This is a tape recording of Mr. Ralph Cameron who is eighty years of age and is into his first month of his eighty first year, he was born June the second nineteen fifteen at Maricopa Colony, Arizona, he will be talking about his experiences growing up in Arizona and learning his education under the Bureau of Indian Affairs program held at the Phoenix Indian School in Phoenix, Arizona. This is being tape July 22, 1995. Today I shall talk on what I have seen in my past life as I was born on the Indian Reservation at Levine Arizona Maricopa Colony. And I was brought up in a very good home, much different than it is today as we see it. And I have not heard or understand anything until I reach the age of knowing probably at the age of about five when my grandfather was already carrying on this teaching in the home because that was the obligation of the elderly of the home. And sometimes its not the grandfather the grandfather may have passed on, and the grandmother takes his place but its always the grandparents that counsel and also tell us stories and songs of our tribe, the Maricopa tribe and like I've said awhile ago, I came it was already going on, being told my grandfather to his whole household and that my father and mother were also there in the house and they heard this and they my father probably have heard that ever since he was a young boy just like I was starting at that young age, at about around five, but he never made any complaint about it and my mother was there but they both never make any complaints because they know it is the future life that every youngster will have to try to live an overcoming life and it was through this way, the stories and the songs the legends, that has been passed on by grandparents, thousands and thousands of years back and so I was born in that atmosphere, an atmosphere of love which is what we do, need today which is lacking today in many homes, there are some homes that are practicing this. But it is for this reason that somebody, someone may listen to this tape and then carry on to their household, hoping to lead them in the right direction when they come to an adult age, living an overcoming life, living and following the Maricopa way and also abiding with the laws of our country today because I know that through these teachings that I have learned many things, I the Maricopa's been given four things that are very valuable
in our lives. And like I said through the songs and stories its told and sung, then that's the way I had received it and I was one that was really interested in listening to my grandfather telling the way of Maricopa life. But there are some children too, that including boys and girls that don't have no interest, they don't listen to this teachings that's coming right out from the very heart of our the elderly people and those are the people that in later life, adult life, they cannot manage their lives and nor manage their home life but I was like I said I was very fortunate that I have learned to create an interest in it, and I remember many nights that I went to my grandfather and I asked him, grandfather, tell me story, tell me sing me a song, when I didn't know none of them to start with from the very beginning at five but as I kept on asking he kept telling me and singing right along, I start to live I start to learn because the interest was there and I picked up all these stories and songs and applied them to my heart. And I would go to him and sometimes he would be tired that night and he would tell me that you always go to sleep on me you don't stay awake long enough to hear this out and that was true but the he would still go ahead and tell me because that was his duty as a grandparent of that home to carry on those things and I would liken that to like to the day today when many Christian people have prayers in their homes but to me that seem like the Indian way was done more because it was always done at night and for a long period of time that they speak maybe for a couple of hours sometime, and this is what I have heard from the very beginning. He told me of everything around the house there and later on as I would step away from the home I would see different things, like animals, like birds, like insects all those things and also he described the color of their appearance and also that of the insects, animals of all kinds that I would see these at a certain place. When I got older and got away from the home, maybe I would say about one hundred, two hundred yards away from the home, I did see these animals and birds that he was talking about, but I already knew what it was and I appreciated that and it was an education starting there at an early age because of the interest I have in it and I would come back home that night and then I would tell my grandfather that I say I saw that certain thing that you have described to me or sung about it and all the little birds, all the insects and animals and there's a song connected to it describing their appearances and their actions and what they eat and where they live all those things are told and also that I know that was true because I have
seen it with my own eyes and I began to appreciate this and my interests grew more deeply into these things as I saw them in front of me and I would ask him, everyday, and almost every night I would ask him and he never hesitated to tell me but he'd go right ahead and tell me. Then as I grew older I got away from the house more farther and the first thing that came to me that was very important in my future life was to learn how to swim and we live on a farm, we plant crops, all kinds of crops and we got that water from the Salt River which was once flowing, it was natures gift to us. And we, the old people of old went and dug ditches from the main river and made it climb uphill in places but they knew how to do that because later years I have read about modern, modern surveyors have wondered how they ever did that how they did they know to make the water run level to the high lands to the high farms but what I've heard later was that they went according to the growth of different kinds of vegetation