

Doreen Wabasca

Jan. 4, 2017 Interviewers: Muriel Venne & Catherine Cole; Camera: Don Bouzek

DW: My real name is Frances Doreen Wabasca but I only use Doreen because great grandma couldn't pronounce the rs. So she called me Doeen. I was born in Grouard, Alberta in 1940, January 18<sup>th</sup>. Our hill was called Bottle Town because some of my ancestors were nicknamed Bottle, but they're Chalifoux. But Chalifoux before that was Gladue. There's seven members of my mom and dad's children but there were only two of us who were born in Grouard – my older sister and I. Then at the age of eight we were put in residential school.

Q: Where were you in the family?

DW: The second girl, second oldest. Violet is my older sister. We were both put in the mission; we were boarders. Our family, mom had to work, dad had to work to raise a family, but they put us there as boarders. I was there for six and a half years but my sister was there for maybe a year and a half maybe. But a nun beat her up so bad. I seen the nun, this tall woman with a big cape, hammering her with the clappers, the wooden clappers. Even when I'm talking about it, it's like I can see it. But the way I survived I think is because I forgive them. But I can't forget. The thing is, in the mission at my time it was outlawed to be Native. I was Native from day one but they outlawed it – I couldn't speak my language in the mission or do any kind of crafts or wear moccasins period; you don't. We couldn't speak our language from Sunday to Friday, and then dad would pick us up and then we could talk Cree at home. We loved it. Great grandfather talked French but he talked Cree with his wife, our great grandmother Marie. She taught me how to do sewing and stuff. In my early childhood I remember dad hunting, going to traplines in the winter. It was beautiful before I went to school. We had cows, we had chickens, we were the only Natives that had a garden too in Grouard. The way they done it is they even dug a great bit hole there in a big hill and they framed it in there. I used to see these hindquarters hanging there. The lake was right there, a

few hundred yards, and you'd take great big blocks. It was like an ice house, because there's no fridges there at that time.

Q: Did your parents agree with you being in the residential school?

DW: It's not that they wanted me there; they had to work and we were supposed to be looked after. We were not supposed to be harmed. A few times what happened was I'd tell dad, I'd tell him the nun or the priest. . . I was 11 years old the last time I went to confession. What happened was we used to get suckers once a week, all the little girls and probably the boys too.

Q: You mean candy?

DW: Candy, little suckers with the little wooden sticks. These poor little girls, either they were scared to get up, but they peed in their beds. I felt sorry for them. I learned how to pick that lock. Those keys used to be real long, but I used the wire. I unlocked it and I gave them each one; only three I took. I don't know how many weeks I done this, and I felt kind of bad because I was stealing for them. So I went to confession. Father Brookard was there. Every Thursday we used to be taken; if we made a pair of socks we go to the theatre. I couldn't go. I went crying to a nun that was dying of cancer; her name was Sister Jean. Anytime I did anything wrong I'd go to her. I said, I don't know why they won't let me go. She said, Father Brookard told on you, that you were picking the lock. But anyway, this was Thursday early. So when dad picked me up Friday, mom never came to protect or nothing – it was our dad that was there to pick us up and to hear. But even before he got out of the car I went running and crying and said, father, I went to confession and Father Brookard told on me. He never said, what did you do, my girl? Nothing; what can a kid do? He went to Father Brookard, the priest's house. By the time I got there Father Brookard was down out cold because dad hit him. I thought, I'm dead meat now when we come home, because I had to go back. This was Friday afternoon. I cried coming back; I didn't want to go. But dad told him, he said, my daughter can talk. He told the nun that too. So anyway, he brought me back Sunday

and it was not too early, but brought me back Sunday, but he told them. The next morning, every morning early we'd go to the chapel, the girls, in our nightgowns and stuff, housecoats, we'd go to the chapel. I seen him when I walked in but he had his back to us. I thought, oh I hope he doesn't see me. When he turned around he had two black eyes. The story was they said he fell, but whatever. He fell, because I seen him on the floor, but... And my dad told him never for me to go in that confession box from that day. Then they called me a heathen, the nuns did.

Q: Then when did you leave?

DW: When I was 15 finally I wouldn't go back, I wouldn't go back.

Q: Was that when you started helping your dad with fishing?

DW: Yes, before that too. As soon as you're old enough, especially summer holidays when I went home. He was working in a camp and mom was a cook; well, she had to cook for the camp. Dad used to take us with him when we would haul logs out, after he'd fall a log; it was for the mill. So we were always involved because we were all equal. We had a younger brother next to me, and he had to do the work as a man too because he had to work. You gotta learn. It was nothing; you don't get no spending money every week. That wasn't the way we were raised. It was just you have to do it.

Q: So it was the entire life of using the moose for food, and fishing. . .

DW: Yes. We had cows and chickens too, stuff like that. No pigs.

