

Sister Michael Wilson

Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Ann Mary Lutzick

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Ann Mary Lutzick My name is Ann Mary Lutzick and I'm the director of the Old Trails Museum in Winslow, Arizona. I am doing this interview for the Capturing Arizona's Stories project, which is a Centennial Project of the Arizona State Library, and this interview is part of the Navajo County Library District's collection, which will be a part of the Arizona Memory Project. This morning at 10:20, I'm interviewing Sister Michael Wilson, formerly of Winslow, Arizona now of Chinle, Arizona, and (papers shuffling) we're going to dive right in. So, where and when were you born?

Sister Michael Wilson I was born in Detroit, Michigan, 1933, and that's it.

Lutzick And what were your parent's names, what did they do?

Wilson My father was Joseph Claire [phonetic] Wilson and he was a lawyer. My mother was Evelyn Wilson and she had worked in the optometric business, which my grandfather had established in Detroit.

Lutzick And did she work outside the home while you were growing up?

Wilson No, she was at home but previous—well, my first five years she did some work at the optometric business but otherwise she was at home with after the next four siblings came along.

Lutzick And so what was life like for you growing up in Detroit?

Wilson

We lived on the edge of Detroit. Detroit ended at Seven Mile Road, but limits said Detroit went to the Eight Mile Road, and so we lived in where farms were being subdivided at that time. Our roads were not paved right away. We just swung. I used to swing Tarzana style from pear tree to pear tree in the back with my friends; in the back ends of the farms. And we hiked. Near the farm regions there was a drainage ditch—went to a two room school house and there was a drainage ditch that was on the back end of that. And so, in the springtime, we usually made ourselves a nice little float of some sort and pushed ourselves up and down in the water at playground time and things like that.

Anyways, I did county living for most of my life and there; although we could hike to the Six Mile Road to the nearest public library which a group of us did probably once a month. So I was used to doing reading, and then the other times we'd sit up under some of the trees and we'd coach each other on whose books were you reading, whatever. So I was glad that the number of boys that I grew up with we ended up—we liked reading as a whole, so we could share stuff on that. And then we got into boxcars, making the push carts like out of the old crates and putting, finding wheels going up and finding wheels any place in an alley or trash places. We had a victory garden where we grew all the different things. And my job was to pick green beans and I have just hated green beans ever since that. But we did have peas and tomatoes and—what do you call it, not oranges, but corn and, well, we

tried. I think my family tried to do some of the fruits and things too, but that didn't work too well. So I kind of have a farm background, an outdoor background, and the community that I joined ends up being in the farm area in Adrian, Michigan. So I continued my life and the first eighteen years as a Dominican sister, I was sent to rural areas. And then I came west, and still have been in the rural areas. I'm used to the wide open spaces, long highways, and everything else to get here there or anywhere.

Lutzick So did you go to high school in Detroit?

Wilson I went to high school in Detroit. There was an all girls high school and I had possibilities of a scholarship going there from the public school that I had graduated from. So yes and I—

Lutzick And what did you do immediately after high school?

Wilson Then I was doing—I joined the community and started my college training for teaching. So that went from one next to the next. I love the teachers I had in the high school and I wanted to be like them so.

Lutzick And so you went to a Catholic high school?

Wilson I went to a Catholic all-girls high school. I had gone to eight years, or well eight and a half years counting kindergarten, to a public school and then. But that was because it was at the end of Detroit. Since then there's a big grade school that my younger sisters went to and there's a lot of improvement and there's paved roads and I'm not even sure if the old pears trees are still around (laughs) for the kids to hang from

so. But it was, it was a rural business, a rural type of living. And I was glad for that.

Lutzick But then when you went to the catholic high school your teachers were?

Wilson All Dominican sisters. Well a few who weren't, but the majority of the faculty was Catholic Dominican sisters dressed all in white with a black belt and a black hat and a black veil and that was—they were just neat women, good teachers and I wanted to imitate them.

Lutzick So you went into the order immediately after high school?

Wilson Right after, right at the end of high school.

Lutzick And that was where the—

Wilson From Detroit to Adrian, Michigan, which is on the border of Michigan and Ohio. And there's a college there that was built and designed back about 1920 for young women especially to become better teachers because they found out, the Mother General found out that many of the little girls' schools in Ohio and Michigan in the area were being taught by eighth, former eighth grade graduates because they couldn't afford to go on further but they were probably good students. So anyways, we opened the college up for teacher training, so that they didn't have to go all the way to Detroit. They could just commute from their little towns.

Lutzick So this was a Catholic college?

Wilson Catholic college, yes.

Lutzick And did it only train nuns or could other?

Wilson No, it was anybody and then it became—first of all it was just a girls’ college but then later on, not too many years later, it became male and female. So, but it addressed mostly education then swung into anything that had to do with education, in the way of science and chemistry stuff. Name it, the college does it.

Lutzick Now what was the name of the college?

Wilson Sienna Heights College which became Sienna Heights University.

Lutzick So it's still there?

