

It Still Lives, Season 4, Episode 4: Remembering the Snowbird Day School

Trey Adcock (TA): I'm Trey Adcock. I'm an associate professor at the University of North Carolina – Asheville. Finishing my tenth year. I'm a citizen of Cherokee Nation. I direct the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at UNC Asheville. That's about it.

Gil Jackson (GJ): I'm Gil Jackson, also known as (speaks in Cherokee 0:36-0:41). I'm a Cherokee language speaker, and I'm also a Cherokee language teacher. I teach at UNCA, I also teach at Stanford, at Robbinsville High School, and I also teach at the adult immersion program, so my day starts about five o'clock every single morning and ends about nine. And I'm 70 years old and I'm not sure how I'm going to—I'm trying to be retired. And so, in addition to that, I cut wood for the senior citizens, I deliver wood to the handicap people in my community. And there used to be eleven siblings and there's only five of us now, and I'm the only man in the family anymore. So I have one daughter, one son. My daughter has adopted four children—or is in the process of adopting the fourth child. Otherwise I wouldn't be a grandpa. So that's me.

TA: He's been saying he's going to be retired for about twenty years now.

Kami Ahrens (KA): So how did you both meet? And can you tell us a little bit about how you guys got started on the project together?

GJ: He used to email me. He used to email me, "Can I come over? Can I come over? Can I come over?" So yeah, finally, come on over. I was the principal of the Cherokee language immersion school at the time. and he was professor at university, so he came over and brought me gifts and, you know, necklaces and all kinds of things. And trying to make my acquaintance.

TA: So let me tell you the true story. *laughter* Actually, Gil and I have talked about this, I met Gil at an immersion class that used to be hosted by the Museum of the Cherokee Indian that Bo Taylor was leading. I was at grad school, and at UNC Chapel Hill, they had a Cherokee language program too. And so, that's where Gil was sort of the, one of the elders that was a part of that class. And so that's where I had first met him. And he was the principal. He kept emailing me, "Come hike, come hike, come hike." But anyways, we became friends and the first time I hung out with him was on a hike. Gil said, "Let's go for a little hike." I said, "Okay, great." I thought this would be like flat, walking by the stream sort of situation. Fourteen and a half miles later, my feet were bleeding, I was tired. He had to carry me home. That's how we met.

GJ: I have to add, that was after I ran a ten-mile, I mean a 10K race. So I said, well, fourteen miles. Nothing to it.

KA: So, can you tell me about the Snowbird Day School project? And you know, how it started.

GJ: I think the idea—well, not think, I know the idea came from my sister and another lady by the name of Shirley Oswald and another lady by the name of Nancy Jumper. They both attended the Snowbird Day School. Shirley was like three years behind me, Nancy was probably about the same age as she was. They talked about, "We should have a reunion, you know, because most of us that went to the Snowbird Day School were speakers." Probably around 95% of us were speakers, had Cherokee as our first language. We didn't start to learn the language until we entered the school. And it was quite a

transition, but at any rate, I think that's what I remember. And my sister said, "Can you do it?" And I said, "Yeah, but I don't think I want to just have a reunion. I just want it to be a little bit more than that." And from there, I got in touch with Trey and asked if he would have an interest in helping us, and he certainly added a lot of expertise and added to the whole process of having a reunion.

TA: Yeah, and that's really kind of how it started. The conversation started at the same time, sometimes these things just kind of work out together. The university nominated to go up for a Whiting Scholarship and so, I mean, Gil and I talked and we kind hashed out what this might look like, and I think, along with the reunion, man, this is like an awesome opportunity to have people's memories and stories about their experiences. It turned into a \$50,000 fellowship. The Eastern Band also—

GJ: \$38,000 from the Preservation Foundation

TA: So that allowed us—which was really important, do I think it could've been done without that? Yeah, maybe—we didn't have any equipment or anything. So all of it kind of came together perfectly. And the other person that was involved in the initial conversation was TJ Holland, the tribe's cultural preservation officer. And anyways, all of it kind of came together.

KA: For people listening who don't know what Snowbird is, could you explain in a few words what the Snowbird Day School is and why it was important to collect these stories?