Q: Do you remember the mariahs? (they were more like an eel, also called a "ling")

DW: Oh yes, but they tasted good. But you gotta know how to fillet them. There's just a piece on the back part. I knew how to fillet too.

Q: The whole business of survival was part of your life.

DW: Yes. When dad worked construction too, I worked there because no man would hire me, but he's my dad so they'd let us work. The men didn't like it, but they gonna fight dad? That's not the way we did it; they just didn't say nothing.

Q: Was your dad French?

DW: No. They said he was French but I found out most of them in Duck Lake, people that was supposed to be from Europe and all this, they're from the Black Powder line.

Q: The Black Powder line?

DW: Yep, that's the head dude, the father of all of us, the Buffalo, the Dion, all of them. Even his mother, the Desjarlais side and Cardinal, they're Native. I found them treaty numbers. It's so important to know our identity. We were taught as children from day one we're all equal. No matter what kind of work was out there you had to do it. When I was 15 I thought, oh boy, dad said, he was hauling logs with his own truck and stuff but the hired man didn't show up. He said, you gotta come with me. I thought, oh boy. But I used to watch him when he was shifting, and I knew what he was doing. Standard, big truck. When he got to High Prairie where we were to unload the logs he said, Doreen, get out. So I got out. He said, either the belt or the truck you're going to drive today. You're going to back up the truck and I'm going to point where we're going to unload. I thought, what if he hits me? He never did, but I seen him use his belt on his sisters when they weren't behaving. So I thought, okay, so I got in. I shifted, because I knew how to shift and put it in reverse because I was always nosy.

Q: When did you decide to come to the city from Lesser Slave Lake?

DW: I think the reason why is because I was getting a divorce, the first one. That's when I had to leave there. Commercial fishing didn't give me enough money and there was no welfare; like you have to support yourself. Your children too. But I was lucky, I

only had one, because he took the other two. I didn't know it wasn't the right thing but white man said, I'm gonna keep two and you can keep one. The Native had no rights, more or less. So I said okay, fine, as long as they go to school and you raise them. But it didn't work out that way. He abused them. So I stole them one at a time, first the boy and then the girl. Took him to court and stuff. I'm not prejudice, but he was a German; but there's nice Germans around. But he was one of the bad dudes.

Q: So you came to Edmonton and started working.

DW: Yes, different jobs. I even took hairdressing and stuff like that, but that wasn't me. There's so many women already doing that, and men hairdressers. I kept wishing I'd go back to the way I was raised, to go outside and work. More money and we have equal rights, but it's not that easy. It was hard walking into that. I had three strikes: I was a woman, a Native, and I wasn't educated.

Q: How did you get the job with the City?

DW: First of all, I heard they were training the men in Fort McMurray; there was the college there. So I asked my Lloyd, his cousin Misconac, to come with me because she didn't want to come with me, didn't believe in it. I said, you gotta, I can't do it alone, cuz 42 men in a class. I thought, even if I have a little backup, a woman; so I took her along. We went and took the course. But instead of going to the bar like the men, I'd go to the library. I wanted to learn as much as I can. I went to workshops for concrete, sump?, all that stuff I wanted to learn, the industrial – jumping jacks, jack hammers, stuff like that.

Q: So one of the main reasons for the training was safety, to keep yourself from getting killed on the worksite.

DW: Yes. Some of the young men didn't have a clue even how to operate a power saw, but I taught them because I knew how to operate a power saw before.

Q: So you had a lot of skills already.

DW: Ya, but I had to have the certificate to prove that I can do that.

Q: That's about the time we met.

DW: Yes, because Fort McMurray, they hired the men automatically but not me, cuz I'm a woman. They had no accommodation. They wouldn't recognize me. Then I had to go to this office, Muriel Venne's, office of Native Outreach to help me out and my first cousin Lloyd knew to help me out to fight. You got a hold of Stan Daniels and you came up there. That was it. They had to fight for me. [Stan Daniels was President, Metis Association of Alberta]

Q: What I remember asking you is, why don't you want to stay in Fort McMurray? And you said?

DW: I had my home here at the house here; my family's here. This is my home. But I would've loved to work there fulltime at that time, but I did get there later. Then I thought, well why can't I apply in Edmonton? So I did.

Q: And that's where you really got into...

DW: That's the worst, yes. The men didn't want me, period. The superintendents didn't want me. The men were so deadly against me working – lots of Italians and lots of people from across the ocean – but they didn't want me there working their jobs, they said. Why? We're equal, we can do anything, but you gotta learn safety the right way. The way I was brought up I don't give up. I kept working, although they wanted me out of there. I cried at times too but I didn't say nothing to them to see me cry. I cried because I was so hurt, but I wouldn't give up. It's hard. I used to talk to her; I need somebody to talk to. I couldn't talk just to anybody; it had to be somebody close. I didn't

talk to my sisters, no. It was something personal, because I don't want them to see me weak like crying. So I used to talk to my friend Muriel.

