Ethan Madla, Erick Ortega, and Isabella Praslin (editors)

# *An Apache Teacher's Legacy: Ida Largo on Indigenous Urbanization through Education (1971)*

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California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).
The Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH).
Project: Indian Urbanization.
O.H. 0770.
Oral interview with Ida Largo, conducted by Sharon Galassi,
August 16, 1971, Riverside, California.

*Introduction*

The oral history transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "Indian Urbanization." The interview with Ida Largo was conducted by Sharon Galassi on August 16, 1971, in Riverside, California. It is 1 hour, 10 minutes, and 52 seconds long, and it is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in the fall of 2024 by Ethan Madla, Erick Ortega, and Isabella Praslin.

Ida (Gooday) Largo was born on October 13, 1903, in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as an Apache prisoner of war. Her family had been associated with Geronimo's militia, known for their resistance campaigns against the U.S. government; therefore, the Department of the Interior forcibly relocated them from their homeland in Arizona and New Mexico, first to Florida and Alabama, and subsequently to Oklahoma. After their release from captivity in 1913, the Fort Sill Apaches were given a choice to either stay in Oklahoma and receive farmland, or to move to a reservation. Largo's family chose to become farmers in Oklahoma, where she continued her education, first at Chilocco and eventually in Phoenix, Arizona. After graduating from high school, she worked as a school matron (dormitory aid) but felt that she wanted more; consequently, she enrolled at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, to train as a teacher, completing her program there in 1927. She then taught elementary grade students for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in various reservation schools but ultimately transferred to work at the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, an assimilation program that provided Indigenous children with literacy and vocational training, as well as instruction on how to integrate into Western society. After her retirement in 1966, she volunteered as an English tutor for non-English-speaking immigrants. On April 27, 1995, at the age of 91, Ida Largo passed away in Riverside, California, and she now rests in the Beef Creek Apache Cemetery in Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma.

Ida Largo's oral history covers a wide array of topics, including her commentary on the different school types frequented by Indigenous children; her assessment of the challenges these children had to navigate between learning and homelife; her defense of the BIA's educational endeavors and accomplishments; her views on pedagogy and students' agency;

her memories of Indigenous cultural practices, such as dances and related ceremonies; her feelings about "Indian urbanization" and Indigenous assimilation; and her insights into her own family's varied experiences. Considering these topics, which range chronologically and geographically from the nineteenth-century Indigenous resistance against the U.S. government all across the South to the decades-long experience of a dedicated Apache teacher in the American Southwest between the late 1920s and mid-1960s, Ida Largo's reflections should be of particular interest to scholars of Indigenous and U.S. history, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, epistemologists, and both practicing pedagogues as well as researchers interested in pedagogy.

Only identifiable individuals, locations, and technical terms have been referenced in the footnotes, usually when they first appear.

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## *Copyright Advisory*



## *Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 0770)*

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

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| NARRATOR: | Ida Largo [IL] |
| INTERVIEWER: | Sharon Galassi [SG] |
| DATE: | August 16, 1971 |
| LOCATION: | Riverside, California |
| PROJECT: | Indian Urbanization |
| TRANSCRIBERS: | Ethan Madla, Erick Ortega, and Isabella Praslin |

SG: This is an interview with Ida Largo for the Indian Urbanization Project[1] by Sharon Galassi at Riverside, California,[2] on August 16, 1971, at one o'clock p.m. Would you state your name, please?

IL: Ida Largo.

SG: And, uh, the place and date of your birth?

IL: October 13, 1903.

SG: And where were you born?

IL: Fort Sill, Oklahoma.[3]

SG: Could you tell me a little bit about you-your childhood, uh, about your parents,[4] and, uh, the place in which you lived?

IL: I was born a prisoner of war, (pauses) and the reason I was a prisoner of war—my parents were—a band that belonged to that A-Apache band[5] of Geronimo,[6] and who was captured because of his Indian raids against the white people,[7] so it is said, but my parents feel otherwise. And they were taken as, uh, captives from their native land in Arizona and New Mexico to Florida and Alabama and held captive there (phone rings) until the Indian territory opened up in Oklahoma.[8] (tape stops, restarts) When the Indian territory opened in Oklahoma, we were transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and given—and given places to live on the military reservation[9] (pauses) until 1913, when we were (pauses) released and given farmlands in Oklahoma of 160 acres per family.[10] And then we were classified with the Oklahoma Indians at Anadarko Agency.[11] Some of the original prisoners chose to return (pauses) to a res—to a reservation,[12] and this reservation was in Mescalero, New Mexico,[13] and there they were given sheep and cattle to start their new life in a new place. My people chose to stay in Oklahoma, and we became farmers on the land that was given to us, and homes were built for us. (pauses) We were then (pauses) free to live as we pleased, and many of the people became very good farmers, and their children were accepted in the community where they lived and sent to public schools or to boarding schools away from their home. My first schoolin' was on the military reservation[14] (pauses)

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[1] A COPH collection of oral histories on Indigenous assimilation into urban environments.

[2] City in Riverside County, California.

[3] U.S. Army post, founded in 1869, located near Lawton, Oklahoma.

[4] Talbot Gooday (c. 1863–1962) and Annie (Nahgoyyahkizn) White (c. 1871–1913). For Ida Largo's family, see Alicia Delgadillo and Miriam A. Perrett, eds., *From Fort Marion to Fort Sill: A Documentary History of the Chiricahua Apache Prisoners of War, 1886–1913* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 102–106, 266.

[5] Alliance of Bedonkohe (Ndendahe), Tchihende, Tsokanende (Chiricahua), and Nednhi Apaches.