TA: Yeah, so I mean, Snowbird is a place. So you have the Qualla Boundary and 45 minutes or so southwest, to an hour, is the Snowbird community. In the language, it's referred to as *Tuti* or *Tutiya*. And so the day school was really a part of, it really comes about in a historical period of reform. And so most people that know about schooling as it relates to American Indian people know about the large boarding schools: Carlisle, Chilocco. Less is known about, less has been written about, studied about these day schools, these smaller day schools. So prior to the '30s, there were some day schools but ours had a Quaker school district. And the boarding school was a part of that. So during this great kind of reform period of the '30s and '40s, they started transitioning away from boarding schools into these day schools. So the kids got to go home. So that's a huge difference in these boarding schools—kids were often shipped a thousand miles away, they're away from their families and their communities. So that's kind of where that story started. And it runs for a perfect thirty-year period: 1935 to 1965. It's important to know that history. I mean, one, it adds to Cherokee history. This projects really cool 'cause, you know, the idea came—as Gil was saying—from Cherokee people. The voices and the stories are told by Cherokee people. I think that's really important. I think it complicates the history of schooling for native people. And it's kind of what the day school just on the surface was.

GJ: Snowbird, at the time, was very isolated. And there was a gravel road to get to it, and it was mountainous and it still is, but it is at least paved now. And for fifteen, so many years, teachers would come—because it was isolated and you know, there's no social life, I mean I'm talking really isolated. One gravel road to get in. one gravel road to get out. So teachers were turning over constantly, year after year. and so there was no continuity and then, I guess maybe the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they decided, we need to do something else. You know, constant turn over, it's not good. And I'm glad they at least thought of it, so they hired two—they interviewed a teacher from the University of Tennessee graduate program, or graduate. And while he was being interviewed—and Trey you can tell the story better than I can—anyway they wound up hiring his pregnant wife. Is that correct? Yeah. And so they both—she wasn't certified teacher, but she was an excellent teacher. So she, and the school itself was

two rooms in this building, which has been demolished, so she taught first, second, and third. We didn't have kindergarten like today. And he taught fourth, fifth, and sixth. So that's kind of what Snowbird Day School was about. I think what was so different about that day school is that they didn't really follow government policy for assimilation. They allowed us to speak the language. They allowed us to speak the language in the classroom and the lunchroom and the playground—anywhere else. But they also said, "You need to learn English because that's where you're going to be operating for the most part in the future." You know, "We want you to learn English, but keep what you got." Which is very unlike what they had in the day schools up here at So Cove, Big Cove, and Birdtown. Whereas there's plenty of stories about children being whipped for speaking the language. And so, I think that's probably one of the reasons that Snowbird Community has one-quarter of the speakers that are left on the reservation. And it is probably, I think it is the smallest community. And there's six communities up here, one down there, and we have one-quarter of the speakers left. And I'll give the credit to those teachers who did not make us have to speak English.

KA: So you attended school at Snowbird as a child, right?

GJ: Yes.

KA: Can you share a memory or two of your time there, or something that stayed with you after?

GJ: Yeah, I think one of the first two or three days, we had no ability to speak English, because we were isolated. If we went to town, mom and dad went to town and shopped for groceries. They walked. So the only thing I remember being able to say was—and I didn't even say it right—but "Coke-cola," instead of coca-cola. And ice cream. And I remember the teacher one time at lunchtime said, I do kind of remember this, she said something to the effect of "noontime." Like twelve o'clock, it's probably time to go eat. In Cherokee, *nuna* is potato. So I put two and two together, and said, "Oh, it must be time to eat." Yeah. So another time I remember needing to go to the bathroom. We have a word about that long, I need to go pee. And I had no idea what to say in English. So I went to one of the third graders, more than likely. I was first, my sister was second, my oldest brother was third. So I probably went to him and said, "Hey, I need to go pee. What do I say?" And he mumbled something like "be excused" or something like that. So I went over to the teacher, and said "be excused" or something similar. And she knew what I was talking about, so she pointed with her finger. That's what I remember, but there's also other memories too.

KA: How did going to school like that with your community and being able to continue speaking the language, how do you think that shaped you as a child? Or how did it lead you to where you are today?

GJ: I think I have just incredible pride and also thanksgiving to my parents who taught me—and my mom went to a boarding school up here in Cherokee. At some point in time, we didn't have a school in the community, so they had to come up here. And she said they cried for two days, her and her sister. Maybe three days, something like that. And then they walked home. I have no idea how they got home. Because in the day, it was probably a two-hour trip. The roads were curvy and lot of it was gravel road, so I don't know how they got home. I wish I'd asked her. I just have some incredible pride and thanksgiving for the ability to have learned the language. And as I told you earlier, my day starts at five, ends about nine o'clock in the evening. That's at least four days a week, and then today I just came right from the adult immersion program, which started at 8:30. I said I gotta go, I got another meeting. So I think that I'm blessed, thoroughly, and I want to pass it on.