Q: What was the actual job you were doing?

DW: Construction, open cut construction.

Q: Constructing buildings?

DW: No, not buildings. You know the ones you see on the street when they're digging up and making all these barricades for you so you can't get through? We're the ones that's working there, either jackhammering or after we dig it up then we gotta nicely cover it with asphalt; you mix it. So all that stuff we had to do. I loved working. I was there way before them. I'd go have a coffee and I'd sit there and wait for them to come to work. I was always 15 or 20 minutes earlier. And to get out from the house, the children were fine, went to school and stuff, but you still have that quiet moment. You go a little earlier, you sit there, then what you gotta do that day. But it was always just about every day I had to fight to protect who I was, because I'm a woman. But I could stand up to--I might be 76 right now--but I had a life of we were taught that. We were taught to be equal. You can't hate nobody but you gotta defend yourself.

Q: Was there verbal abuse from the men to try to get you to quit?

DW: Yes, they done everything like call me wagon burner too, squaw.

Q: The Italian workers...

DW: Those were the ones, yes. I don't know why they done that, because we're all equal. Why do that? I wasn't raised that way. But when it came to me, I wasn't going nowhere, with your help.

Q: How did you become a foreman?

DW: What happened is eight months after I was working at coffee break I seen some sheets there and I just picked one up and looked at it. Pens were there, pencils were there, and I filled it out. I knew the motors; I knew the stuff. The guy that was working there that applied, he was there for 15 years. I filled it out and put it there. Apparently they were told I got the job but they wouldn't tell me. No. The superintendent came and got me this one morning a few days later, and he was mad. He said, come with me. I had my hardhat on and everything. You don't carry purses when you're working construction, but anyway. I'm dirty, and he took me there and said, get in my truck. So I did. I said, what's wrong? He said, you must know. He said, you must have somebody up there. I was thinking: was he talking about God or something? But anyway, he drove me to the CN Tower and told me what floor. That was it; he was mad. So I went up to this office and I thought, what? I didn't know what I did. Nobody told me nothing. I forgot everything about that. So the secretary, I introduced myself. Then she talked to somebody and he came out. I said, what did I do wrong? I wanna know now, what's wrong? He said, didn't they tell you? I said, no, I don't know. He said, if you want the job you got it. He said, how you gonna handle it? I said, I don't know; it's work, no big deal. Oh, they were mad at me. They used to call me Doreen but they started calling me Boss. They never even said nothing. It was worse then but I didn't care. If I'm gonna be a boss, I am the boss. But I wasn't their boss. I just said what you gotta do. I'll tell you something if we're not on camera, or if we are, it don't matter. When I found out we got an okay for us to go hunting, just my sister and I, fish and wildlife. I told them straight out, too bad I said, now we won't have no fun in poaching anymore. No more fun. [*The Supreme Court of Canada gave hunting and fishing rights to "Indians" across Canada.*]

Q: What year were [you] made supervisor?

DW: In the '70s, that's all I can remember. I asked my daughter that because I wasn't trying to show off but I keep every little record about what I've been going through. It's just normal. All the little picture I have inside of me. I'm there to work; it's normal for me.



But I thought they were so silly taking pictures of me. The City did when I was hired. I was in the hole there, hardhat on and everything. But I thought, you guys are silly. But I couldn't say that because they're the men's world or whatever you wanna call it.

Q: Were there any other women?

DW: No. It was hard.

Q: The only job now you ever see a woman doing is flag person.

DW: I know, and we can do it. Jackhammer, it's not how strong you are; it's you balance. There's no such thing as you gotta be strong. It's how you balance it; you don't carry it. You're strapped when you have to do the walls like we did, have to make holes for the pipes. We were kind of tied up with the jackhammer. It's not how strong; it's how you balance it.

Q: How many years were you there?

DW: I thought, nah, I wanna leave here. Close to two years. I thought, nah, I wanna go back to truck driving. So I went to truck drive for Bellerose, Russell Bellerose and his wife. He was getting a lot of money for his trucking. I told my husband, I said, I want my own truck. So he did. That's when I started with my own and we went on rotations for the City of Edmonton, winter and summer. I liked driving.

Q: So you moved over from being a labourer to truck driving and contracting with your own truck.

DW: For the City, yes. But the reason why I quit hauling for the City, I'll tell you the truth. When I found out there was bodies on the south side, one of my brothers' name is George. He was the one that what you call it, that digs holes and loads up. What you call it again? I'm thinking of the construction, front end loader, something like that.

Anyway, he said, there's bones here, Doreen. Because he had a break and he came to my truck and he said, there's bones; it's a burial site. It's south side too. I said, that's the last load I took down to where we had to deliver here just close to the City Hall. I just quit. But I still drove, but not for that.

Q: So from there?

DW: I kept working. I had to keep working. Different contracts I got too. When you're on rotation you just go to work for the City for so long. Then you have to find another job. But I was hauling either asphalt or got a few tickets too--speeding. Some places you get paid by ton mile, not by the hour, so ton mile I got stopped.