[6] Apache military leader (1829–1909).

[7] Reference to the Apache Wars (1849–1886).

[8] Reference to the Oklahoma Organic Act of 1890.

[9] Reference to Fort Sill, see note 3 above.

[10] Reference to the 1913 application of the General Allotment (or Dawes) Act of 1887. See also See "Apache, Fort Sill," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, online.

[11] U.S. government agency for Indigenous affairs, based in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

[12] Land set aside for Indigenous occupation.

[13] Place in Otero County, New Mexico.

[14] Reference to Fort Sill, see note 3 above.

and the milit—on this reservation the missionary (clears throat) that came to (pauses) to our people were the debt reform people[15]—and they established a school,[16] a great school that went through at least the sixth grade, if I remember right. (pauses) And we attended this school until the—we were released as prisoners of war in 1913. So, my folks sent me to Chilocco, Oklahoma,[17] and that's a boarding school.[18] I stayed a year at Chilocco, then I came back to my family in Oklahoma and went to public school for about a year. (pauses) Then, I was in poor health, so they sent me to Arizona, and I finished my high school at the Indian School[19] in Phoenix,[20] up to the tenth grade and went to the public school from the Indian School to the Phoenix Union High School,[21] (pauses) and I finished my high school education in (pauses) Phoenix. From Phoenix, I worked a year at the Indian School as a matron, they call them matron stand,[22] but today they call them dormitory aids. But I felt that I could do better, so I enrolled in Haskell Institute,[23] where they offered a two-year training course for Indian teachers to be placed on reservations. So, I went to Haskell and went—took my training as a teacher. At the end of the period, we took the civil service examination, and if we passed, we were placed on reservations. I was very fortunate to be chosen to return to Phoenix, where I had gone to school, and I taught the second grade when I first entered there. I worked in Phoenix for nine years as an elementary teacher (pauses) and went to different colleges, Flagstaff,[24] Bailey,[25] Tempe,[26] and San Diego,[27] where I (pauses) took different courses. Then (pauses) from Phoenix, when the, uh, elementary school was closed, and it was made a high school, I was transferred to a reservation school[28] (pauses) near Scottsdale,[29] (pauses) the reservation Salt River for the Pima people,[30] and I worked in the primary grades for six years at this school. From (pauses) Salt River, I moved to Blackwater,[31] which is another Pima school near Coolidge, Arizona,[32] and worked one year. At the end of the year, I was transferred to the Navajo reservation[33] and was placed in a day school

[15] Presumably a reference to representatives of the Country Life Movement.
[16] Presumably a reference to Fort Sill Indian School, founded in 1871 by Quakers, non-sectarian since 1891.
[17] Place in Kay County, Oklahoma.
[18] Reference to Chilocco Indian Agricultural School, founded in 1883.
[19] Phoenix Indian (High) School, founded in 1891.
[20] City in Maricopa County, Arizona.
[21] Founded in 1895.
[22] Boarding school position that includes aspects of domestic and medical care.
[23] Now Haskell Indian Nations University, founded in 1884, located in Lawrence, Kansas.
[24] City in Coconino County, Arizona.
[25] Presumably a reference to the eponymous place in Grady County, Oklahoma.
[26] City in Maricopa County, Arizona.
[27] City in San Diego County, California.
[28] Salt River Indian Day School, founded in 1935, located in Maricopa County, Arizona.
[29] City in Maricopa County, Arizona.
[30] Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, founded in 1879.
[31] Blackwater Community School, founded in 1939, located in Coolidge, Arizona.
[32] City in Pinal County, Arizona.
[33] Navajo Nation, established by treaty in 1868, encompassing areas in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

sixty miles from Tuba City[34] up in the Navajo Canyon Country.[35] It was a one-teacher day school. I was the teacher. I had an assistant that drove the bus, an assistant that did the cooking, and I was the only teacher, and I had only three pupils at the beginning of school, and we couldn't bring any more people in, because that was the beginning of the Second World War, and we had no transportation, and the Indians did not wish to bring their children to the day school. So, I was transferred then, from Tuba—to Tuba City, from Shonto,[36] and stayed at Tuba City for eight years and taught second and third grade. (pauses) When my own children,[37] I had three children reach high school age—when they were reaching high school age, I felt a need to move away from the reservation, where I could be with them instead of sending them to boarding school.

*[00:09:52]*

IL: So when the opportunity came for me to—for an opening in Sherman Institute in California,[38] I transferred to California in 1951 and taught in the five-year program, a program where—that was planned mainly for Navajo boys and girls who did not have the opportunity to attend school regularly. Many of these boys and girls were children, or young men and women, that had never been to school, maybe, but a year and some that never had gone to school at all, because many of the families wanted their children to stay at home and take care of the sheep—so they did not send their children to school regularly, which made it very hard for these Navajo children to stay in school continuously nine months. So, we took these children to—brought them to Riverside, and we worked with Navajo interpreters who helped us to relay the messages in a condensed form, so that these children could learn the English language quickly and advance at their own speed. We worked—we gave them a choice of a vocation at the end of three years in school, the first three years were very intensive work in teaching the fundamentals of conversational English and reading and writing, as well as learning table manners and all—and how to (pauses) live in a city, and many excursions were made to the stores around and to the theater where they would get the experience. And then we would teach, from the experiences, all the words that they needed to learn about crossing a street, buying something in the store, all of those we brought in. And in our classrooms, we had as many as forty-two, and we do—we talked in groups. And if you were to see some of us, you would think we were running a three- and a four-ring circus, because we tried to cover all of these groups and give them a part of our time, explaining everything to them in English, and then having the interpreter follow up our teachings And so, that was a full day's work, but it was very gratifying, at the end of five years, to see that you have—that when these children graduated at five years, that you were

[34] Town in Coconino County, Arizona.

