

Oral History: Carlene Campbell

Interviewed by Marcia Slosson

Carlene is a thirty-eight- year-old enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of southeastern Montana. She currently serves as the coordinator of the Youth Program of the North American Indian Alliance in Butte, Montana.

Carlene was raised partly on the reservation, by her grandparents, and partly off the reservation, by her mother. Her heritage also includes some Hispanic ancestry. She describes the central experience of her life as an "identity crisis", due to her mixed ethnic heritage. On the reservation, she was regarded as "Mexican," and was rejected by children and adults. Her Hispanic relatives regarded her as the Indian in their midst, and she suffered from rejection in this environment, also. Then, living in Belgrade with her mother, she again did not fit into the predominantly white community.

Since I am planning to teach, I asked Carlene about her experiences in school. She said that she was a slow learner, but after seeing this woman in action on the job and listening to her speak, it is clear that she is not slow in any way.

Through all of her conversation, the impact of alcoholism on the Native American culture is apparent. She mentions being an "ACOA," or Adult Child of an Alcoholic. She talks frequently about treatment and recovery, as though it is simply an every-day part of life. There is a strong recovery movement now within the Native American community, and she talks about the conflicts experienced by those who

go to treatment for alcoholism. She also shares her view that the Native American tradition of sharing possessions and caring for one another's needs becomes, in its extreme form, "enabling," and prevents self-reliance, accountability, and responsibility, thus contributing to the problem of alcoholism.

Carlene touches on the issue of racial separatism. Her opinion is that Native Americans need to be able to survive either on or off of the reservation, and she favors such programs as "Mormon Placements", where a child leaves the reservation to live with a Mormon family and participate in their world. (This program does not meet with approval from all Native Americans, however, because of concerns about the loss of cultural identity).

Carlene says that life has been easier for her sons than it was for her, and she has hope that things will improve for Native Americans in the future. She believes that, although many elements of the Native American culture have disappeared, and although Native Americans often have no choice but to live in the "white" world, it is important to preserve some sense of Native American identity and pride in ones heritage.

I, Carlene Campbell, surrender all rights as to the use of and quotation of the material on this recording.

Carlene Campbell
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