Q: One of the things that the City of Edmonton union did was to stop, like my dad worked for the City and as soon as he'd have enough hours to become permanent they'd lay him off. The union fought for that and they got it changed. They used all the workers. They would never give them permanent status.

DW: Then after I left here, I went back to Fort McMurray and we built that pizza place there. There too, they made me a foreperson. There too I had problems with people – the men, not women, men. One guy was late three times and I had told him, don't do that because I'll have to let you go. Again close to an hour, 45 minutes maybe, he showed up. I said, go see the supervisor. He said, you're firing me. He said, I know why you're firing me, because I'm from Quebec. It made me laugh because what's that got to do with it? But I couldn't say, you're fired; I just said I'm letting you go. I had a rough time there. They even soldered my wheel barrel because I was a working foreperson. They soldered my shovel sometimes. But I didn't get mad. I just said, when I come back, that has to be cleared. They tried everything to get me to quit, no matter what I was doing.

Q: When you say they soldered it, do you mean they attached it to something else?

DW: Yes, concrete. I was just going to lift it and I looked and sure enough it was there. But I didn't throw a fuse or nothing. I just said, when I come back, it better be done. They done lots of stuff to discourage me to get home. You belong to your husband, belong at home. How many men I never met before said that to me. I used to feel sorry for them. Where were they coming from? This is our country. We're all equal here, we are. But it was tough to work in a man's world for a woman at that time.

Q: And a Native woman at that.

DW: Yes, and on purpose, I used to have this long hair but I'd wear my pigtails just to show off I'm Native too.

Q: You were recognized by being presented an award for being a role model for other women. This was held at a banquet, to honour women of courage in the workforce.

DW: They picked me as a role model but then I had to wear Native clothes too. I never wore Native clothes before and remember I had to wear First Nation or Métis outfits. I was thinking, they're all silly, these people. But I just went along with it. But there was hundreds of people there. So I started telling a story never to give up whatever you're gonna do. I even mentioned Muriel Venne, because she's the one that kept me going, because I used to listen to her too. There's angels among us; she was one of them. But anyway, I even said her name, Muriel Venne. I couldn't see who all was there; it was dark and I was in the spotlight. Here all of a sudden, when I was done, she stands up and comes up to the podium. I didn't even recognize her. She had a nice hat on. I got embarrassed. I was talking about a woman and I didn't ask her permission or nothing.

Q: The beauty of that award was Doreen told her story but she didn't tell of all the recognition that she deserved and wasn't getting for her courage and her determination not to let those men put her down. I remember what you told me about the bad names they called you.

DW: Swear words, everything like that, yes.

Q: Were you in the union?

DW: Yes. They didn't like me there, neither, even the truckers. It just happened they picked my ticket. They have a prize every meeting. I won that. That made it worse, too.

Q: You weren't supposed to win it.

DW: No, they didn't want me there. But I sat through the whole meeting too just to bug them. Oh ya, just like I was there to bug them too, because I knew I had every right. But I didn't say anything.

Q: You asked a good question with regard to the attitude of the union. The union business managers and so on...

DW: They didn't like me.

Q: No, and that's why it was so difficult to get on. Then when you did get on, you'd better be prepared for a lot of abuse.

DW: Yes and I got it too, but I wouldn't give in.

Q: Were you working with Indigenous men at all?

DW: Not the City, no, there was no Native there, not that I could recognize; some of them you can't tell. But not one, not one. They're all from across the ocean.

Q: The other stories of the guys that were working onsite, they got a lot of tricks played on them. One of the guys, they put a bow and arrow through his coveralls and hung them up, and did bad things to them.

DW: Ya, even the pictures. Oh I made them take everything down though, their pictures right out of there.

Q: Pictures of what?

DW: Naked women. Well I'm a woman. They got mad about that too because they had to take them off because I complained.

Q: Tell us about how this affected you.

DW: I can't put all the blame on that but part of it is working that life. My husband and I, we fought. He didn't like me working with the men either. He's a pipefitter. He got mad at me when I did work in Fort McMurray because he didn't want me to sit with men. But I'm working. He didn't want me to sit with the pipefitters and welders – they have a higher class in the construction. The welders are just down here, I mean the labourers. Anyway, he didn't want me to sit with men but yet he wouldn't come and sit with his wife that was a labourer. There was a problem there too, just like he's embarrassed sitting next to me. But yet he didn't want me to sit with the men. Where am I gonna go? I gotta sit; I gotta eat. That didn't work well neither. He was jealous of every superintendent; whatever I had, it didn't matter. I fought there too. Equal rights was something I fought with all my life. It wasn't right. I used to love truck driving to out, come back in, make my coffee, go outside. It was just like I was going on a vacation every time I got out of that door, because I wanted to work. I loved the sound of the motors even when they're building a house next door and they took the trees down at my building there, senior place. The sound of the hammer and stuff and the saws--you hear that and it reminded me, because our dad was a boat builder too. So we're so used to that noise. Other people were complaining, but I said, that's beautiful sound that reminds me of the happy times growing up. They were housebuilders too, like my grandfather. I never lived in a teepee but my great grandparents had one; so we used to go there. But we always lived in a house. But people thought, you're Native; you're in a teepee or something.