[35] Reference to Navajo lands in northern Arizona and New Mexico.

[36] Place in Navajo County, Arizona.

[37] Tonita Ann (1938–2021), Gloriana, and Joel.

[38] Now Sherman Indian High School, founded in 1892, located in Riverside, California.

instrumental in giving them the education that helped them to ge-secure a job away from their home in the cities. I worked at the Sherman Institute until my retirement in 1966, (pauses) and I feel that I have, uh, (pauses) done something that I love to do, and something that I know and feel satisfied, that I have tried to help the same race that I came from.

SG: How do you feel about having, uh, an Indian school rather than, uh, rather than having the Indian students go to a public school?

IL: I feel very strongly that the Indian schools have been very beneficial to a *number* of people. I think the Indian schools that have been condemned by so many people—I—that you hear today that the Bureau of Indian Affairs[39] is not—has not done what it should do for the education of the Indians. But for my part, I feel that without the Indian Service,[40] I could not have gotten through, and there are many other Indians who have received only Indian school education. We have—we were given the opportunities, (pauses) given no other race of people. And I think that if every Indian boy and girl made the best of the opportunities offered them by the Indian Service, that they—we would have many more educated Indians in the Service, because the Bureau has done a wonderful job, and many other people that are condemning the Service today, (pauses) I do not feel that they are justified, because, after all, they—they got their start from the Indian Service, and I should think that—it would—they should be very, very grateful to the Bureau that they got their start. And from there, they went on into higher education, and there are many, many of them that are principals of schools. Many of them have become lawyers, many of them have become doctors, but you don't hear about them, because they're not going around condemning anybody. But there are many teachers that have gotten their start from the Indian Service, and I think the Bureau is doing a wonderful job. And it's only up to the individual, the Indian himself, if he wants an education, he can make the best of it, and if he feels that he wants to further his education, he has the opportunity today to go on and make something of himself, (pauses) and—so that he can help his people, so that the Indians can have educated people, too. And I—very, very much against all of these people that have condemned the Service. You hear it all over, and I, and I'm very much against it, because I believe in the Indian, Indian Service, and I believe the BIA[41] is doing a wonderful job. I believe that we do not wanna be seg—uh, segregated from other people, but we are not. (pauses) You take the Indian children today. Many of them are in public schools. Because of their heritage and the heritage of being quiet, not wanting to speak up, they sit in the back and will not answer a question, and maybe they know the answer, but the teacher thinks that they—they don't know it. So they keep still, and then they think, "Well, that's a dumb Indian"—they can—they push them in the back, and they don't stop to think that this person maybe knows the answer. And I, I've heard many, many people say that, and some of the children that we received from the public schools and were dropouts,

[39] U.S. federal agency, founded in 1824.

[40] Synonym for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

[41] Acronym for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

returned to the boarding schools, and we have to start almost from scratch and begin all over with these students that were in a public school. So I think we can look at it both ways, that the public school is wonderful. But until the Indian is ready to accept it, and the parents are ready to back up the public school and *send* their children to school, it is only then, until—that the public school can do a—better than the Indian school. But in the Indian School, we know that we have them. The-They're there day and night, and we know that we will have the next day and continue. It's a continuation. But they cannot stop. They cannot drop out, because what they have learned today or then—they—and they go home for a while, and then it's forgotten. So I believe in the government schools, and I believe that the government school *is* doing a wonderful job.

*[00:20:25]*

SG: Do you feel the boarding school is really more advantageous than the day schools? Do you feel that, that you just stated that you think having the Indian there day and night is, uh, has worked out the best, so would you be for a boarding school?

IL: Well, I think for the boarding school, (pauses) it's good for the child (clears throat) that has no home, or comes from a broken family, or there are problems in the home, and I think that it's, uh, it's good for them. And I think that if, uh, if the boys and girls live far from the reservation, or on the reservation in isolated areas, I think that it is good for them to go to the public—to the boarding school, where they will meet other tribes and not be segregated only in just their own tribe, because after all, they—the Indians are divided up into many different tribes, and each tribe has different customs. Just like the white people, they have different, uh—they belong to different, uh (pauses)—we'll call them the, uh, the Germans or the French, and so forth. Well, th-the Indian people have different tribes, the Apache, th-the Pima, the Papago[42] and numerous other tribes all over the United States, and if they are sent to these boarding schools that are maintained by the government, they will learn ideas, and they will not be taught in their own language, like they do in the, uh, day school. However, I think that, that the small children—is better for them to be in the day school, where they will be with their family, and their family be responsible for sending them to the bo—to the day school, and they will be at home with their, with their parents, and that way, I think, where the parents have control over these young children, I believe that the day school is better for them, but I believe that, as they get older and they, uh, they do not wish to stay in the public school, and are dropouts, I think that they should be sent to a boarding school where their education will be continuously because there are many advantages they are—that are given to these boys and girls today. There are many, many places that they go. It's not all classroom work. They go on field trips, and people are brought into the school, where they learn many, many things from people on the outside, and then they have the privilege of working for families if they wish to do so.

[42] Indigenous community in southern Arizona.

SG: What are some—you mentioned a couple of special problems that the Indian child has. What are some others that you found in your teaching? (pauses) You mentioned the idea of the Indian child being very quiet.