Wilson It's still there, still going strong, and now has I think four or five campuses, sub-campuses around Michigan.

Lutzick And how long did you spend there?

Wilson Oh, I had thirteen summers of summer school in order to get through with my science and my teacher education. So I was in and out of Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois. I was sent to teach in rural areas outside of Detroit, outside of Cleveland and outside of Chicago. So, got to meet up with people whose families—probably many of them never finished high school, which was an interesting development, but they wanted their kids to get finished with high school even though they were mostly farm. And I just remember one day a ten year old came in—was a big husky kid—and all of the sudden he's crying in school. And I'm saying, “What's the matter?”

And he says, “All my baby turkeys died from mold!”

So he explained to me how there was a leak in the granary and some of these animals had eaten the grain that has become moldy. So I became

aware of things like that, even, hadn't even thought of things like that for rural stuff. And so, I could appreciate sheep, cattle, horses, whatever because many of my young people took care of them and would share stories with me about what was happening with their lives, with their animals.

Lutzick And what grades were you teaching?

Wilson Because I'd had all the childhood diseases except whooping cough, my principal licenses that I could teach first and second grade to begin with, because then that wouldn't be losing time when, what is it, the measles season started or chicken pox because I wouldn't have—I wouldn't be out of the classroom for it. So, that was one interesting thing. Then I progressed as my studies went on for math and science teaching and so I ended up going on further in the math and sciences. And so that's why it took me longer. Many of the people who were going on in English and History, of course they were finished with—couple summers, summer school but by the time we did all the chemistry, did the lab experiments, and all the other stuff forget it. And then staying up until midnight to try and get your written work done besides. It was interesting.

Lutzick So you were teaching during the year and then learning to teach more during summer school?

Wilson Yes.

Lutzick Okay.

Wilson That was the—we were not allowed to teach until we had had at least two years of preparation. I'm sorry for the young people today, personally, that if they go through four years of college and really haven't had a chance to experience until those last maybe couple of months of practice teaching. You don't know what questions, [to ask]. I knew what questions I needed to ask when I went to summer school because I thought, “Oh I didn't realize this, that, or something else.” And so that's where I think I opened up to what's going on around me and then what do I need to know. So, that's where I am right now. I think. (laughs)

Lutzick So after you left that area of around where you grew up while you were teaching, where did you go from there?

Wilson Well that's where I went outside of Chicago and was in Holbert, Illinois and then shortly after that I was at Medina, Ohio and then shortly after that I was in the thumb of Michigan called Ruth, Michigan. And somebody took the H off the post office and we called—we lived in the Rut. And then I was transferred to along the water's edge up north of Detroit to Baltimore and then back down closer to Detroit known as the Shores, Sinclair Shores and stuff. So I just kind of got exposure to all the country kinds of stuff.

Lutzick And what, when did you come to Arizona?

Wilson Nineteen seventy-two. One of the things another sister and I discovered with our rural teaching, was that many of our parents did not finish high school. And sometimes when their farm business

dissolved or somebody came in and purchased a whole bunch of territory, they could not get jobs someplace else because they had no high school diploma. So we started to do GED [General Education Development], and then I've been experience of a couple summer grants that I had in the West for environmental studies. I decided I want to come and found out that there are at least five places that my community knew of that needed GED, and Winslow was one of them. And it turned out that the pastor there happened to be in charge of the GED program for Joseph City and Winslow and had the staff, was staffing some of this. So I applied there for part time teaching at the St. Joseph school and then GED as the other part, which turned out then to be tutoring at the dormitory for twenty-two years in Winslow's dorm.

Lutzick

So in 1972, you started a twenty-two year stint in tutoring. So these schools were they exclusively Native American or was this the public school in Winslow?

Wilson

No, the public school, the young people—there was a two hundred bed dormitory which was the pattern for quite a bit of Northern Arizona; and from Gallup—following Interstate 40 from Gallup on through Holbrook, Joseph City, Winslow and Flagstaff. I am not sure if Williams ever had a dormitory, but there were dorms provided for these students to come in and attend high school. So all of the students I tutored were Native Americans at the dormitory for the twenty two—

Lutzick They were attending the public high school not another different high school? So it was the dorms that were provided for them that the regular, or the Navajo County—

Wilson Navajo County and Apache, Scout—well whatever would have been McKinley County in New Mexico—would have been Apache County and Navajo County and then Coconino County were involved in teaching them.

Lutzick Yeah. So you were tutoring specifically for GED students?

Wilson No, just to help finish their high school. Some of them, I don't think that I remember anybody being in the tutoring that was there for a GED. They were there for a diploma. That was it. That was understood why they were supposed to be in the dorms. So I know there were some dropouts. We tried hard not to have the dropouts but with family situations where somebody had to stay home and take care of grandma or grandpa while on the rez [reservation] then some of them didn't finish, but that's not too many. Most of them, I barely, you know what? I've never done an actual study of how many of them over those twenty-two years dropped out. I think we had a fairly decent record.