Q: My grandmother used to put a tent up.

DW: We had tents for camping.

Q: For the summer. My grandfather had a house. But she took her bed and put it in the tent and she slept there all summer.

DW: Dad worked in camps. You'd have a tent but you'd have a floor and part of a wall, and the tent would be sitting on top there. Mom didn't like mice. She didn't want to sleep on the ground, period. No, no, no, it was always a tent with a floor. Wood, boards, and that had to be washed every day. That's the way we were raised.

Q: It was warm in the summertime.

DW: Oh yes.

Q: The heat from the tent. Those wrought iron beds, she'd sleep in there and she loved that. So you're still working on construction. So what happened after that?

DW: Well, I kept driving even after I got divorced from my husband. He took the truck. Fine. I didn't care, whatever. I kept driving for Bellerose off and on but then I got sick; so I couldn't keep driving. Then I went all out and started making Native stuff, because it was outlawed and I was 15 when I left there (the residential school). But our mother couldn't teach me nothing. She was raised in a residential school, the same school I went to since she was six years old when her mother died until she was 18 when the priest sold her.

Q: The priest sold her?

DW: Ya, that's what the priests used to do. They used to sell the young girls, even my auntie Doris. Her husband bought her. That's what they did.

Q: How do you sell someone?

DW: That's the way the government, they sold a lot of women like that. You don't just go pick a woman there. You can date her. So they had to make arrangements, either horses or a cow or whatever. Mom was 18. So her auntie took her, but then she married Pete, our dad. But they used to sell them. Honest, I don't make up stuff. We have to have facts and we do.

Q: My mom gave my sister to her sister. My auntie Lucy didn't have any girls. So my auntie Lucy made a deal with my mom that she would give her Shirley, my sister.

DW: Auntie Doris, when she was bought, she didn't like this man but she had to stay married to him. When my mom and dad said I had to marry a farmer's boy, I took off. I was gone for close to a year until the RCMP found me. I wasn't going to marry him. Thank god, because he had 13 children with his wife and he won't work and he's been on welfare. He never worked. You can't live like that. You gotta work.

Q: So you were sick, and what did you do after you got better?

DW: I kept researching. When I found out we're Native, there's some of us but I didn't know where we came from. They said we were from France. I never found one from France and I only found one from Holland; he was Dutch. Michael, that's it. But all the rest, I was so proud I had to find out. When I found out great grandma was on the reserve south side of Edmonton I couldn't believe it. I totally got hooked. That's when I went to university. Never paid; every day I was there all day too. It was dark in the winter when I left and it was dark when I came home. I just kept researching, my sister and I, but she's in Grande Prairie so I'd have to wait until she came, but I kept researching. Our Uncle Ralph, dad's younger brother, he had a lot of bucks. So he just

got me. Sometimes I'd have to sew to make a few dollars, having started the meetings. But what we did with the Papatash Association is we paid to get recognized to be legal. We never got no money from the feds or nothing. We just kept on. I wanted to find out who I was. That meant every Doreen out there that don't have a clue where they're from originally. So I had to keep on. While I'm doing this I'm sewing. I love beadwork, I teach even that, and basic Cree I teach too. Once you know it was outlawed and now you can do it. You want everybody to learn to talk Cree. It's a beautiful language.

Q: You're also a psychic as well.

DW: It's a gift I had since I was a little child. I could see stuff, the ones that have passed on. You've got quite a few in here. But they're nothing to fear. It's a calming thing when you talk to them or when you know they're around you. We had that gift from day one before even born, like Black Powder's line all the way down. We have that gift like you have it, that native thing. You have that too. It's so important to connect to that. Otherwise I think probably I'd end up in Alberta Hospital. But no, we don't do that anyway. But the thing is the calming thing that comes over you when you know who you are and be proud of who you are, not just because I'm a woman. I love men but I love being a woman more. I love my great grandchildren. I only have five grandchildren but everybody I've been helping out now, I don't know, I have hundreds of grandchildren. They all call me grandma. There's some black, some white, and even some Vietnamese. They're all my grandchildren. They call me kokum or grandma. I love people though.

Q: I'm curious about knowing whether your experience when you were working changed, or were you always the alienated person?

DW: At that time, yes. But then when I took my Lloyd first cousin, she got a job at another site. I told her, you gotta come and apply too. I thought we'd be together, but no, they put her someplace else. But then she ended up marrying her foreman, then divorced and stuff, and she quit working.