IL: Language is difficult. Understanding the English language, and, uh, (pauses) we worked with interpreters, and we explained every word that was given to the child. I worked with a non-English speaking child, and, uh, my work was to, uh, teach them to speak English, and, uh, you couldn't, uh, give them a book right at the beginning, because they have no idea about it, and most of our work was conversation or the activities that we did, and we wrote booklets on them. That is the main thing with the, uh, with the Indian children, they, they lack an understanding of English, and especially if they come from a group, from a reservation where the family talks their native tongue constantly, and then they hear no English when they go home, and then when we—they come back, it's something strange again. They—you have to begin all over again. Now that is one of the main things that is, uh, th-the most difficult. And then they, uh, they do not—(clears throat) they're very quiet, and you have to be very, very patient to get them to express themselves. That was something that they, uh, I think they had a fear of getting up and telling anything for fear somebody would criticize them. That is the main thing. And I—even today, with all of my experience, after I, I retired, I found that most (pauses) difficult. I had an inferiority complex and felt that, because of my color, (pauses) I was afraid I might say the wrong thing. And I think that Indian children have that in the classroom today. They think that they will not be accepted, but—and i-it's just, uh, something in their heritage that just, you know, draws them back instead of being too forward, you know. And I believe that—but I know the language difficulty where they speak mostly their native tongue at home, and then, when they return to school, they don't apply themselves as well as they should and try to speak English with other tribes that are in the school.

SG: I've, uh, read some of the poetry that some of the Indian children you've written, and I've seen some of the paintings. Did you find that, uh, that they were very creative, once you were able to get them out of there?

IL: Very, very creative, and they, they really have, uh, a talent for art. They're very, very talented in art and the ad—once you can, once you get them, uh, started and, and ask them to, uh, write something about their home, it is amazing what they, what they bring to you.

SG: Do you think they're stifled then in the public school, more than they would be in the Indian School?

IL: Well, I really couldn't say because I, uh, I never taught in a public school, but I'm just quoting from different people that have taught in public schools, but I to—for my part, being a product of the Bureau, I would naturally be in favor of—

SG: —Um-hm, um-hm.—

IL: —boarding schools for Indian children, because I feel that they can get out into society, they—if they wanna go on, to school, but they have the privilege of going on to school.

SG: To, uh, go a little bit further now and change this topic a little bit, I'm interested in your opinion of the reservation life and Indians returning to the reservation. What is your opinion on the life and on the reservation in general?

*[00:29:19]*

IL: Well, I've, uh, I have never lived on a reservation, as (pauses) I'm on my own tribe, because we did not have a reservation. After we were freed, we, uh, had farms, and our farms were on—mixed in with all the white farmers, and we lived, uh, and competed with our white neighbors, so we did not have a reservation. But, I have worked on the Pima reservation, the, uh, Navajo reservation, and I have worked in two large boarding schools, Phoenix and Sherman, and I feel we—(pauses) I think it is a very sad thing to see the boys and girls returning to the reservation and not making use of what they have learned in school. Some of them return to the reservation and remain on the reservation and don't try to better themselves. Of course, they marry and they marry and they—they live there, and there are not many opportunities, as far as I can see, where they would find work. I think that there are—that they would have to branch out and, uh, find employment. Many of them are—when we had the five-year program, we taught them a vocation, that was because we had dropouts, and they were—if we kept them through high school, they would be too old. So therefore we had to teach them a vocation where they would, uh, go out and be able to support themselves away from the reservation. However, many of them have returned, even now. And, of course, the reservations have changed quite a bit. The Navajo now—they have many, many different occupations, I understand, and they, uh, have, have homes that are different than it was when I was there, (pauses) but, uh, I think that if they could, uh, (pauses) build up their communities (pauses) and really work their land and improve their way of life, I would say, "More power to them," develop what they have. But so many of them return, and I don't think they do anything, and that's the sad part of it.

SG: Well, do you think that, um—kind of connecting this with the urbanization project as such, bringing the Indian out and relocating him, um, do you think this has created problems with the Indian, (pauses) failures and so on, in which they, they returned?

IL: —Well, I, I couldn't give you any statistic on it, but I believe that, uh, there are many that have made good. There are many of our, of our boys and girls that went out to work that have made good. Some of them went into, uh, bakeries, since they were bakers, and they were accepted, and some of them were very—have become very good carpenters and, uh, cement workers. And, uh, so I believe that it's just up to the individual himself, if he wants to. Some of them have, uh—couldn't adjust to the city life, I don't think—the urban life. They felt alone in this, and, uh, even though they had a good job, they preferred to be with their own people, and have returned. So, I really couldn't judge, you know, what the s-statistics on that would be.

SG: Do you think it was propab-maybe difficult for them to adjust to, uh, two totally different ways of life. Do you think—

IL: —I believe that's what it is.

SG: —Uh-huh. What do you think could be done about this particular problem?

IL: (pauses) I really couldn't say. (pauses) I think they need a lot more, uh, they—if they could, uh, if the Indian people could work together as a tribe and stick together on what they believe in, I think they would, uh, conquer a lot of their, uh, frustrations that they have in the city. And I'm very, very sorry to say, but most Indian people don't stick together. Most people. They argue with each other, or they're jealous of the other tribe getting it, and there's just always a conflict. And they don't stick together to form a union and say, well, we are *in* this, and we are gonna *do* this and be recognized. But there's a weakness there, and I, I don't know what it is, but I think that—like in Los Angeles, I think there are many, many Indians here that have relocated in, in Los Angeles and around the different cities and suburbs of, uh, Los Angeles. And I, I'm sure that if they could, uh, work together and form a club and get people interested in them, sociologists and, and psychiatrists and other civic workers, uh, that would help them to, uh, understand the different things in the city. Churches could help a lot, but it's up to the family and, and the India-Indian himself, instead of giving up so soon and returning to the reservation, I think that he should try to solve his problem and not wait for someone else, somebody to come in and do it for him. And I think that is the downfall of the Indian, because they're always waiting for somebody to, to help them and do something for them.

