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San Jose Experiences of American Indians in  
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## Mildred Doris Rodriguez Interview

Mildred Doris Rodriguez

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San Jose State University Department of Anthropology  
San Jose Experiences of American Indians in the Urban Relocation Project

Date of Interview: 4/2017

Interviewer: Graduate Student Veronica Saldivar

Interviewee: Mildred Doris Rodriguez

Interviewer: So, I understand that you came to, is it San Jose, California in 1957?

Mildred: Yes, after I graduated from Stuart Indian High School. I mean, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you want to tell us a little bit about what the experience was like at the Stuart Indian school?

Mildred: Uh, I forgot what year I went in. I was there about nine or ten years. I Can't remember right now but maybe 10 years there at the school. And after I graduated in 1957, I went to work in Reno Medical Center, Washoe Medical Center, and I was training as a nurse there. And, and then I got a notice saying to report to the bus station. And there was a man there waiting waiting for me - paid my way - to San Jose and then there was other people there too that were to be relocated. So, I went there and packed up my clothes, and I came and I got on the bus and we ended up here in San Jose. And the other people were relocated somewhere else, Los Gatos and Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and all that, Sunnyvale, you know. They all went, and I stayed here in San Jose. And, they found me work at Red Star Laundry. And, uh, I worked there, I don't know, until they moved somewhere else. And there they found me a place to live and my job. And, I see what else. And in '58 I had my daughter Julie. She was born my firstborn, and my mom came. She came from Bishop. She came, and she worked as a cook in a retirement home. And, she looked after me when I was pregnant, and she called the taxi to have my daughter Julie at the Valley Med. So, I had her. And then, Julie's father he lived in Texas, and he took off and he paid my rent for the whole year so I could stay there. And, and that's when I, uh, was in '58 '59, and I stayed there in '59, '58, '59, '60 and was still there at '60. And, and I didn't work at that time, So I just stayed home and take care of my baby and then go visit my mom. She worked as a cook at convalescent home or something, anyway she's a cook there on 13th Street. And, let's see what else then. The I forgot where I was after that. Then my mom came and stayed with me. I'm kind of confused. It's been a long time. Yeah so that's part of it.

Interviewer: How long have you been in San Jose?

Mildred: Ah, since 57 until now. I probably be here too till the end I guess yeah.

Interviewer: Were you able to connect with other Native Americans?

Mildred: Oh yeah, mm-hmm yeah they have their, what do they call, their health center here like which I go at there. Go to like the diabetes classes. I go there and their clinic. I still go to my clinic, yeah, so they do pretty good yeah. Now I live in a senior home because I'm hitting 80 right now, and so, so I'm here. I guess I'll be here. So, I'm trying to be probably be buried in Morgan Hill where my mom is, yeah. So I paid my insurance to get there every month. Okay what else?

Interviewer: What's the name of your tribe?

Mildred: Shoshone.

Interviewer: Where is that located?

Mildred: Let's see where. See where I was born is in Schurz, Nevada at the Indian hospital. And now, so, I was with my mom and dad. My dad was a rancher. So he moved from ranch to ranch and broke horses and branded cattle and all that, you know. But he drank a lot; so, he passed away early. I was what only seven or eight years old. So that's when my mom couldn't, uh, send me to school or anything. And I went to school; started school when I was older. I was the oldest person in first grade yeah in Tonopah Nevada. So, so that's the reason my mom sent me to Stuart Indian High School, I mean to school. 'Cause she couldn't send me to school. She could hardly feed me 'cause... she was just... she did ironing and had to cook and all that. So, she did the best she could to raise me. But she couldn't you know send me to school or anything; 'cause, she's always on a ranch or cooking for somebody. And, I had to walk in the snow in Tonopah. That was... I was in first grade. So, and, my cousins were there too. So, so, we all walk together to School in the snow. That was fun. So, finally she sent me to Stuart. So, that's where I was for 12 years so, even 'till I graduated.

Interviewer: What was it like being at Stuart Indian School?