Q: I've heard that people in work camps didn't want women because it was disruptive.

DW: I worked in camps too as a cook's helper. I worked in camps as the one who looks after your stuff, campy. I did that too and they didn't care for it. But the reason why is they figure that they're gonna fool around with the men. No, you're there to work. It's beautiful out there.

Q: Did you ever feel that you were in danger because of working and living so close to men?

DW: No. They knew. The boss became my friend just because I was ?, but nobody's going to mess around because I wrote down everything that happened. I had to fight for my rights too.

Q: Was that on the Syncrude site?

DW: There I worked too, yes, Syncrude site. I worked there. But that's a different one too. But I worked in different camps. At the site when I was working in Fort McMurray they weren't too happy. But they had to get over it; I wasn't going away.

Q: Were you the only woman on the Syncrude site?

DW: No. Oh the only woman there, ya, because I was by the power plant. They gave me such an easy job there because I was a woman. I thought, you guys are so silly. I'm getting the same money as you guys.

Q: I did some research because I worked for Bechtel and what I found out from the safety books was that it was 300 women and 5,000 men. In the first aid books the women were given Valium at the same rate as the men. The women all got Valium and they sent them back on the job.

DW: I know it's the worst place.

Q: It was given for anxiety.

DW: Yes. It's so hard. I don't know what we're made of but the way I was raised it helped. It was so hard to go to work; I know that. But I had to work. That was normal for me to work; you just had to. But a lot of times I cried. I think that's what helped me. I didn't keep it in here, and with the help of angels among us, I call her, but to talk to you was just like a helping hand.

Q: The women really had a rough go on the site. That was proven by the medication they gave them.

Q: Women were advised to carry weapons in the camp in case a man tried to accost you.

DW: Ya, well they tried but then I told on that guy, the cook. Nothing came of it, but he wouldn't dare because my husband was going to come after him. I ratted right away. We gotta tell the truth. If you need help, you gotta reach out. That's when I still had a husband. So they knew he was gonna come after him if he tried anything. So they fired the guy, the cook, because he really went after the poor girls too. He wasn't coming after me, because my husband was you know, but the girl suffered.

Q: So she was vulnerable because she was alone.

DW: Yep, it's a good thing I was there though. I had to tell. It was so bad. Even you walk in, you think, because we all got hardhats, we're all working, all getting paid. But yet they treat us like we don't belong there. I was alienated from my own country. You don't do that to nobody. Sometimes I'm embarrassed for them when I think about them, the ones that called me down; I'm embarrassed for them.

Q: You wanted to make your mark in the work world and be as good as they were, which you were.

DW: I wanted other women to come there too.

Q: I got hired by Bechtel 10 minutes after I said I was leaving Native Outreach. But the thing was, I was going for a good study based on experience of Syncrude that they could do better the next time because they were on a new project, the Alsands Project. The project failed. The headquarters for Bechtel is in San Francisco and my boss tried to get the okay for me to do the work. I was looking for treatment of the men but I couldn't find anything. They didn't wear their protective glasses, just like all the other ones. The safety guy told me that when they'd see the safety guy coming they'd pull out their glasses and put them on.

Q: Were you still at Syncrude or one of those larger companies when they hired Aboriginal liaison workers? Was that a part of your experience at all?

DW: Well, to be Native to go to work there, you're second class automatically, married or not. You're Native. I wouldn't even stay in the trailer. The trailer--by the time we fought they had a trailer pulled in for ladies. It was 6 to 9 numbers; they made fun of that too. Everything that we were involved in, they made fun of it. Probably the company did that on purpose too, I don't know. Why was it that? Then I heard when I was taking a course there in Fort McMurray on the radio they said, "what is this world coming to", because I, an Aboriginal woman, was taking the training.

Q: An Aboriginal woman.

DW: Yes, what's this world coming to? I couldn't believe it.

Q: Were you able to make friends with Aboriginal women working in the camps?

DW: If I worked with another Native I loved it, because I talked to them as equal as I talk to that white person or whatever. I know they're kind of shy; I was never shy. I was raised that way. I was so proud to be Native, although they tried to beat it out of me. But I was proud to be who I was. I never thought it was so different, because I'd done it all my life, to work construction or whatever. Then they made a big deal out of it. I thought, you silly people.

Q: It was a big deal.

DW: I was so proud of people that stood by me to help me accomplish what we did. It's not just me; it's who helped me. Otherwise, without them, I wouldn't have been nothing. It's true; it is true.

Q: When I look back on that era, often I was the only woman in the room. The whole idea that a woman can do anything: I was head of Native employment and I believed that I was the only person that could've done that job, because the men weren't going to do it and they didn't know how and they didn't have the pizzazz.

DW: It took a woman.

Q: Why I'm mentioning that is that's what had to happen. You had to be there to break down those barriers, become a foreman in the City of Edmonton on a crew that didn't want you there, and get over to Syncrude and prove that you had as much knowledge if not more knowledge than any ten men they could put together. It's a tough go but I would really like to thank you publicly for doing that marvelous work and just barrelling through.