in certain areas, certain areas there grew certain kinds of plants and that takes more water and again there are some that are sparse that don't that aren't much growth there and it goes to show that land is higher so they dig it down deeper even with the where the plant, even with the plant that grows thicker and that is the way they got the water out there. And I've seen this, and they reached the farms and as I've said awhile ago one of the important things that came that I've learned there on the farm the ditches that were strung out to our farms were not very deep I would say they about three to four feet deep and we would learn to swim in the shallow waters we would go there and we would swim and after awhile we it was it was a way of sport this was one of the main sports that I learned. I went out there every time we bring water on our farm the ditches are fill, full and I went out there and swam, mostly in the shallow waters to start with and then I got out to the deeper part until and I learned how to manage to swim a little and then after that I was old enough to go down away from the home to a distance about a mile and half was the main Salt River water that was flowing, flowing deep and wide and crystal clear and you could see the fishes at the bottom there and along the edges of that river were trees great big giant willow trees cottonwood trees were the two most common trees that grew along the water there and we all went there. I remember when we first went swimming we swam at a different area because we did not want to swim with the grown up people grown up boys because a lot of times they would grab you and place you under the water and then release you and we
were afraid of that and so we had our own place to swim when we were small and it wasn't long before we learned how to swim, to swim upstream, downstream, and still waters, and fast currents, we learned how to swim. And then after that, we would move down to where most of the grown up people were swimming and I remember at one place that the river came southward to a certain area, sort of a highland there and it hit the side of the highland there and right by there was a whirlpool and that was a dangerous place to swim in if you don't know how to swim but we were taught how to swim under in that in that whirlpool by the older men there. What we did was go up to the edge of the whirlpool and the we take a deep breath and the water would draw us down to the very bottom of that whirling water and we lay there until we almost out of breath then we exhale and we swim away from that center part of that whirlpool and come out where the waters are gentle. And this is what we have learned and along the trees there, the trees were there and we would use that as a diving board, we climb up on that, we cut the limbs off and we make a diving board and from there, a willow tree is flexible, it does not break off like cottonwood tree. So when you walk yourself on that willow tree it will bounce up and down just like a regular diving board and so we learned how to do that we swim, we dove into the waters and many things that went with it we went and took later on as we grew a little older we took our horses and we had a good time. I remember that the, the boys my age we would wait for one another at one certain spot a great big mesquite tree there and the first one that gets there would wait there till some more boys came from all directions and we knew which one who came in last and when the last boy came in we made a wide rush, a stampede down towards the river racing down to see who would get into the water first, first we get out there, jump off our horses, tie our horses up and then we jump into the water and that was part of the fun that we had, we swam there, and we got stronger and this came into use in later years like when I was in the service that was I was, there was no river that was wide or deep or fast currents that would prevent me from swimming across it. I already mastered that with all the army flotations that we had under each arm we were perfectly safe but there was many boys who did not know how to swim and those flotation bladders were for those purposes and they made it across and so this is the kind of life that I live. I went out hunting and all those things but here I will tell about my going to school. I went to school at the day
school right on in my Indian community. The school was I would say about a mile and a
quarter from my house and in those days we did not have transportation such as they have
today buses running, loading kids up. We had to walk, rain or shine, we had to walk and
we didn't have no blacktops to walk on and it was muddy and during the rainy, winter
season it was cold, but yet we went to school because it was very hard. The Bureau of
Indian Affairs was very hard on us and also our parents if we do not show up for school
and the very next day they would come out and ask the reason why I was not in school
asking the parents so we went to school and when I got to the school, I did not know any
English words at all and I was expected to learn to speak the English language right there
which was impossible and it was hard and we were under stress all the time we were
afraid we have to say something so we sneak around and we talk to the other children in
our own language, sometimes we would get caught and have to go under the whip and be
whipped and slapped around, all those things it was hard and that was I don't know why
thy did that they don't do that today but what they were doing was that to keep me in fear
that I would never learn nothing and to end up as a nobody so that was the main reason
for but like I always said that I had to teach under love and concern from the very
beginning from the grandfather the grandparents, that it made already it already made a
solid foundation that I was standing on and it was just like a willow tree in the middle of
a great big flood in the river and the current was so fast, like I said, the willows don't
break it will bend back way back and goes under and when the water eases up it will start