Mildred: Oh it's like a military school where I ... they give us a number and we had to get in line like a military school which was good. And we wake up about... wake up about five or six and get ready for breakfast at 7. Then they had to get in line, and you had to eat fast so that other people could come in. There was a lot of people there and boys on one side and girls on the other. Seven. Then we had to, oh, we had to make up our bed like Army style...stretch it ... flip a coin and it got to bounce. Yes, stretch real good. Then air our blankets out for lunch, and then we came back from breakfast and did our homework. At night you supposed to do before you go to bed, finish your homework and be ready. And you wash your own socks and your undergarments. The night you take a shower. When you take a shower wash. Then you hang it on your bed so be clean for the next day. And you put that away then wear another one and put that away. So, and then laundry time come every week. Then we strip everything down. So it is to teach us how to wash your underpants and stuff like that every night when you take a shower and hang it on your bed. But, it that still has to go to the laundry no matter if you wash or not. So, we strip our beds for... And, just like a military style; so, you have it rolled it up. And, in fact, I worked in a laundry too there, yeah. Oh it was real nice. I got used to it. I cried for about three years for my mom, yeah. So I got used to that. So and then after that everything with you know just wait line with the float yeah. Then our punishment there was I like you give it in the hotline if the girly close up that your need take a shower you want so hot out steam from one one shower to the end and in hot water and may say my shoulder burn. Did you say every trait I don't know who inside decided okay that burn marks right here that's the way we have punishment. But I got that there, so let's make you behave and what sure all the windows on Saturday with the cleanup they take our toothbrushes and participate to things clean along the thing along the side of the hall that oh yeah maybe straight-out terrible, but I go through with it but I got used to it. that was home then we had our say and then maybe moved they moved me from the smaller ones they're kind of graduated a long four different buildings different buildings, I wish I could taken a picture of that Stewart school when we were, There I guess at dormitories and stuff where are you still there right there and so I finally graduate from there. Oh, it was good. We had that we had to raise our animals there to like a sheep or pig or cal; take care for the horse or whatever there we got that program that we had to feed them in the morning for them brush them down clean them. Well, I had a little press stuff to take care. Yeah, and then, I during the musical, it's like singing and I was a cheerleader within the band. I had to take some kind instrument. They rented that the thing every morning. I hate it was when we had to get a line to take our castor oil castor oil every morning; take tablespoon yeah oh my god it was awful - the fishy taste in your mouth. I'm and some of the people couldn't take it. They just threw up. But then you have to go by in the line take

another dose and they had the water right there. You had drink water after that. But some people could have let them is it syrup yeah I think okay back in the night and of those so I just had my - I will have mine and tell that there's a water from that I wash it down. Yeah that was awful but it kept this going. Yeah, because there was snow there too and I we use to hold each other like that by the hem and we and sweet each other wrong like yeah we take turns on the end the person member in verse 5. Whereas, I was fun in the ice. Yeah, so that was pretty good yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: The first three years you did not see your Mother?

Mildred: I didn't see my mom. Well, she come a visit when she could but but then I'd miss her more it was to keep some visiting me did forget about them then she come and then I try for her with you. Yeah and then when I got into high school, Dave let us go back for the summer. So, I pick up my stuff and then they would send us on the bus. But my mom was in Bishop and she meet me at the bus station and she used to work for the dairy and Bishop and so I stayed there with her then and helped her set the tables for the working men. Their mothers you know they they did it by hand now. They don't do that anymore they took machine just wearing dry desert and so she worried for their dairy. I enjoyed that there was a man there he'd go bring in the cows in about four or five in the morning. Either d'argo know really how gather the cows up and need help that man gathered the cows it so all they did was open the gate and that cows come in to be milked and there's that man just do that's about 12 of them. They have a stall anything they'd be out doing milking the cow that was the old-fashioned type though you see now this one minded and they have their creamer there's a big old barrel of big giant barrels and that they let that sit there cream comes up to the top so they did skim the cream off to make butter with weather and sour milk parties and all that different things stages when the milk goes into cartons. Yeah, that was interesting to see. Yeah, their dairy for my mom worked as a cook so I helped her new cooking to like make mush and toast and she did the rest and they supply the ham they pigs never slaughter and their own cows just love it so I planted food there that's why my mom learned how to make cottage cheese - homemade. They'd just hang them on the line. Yeah, that's why she learned how to make her cheese, butter, ice cream, homemade ice cream. Yeah everything yeah yeah we had our own bacon and she'd make the beans with the bacon rind and in the day now they making them throughout their chicharones always yeah that's what they make it for you can see the number but my mom is to make good bacon was a pig skin like that yeah before they make it into...

Interviewer: During the summers were you able to spend time with your mother were you able to learn about your traditional tribal...