SG: Do you think this is mainly because of the past history of the government always giving—

IL: —it could be that, but I couldn't say.

SG: Um-hm. (pauses) But you do feel that quite a few Indians haven't made a success of them (inaudible)—

IL: —Oh I do, too, I think so many have. There are many, many people have made successes.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: There are many Indian teachers and—that don't teach in Indian Service, they teach in public schools. There are teachers that have their master's degrees. There are teachers that have, uh, gone on to, uh, higher learning in every field that they, that they have gone into. But those are not the ones that are ever mentioned—

SG: (laughs)

IL: —it's only the drunkards that they find.

SG: Um-hm. What is your opinion of the, uh—I don't know if you had much contact with the mission school,[43] but what is your opinion of the mission school, that they—a type of school in front of the Indian?

IL: Uh, you mean the, uh, the different denominations—

SG: —right, the church-related—

IL: —the church-related—

SG: —mission schools. Um-hm.

IL: Well, I don't know. I don't know too much about that. We, uh, we've had, uh, boys and girls coming to us from the, uh, mission schools, from the Navajo, I know, and,

[43] Educational institution run by Christian missionaries.

uh, usually they are pretty well, uh, they're very, uh, well along in their, uh, a-academic work, because they, uh, they've had the Christian influence, and they've had the discipline, and they, they've lived, you know, right, closely with the, uh, the missionaries. And I, uh, I think that they've done a very good job, because some—a lot of their students, I know, that we received from the mission schools were, were really well along academically.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: But of course, a lot of these mission schools, you see, are day schools, and they're close to the family home, and they can walk to the school, or they can, uh, be bused.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: So I think that makes a lot of difference, too, because they have the family influence as well as the, uh, missionary influence there.

SG: Which is different from the boarding school.

IL: Um-hm.

SG: Okay.

*[00:40:00]*

IL: Of course, they, uh, when I was in school, we had, uh, religious education, and the missionaries came to the school, and one day a week was Sunday, and then one day a week, during the week, we had missionary instruction, uh, we had church instruction.

SG: Um-hm. Did you find, uh, many Indians resenting, uh, the missionary coming in?

IL: I, (pauses) I don't think so, not with, not with me. I know I've never really heard anybody, you know, say on the reservation, because I, uh, know that many of them in Salt River, where I taught, they had Catholic churches on the reservation, and they had the Mormon Church[44] on the reservation, they had the Presbyterian Church[45] on the reservation, and, uh, I know that they were well attended, and they had—what carried on with the different activities the church usually has with—all through the week—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —when the children came to school.

SG: Um, and you're relating your, your lifetime, you mentioned something about farming. Um, I was wondering how your parents felt at, uh—the government did put them into farming, didn't they? Isn't that what you were—

IL: —Yes.—

SG: —what were the feelings there about, uh, that?

IL: Well, (pauses) of course, we had a choice.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: The family, uh, all the families had a choice of returning to a reservation and living on a reservation in New Mexico, but those that remained in Oklahoma *chose* to be

[44] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a Christian denomination, founded in 1830.

[45] Reformed Protestant Christian denomination, founded in the seventeenth century.

farmers. So it was really, uh, when they decided to be a farmer, it was, uh, their own wish, because they could have gone back, become sheep herders or cattlemen if they wanted to. But my people preferred to live in Oklahoma, and they preferred to be farmers.

SG: What type of farming?

IL: Well, my father farmed 160 acres, plus another 160 acres of, uh, his children. We had cotton, wheat, (inaudible) corn, anything, you name it, we farmed it. And he was a very, very good farmer, a very successful farmer, although he was trained as a carpenter—

SG: —Oh, (inaudible)—

IL: —when, when he was the prisoner of war—

SG: —Do you feel—

IL: —and many of our, (clears throat) many of our—that our people, our tribe, and in, in our family have never attended boarding schools. We—my own family,[46] my sisters, my brother, my sisters and I went to boarding schools right from the beginning, because we had lost our mother at an early age, and, uh, (clears throat) so we went to boarding schools, but my other sisters and younger sisters and brother, uh, went to public school, and many of my sister's children have gone to public school—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and, uh, in our family, we have, uh—my sister was a nurse, and, uh, I have a niece that is a Home-Ed[47] teacher. I have another niece that is, uh, a bacteriologist, and I have a nephew that teaches art in Santa Fe, and I have another niece that's, uh, a primary teacher. And then I have three or four nieces that are private secretaries, one works in Florida. She's a, a court secretary.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: So, I feel that the public school and, uh, the families have done well that have stayed in Oklahoma. They have made, uh, they have made it, made it known to their children. (tape stops, restarts) A court secretary.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: So, I feel that the public school and, uh, the families have done well that have stayed in Oklahoma. They have made, uh, they have made it, made it known to their children to get an education.

SG: Did your father relay any experiences to you as a prisoner of war?

IL: Not too much, because, uh, we left home, and we didn't stay with my father after we left home.

SG: At what age did you leave?

IL: We left, I left—I imagine I was around about, uh, ten when I left, and I never returned, and if I did, I stayed with my sister.

SG: Oh.