Lutzick To back up a little bit to when you, right when you moved out to Arizona what were your impressions of Winslow and your students coming from the Midwest like that?

Wilson Because of my exposure, I think of the summertime studies and because I had been in rural areas so often or so much, this didn't disrupt my life

at all. It fit in. It was a small town. I just reflected the other day that this my first time in all the years that I've been a Dominican sister that I'm not in a town with a train running through. Chinle has no train service, and so listening to the trains when I come into Holbrook or Gallup or any of the places, just, "There's a train!" I can hear it coming and going and maybe some people ignore the sound but that's a part of Arizona; northern Arizona for sure and I think sections of Tucson. It's the trains running through that provided whatever was in Winslow and Holbrook, provided food and whatever clothing and everything else besides vacationing. But my time now in Chinle, there is no train blowing its whistle for me. It's interesting.

Lutzick

What did you think of the landscape when you got here?

Wilson

Because I had already viewed the—I meant been aware of it doing some studies here, I still love it. I mean I loved it and I still love it. I found the Flagstaff Peaks are one of the most gorgeous adventures to travel around; to see it from the North, the South, the East, the West, to see it springtime, summertime, winter with its fantastic snow display. That has impressed me very much because back in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois we didn't have all, we had mounds but you really don't have mountains. And so I was really excited about that. Even the flattened mountains around the Chinle Valley, but their rises don't come to peaks but they do rise up and the snow blasting on them and the storm coming down on them and changing their colors to deeper colors. That was the one thing though that impressed me was the Painted Desert

effect. It's more prominent here in the northern part than it is down in the southern part of Arizona, to watch the snow as it melts, to watch the rain as it hits the soil and changes its colors. Many times I've taken people to the little, to the Painted Desert and just the spectacular changes of the seasons, when I've taken people, has impressed me magnificently. To find the colors that all the sudden on foggy days or kind of damp days, then the colors of the maroons, and the grays and the greens are so strong. And then on drier days, there's the lighter colors that's almost like a difference in arc towel for like, what they do watercolors or whether you do, you know, chalks or something like that, or oils. There's that whole difference in watching the scenery around us and traveling through it. And so the other thing is I'm thankful that many of the roads are in fairly good condition. I'm thankful for many of the people who have been able to have it.

I just passed a trading post that is pretty much falling down in Leupp area on my way to Flagstaff. And that was my first time, in about 1973, that I saw a couple riding their wagon. And they were pulled out of the trading post, parked the wagon along the side in the shade and I couldn't quite see but I have sneaky suspicion they were drinking their pop or eating whatever they got from the trading post. It was an interesting thing, having seen pictures and drawings and all these Western stories that you'd see in the movies where the wagons—and when the Indians were coming to town with the wagons, that's the only time I actually saw a wagon with a couple in it. I've seen them parked

but, and in the parades at Christmas time in Winslow particularly. But actually the chitty as they call it, the car, started making its appearance and many times I picked up people along the road knowing that there might be only one car, or one chitty, and they needed to be getting into town or they were leaving Winslow to get back on the reservation. And so I used to say to some of them, "Indians walk in beauty. Navajos walk in beauty. I drive in it." And then they'd give me a chuckle or two on that. But it appears now in these thirty years almost every family has a car. Very seldom do you see somebody hitchhiking, except maybe some younger people. I just feel bad that over the years, Mac at the bus station in Winslow, was really disturbed that some people would come in and get caught in town. If somebody was coming in to town, like on Sunday night or Monday morning, to go to work or if they were going further to work they'd bring somebody in. But then that means that the person came in maybe to shop, get groceries, but they had no way of getting back because that person probably would not be back for another whole week. So that's when I realized when Mac tried to get a bus service, a taxi service, something going on the road between Winslow and all the way to the Hopi mesas. And he was successful a little bit and so I see there is a blue bus that runs along east west out of from Tuba City, I think, to Window Rock they tell me. But there was a bus that used to park in the shopping mall and then at about, I'm not sure, around 5 o'clock, it would head out to the reservation. I understood that was it, I was glad that Mac tried for it.

Lutzick

And who was Mac?

Wilson

Mac was the director of the bus—what was the failed bus station that Greyhound took over? Anyways, because we had two bus services running through Arizona and a number of other places. And so he had the one, he was the bus manager in Winslow for that one. So that was an interesting development that he tried, at least. And so somewhat has been followed for some of the people in that but then I see that the next thing was that many people came in to work at the hat factory. And the hat factory out at the west part of Winslow was built on the sense of jobs for native peoples. And so many of them had to hitch rides to come in once they got the job. And then I saw the housing starting to build up bigger and so then they didn't have to do that much commuting because I know that many of them were over at the mall to hop the bus to go home, until after more homes were built. So I saw that happening in Winslow, in the Hopi housing out in that region too. I'm only sorry that the hat factory has closed because—but the people are still living there and attending school and other jobs evidently. Because when I did Indian education work for the school system, then I was chasing some of these young people out in that region. "Get here to school. Hurry up! You got something to do."