KA: For you Trey, growing up Cherokee Nation, what brought you to this place? How was your upbringing different and how has that shaped you and your current career?

TA: Well in terms of the more personal part of that, I don't come from a family of speakers. So to be a part of a project like this where the interviews are conducted in the language, you know, just hear it. you know, I got to hear Amy Smoker speak and I've gotten to hear Ella Bird speak and I've gotten to hear Lou and Gil. And to hear that, is just the blessing of a lifetime. And I think this project is about the history—documenting that history—but it's also about language preservation. And so to be able to contribute to that. And we have 30 interviews that are all in Cherokee. I mean that is, I'm really proud to have helped this project and, most importantly, help the community. We did have a reunion for—so we have the oral history piece, but we also have the digital piece of this which is, I know, when we first started, they said we might only get like forty or fifty pictures. I don't know, but we ended up with 450-some odd pictures. We digitized all of those and we blew some of them up so that when people came for the reunion—I mean to see these elders around pictures sharing stories and laughing, I mean, I could've never have dreamed of that. So that's personal and professional side of it for me, because when I went to grad school in Chapel Hill, you know, I wanted to work with Cherokee populations. And so I'm blessed that my job at UNC Asheville to work with students like him and Gil, so it's kind of all of it is together, and that's really cool.

KA: I'm really interested because this was a community born project, as you said. You know, what were some of the lessons that you learned working with this closely with the community, either of you, when trying to still have this professional project and output. Were there obstacles that you overcame, was there advice that you wish you would've had before you started or?

GJ: One of the things that we, that was so neat, was that there were so many pictures. First of all, we didn't think we'd find twenty, even thirty pictures because nobody had a camera. Apparently the teachers had a camera—they had tons of pictures. And as we understand, they were getting ready—the family that the children of the teachers, they all live in Wyoming, Arizona, Colorado. And they were getting ready to get rid of them, I guess burn 'em maybe, throw them away. And somehow one of their friends, the boy's best friend was David Coat, who is a tribal member, went to the Snowbird Day School. Trey, you know the history on that a little bit better than I do. But I'll get back to that. Anyway, when we got those pictures, a lot of them we didn't recognize. So we brought the community people together and we met and met and met and said, "Now who's in this picture, and who's in this picture?" some of them, most of them we could identify. Somebody would know somebody. "Oh yeah, that's Rita Brown. That's Jim Bird. That's Solomon Bird. That's so-and-so." So that was such a—and we had elders that come in, you know, older than me. And they were able to identify people that I couldn't, because they could remember somebody, how they looked when they were younger.

TA: I appreciate you pointing at me. *laughter* I think working in community—so I have two thoughts about that. One, I think like the project, it worked, you know, it worked. It was really successful. We were able, we published a book on it. Not an academic book, we published, we took the photographs and we basically made yearbooks for all the alumni. And that was amazing, to be able to hand those yearbooks to the elders. And it was just so awesome to watch, laughing, and again, sharing the pictures like you're in fourth grade and you get a yearbook at the end of the year. that was super cool. And so it worked. It is hard, and I think as an academic, you're trained to control processes and methodology, and this was not that. Which made it even more rewarding. I personally think—and I don't know how Gil

feels about this—one of the first things that we did, and I think it was one of the best things we did, is we went to the community and we have found some photos. But I think culturally it was appropriate, we ate and I think it was at the Boys Club in Snowbird. We kind of introduced ourselves, we showed some of the pictures. And I think that allowed the community—even though they knew who we were, to see that, this was something they could get behind and support. And it was cool, just even about that night, is people started sharing stories about their experiences. And I think there's also some healing that came about for that. The whole experience is really cool. Every part of it, we tried to get community feedback and let the community guide the process.

KA: So they were very willing participate.

GJ: Oh yeah.

TA: Oh yeah, but I think the important part was this was not an idea that originated at the university. I mean as Gil was saying this came from the community. My job was to get out of the way and just bring resources and try and help. So to me, it's a great example of community-driven. And I think that's why it worked and people have good memories of it.