IL: My sister took care of us because my father had married again—

SG: —Um-hm.—

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[46] For Ida Largo's family, see Delgadillo and Perrett, *From Fort Marion to Fort Sill*, 102–106, 266.

[47] Home education, homeschooling.

IL: —but my uncle and my brother-brothers-in-law always told us stories, you know, about—my sister that was born in, uh, Florida, they, uh, they always tell about the different life that they led in, uh—as prisoners of war in Florida and through there. My—when my father was captured, he was about fourteen, and he, uh, all he had—and most of them wore nothing but G-strings[48] when they were—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —capti-captives. And, uh, then, when he grew up, became a man, he went to Carlisle, Pennsylvania,[49] which was a boarding school,[50] and he learned the trade of a carpenter there, and many of the other men became—learned trades and painting and blacksmithing and whatever tha-that was offered. So they, uh, they were sent off, you know. However, it was very, very, very sad, because the people that were used to an arid climate like Arizona and New Mexico, and taken to Florida and Alabama, where it's very, very humid, was very, very disastrous, because many of the prisoners died—

SG: —Yeah, um-hm.—

IL: —because they couldn't get used to the climate.

SG: How were they transported there?

IL: Just like cattle in a freight train.

SG: Hm. And do they take women and children also?

IL: Yes, women and children. (pauses) Women and children.

SG: Do you recall any of the stories, you said, that, uh, that, uh, you heard?

IL: Well, I really can't tell any of them, because I, I just know snatches of here—

SG: —Oh.—

IL: —and there, and I, I can't piece them together to make it intelligent for people to understand—

SG: —(laughs)—

IL: —however, I wish I had (pauses) written down all the things that were told to me. I think it would make a very interesting book.

SG: It certainly would, because that's something that, uh, very few people—

IL: —Um-hm.—

SG: —probably realized.

IL: So I was born a prisoner of war.

SG: How long were you—before then—you went to Oklahoma?

IL: I was born in Fort Sill—

SG: —Yeah.—

IL: —see, I was born in Fort Sill in 1913, 1903—

SG: —Uh-huh.—

IL: —and then they were freed in 1913—

SG: —I see, so you lived there for quite a few years.

IL: Yes, um-hm. I went to, you see, the, uh, mission school.

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[48] A garment covering the genitals.

[49] Borough in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania.

[50] Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879, located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

SG: Uh-huh.
IL: That's where I got my beginning. Um-hm.
SG: What kind of homes did you live in?
IL: We lived in framed houses that were built by the, uh, government.
SG: Um-hm.
IL: And we had cattle. We had, uh, a, uh, quite a few acreage for these, all reservation. It didn't belong to us individually, and it was just a reservation on the military reservation in Fort Sill. And there were different, uh—there were a lot (pauses) maybe ten different villages within the radius, uh, between, um, uh, say, uh, about ten or fifteen miles apart, but, uh, it was all a military reservation.

*[00:49:50]*

SG: Hm. Uh, you mentioned you attended Haskell—
IL: —Yes, I attended Haskell,—
SG: —uh, what is your opinion on Haskell Institute as a school?
IL: When I was there, it was a very, very good school. A very good school. They had a Commercial Department[51] where they're—there—they trained, uh, boys and girls for office work, and many of these, uh, these, uh, graduates, the graduates from the Commercial Department were sent to Washington, D.C., and to different areas all over the world, I mean, all over the United States. And after—a lot of them went into private business themselves, because they were—they had received such good training. And then the, uh, Normal Department,[52] which was—which I attended for two years, uh, was affiliated in many ways, with the—with K.U.,[53] and we took many subjects at K.U.—
SG: —Um-hm.—
IL: —and we did our practice teaching with this—with the students that were there. And, uh, but, uh, then they had the Home Economics Department, and, uh, they trained, uh, girls to be, uh, good cooks, and they did a lot of production work, too. So I—at the time I went to school, it was a very, very highly recommended school. And we have *all* tribes from all over the United States. It was like a big college—
SG: —Um-hm.—
IL: —that you find any place, but it has changed a lot since I've been there, and I've never been back since I graduated, so I wouldn't be able to tell you anything about today—
SG: —about the changes.
IL: Um-hm.
SG: Uh, did you speak your na—your native language, uh?—

[51] Business school.
[52] Education school, teacher training program.
[53] University of Kansas, founded 1864, located—like Haskell—in Lawrence, Kansas.

IL: —I did when I was very, very small, but not for long, because I went away, and, uh, when I go back now, I have only one sister living that speaks in, in the language, and she talks to us, and that—I can understand her—

SG: —That's fantastic.—

IL: —and I can, uh, I try to carry on a conversation, but they laugh at me, (both laugh) so I don't do it very often, I guess if I tried, I could really, you know—

SG: —It would come back.—

IL: —It would come back to you. I know, I can sing with her better than I can talk. I—she sings in Indian, and I sing with her. And, uh, of course, I love music, so therefore that just comes natural—

SG: —Comes natural.

IL: Um-hm.

SG Do you—did you have any, uh, different types of, uh, dances, or?