Lutzick

Were your students both Hopi and Navajo?

Wilson

At the dormitory, in the beginning, it was Navajo and Apache and other tribes whose families might have intermarried or families had a Laguna people, who had jobs in town. At first, I was aware that there were no

Hopi students at the dormitory. I asked one of the sisters I was living with, whom had lived here in Winslow, been raised in it, and she said her understanding was that Hopis were really not accepted in the public school system. Except if they had an actual home here. There was busing—there was some busing, not too much back in the seventies from the reservation but it principally was from Dilkon, Seba, and Teas Toh, just within the thirty miles north of Winslow. Then all of the sudden we had some Hopis. [They] were allowed in the dormitory. Otherwise they had to go all the way to the Phoenix Indian School or got to some place in Utah, or Riverside, California. So that was part of the Indian education program. However, whoever was setting it up, I do not know. I just saw the results of it.

Lutzick And was that the reason that it was only Hopis who had jobs in towns who were at the schools?

Wilson It looks like that. That seems to be what I've could gather.

Lutzick Do you know if that was because the Hopis didn't want to come to those schools or you say they weren't—

Wilson They weren't allowed to.

Lutisck —allowed to come to those schools?

Wilson One of the things, one of my first impressions when I got to Winslow—I was reading the paper, our *Winslow Mail*, and it said there would be a bus at 9 o'clock at First Mesa, at 9:30 at Second and 10 o'clock. And that was going to Riverside, California. There would be a bus at 9:30, 10:00 and 10:30 in those same three places and that would

be going to some place in Utah. Then starting at 11:00, 11:30 and 12:00, there would a bus and they would be taking them down to Phoenix Indian School. And that's when I became aware of the thing about no Hopis being basically in Winslow except the ones whose families had homes here. And so, all these young people were being sent further away from home.

I have a reflection on that. I found out that these were only high school students; where as many of the Navajo children were taken away from their homes and put into the dorm schools. And they were grade-schoolers. And so then some of them then of course, came to Winslow to high school and lived in the dormitories. My understanding is that there's a document, I've forgotten—I've not had a chance maybe somebody could check on it, but sometime before the 1900s, that basically said that Navajos were not intelligent enough to have high schools. And so that's consequently there are, now there are more high schools out in the reservation but when I first began teaching there were, I think, they had one at Tuba City, one in Window Rock area, but of course there was St. Michael's School that Sister or Mother Catherine decided yes these kids needed an education. It doesn't matter. They were already bilingual so why not go on and finish up their education? And so then now there are more high schools up there, but there still aren't enough, as far as I'm concerned. So I don't know why children still have to be bused into Winslow school district or to Flagstaff school district or wherever; Holbrook. Yeah there's a bus that comes in and

out. They do not stay at the dorm. And I see that too over the years.

Many of our native children are needed at home.

I'm just thinking of all the rural areas I did: Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio.

Those young people were needed at home to milk cows, take care of sheep, take care of chickens, take care of whatever animals they had, and that would be their job right as soon as they got home from school.

The other thing would be right first thing in the morning before they even got to school, all this animal care that had to be taken care of or other farm stuff. And so, I just felt bad that some of these young people were not really learning how to live with the land. Maybe on weekends, if their parents could pick them up and bring them home.

And sometimes the roads were very bad into Consaba [phonetic] Teas Toh, and Leupp, that parents couldn't come in and pick their children up. So there were some weekends there were quite a few students at the dormitory. They tried to provide some kind of recreational kinds of things going with them. I'm not sure. I remember one principal at Winslow dorm, saying he had run out of funds in order to provide like intercollegiate or inter-basketball or something else with the other dorms. So that also depended upon what the funding was going to be for them. I was funded through—and there was one other lady she did the tutoring of English and histories, and I usually did the tutoring for math and sciences but not exclusive. And I just remember as a sideline story which I love to tell. Three boys were having a real difficulty with an assignment and I said, "What's going on?"

And they said, We've got this thing to read and we're supposed to talk about it.

And I said, "What is it?" It was Romeo and Juliet.

And that, We don't understand what they're saying here?

I said, "Ok, give me the book." So I began to read it with inflection and tone and everything else.

Finally one young man looks at me and at the others and he says, "You mean Romeo's got the hots for Juliet?"

And I say, "You've got it. Now read it with that sense." And so then they got through the reading on it but I just love it, Romeo's got the hots for Juliet. And so it's stuff like that, of having young people become aware of what we're trying to teach them and forgetting that we forget sometimes how can you have a vocabulary if you really are just getting into basic English. And that was one of the things I marveled at.