DW: I never nail polish though, when I was working. I feel so good. I'm 76 years old and on the 18<sup>th</sup> I'll be 77, and I'm so proud. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel. I feel good, no boo-boos, nothing.

Q: You mentioned learning how to do Native beadwork.

DW: Yes, I had to go to school. In Fort McMurray they just happened to advertise that they teach how to do beadwork. So I thought, well I'm gonna go ask. Sundays I didn't work so I went and applied there at the Friendship Centre. You gotta save your money. So I said, what if I volunteered for cooking, would you teach me? She said, okay. So I did. The first pair of moccasins became hundreds of moccasins after that. I just love making them. I sell them. I make boots. That coat I have on too is made, and I call the boots Wabasca Boots because I created them.

Q: Somebody made your coat?

DW: Well, I bought the material and then I cut it. But then I need the serger. So I got them to serge it. I love life. And just think, I wouldn't have met ???. It's pretty neat; I love it. If we didn't do genealogy I wouldn't have known. That's how come I'm so proud of Aboriginal women too, because of the history we have. We do, because there's one story I'll tell you. This was way back. There was a chief, I won't name the chief because it'll be on tape, but if you have to force me I guess. But anyway, his wife had to stay home. She got mad; she wanted to go fight the Blackfoot too. So as soon as they left and all the men went to war, she caught up with her husband. They were badly beaten and even the chief captured her. I don't know what he was thinking. He bought her for a good price, a chief's wife and all these scalps here dangling. Anyway, I don't know what he was thinking. He put her in the back and they're riding through this maze of little trails in the bush. She killed him. She knifed him with his own knife. Knifed him, threw him off, went back home with the horse and the scalps hanging. Women are strong. It's not only these little stories. I know I'm proud to be a Native, that part, but as a woman too.

Q: We had all the emotions that men have and I know that personally I could kill if I was pushed.

DW: For protection, yes. Even when you go moose hunting, it's for your family. Like I go moose hunting--as long as I kill the moose, then we know how to cut it too, the way you cut meat. That's for all winter. Same thing with a garden: you gotta have a garden so you have vegetables, either can them or whatever.

Q: Can we talk about Papaschase? First you can tell us how you are a descendant.

DW: Through Josette Cline and then through Lalouise Nayass, that's through the Black Powder

? line. Then the other one is Rosalie's husband Chalifoux but she married a Carofel and he was shot on the south side by the agents. She was in a wagon but their son Augustine was only seven years old when this happened, when it was being taken away. They covered him and all four members of his family was shot, the grownups that were in the wagon. They left like that; they rode away. Then the farmer's wife not too far from there went to see what happened. She went because she figured there might be a child there, and it was my great grandfather, Augustine Chalifoux, I mean Carofel because his grandmother's Chalifoux or his mother. But anyway, they raised him. I thought, oh boy, until he was 11 years old. From 11 years old he was on his own from there on. I have a picture of him in my family book, this Augustine. He told that story. He died in 1948 but he told that story to my dad and mom. I was just a little kid. I didn't hear all of it. But I know of it, the story.

Q: When they killed all the family members...

DW: They didn't kill them all. They tried but some ran away. Some were given smallpox injected by the agents. Well, I know that because in their little journal one agent said to the other by mail. It hurt me when I was researching why that white man did this, like genocide here. This is our land.

Q: Was this at the time of the surrender?

DW: They never surrendered it.

Q: But there were??

DW: That's false too. Once you're a Native, that's why I proved it. Once you're a Native, you're a Native. How could you sell your rights? You didn't. He was out hunting, the family, the brothers were all hunting. Like us when we were small, when you go hunting you go with about four wagonloads of families who would all go hunting. That's what Chief Papas done with his brother and I'm not sure who was involved. But when they came back that thing had been stripped. Then they said they sold them for horses. Geez. But anyway he took off, Chief Papas took off and went to Beaver Lake and that's where he settled. Then he used to walk to Grouard because Chief Wapasos, my great grand grandfather, their mothers are sisters like Louis Riel too, like their mothers are sisters. But anyway, he used to walk there to visit because great grandfather was a medicine man too, William Chalifoux. I heard about this but I didn't know where did that guy come from; we don't know anything. So when I started researching I found out the reason. I'm bragging about this is a free country, black dirt 22 inches deep or something, but black dirt there and so they didn't want anybody there. They burnt lots of stuff.

Q: I've heard when the treaties were signed they were sacred to the Indigenous people but the white people looked on it as a real estate deal and that was it.

DW: Tone's brother was a signatory peer, a signatory in September ??but in 1876 he signed a treaty, signatory Peter Wabasca. He didn't use Dion or Buffalo or nothing. Wabasca means white; they look white, on account of supposedly my great grandfather Black Powder kidnapped the white settler's daughter and had sons. One became Father Lacombe. One is my great grandfather Antoine. But Antoine was from there too but the rebellion, they call it, that's just a nice word. They were out to kill for the land, it didn't matter. Big Bear, the same thing.