IL: *Oh* yes! We have—

SG: (inaudible)

IL: —we have the, uh, (pauses) we have the, uh, the dan—what they call the, uh, the Devil Dance, some of them called the Sunrise Dance,[54] but it is a dance ceremony for girls when they become of age—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and it's usually a four-day dance. And (clears throat) these girls are—their parents give this dance (pauses) either in the summer or in the late fall, if the girl in, uh—during the winter has become a woman. And they give this dance *for* her, and she dances, and, uh, the f-first day of the dance, she runs, oh, I would say, about a mile, perhaps—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and she, uh, she runs, and then she is blessed with the sacred cornmeal that they have. And she runs to one end, where they have a basket of, uh, cornmeal, and then she comes back. And then, they put her on the ground, and the women of her family massage her back. And I really couldn't tell you the full meaning of it—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —there's, there's the meaning for it. And then, she gets up and runs again. That was—that's the first day at sunrise, and that reason it's called Sunrise Dance with some of the people. And gifts are given by the, uh, by the family, and they furnish *all* the beef for the people that come—

SG: —Gee.—

IL: —and gifts are given, uh, like in the, uh, yardage, blankets, money, food, and they are showered on the girl as she stands, and all the people can take what they want. And then in the evening, she is da—and she is, uh—she dances all night. And men, the medicine men,[55] are the ones that are the dancers, and they dance around the fire. That's why some of them call it the Fire Dance too—

SG: —Um-hm.—

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[54] See "Apache Sunrise Dance and Ceremony," *Arizona Museum of Natural History*, online.

[55] Tribal healers that use medicinal herbs, songs, and chants in religious ceremonies.

IL: —they dance around the fire. And this, uh (pauses)—she is also (pauses) purified, I understand, in a tepee where the medicine man blesses her before she goes out to dance. And many times, there are two or three or maybe sometimes five, you see, that dance that has—that coming-out dance. And they dance with these medicine men that are in the dance. And they dance all night long.

SG: (laughs)

IL: That's one of the dances that they have. But then, of course, they have a social dance, where everybody comes in and dance. They call it the Back-and-Forth Dance. The man is, uh—that usually has two women, and then he faces one way, and the women face the other way. Then they go back and forth, back and forth—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —the chords, the rhythm of the drums, and the singers—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —but the man, uh, the women are the ones that choose the men—

SG: —Oh! (laughs)—

IL: —to dance. It's not like the white people—

SG: —(laughs)—

IL: —and the man has to pay the lady. But you can make money if you go out, you can—

SG: —That's amazing. (both laugh)—

IL: —you can get a—if you can get a rich Indian to come out and dance with you, you can make money then.—

SG: —(both laugh) And a lot of people participate?

IL: Oh yes, many people participate. It's a lot of fun.

SG: It sounds like it.—

IL: —Um-hm. Those are the only two dances that I know that our tribe would do.

SG: Were they in a circle, uh, the two girl—women and the men?

IL: Uh, no—

SG: —in groups—

IL: —you just find them i-in groups here and there—

SG: Oh I see—

IL: —they're just dancing all around in, in, you know—

SG: —(both talking at once) But they're not in the circle?

IL: Unh-uh. No, they just have different groups when they dance.

SG: Uh, did you know much about the medicine man, and what he, uh, did?

IL: Well, he did a lot of healing, and then he did a lot of, uh, singing, and each song had a meaning, and he used a lot of herbs, but—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —they used a lot of—and they seemed to know just what to use, and how to use it. (pauses) And that's another thing that I wish I had gotten from my folks—

SG: —Oh, yea. When, when did they stop, uh, having the medicine man?

IL: Well, in Mescalero and up, uh, up in Whiteriver,[56] where they have the Apaches, there are many different bands of Apaches, you know. But then, uh, in a lot of these, uh, places, they still have medicine men, but, of course, they don't do that as much as they used to, you know—

SG: —Unh-uh.—

IL: —and of course, a lot of it is commercialized, being (inaudible), which is a shame, I think, you know, if they could just keep it pure, you know—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —it would a—be a wonderful idea.

SG: Um-hm. Well, I (inaudible) (tape stops, restarts) Uh, Mrs. Largo, have you ever felt any discrimination as far as you—you did say that you felt shy from time. Did you ever felt any discrimination from, uh, other races of people?

*[00:59:19]*

IL: No, I never have myself, um, but I've always felt that I wouldn't push myself till I know that I was gonna be accepted because I was, was not gonna be hurt, because I've known others that were hurt, and I've always been very cautious, and it's taken me a long time since I retired, uh, to overcome that.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: And I think the reason that I feel so strongly on that is because my sisters, my older sisters, in their travel through Texas, uh, were turned away from, uh, restaurants—

SG: —Um-hm. Okay.—

IL: —and, uh, that has always stayed with me and I—, and I think, uh, you just (pauses) almost feel a hate, which is wrong, (pauses) because, after all, you could—you're gonna have to consider the source of the people (pauses) who would (pauses) stoop so low to think they are so much better than—God made all in—us equal, all people equal. Why would the white people feel that they cannot sit in the same room or sit at the same table with a, a person of a different color. And I've heard many Indians that were turned down—now, in my family, my sisters and her family, and I can't see that they were justified in being turned down because we had lived on farms and lived among white people. We didn't live on reservations. We had a car, we had, uh,—and we were always clean. We were never dirty. We never wore Indian costumes, because we just never did—live on reservations—on the, on the farm—

SG: —Um-hm.

IL: —So why would they be—discriminate us—against them, only because the color was different? However, I wasn't along when that happened. But then, of course, (pauses) we heard it from them, and we formed our own opinions that if they would do it to them, they would do it to—

SG: —Um-hm, um-hm.—

[56] Place in Navajo County, Arizona.