As young people came from the reservation to the dorm school or the dorm living experience, theirs was basically basic, perfect English. And it was just one other teacher and I when we noticed something similar to this; we made arrangements with the principal of the dormitory. As freshmen came in from the reservation, on Wednesday evenings, we had a special class with them to teach them the idiom of what we think. And what got me started on that is one kid came into my Indian education office and said to me, "Sister, we had a pep rally the other night and everybody's laughing because this act was going on, what big

eyes you have, what big ears you have. And everybody in the stands is giggling. We're not understanding what was the talking about? The big eyes and the big ears?" And I thought, Oh *Little Red Riding Hood*. They've probably not heard that story out in the reservation. And I thought, I wonder what other stories that our kids and our teachers just take for granted? So this other teacher and I decided we would find out something that the teachers might have been saying, that their native students kind of gave you the impression, I don't know what you're talking about. And it might be some simple thing. So we started collecting ideas and stuff and different, I say, "Okay, what idiom do you use in class sometimes? And so stop and think about that because how would you translate it into Navajo or Hopi or Apache?" So we got quite a collection of words and terms and things and we started introducing it. And so on Wednesday nights, when we met with these freshmen, we'd go through some of this like *Little Red Riding Hood*, and one said, "What's a blue ox?" And of course Paul Bunyan. And I said, "Oh, how would you say blue ox in Navajo?" "I'm not sure." And that one I was even trying to check on. So we got a film and we showed them this thing and then all of the sudden in the darkness I heard this voice saying, "A blue ox! That's what Mrs. Freeman was talking about." And then pulling the road straight was another thing that the Paul Bunyan had him do. Well, having a road pulled straight was not really their concept of something and because you've got dirty rutted roads that were going wherever you could go

except for the main roads that were paved. So it was interesting development.

And then one time we—another woman said to me, "Sister, would you please answer my question for me? My son keeps asking his Navajo football player friend to come to our house and to have supper with us and he keeps declining." And I thought, Oh okay, here's another home thing. The dormitory used trays, sectional trays. You had a breakfast, lunch and supper. Out on the reservation you had your bowl of stew, you had the pan of fry bread on the hot stove. And so how to you use other utensils? You might have if they went to one of the restaurants at that time Little Black Sambo's. You might go to Sambo's and have your cup of coffee put on a placemat, but not a real saucer. You'd have your silverware wrapped up, and not placed properly. So this teacher and I decided we would have one of these kind of classes that we would setup dishware, and do things like that for the next couple classes. And so we got this film, one of them and it was showing the young persons at some kind of a banquet. And so there's a guy walking around with a towel over his arm.

And so anyways at the end of the film the kids are saying, What was the guy doing with the towel?

And the other teacher says, "Oh, you know when you're invited to a fancy thing and you're wearing your velveteen and all of the sudden you knock your water over, somebody will be over to blot the water up for

you so that you won't have it all over your lap or over your velveteen or whatever your feather and that."

Oh, okay. So anyways, that was the explanation given to them. Then we went on with a number of other things: place settings and how you start with the outside forks, knives, spoons, dish setting on that and everything else so. And then one kid said, "Well what if I don't know what, what if I go to my friend's house, how am I going to act?"

And I said, "Well I'll just tell you one thing. Remember in the film you had a host and hostess? Okay so when you go home to the home's mom and dad are going to be the host and hostess. So you just watch to see how they hold the food or how they eat it. It might not be food that you normally eat. You'll know which fork to use if they have several forks. You'll know which article to do. Okay fine and then you'll know about napkins and things like that."

Well as a few weeks went by, the one teacher says, "Do you think they're really getting what we're talking about?"

And I said, "Oh yeah, they're soaking it up like a bladder." And so about the middle of the class, we'd have snacks and the teacher or the principal had said to us, "Please if you're gonna have snacks, have something that's like oranges and lemons and things like that because they're not used to eating that. You know there's no refrigeration on the reservation. So the only time they might have it is when they come into town." They can have maybe some things of orange juice but actually the vegetables and fruits. Now that's not the thing. You don't

have refrigeration so you don't take it home. You might eat it in town.

But you might not because you don't know how to eat it. So we decided we'd start doing that too.

So one of the kids said, "Can we have hosts and hostesses?" because we had three or four tables set up.

And I said, "Oh, okay fine. You want to do that too." So anyways, the host or hostess was to make sure that his or her table had paper napkins, if there was a chip dip, if there was whatever the ingredients for that night was at their table. And so anyways, we were going ahead and all of the sudden we saw one kid at the far table went in for some chip dip, came out and the dip dropped on the floor, dropped off of the chip. Kid on the other end, picks up his napkin, throws it over his arm and goes around to the end of the table to wipe up what was off the floor. I went into complete hysteria. I had to turn around and laugh and I said to him, "See I told you, they soaked it up." (laughs) But that was an interesting experience because figuring how many wouldn't have had that experience kind of thing.

So they—oh that was the question was, why weren't more kids attending the banquets, the school banquets at the end of the year? And so they asked me if I could find out why very few native students were there. So I checked with the principal and she said to me, "Sister," she says, "I keep trying to get them to come or to go." She said, "But they kind of say, Well I don't think so." And so that's when we thought of we needed to teach them what you mean by banquet and although

most of our high school banquets were hamburgers. But still it was this concept of the word. And then we taught it. Well we taught those freshmen and then word got around—I think when they went back to the dorm—what they had learned on Wednesday nights. And so, from then on, I hadn't heard any complaints about native kids who deserved honors would[n't] be showing up. Those are some of what has happened in those thirty years that became acquainted with what is happening.