to rise up again and stand right straight up and that's what it did to me. They were trying
to discourage me so bad that I would give up life but it was a teacher that pushed me on
to go on and on and then after awhile I learned to speak the English language and then
about ten years old the policemen came to my house that summer and said you go to the
Indian school, government school, you are an Indian you do not go to no public school
that's what they told me. So that fall, I went and enrolled at the Phoenix Indian school and
there it was hard the first day. I was brought up in a home where there was concern, love
and care but all of a sudden I was in a strange place, strange peoples, other tribes and
some of those bigger children, kids were bullies and they picked on you and made life
miserable for you but as long as you had a friend, a grown up friend, and you they protect
you and that's how we got by. And that went on, and on until I learned a lot of things on
Ralph Cameron's Phoenix Indian School Experiences

the bulletin board there would be, I think close to about thirty dos and don'ts and I did not learn how to read to do well then and so I broke some of those but I didn't want to do it intentionally but I did not understand it I broke them but that was no excuse, they punished us for that and they take away our off time. Like Saturdays, we are supposed to be off a half of a day and all day on Sundays and on those half days you were penalized for one of those rules that you have then you are made to march around. I forgot to mention about the year I entered the Phoenix Indian School, it was the year of nineteen hundred and twenty six, I got ready at home and I got ready at home and I believe it was a Saturday morning that my father took me down there and this was during the horse and buggy days and so he took me down there to just I and him and we got to Phoenix and we went to the stable and they put up his horses and fed the horses there and after that we walked to town and we got on the streetcar. The streetcar fair was only a nickel those years and the distance to the school was about three miles and so we rode on up there and then we got off at the end of the car line and we walked on over to the administration hall which was right at the entrance there and I remember I walked in there and registered my name and got everything fixed up. And then they had a boy there that was working there in the office that took me to the small boys home which was called Lee Rainbow Lodge named after a warrior hero during World War I, it was named in his honor and so I, first thing they gave me was, they assigned me a bed, a cot in a big dormitory and there I made up my sheet they told me, showed me how to make the bed and the pillow and the blanket that give us and then the next thing I was taught was were the bathroom was, the washroom was and what time we were supposed to go there and clean up and so I did that and I was at a loss then completely at a loss and I didn't know what to do but these boys showed me around then after he showed me and told me about some more things he turned me over to the boy disciplinarian that was in charge of the small boys home. And this the boys disciplinarian was a Papago tribes man, he was there then he told me what to do, the next thing the first thing that he said was go on over to the supply room and get fitted out with uniform and in those days the Indian school, the government school was under the military system so we were furnished uniform which we wore only once a week and that was on Sunday. I was given a regular uniform, a uniform composed of like a cap, a shirt, a tie, and khaki pants, this was all khaki color, an army belt and also oxford
shoes and also we wore what they called wrappings, it's a strip of wool about four inches wide and about four feet long and we wrapped that around from our ankles on to up half way up and that completed the uniform and we the next thing I was assigned to a company, there was about, I can't remember how many companies were there, it started from the A Company, B, C, D Company, and F Company was the regular National Guard Company in that school then that has been going on since, since for a long time. Next it was G, H, that was all and I was assigned to H company, next to the smallest boys and I was assigned a certain squad, under a certain squad leader, and all the leaders like the captain, lieutenant, corporals, the sergeants were all Indian students, I noticed that most of them were Hopi boys that were assigned to these jobs because they were really good disciplined tribe those years and they got promoted to that honor position and there the first thing we get up in the morning at six o'clock the whistle blew at six o'clock you could hear that a mile away because of the quietness of the city those years and we got up and were given fifteen minutes to run down to the washroom, and wash our face, brush our teeth and then another the first bugle blew, no it wasn't the first bugle, we came back to our dormitory, we made our beds we had to make it just like the army makes it, we had to do it a certain way, if its not done a certain way they tear it apart and you have to make it again. Another thing, early in the morning when we arise out of bed, the boy's disciplinarian was there already, making his rounds, if you're a little late, laying in bed there, they would turn your bed over, bed and all if you were in it and so that was done. And after we made up our beds the next thing to do was to get ready to march to the dining hall for breakfast, then the first bugle call, they call it the first call, and then the second call was blown and you were supposed to be ready to go out there by then, everything in order, and then the last call was called assembly call, and when that ended you were supposed to right there, in line right in your regular position, that's when they take a roll call to see who was absent cause a lot of times there was absentees some come in late, they run in late, and they get your name down and you also get punished and your Saturday, Sunday off day privileges were taken away from you.