IL: —and so, I think, from that point, that is the only reason that has—that I have always been very cautious. But I think I'm overcoming it a lot more since—as I get older and I'm—most of my friends are white.
SG: Do you think teaching helped you—
IL: —I think so.—
SG: —in being more outgoing and—
IL: —I think so.—
SG: —adapting?
IL: Um-hm.
SG: Uh, are there any problems with joining organ—various organizations?
IL: No, I've, uh, (pauses) I joined, when I retired, I, uh, I knew that I had to do something that I couldn't sit and fold my hands and let it be that I'm through work and I don't have to do anything. I couldn't do that—
SG: —Hm.—
IL: —I had taught for forty years through the Indian Service, and I knew that I had to, to keep going. So, when I retired in December of '66, I, uh, thought, well, I did—you're—the government's not going to protect you anymore—
SG: —(laughs)—
IL: —you're gonna get out, and you're gonna meet people, and nobody's gonna do it for you, you gotta do it yourself. I had never lived off of a campus, a government campus. All my life had been with the BIA and—
SG: —Um-hm.—
IL: —lived on the campus, even after I taught. So, when I left, I retired, I moved off of the campus, and I had to live as other white people lived, which was something very strange to me. But I signed up for many classes right after that, and I took the—many things at the Y,[57] and I went on a schedule—9:30, I—but—at least slept an hour later (both laugh) than I ever did. But by 9:30, I was out of my house, and it was very, very hard for me to go and, uh—by myself, because I knew nobody was going to take me because my other friends were still working—
SG: —Right.—
IL: —but I went, and I took knitting, and I took, uh, bridge—re-a, re-a, uh, refresher course in bridge, and I took, uh, reading. (pauses) And then I joined a woman's club, and then I, uh, joined senior citizens club,—
SG: —Um-hm.—
IL: —then I joined a tour club.
SG: Oh my goodness! (both laugh)
IL: So, I really was busy—
SG: —(laughs)—
IL: —I didn't have time for anything, but I found out—and then I, I, uh (talking in background)—and then I (background shuffling) took this course in reading (door

[57] Abbreviation for Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), nonprofit organization, founded in 1844.

closing), where I, where I taught the—the non-English speaking Mexicans (background shuffling), and, uh, the foreign-born people—

IL: —Um-hm.—

SG: —many of them were university graduates from other countries. I had one from, uh, uh, Arabia and many from South America, many from Mexico. And I had the, uh, immigrants that came up and worked in the fields—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and, uh, (background shuffling) I taught them—did volunteer work with them, and of course, it was—I taught them on the same basis that I used when I was teaching a non-English speaking Indian—

SG: —Right.—

IL: —and so it was very, very interesting. And these, uh, especially the, uh, uneducated, uh, Mexican that worked in the, you know, as a laborer, and he was so eager to learn, so that he could communicate with his boss and could communicate with, uh, with other people besides the Mexican family. And when he learned to say, when he learned to say, uh, "Hello, Mrs. Largo,—

SG: —(laughs)—

IL: —"How are you, Mrs. Largo?" why he just really—and, and then when he learned to write his name and tell me where he lived, and began to read, a few lines at a time, (pauses) why, (pauses) I think that was the best thing I've ever done since I retired. With the women's club, I didn't stay with that very long, because I felt that, uh, (pauses) I felt that I, uh, I could do something else besides going to a club meeting—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and so I dropped that. I was kinda shy at the time. When I joined it, a friend of mine belonged to it, and she asked me to go, and she sponsored me. But after the third day—you asked me if I, uh, felt discriminated against, it—but I don't believe it was discrimination. It was just me, but I felt left alone all by myself—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —and all the others knew each other, and they were in groups, talking, and I felt like an outsider, and I couldn't—I'm not the type to push myself in. So I thought, "Well, that's not for me"—

SG: —Um-hm.—

IL: —so I quit, but that's the only time.

SG: Um-hm.

IL: Um-hm.

SG: How long did you teach those, uh—

IL: —I taught 'em about two years. And then I, I just had doctors say I had to give it up, so, it was too much—

SG: —Yeah.—

IL: —if I could go in and, uh, without any preparation, but you—when you—when I teach, I put my whole self into it, I work, and it, it becomes (speaking at the same time) just like teaching again—

SG: —Oh sure.—

IL: —so I, I couldn't do—keep on doing it—

SG: —Um-hm. (squeaking sound)—
IL: —but I loved it.—
SG: —I can—
IL: —Um-hm.—
SG: —tell that you're good at it too—
IL: —Um-hm.—
SG: (both laugh) There's one question I wanna ask you, and I'll let you go 'cause I know you're—
IL: —Um-hm.—
SG: —uh, busy. Um, you hear so much in reading and so forth about the Indian drinking problem. You think this is just a stereotype of the Indian? Do you think this is, is actually a true problem?
IL: I think, as much as I hate to say it, I think it's a very, very true problem. And I wish it could be solved by some, uh, psychologist or sociologist or doctors or somebody that knows, why is it that the Indian can't drink without getting drunk? Why is it that he can't drink like other people, but the minute he starts to drinking—he just (thudding sound) goes—
SG: —Um-hm.—
IL: —and he can't hold his liquor. You find that with ma-many, many Indians, even in the urban—cities and even in—and on the reservation, it is very bad. And I think it's a very, very sad problem, which I think is a detriment to the Indian people.
SG: Do you think this is one of the problems that causes the families—
IL: —I think so. (speaking at the same time) I definitely think so.
SG: Um-hm. And the children, I—
IL: —Um-hm.—
SG: —in the Indian schools, I know it's been mentioned before that there are quite—
IL: —Yes.—
SG: —a few children that come—
IL: —Um-hm.—
SG: —from broken homes.
IL: That's true. Um-hm.
SG: Okay, well, thank you, Mrs. Largo, I really (speaking at the same time) enjoyed talking to you. (tape stops)

*[01:10:52]*

END OF INTERVIEW