Lutzick

You talked about teaching them certain things from culture in town or Anglo culture, or whatever you want to say about it. Can you tell me some things you learned and appreciated about Native American culture by being their teacher? Things maybe they brought to you or worked the other way?

Wilson

Yes, there was a lot of sharing. Once I started tutoring at the dormitory, and then the Catholic school closed where I was teaching part time—closed down. And so I was offered a job to direct the Title VII Indian education program for Winslow School District. A year or so later there was funding called the Johnson-O'Malley [Act] funding and I became the director of funding for both of those. I ended up having to have parent committees to choose how the money was to go. I could make some suggestions or I could say to them, "What do you think our kids need to know? What do you think our teachers need to know about our kids? What do you think the principal needs to know about our kids? Or superintendent or the school board? Whatever you

feel they should know, I will try and give them that or I will have you help me do this."

We did have at least once a month, at a meeting with Indian parents committee, anybody else would come along, and one of the things was, "Sister, you know what? I don't think our families know how to do meals because they've lived in dorms most every one of them. They're not sure." Well, one of the happenings that was brought to my attention, one of the parents said to me, "Sister, I'm not sure about some of the stuff my kids want to eat and we've never had at our home. We didn't have refrigeration so there's lots of stuff we didn't have. You have canned stuff and everything else."

One non-Indian parent said to me, "You and your Indians. (coughs) I'm really disturbed. There was a man ahead of me in the store and dressed nicely—" (pause in recording)

Lutzick

Okay we had to take a little break there but to continue on with where we left off, I was asking you about the kinds of things that you learned from them about either reservation life or Native American culture, both Navajo and Hopi. And I know that besides the boarding schools in Winslow, you started to travel around to teach on the reservation itself. So let's try, I'll just say once you started doing that maybe you learned more things about their culture and their way of life. So tell me some of the things you learned from them.

Wilson

Three things that I learned was the way that they began to try and take care of their children by leaving them in the dormitory on the weekends

when they could not make it out of their homes. The second thing is that there were some children who ended up many weekends at the boarding school that didn't get home. And I remember three little children: first, second, and third grade brother and sister. And when I went to the Dilkon Dormitory on Monday nights, they were usually with me. On weekends, they were usually with me to pray and to study and that. One of the things was, "You've been here for three Sundays. What's going with your life? Is your Mom sick or is somebody, an elder that's in the hospital that they have to take care of them?"

No, the roads were too bad in this region where those three lived. I later checked it and the road was really not very well graded at all. If it was rain, snow or damp weather, the road was very bad to try and get in and out of. So I can see that unless they really had to come in and get shopping done, they weren't going to try and bring kids home on a Friday and then try and make sure they got them back on Sunday night. That was one of things I discovered there with the dormitories. The second thing was the adaptation of some of the things that they could. One day, I was with another woman. We were trying to visit a whole region that was around the Dilkon area to see where these young people actually lived and came from. I started a map and we visited over a hundred homes. The Indian Health Services had no map of that area north of Winslow at all. Thank heavens the car had an odometer on it so I could push it back to zero and say. "Alright, we made a right turn and then there's a fork off of that." I put that in there and this in one-

tenth of a mile and that was five-tenths of a mile or whatever. So we made our map and made home visits to all of them. One of the hogans that we came to, I knocked on the door and said, "I'm Sister Michael. I'm here from Winslow."

A petite Navajo lady opens the door for me and she says, "Welcome to the Brady Bunch." And I almost fell in the doorway because it was a step down into the hogan.

And I said, "The Brady Bunch?" She says, "Yes. My husband's family, his grandfather worked for the trains over in the Gallup area and moved into Pachuki [phonetic], and married our grandmother from there. So that's how we have the Brady Bunch." And there were a number of children, so she said she and her husband had four children of their own. As I walked into the hogan, I noticed on the right hand side was one of those white enameled tables. Next to it was a counter, one of those old white enameled counters with maybe a couple of cupboards above it. On that, were two huge big storage ice chests that you use for picnics and whatever. In one of them she was telling me that she would put, that when she came into town, she would get four or five bags of ice and she'd put that in one. Then she'd take one of them out and let it melt in the other and that was their drinking water, their cooking water and everything else because there was no well near them. This was better than just buying jugs. The other thing is that she had pegs around—yes hers was a six-sided building. She had pegs around on there for hanging the clothes, those plastic clothes containers with the

zippers on them. They were hanging their good things; you could see some of them, their velveteen dresses and skirts and some of their shirts and everything else, maybe in one or the other. Their beds were their couches as well as bedtime stuff. There were things rolled up at the top of each of the beds and then I figured you roll it up when it's time for sleeping.