GJ: I think the only thing that we controlled Trey is I wanted to do the interviews, 'cause I had had some training from you folks (Foxfire). And I thought I did a good job of interviewing people, because I know that somebody could mention something and I could put it back into my head and thirty minutes later, I said, "You mentioned this a while ago." And it's all in the language, but if you don't use it in the language, you miss so much. And so I kind of give myself credit for that, but I also give credit to the students at your program that taught me some interviewing skills back when, almost fifty years ago, forty years ago. Yeah.

KA: That's awesome. That's amazing. And you had a lot of students involved too, right?

TA: We had students, I mean, like, so for instance, like Gil was saying, one of the things that really worked was that Gil was doing the interviews. So you had elders speaking to elders in the language. And I think I have seen some other projects where the interviewer, even if they're from Cherokee, speaking in English to an elder—and Gil can talk more about that. It works, but it doesn't work as well as Gil sitting down with Miss Bird and talking in the language. So my job, and a lot of the students' job, they just ran the equipment. And they helped with the recording and taking pictures, yeah. My students would enter metadata, so as we were digitizing photos we created an entire database, so they learned how to do metadata and what that meant. And then Gil had students from his Cherokee language classes that have worked on translations. So if you look at the lifecycle of knowledge (22:50), I mean, it's totally circular and holistic.

GJ: Yeah, and we still are working on translating some more into English so that we can have them available for people who don't speak but are learning, and use that as a resource.

TA: And I'll just say, one of the students that was involved, her family is from Snowbird—Dakota. And Dakota was a student in my class at that time, and her grandmother was the chef. Her name was Zena Rattler. And I didn't know Zena, I didn't know who she was, but almost every interview people were expressing their love for Zena and her cooking. So we had gotten this batch of photos and Dakota was in class and I was just telling my class about this project and I put up on the screen one of the earliest photos we had digitized of Zena Rattler. And I just remember Dakota's reaction, she had never seen a

photo of her grandmother, particularly at that age, and the tears just started coming out. And that story played out over and over again because the photos—I mean, Freda in the blue dress, there's just so many amazing photos. It just was super cool.

KA: That's phenomenal. Where do the materials live now?

TA: So that is a challenge. I think one of the best things we did, and this came from both Gil and some of the women, is the idea of the book. And again, we made these yearbooks and we digitized—I think maybe 250 of the photos are in this book; it's a yearbook. So that's one place it lives. We did the special edition of the journal of Cherokee Studies. If you look at how we did that, we took parts of the oral histories, we wanted those to say—we just wanted to present the information back to the community in a way that was accessible and they could engage with. So it lives in the Journal of Cherokee Studies. A lot of it lives on Google Drive. And so I think it is a conversation that we are still continuing with the tribe in a sense of where is the digital infrastructure to preserve the materials moving forward. One of the early promises of this project was for all of the materials to be housed at the Junaluska Museum.

GJ: One of the things they talk about in their interviews without exception was Zena, the cook. And I would say she was a very good cook. But given the time and the day, we were all so very hungry. I'm serious. Food was like, wow, we've got milk. We've got dessert. We're having meat. We have beans, we have mac and cheese, and at home, you know, during the summer, it was pinto beans in the morning, pinto beans in the evening, and maybe something at lunch. I'm not taking anything away from Zena's cooking, she definitely fed us good and gave us as much as we wanted. I'm sure she understood where we were coming from, and so was very generous with the food. But the other thing about the food thing was students went in and served the food daily. That was part of our job. If you were a good student, you get to go serve, you get to go serve, he doesn't get to go serve. *laughter* and Trey would've never gotten to serve.

Barry Stiles (BS): Did they have to raise the food?

TA: One of the students, that was basically what her undergraduate research was on, was on the food at the day school. So like from '35 to '49, '50, they almost were self-sustaining in the sense that they were growing all the food. And then it changed and they were contracting out.

GJ: Well part of it Trey, could've been that big flood in 1951 where they lost all the top soil.

TA: It was a hundred-year flood.

GJ: And there's nothing but rocks there.

TA: That's still one of the best stories is the story about the horse.

GJ: Go ahead tell it.

