the properties to (57:18) You know, the whole block, we want that whole block.

KIM: Yeah, my housemates went to a sustainability conference and they had mentioned her. That's why

the name sounded familiar.

LORI: Yeah, she's, she wants to help with that project. You know the families are still going to be, probably, low income. We're gonna help them go through a training that would help them get their credit standards in the right place, where they would be eligible to start owning a property, and then move on from there. Ah...they, some of the units we went and looked at, they were originally single family homes and then uh, the owners split 'em up into like duplexes and they were just awful. I mean uh to me it was sacrilegious to break up a single family home and you know, turn it into a two, two houses that weren't really practical. I mean they were probably practical for the owner. That way they could you know recoup some of the money from...you know utility costs out there are so outrageous these days. We're trying to make every effort to offset costs for our potential home owners. And I'm thinking maybe one day I might, but I haven't planned that far ahead yet.

CLAUDIA: What are your sort of broader hopes for the future. If you have...

LORI: Oh jeeze, my hopes for my future are mainly based on my kids. One of my daughters, (sigh) she remarked to me one day, she goes, "man, mom I'm gonna have a good career that pays a lot of money so I'll be able to afford to buy you a place in the best nursing home around." (laugh)

KIM: (giggle)

LORI: I said, "what do you mean?" I said, "traditionally," 'said, "Natives didn't go to nursing homes. Their children took care of 'em until they passed away." So we kinda were teasing each other about that. And that's part of Native humor. We tease each other about really serious stuff and you know it's just, just the way, you know.

CLAUDIA: Um...well, we've come to the end of our main set of questions, but I'd like to know if there's any issues that you think we should talk about or that we haven't addressed in our interview. Things, you would like to address...

LORI: I can't think of anything right off hand.

Um...Little Earth is going to be celebrating its 30th this this year, as well as our 25th anniversary... Or no, 35th anniversary, that's right. And then uh...the 25th anniversary for LERA, so we've got quite a year ahead of us. If I think of anything I'll certainly give you a call. If you have any other questions, give me a call at work. And if you need to piece together anything and you think I might have answers to feel free to give me a ring.

KIM: Well, since you did bring up um, that this will be the 35th anniversary, um

LORI: mmhmm

KIM: We heard that the 30th um anniversary um was quite an um celebration and

LORI: Right, and uh.

KIM: could you describe a little of that.

LORI: We had a big dinner out at the Thunderbird hotel in Bloomington, MN. There were hundreds of people there. I got an award for Long Term Commitment to Little Earth. And I was so choked up I couldn't even talk. So I just went up. Well I wasn't expecting it and I had three different people offer me tickets to this event. And them tickets were \$75 or \$100 and I kept turning everybody down. And then finally at the last minute, somebody said, "But mom, you have to go. You were there the whole time. You played such a big part in everything." And I said, "Okay, okay, I'll go." So I went and really enjoyed it and then there was the summer celebration they blocked off Cedar Avenue, cornered it off, had a stage with a, a band, some puppeteers, uh different people, another award ceremony for various people that were inclu, ah that were included over the years that really helped with Little Earth as a whole. It was this really spectacular...it's the first time I ate buffalo and I didn't even know it was buffalo until, well later. I should have known though, because it wasn't all fatty. (laugh) But it was good. (laugh) I ended up taking a big 'ol pan home with me. And then they, that's when they named the street, at that celebration, that Stately Street. So, that was a good thing.

CLAUDIA: You said you received an award. Um,

what other types of awards or events um were sort of honored at the celebration?

LORI: Well jeeze, there was MCDA, ah, let's see, gosh there have been so many hundreds of people involved in Little Earth over the years. It's just, I can't even begin to list 'em. A good lot of them are listed up here. (gestures to the timeline). Some of the attorneys that volunteered pro bono. Some of the developers, there's Teresa Pendigash, there's Margaret LaRose, the old South High School, Teresa Dunkley, one of the first residents that moved in Little Earth. Of course there are a couple people claiming that they were the very first resident, so it's hard to say. But there was a lot, a lot, a lot of history here. Still is. When we took back the property in '94 we planted a tree over on Cedar Avenue. It's still growing. It's well over six feet tall now. When we planted it, it was only about four feet. I think it might be seven, eight feet by now. I usually, when I'm feeling really bad, or having a hard time in my life I, or having a hard time at Little Earth, I go over there with tobacco and put out tobacco and pray by that tree. So it's, for me it's really...I call it my tree. (giggle) Because I was there when it was planted. Oh there's a picture of it, the planting somewhere. (gesturing to the timeline.)

KIM: maybe that one, (giggle) (pointing to a photo where people are planting trees)

LORI: That may have been one of our Arbor Day events. This one was a black and white. I'd guess that Alley (title of a newspaper) one up there. Next to the drum.

CLAUDIA: hm.

LORI: (stretching sigh)

CLAUDIA: Well, um, thank you so much for being a part of this. We actually have a couple more sort of questions about just the interview itself.