The other way of living was they had a kind of—outside was a—it looked like they were drying wood for chopping. Oh, that was the other thing, the container was one of the big drums and then that was their cooking area at the top of that. They had an outside ramada and it was—I thought it was maybe just for drying wood for the fireplace. But actually I was informed that when it really got too hot, they moved everything out. They moved the big barrel out there and still do their cooking. They could move their cot beds outside and sleep there too. They had a summer home and a winter home. One right next to each other whereas my thing with non-Indian peoples, if people had a summer home they had some cottage at some lake or something—or they had a trailer someplace. So they had a summer home and a winter home. This was their version of the summer home and winter home, not too far away from each other.

The other thing was using the outhouse. She had brought and made a toilet. She had a toilet seat there over the hole with a cover with a flap down. She had on a little counter next to it; you could have the soaps and hand lotions and everything else that you would need for washing

your hands after using the bathroom. That was kind of an interesting development of an outhouse, which I had never experienced before having worked and lived in outhouses before. Just—these adaptations that she was using for her family, and finding out that her sister who lived in another hogan not too far away with some of the other members of the family had similar setups.

I had asked about that and they said, well, she said that because she had been raised in a dormitory for much of her life she liked some of those things. As long as she couldn't have running water and all the other things, well this was her adaptation whatever it was. She also found out that she didn't have the good refrigeration, but in the winter time or when it got cool, they could dig a small hole, which I remember from some of my farm families back in Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio. You'd have a sub-basement kind of thing and you'd put your potatoes and all the other things down in the underground kind of thing. Well, she did a little one. I did not find that as a prominent thing, in that they either bought it or they ate it right away and they didn't really keep too much afterwards.

The thing of buying pop, that was another thing that intrigued me. If you had no running water, like this woman she had her two grandchildren at her cabin in Heber and they didn't have—if she didn't have electricity to get the water up what would she have given to her grandchildren? That was one of the things was making other people aware as I became aware of what do you do when you haven't got

something. I was intrigued by the two ice chests. One for storing ice or probably some other cool things that they needed and that would be the less use of milk because you wouldn't have had that either. You might have if you raised goats. In some places on the rez goats were raised and so you might have goat's milk. Not too many people that I know of had them, not in my region, other regions there are more of that. It was intriguing to see the adaptations that needed; that they put into their life.

The other thing was lanterns. Making use and then one of the subdivisions in Bird Springs—a professor from California came and there was a ranch on the edge of the reservation just north of Winslow. He was renting it because he was doing some research paper and staying there, kind of in a quiet place away from everything. Many of the native peoples would cut through his road to come into town so he met up with some of them and found out about the lack of electricity. He said, "Well, you've got all this sun up here. I don't know why you can't have solar power." So he taught them how to make solar panels.

So a whole group of houses in the Bird Springs area ended up putting solar panels so they could have a refrigerator. So they could have a radio that didn't run on a battery. That was another whole adaptation. How did you get communications going? You had to do it with something with batteries. That was another thing that I had realized. I also found out, some years ago some fellow was assigned to put power poles up eventually from north of Holbrook all the way through to the

end of the reservation, close to Tuba City. Well, when he got to Route 87, he didn't like several families that were between 87 and [Route] 99. So he stopped putting power poles up. So anyways, I get this word, "Sister, we're supposed to have electricity. The other people on the other side of 87 have it, our relatives and friends have it. We don't." Well I said, "Investigate it." So they found out this guy that didn't like some of their families, the one who was assigned to do it. So this period of time, that between Route 87 and 99 there was no electricity, except if they had the solar power in the Bird Springs area. Some got gas generators so they could have some kind of electricity to keep their refrigerator going because they wanted those. Some of them started moving into trailers; that was the next thing that was coming. Besides the hogan, you might have a hogan and a trailer. And so you had both forms of living. If this ran down, or didn't work, then you moved out to the hogan, or vice versa. I saw the adaptation that was taking place there.

The thing was the pop. I realized about five six years ago, reflecting back on it, why there's such a heavy diabetes, especially in this part of Arizona. And that would be if you didn't have running water, what would you take home to drink? Some of them were setup to try and do what the Brady Bunch did with their ice, the two ice chests. I don't—some others really kind of followed it or didn't want to do that, whatever. But you brought home pop, and it would be sugared pop because that's the only stuff in the seventies that was allowed or

invented. You didn't have bottles of water then either. But some people would come in, finally got themselves some of those big jugs and would come into town and fill their things up at the school or one of the gas stations, go into one of the bathrooms there and filled their water jugs up. I did see some pickups, at times, that had big plastic water barrels. So I saw that adaptation kind of coming along. But otherwise what else would you drink? And you didn't have to worry about storing the pop because you didn't have to worry about it being destroyed. It was bottled, it was closed and until you opened it. It was sitting there okay. You didn't have to freeze it or whatever. So those were adaptations that I became aware of on that one. I learned from them on that.

Lutzick

Well before we run out of time, I wanted to ask you a bit about something you mentioned to me earlier, that you got a chance to go to some of the Hopi snake dances. So including the snake dances, what were some of the celebrations or ceremonies that you got to attend that you enjoyed?