TA: One of the best stories we heard, at least I heard, I just think it's really funny. We found this really amazing photo of Jesse Crow who was, he was the bus driver, he was the maintenance man—he did everything. He was Mr. Lee's, by that point, right-hand man. And anyways, there's a beautiful picture of him getting ready to plow the garden with the horse. And so I think one of the questions was, do you recognize any of these photos? And anyway, someone recognized the horse. The story came out that the horse got into some patch and got sick and they had to put this horse down. And really, they had

asked for a tractor. That was part of the story. They had asked for a tractor from the BIA and the kind of response, in typical BIA fashion, they didn't get a tractor, they got a horse. And so the horse ends up getting sick and they put this horse down. But in the years that followed, they'd forgotten where they had actually buried this horse. So 1951, you have a hundred-year flood and it just, Ms. Lee with her camera documents, I mean is writing on the photos minute by minute, different parts of the campus. I mean you can almost watch the flood through these pictures. And in this process, the horse reemerges. *laughter*.

GJ: But I don't think that the land was any good for farming—or too good for farming, but I do think they brought in a lot of top soil too, because the teachers had a little garden and Jesse Crow the maintenance man had a small garden, but I think that's the only place they could afford to put them. But talk a little bit about the construction costs, Trey, that was a pretty amazing story to me.

TA: Yeah, and you'll have to refresh my memory in terms of the exact cost. But the Brown family gave the land to the tribe to make way for the building of the school.

GJ: I thought somewhere I read they bought it, but who knows.

TA: The tribe bought it from the Browns. Yeah, for not too much money, but they bought it from the Browns. They built the school, and I can't remember, how much did we say the whole school cost?

GJ: Wasn't it less than \$40,000?

TA: Oh I thought it was, wasn't it like \$6,000 or something like that?

GJ: Oh yeah it was.

TA: It was like \$6,000 to build this whole school. And so one of the things we did is we went down to Morrow, Georgia, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs archives. And the entire history of the school is there. One the things I was really interested was to try and find the blueprints for the school. 'Cause I had worked on a project in graduate school on the East Carolina Indian School. If you go to the state archives, the entire blueprints are there. There are the blueprints down in Morrow of some of the other day schools that Gil mentioned, like SoCo and Big Cove and all that. But there were no blueprints for this school. But what you did see was a record of, you know, the construction of the school and the adding on of the school, so like when they did a teacher's quarters and things like that. When they added the cafeteria. So you can see the physical life of the school.

BS: So did it grow, like when you were a student were there, say, 30 kids there but then 20 years earlier were there more students going? Or was it less? I mean, how did the population change?

GJ: The population of the community kind of dictated the enrollment and it didn't change too much because from my memory, we had a fairly high death rate for infants. So it kind of stayed pretty much the same. One of the things that, and relative to construction, is that we lived across the river, my family and several of us that were in that little community that we call, what's it called—anyway, where I lived. But it was across the river and we would have to walk to school and the bridge was probably only this high off of the river. And oftentimes it would flood. And we wouldn't be able to come to school. [35:11] so somewhere along the line, the sheriff and his department built the swinging bridge—is that correct? Yeah, the Graham County Sheriff Department and the deputies I suppose, they built a huge swinging bridge that allowed us if it's raining and flooded, allowed us to walk around and come across the

swinging bridge. And there's even one picture where it's only—I think it's that flood isn't it? the river's only about this, well, it's below the bridge, maybe a foot.

TA: I think maybe you know the other point about your question is, from all records, I mean, Cherokee people wanted the school. I mean they wanted a good school, they wanted—in that school, I think the other part of that story is that it was not simply a school. It was a place. So like on Sundays, the men would play volleyball, they would show movies there, they would have health clinics. I mean, I would say it's more of a community gathering place than a school. So in terms of the attendance, there were ebbs and flows. When the Lees get there in '49, '50, I think one of the hallmarks of their tenure there, I mean, attendance was around 95%. So they were getting good attendance at that school.

BS: But it was still a small population? I mean, I'm just trying to relate to when like my mom went to Rabun Gap Nacoochee School, there was 30 students in her class. That's just the way it was, it was just really rural.

TA: Yeah, the numbers hovered around the 30s, mid-30s, early 40s. you know, but it was a day school, so there was like one example of one of the substitutes not being nice to a kid, being rough physically. The kid went home on the school bus, told his mama, and the mama got on the school bus the next day, and rode it, and addressed the teacher. And that was the end of that.

GJ: Well that teacher was a substitute teacher, and didn't follow—or followed the BIA policy. If they speak Cherokee, you got to punish them. Got to make sure they don't speak Cherokee. So they followed that policy, and you either beat them or pinch them or do something painful to make them stop. So the next morning the mom comes in and says, "I'm here to kick somebody's ass."