LORI: mmhm

CLAUDIA: So, we kind of want to ask, how did you feel about being interviewed and

LORI: Oh, I enjoyed it. Uh, my only concern is that I'd probably (1:05:52 glade?) something really vital

out. But, you know when you lay the 32 year history it take a lot a lot of time to cram it all together. It's probably take literally years to put together a real thorough history, you know really detailed, with names and dates and all that, take a lot of research. It'd take years. But I felt really good about it. I enjoyed it.

KIM: Yeah, and if there is anything that you think of later, you can always just like um contact us.

LORI: I will. I keep the number right over there. Julie's got it. Who's uh. Yeah, my daughters have picked up on the tradition, my daughter Julie is the receptionist here for the community partnership. And my daughter Millie she's really active and she's given testimony over at the state capital. Is really involved at Youth Care. She's the office manager right now. And she's only 20. She worked for Hennepin County Omnichie (1:07:05) Project for a little while. So she's trying to follow in my footsteps. I said, "Well you better watch that one, because I wear a size 11 and that's some pretty big, pretty big shoes to fill." (laugh) literally. (laugh) But I told her during her training, because they were doing training to ah life skills. I said they taught you some really really good stuff about life skills and all the different elements that make people good leaders. I said, "but," I said "they didn't talk much about ethics." I said, "unless a leader has really good" ethics, "I said, they probably won't be good leaders either." (chuckle) So, she got it. So, she's been reading about ethics and philosophy, so she could be better at what she does.

CLAUDIA: Could you tell us why you decided to participate in this oral history project? Probably just because I'm an old hat, been around so long and I thought that my participation might give you more information. And anything to help Little Earth is important to me. If it means, you know, it's in, it's in my heart and soul. It's part of me.

KIM: And, um, what is it, um, that you would like to see come out of this oral history project?

LORI: Ah, nothing in particular. I read, you know what would come out of it and that's satisfactory to me. I wouldn't mind having copies of my own.

(giggle)

CLAUDIA: We could definitely arrange that.

KIM: (giggle)

LORI: Oh, great.

CLAUDIA: Well, thank you again.

Reflection by Kim DeLanghe

The first day of my Urban Social Geography class I was handed an outline of three options for our final project. The first being a research project, the second community involvement, and the third this Oral History Project with Little Earth of United Tribes. Before considering the first two options, my mind went straight to Little Earth, as I remembered a short encounter with the neighborhood last fall.

My first knowledge of Little Earth was acquired while on a field project for another geography course where the assignment was to compare Little Earth to HUD housing projects we had observed in the Twin Cities. During that field project I did not know about the Little Earth of United Tribes Housing Corporation nor how at one time the land around Little Earth could not grow vegetation. I knew nothing about all the work the community has done to make sure they are able to grow plants and run their own housing and neighborhood facilities. Regardless, during that field project I felt something special about Little Earth in relation to the other homes we were comparing it with. I wondered who and what it was behind this community that created this feeling. Could it be the school, the porches, the park, or was there something more?

When I was offered the chance to participate in this oral history project, I knew this was an opportunity to learn more about the community. This was an opportunity to learn about Little Earth from someone who has been part of the community for over twenty years; an opportunity to learn how the community began and what changes occurred to give it such a welcoming feeling. This is part of the reason why I chose to participate in these Oral History Interviews.

The other reason is that I believe that oral tradition is a wonderful method for remembering the history of place, people, and culture. Before written words, books, file cabinets, computers, and the internet, history was remembered through the retelling of words, often by the elders of a community. I wanted to participate in this project to help present one medium (tape recorder) through which this method of conveying history can continue to survive. I hope that after this semester's class work is complete that the tradition of oral history does not end at Little Earth. I believe this type of history transmission has existed in the community since long before we brought in voice recorders, but nonetheless, I believe it is important to continue recording the history of Little Earth by Little Earth residents.

Reflection by Claudia Leung

My participation in the Little Earth Oral History project has been equal parts excitement and caution. I saw the importance that a project like this could have for longtime residents who could share their knowledge and experience, and affirm the importance of their history. I realized also that as students, we stood to gain from learning about Little Earth of United Tribes' 31 year history from those who actually lived it.

Along with this anticipation, however, came concerns about the historical relationships between academic researchers and Native communities. How could we, as outsiders, best contribute to this oral history with Little Earth residents? Could we build trust and mutual respect with the participants? What viewpoints would be honored by this history? Whose story will be told? Would we ask the right questions? Which questions will be left out?

It's important that we as researchers realize our own role as an outside force interacting with and impacting the way that this oral history takes place. Our interactions as individuals with the people of Little Earth should be positive and cooperative ones. As a group we should be responsible for the outcomes of the oral histories we helped produce; we should be held accountable to the people who shared their stories with us. I hope that this Oral History will have benefits for Little Earth beyond those it had for us as students.

Getting to speak to Lori Ellis and hearing about all the amazing work she has been a part of during her more than thirty years here was a privilege. I learned so much just in the few hours that Kim and I sat in a room with Lori Ellis, listening to her speak. I hope that those who read these pages or listen to these recordings will be inspired and, if they can, seek to learn more about the social and political issues that have impacted Little Earth, the hard work of the residents of Little Earth to battle serious threats to the community, and the different meanings that this place has come to hold over the years for so many people. This project, if continued, can only become more rich and meaningful if opened to participation from more members of the Little Earth community, as both interviewers and history tellers.