Wilson

Well, let's back track because when I got into this job, besides the tutoring at the dormitory, I got into the school work with our native kids. We had an Indian Club, and for eight years we put on our own powwow. I learned how to do all of the dances. I learned—in fact they used to kid me. Some of the guys said, You gotta learn the men's dances too. So they put a baseball cap on my head and teach me how to look the war dance, how to look around the rocks or up the tree where my

enemy might be. I could learn how to do—the only thing I never learned how to do was the gingo [phonetic] dance. It was interesting because I'm a powwow dancer. I can do all of that. I know how to go and step on it. I know how to swing my shawl. In fact I have about five shawls and a couple of times different ones have given me a shawl, so I'll have it for the powwows. I've been a part of some—when I was teaching in Montana, I definitely—they had this huge powwow each summer in Browning. So it was a fun thing to go and be a part of that. I had no problems being part of the dancing and the chanting and things in that area. And learning some of the chants and some of the funny interpretations of the chants (coughing) when all of the sudden—excuse me—they would take a popular song and then change it into a chant. Just recently at Christmas time, I heard one of the groups out of Window Rock and they were doing the drum beat and they were doing the song, better watch out, better not cry, better not pout, Santa's night, that kind of thing. So they beat that out and they do a phrase of it and then they beat some more and then they do another phrase. Of course I had to laugh because they took something like *My Gal Sal* years ago and they'd do a beat and do something. They'd take some kind of a popular tune that you could beat it out and they'd slip these words in between. And you had to laugh.

The other thing was in the midst of even the Hopi solemn ceremonies, and even among some of the Dakota peoples where they're the ones that really did the first of the powwows—my understanding is

the powwows were invented or encouraged back, I'm not sure, at least around the turn of the century in order to give the young men a chance. Instead of going to war, or preparing to war against another tribe, they would do this as a competition. The powwows became a competitive kind of thing among tribal peoples. This is the way you did your best dance. I mean that was kind of—you won a prize for doing that which wasn't taking somebody's scalp off or doing, or burning down somebody's teepee or something in that area. That became a peace kind of thing, instead of a war kind of thing. But it was the warriors, the young men who were classifying themselves as warriors, who were basically the dancers.

I find that the powwows, there's variations on them now. They're almost pretty much everything was exactly the same. You could go to any powwow in Albuquerque, or up in the Dakotas, or Montana, on down in the Tucson area and you would find them pretty much the same. But now it depends on where you are and what adaptations they have made to it too. Even the way I noticed some of way they dress now is even more showy. It was showy but it's even more showy now. There's more feathers, more—just decorations on their bodies than what was there before. The women are now more involved instead of just going around in the circle keeping beat to that. So there's the contest for them too. There's the contest for the young, there's the contest for the middle, there's contests for the elders, which definitely

was not the original powwow with just basically those who were of warrior age.

I've never seen the Sun Dance done, where they have cut themselves in the chest and put the rope in between them and things like that. I've not been to one of those ceremonies. In the case of the snake dance which is a solemn occasion, the praying for water and for the health of the land, for the future. I admire that very much. They're putting their priorities, I feel. This is what our life needs, and so let's pray together for it. The other thing was there's always some funny things going on, even with the solemnity. There are the clowns and they dress appropriately and you never know what they're going to do next, what they're going to throw out, whether they're going to throw watermelons or oranges, or bottles of pop or whatever out to the audience and things like that. Whatever funny dances they'll do in between the very solemn beat of what's going on for that dance and so even in the midst of solemnity, there is humor invited in on it too. And I've always appreciated that. That's one of those things too. Thank you. (coughs)

Lutzick

Well, in closing I wanted to ask you maybe a question where you reflect of the whole experience. And so what would you like people to know or what maybe is one of the most important thing you've learned about your experience in working with Native Americans all these years.

Wilson

The diversity of each of them. The uniqueness of each, knowing there is, I believe, twenty-one tribes just in Arizona alone, and having experienced different ones of those tribes and some of their festivities

and that. I've really been glad that I've been able to participate in them and being freely accepted by many of the groups. One of the years, I informed our school board that we had thirty-six different tribal peoples in our school system and I think that just kind of shocked them. The next time I had another announcement for them that 52% of the Winslow school population was Native Americans. Well, I think some of them almost lost their teeth on that one because 52%, over 50% are Native Americans in our school system, because I was trying to encourage them to allow more things to take place.

So what we invented was "Indian Week" in the fall. Some places have it for a day or so. We'd ask all of the kids in the school system then to wear maybe moccasins or moccasin type. Some of them have them as slippers; maybe to wear their hair in a particular native style. Another day maybe to wear something that was a particular native dress that they could all share in this kind of sharing on it. Then we had always a contest of Miss Winslow, Miss Native American. Just to make the town aware, the teachers aware, the beauty of the traditions and things. I feel that was one of the things I enjoyed the most myself.

Lutzick

Well I want to thank you very much for talking with me today.

Wilson

You're welcome.

Lutzick

This was a wonderful interview. Thanks again.