TA: There are stories like that, but most of those are up here (*in Cherokee*) or they were substitute teachers prior to the Lees [37:47]

KA: So what's the future of the project look like? Aside from figuring out the issue with where the digital materials live. Are you going to do a documentary or are you going to do a similar project somewhere else, or?

GJ: One of the things we've talked about is, it still needs to be done, there's still some speakers we didn't get to interview. I'd like to finish that. The other project you and I have talked about is interviewing veterans who are speakers. There are some really wonderful stories about veterans who are speakers. Robert Youngview was telling me one time that I don't think they allowed natives to, what do you call 'em, sign up in Asheville. So I think he had to ride to—catch a bus to—somewhere to sign up, away from here. Maybe up in Virginia. I kind of forget. So that's one of the things we've talked about, but there are still some things I'd like to finish with the Snowbird Day School project. And not only that, but we've lost several of those speakers who are alumni since then.

TA: Covid has taken a toll. I did a presentation on the project over in the Yellowhill community and a man named Reuben Tesateske came to me and said he wanted to do basically take the model project and do it in the Yellowhill community and he passed away because of covid. So covid is taking a toll. [39:30] I mean, for me, the big thing is the infrastructure. I think that piece has to be figured out. I'm petrified that Google Drive is going to die any day and then we lose all of this. That piece is like a high priority, critical.

KA: What about like an exhibit or anything?

TA: We did a traveling exhibit, we did it at UNC-Asheville so it's there. We blew those pictures up into 36" by 30" with captions and stuff. It's really cool. And we gave all those materials, because the community center, which was built over top of the day school, has gone through renovations in the Snowbird Community and now they have a new building that's opening here in the next few months, and so all of that material has gone back to them to create hopefully an installation.

GJ: The other subject they talked about continuously was the 30-foot slide.

TA: The food and the playground is where a lot of the interviews—it was just like, as Gil said, it was just really special to watch them all laugh.

GJ: And Trey doesn't think I'm too smart, but while I was in the third grade—now this is the absolute truth—I mean I would swear on the Bible, I would. The teacher would put me in sixth grade for math in third grade. And when I was in the second grade, put me in the fourth grade. But that means I had to go to the next room. But Trey doesn't believe that. He doesn't think I could do that.

BS: I believe it. but I'd be curious—this raises a question for me, because my great-uncle went to school and graduated from the sixth grade. And that was the highest grade you could go. But then my uncle could graduate from the 10th grade. And that was the highest grade that they had at that time. so what was the highest grade that you had?

GJ: Well we had sixth grade and then we had to transition into public school. That's another story too. But the reason that I think I excelled in math, the system that you guys have—the Arabic system—and what we have is exactly the same. You start at 0 you go to 9, then you start over. Then you go to 20 and start over. And I excelled. English is backwards, it threw me. It throws everybody who's a speaker. It's very difficult. It's so different. Our language is so different.

TA: and you're right, the transition out of the school, we hadn't really talked about that, but the closing of the school in 1965, we could talk a lot about that.

KA: Yeah, so why did it close?

TA: I think you know, kind of what we found, is there's just so many, there were a lot of forces at play at one time. it is the period of desegregation, and I don't think that directly affects the closing, but that is, you know, it's the mid-60s. So you have *Brown vs. Board of Education* in '54 and you have this desegregation effort throughout the South. So I think that is a force that is out there. I do think that, you know, 1960s, you also have two federal policies at play with is termination and relocation. Where the federal government is doing their best to rid themselves of the so-called "Indian Problem." So I think it is, we're not going to spend the money to keep the school, we're going to push all the kids out into the broader Graham County school district. And so they get the news in like '59 and '60, so they start phasing kids out from that point. So the classes get smaller until it closes it's door in '65. And actually another topic that got a lot of attention is sort of when they got that news, they started taking field trips or inviting the surrounding white kids in that school to come to the day school and meet. And they would introduce the kids and so we got some really good stories around that. [43:45]

GJ: You want to tell them about Lou's story about the watch?

TA: Yeah, so—well you tell, you can tell it better than I can.

GJ: You're a good storyteller.

TA: Okay, okay. You're right.

GJ: He's a good liar. *laughter*

TA: Well yeah, so his sister tells a story about meeting a white student at one of these—she called it a May Day. And they just became friends. And the student had a watch, a pretty nice watch, and she offered it to Lou.