Q: So when they took that land back, your family had been living there.

DW: They were living there. I have proof of that too. They were there.

Q: So the seven-year-old boy was raised by farmers for four years?

DW: They were always farming. Even the Natives you see in movies they say how they got little teepees and stuff. They had gardens across there. Great grandfathers were telling us this story but I was just a kid. They had houses; they were house builders. Even St. Albert, that little church, the museum, great grandfather helped to build that, Antoine. There's no nails there. They carved them so the logs would fit. There's no nails in there. They were house builders too. But they're still Native; they were living on the reserve. But signing of the treaty, what happened at the rebellion or massacre or whatever, when they burnt the Indian agent's fort and it was fully burnt, one farmer, a white dude, he turned around and stole a few boxes from there to protect them. At first he was going to turn them in and he thought no, he kept them. One of the papers in there is when Queen Victoria signed with the Natives and the agreements they had. They were just to come here and farm but never to dig holes, nothing. That was just for the white people when we signed that treaty. That's the agreement we had with that, and we have it.

Q: When the Mill Woods development started to take place, did you realize that was Papaschase?

DW: Across the river. It's not just Mill Woods, it's across the river. That's the white man saying it's way over there, it's right here across the river.

Q: So how did you feel about that development when you first heard about it?

DW: It hurt me how we were treated. It's genocide, just like that guy after the Jews. It was bad. This was our families here that were killed and whatever.



Q: In Mill Woods they acknowledge the Papaschase legacy by using all of these Aboriginal names.

DW: The only thing that I've seen in the City of Edmonton is a little building there that says Papaschase on it. It's so embarrassing, a tiny little building to say, and that's all I see. Saskatchewan, I know it used to be Northwest Territories here, but Saskatchewan has more stuff about the Natives. Here it's just like, oh.

Q: It's even worse in Edmonton. Calgary realized the value of the Indian people in the south and they never had a stampede without the Indian village. But in Edmonton they never did that.

DW: No, even when we marched, we did it on purpose just to acknowledge the news media. We wanted them to know, ordinary people to know, this was our land, a reserve. Everybody's like you pay for your land, but this was our land. So we marched and the police, Randy Wickson, I forget, but the Native one, he came there to the office we had rented on the south side for the Papaschase Association. He said, Doreen you have to get a permit. I said, who's your boss? So he connected me but he said, don't tell him I'm here. I said, okay. So I said, you don't embarrass me. I said, do you want me to get a permit? I said, did you guys have a permit when you put your building right there on our land? He said, forget it Doreen; we'll be there. They even got the police cars to escort for traffic.

Q: When was this?

DW: I think in '96, but I have all the records completely in my binders. I kept those records.

Q: I've got a picture of that in my human rights. We need your closing comments.

DW: The thing is, do not stop working for the people, I mean the Native woman. We all have rights, men and women, but defined as a man's world. They were trained that's it. Don't do that anymore. Please recognize everybody is equal when they come to your door or your school or whatever. Support them. That's all I can say so nobody else will have that bad treatment like we did. Let's not let that happen.

Q: You're just dripping with turquoise.

DW: My sister said, are you going to wear a necklace? I said, no I'm Doreen, just my rings.

Q: At one time the amount of turquoise that you wore was how important you were.

DW: Yes. I'm even trying to hide my rings now.

Q: Especially the guys like Harry Daniels--he used to have rings on every finger.

DW: You know when he first started too, Anderson was a board member. Remember the Métis? I was a board member for about three weeks. He wanted me to lie. I quit. I walked away from that.

Q: What Anderson? Who are you talking about?

DW: The writer, you know the Native English and Cree, Anne Anderson? Her. She was sitting on the board but I was cooking for them at boy's college at St. Albert ? and he came there to the meeting. He wanted me to lie to the people. That's it. I quit. I don't lie.

Q: Well Anne Anderson and I locked horns because the new lieutenant governor was appointed and Anne was nominated for doing the Cree English dictionary and she received this award and recognition. So we made a little party for her because we wanted to know what happened. So I said, Anne, tell me what did you do? She said,

“Well I got up and I shook hands with the lieutenant governor and congratulated him.” I said, “He doesn’t even know his job.” You’re the one who received the recognition; he should have been congratulating you. She rose up and said, “I don’t think the way you do.” But it was true. He let them congratulate him when he should have congratulated the women.

Q: Who was that?

Q: I think it was Lynch-Staunton. He hated that job. He hated it. He hated going to the Remembrance Day. You could tell he was so disdainful of what his role was.

DW: Lois Hole was special. When we marched for the Papaschase to be recognized, she supported us. Before she was lieutenant governor, she was there all the time.

[ END ]