GJ: When Lou transitioned to seventh grade, they met up and I think they were in the same room. And Lou's looking at her watch, looking at that white girl's watch, and she says, "Do you want to wear it?" and Lou says, "Yeah!" and she couldn't believe it.

TA: They stayed life-long friends. So we do get a lot of stories of that. And Gil mentioned this, when we did have the reunion, one of the cool parts of that, the husband and wife who were the teachers, the husband and wife transfers them out to Gallup, New Mexico, to teach on the Navajo reservation. All of their kids came back for the reunion. And they brought, one of the cool things was, when Mr. and Mrs. Lee left, the women in the community—including his (*Gil's*) mom—made blankets for them, a blanket for them. And when the kids came back, they brought the blanket. So it was a really neat time.

GJ: One of the things they had to do in the transition was that the superintendent I suppose, the principal—I'm not sure—but anyway the government saw that there could be some resistance and some anger and you know, "You're taking our kids and putting them in public school." So they sent him out into the community and he happened to know my grandfather pretty well. And my grandfather used to be the chief's advisor. Also I think the translator for the tribal council at one point in time, as well as tribal council member. So he met him and said, "Can you gather the community together and say, you know, we have some stuff that we need to talk about." So my grandfather brought in some of the leaders in the community and he explains to them, this is gonna happen. And we want it to be as smooth as we can. And it's gonna happen in this manner. And also, we've asked the government if they will supply Mrs. Lee in the early grades for one year, maybe two years, to help with the transition. So they had a big community meeting and everybody would talk in Cherokee and then he would interpret and talk to Mr. Carpenter in English. Because he was very well-versed in English. So that was a really critical thing that happened in the transition [46:51] and he said there were fights at first, you know, some people—kids—saying, "You's just a damn Indian." Something like that.

KA: How do you see your work in the immersion school as a continuation of your influences in your childhood? Because obviously, Snowbird's unique, right, because the Lees did a lot—was it the Lees who allowed you, because you said it was BIA policy. So how do you see the Snowbird community helping younger Cherokees to learn the language?

GJ: Right now I don't see that. What I see happening is the university students are coming to work in our summer language program and most of the students are non-Indian. They learn the language enough that they can come and teach in our program. Most of the people who speak are not healthy. They don't have the energy, they don't have—I'm not bragging, but that's just the way it is because of diabetes and heart issues and other kinds of things. They're just not able to help perpetuate the language. So we're

relying on these young people and I talked about the adult immersion program. Those are young people, but what I've noticed in our group is everybody's overweight. I said, "Folks, we have got to take care of our bodies. You have got to take that responsibility. You're our hope that you are going to perpetuate the language, because you are learning, you are doing an awesome, incredible job of learning the language." And it is an incredibly hard language to learn. Just to give you an example, the first word is usually the question. The verb comes last. Like, "Water I want," as a simple example of how the language works. So it's completely—nouns always stay the same, almost always stay the same. They don't go plural. Verbs go plural. Just some examples. "Give me the solid." "Give me the liquid." "Give me the flexible." "Give me the kitty cat, it's alive." I mean, five different categories for many, many verbs. We have ten different people in our language: you, you two, all of you, all of us, all of you guys except me. Yeah. Ten different people. [49:38]

KA: Are you having any success with younger learners becoming fluent?

GJ: I have one in high school that's gone through the summer language program excelling. It's small, but it's, yes, I'd say we are. And there's another girl in my class at the high school, excelling.

KA: That's great.

BS: It seems like a language to me that the only way you can learn it is to hear it. you just can't read it on a piece of paper.

GJ: No, you can't, you have to hear it and you have to speak it.

TA: But it does bring up a good point that we were talking about earlier, I mean at least to me, I could be wrong. everyone can disagree and that's cool, but with this project, you're right about the elders in terms of like engaging with these materials on a computer. Most of what we've found is they want books, but I think the question is like for Gil's grandson, who is a good speaker, and his granddaughter—they're good speakers. How do they access these materials? And they are less likely to do it with a book. But that is the struggle, is how do you make it accessible to the elders but also to the next generation of speakers? I still think one of the most powerful things we created was the little seven-minute promo/documentary we did, because you get to hear the language.

BS: That's important to hear. I mean for your grandson to hear you 30 years from now and others, I mean that will be priceless. We have people come to us that want to hear, "You have my grandmother's interview from 1972 and she passed away in 1973." And it's like, yeah, we do. We can share that with you. So safeguarding that for the future is really important.