Mildred: not really get my mama's nothing into that either - it's like makeup. They lived out by themselves. It's never on a reservation. They lived up there in the Hills. Yeah, my grandpa built his own house side of either Pinewood and it's all made mud like bricks and stuff. Yeah, he'd make his own house and made a house for her. I made a house for their children. I my my grandma had other children but 14 and most of them died in childbirth because there's no doctor there. She had him myself and Oh plus my grandma was blind she didn't have no eyes she's just scared me when we go visit because I did, holes in a hole there's no eyes both. And she'd touch me like that. I used to get scared; yes, oh yeah, "tall your big" she'd say that in Indian. But I didn't know what you're talking about because I grew up like speaking English because I'm always around English people. But, then, I understood what they were saying that in my ain't language (unintelligible) stupid they were talking about but but I say a few words that's about it but and nobody really talked to me just my mom. She and she hardly talked Indian to me too but now I did learn those words here and there. So nothing I was I guess my mom my dad used to talk in it...but I and my dad passed away when I was small. So, I really didn't know the language too much. All I knew is the most nasty words fish fat words is stupid yeah so I thought I know about my dad

and every time my dad used to get pretty following another time and he'd have his buddies drinking that's all he used to go there for. Then every time, it goes my mom would see him in jail. He'd be until... visit. I mean go visit him. Then, they'd get out. We head back home again to the ranch so he did he did that every month. We get paid then back to the routine again. Right ready horse either horse rider have a pictures of him - yeah so I got pictures, but I didn't bring them, maybe some other time.

Interviewer: You said you participated in the relocation program when you graduated from Stuart in 1957.

Mildred: yes, I was here yeah here I was here.

Interviewer: Did you have children?

Mildred: I have Virgil but he passed away. I don't know what year but my (unintelligible) knows and then I had Vicki and then Victor at 4. Yeah, they have their own kids now, about 18, 19 grandchildren and their children's children. So, I'm a great-grandma but when my oldest grandchild, great grandchild will have a child. I'll be a great great grandma and she's already who at 17 18; no baby what you doing good

Interviewer: are they connected to their Native American...?

Mildred: No, that's a lost that's a lost yeah

Interviewer: How does that feel for you?

Mildred: kinda sad, because they're not into the Indian culture no more like my my my children there they want to keep on but they can't speak my language and they only speak English and hardly any Spanish you know but there is done it but that's about far they went there to English because I'm sorry cuz they can't carry on the Indian. They try but you know it did this don't know how because they never seen a reservation or nothing. Just Julie my of it she took me with it to see my my cousin. She lives in a reservation so that's as far as it went. Yeah so I'm hoping I go back again for the last time. Probably to see to see my cousin and like there back and maybe gather some pine nuts. It yeah, and because pine nuts they're very expensive now. Yeah, I'll try to go out and do that myself and get try to do that myself - but it's a very sticky job to do. Yeah get over your hair; can't hardly get that sap out - very hard so on. Now, we're hoping that get go to see my cousin one more time. She lives on the reservation in Fallon, and here when I'm there I like see my dad's grave in Austin. He's buried in Austin. Most of my family were buried in Austin, Nevada.

Interviewer (Teri): May I ask a question? From interviewing other people, they talked about the pow wows. You came to San Jose. Were you involved in any pow wows; have you learned about your culture from that?

Mildred: Yeah from here and I go to Stanford every year, when they have that pow wow.

Interviewer: Where you able to connect and build relationships with others Native Americans?

Mildred: yeah yeah all kinds; the California Indians - the Chynoweth Indians and the they're from all over from Arizona New Mexico they speak Latin - you know not the New Mexico people and I mean all kinds of people different tribes. So, I go to the center and we have talked about diabetes and how's it there. Yeah, it's on 13 Street and I go to Meridian. Then I go to that clinic - and the pow wows every year of course and there you have it. Every year, different people from different places.

Interviewer: Mildred, were you able to stay connected with any of the other Stewart students?

Mildred: No, I lost contact. I tried but they either passed away or move somewhere else. I totally get it contact with him but I don't know how they I would meet them. They had homecoming in Stewart a couple years back which I didn't know of. They told me that they had we come coming welcome back - Stewart after all these years. So I missed that one. I didn't know about it cuz they didn't know how to get hold of me. At least cousin told me they had a gathering there for the people that went to school there. So, I missed that one so I don't know how to get connect with them.

Interviewer: I want to take you back to 1957, when you arrived here in San Jose. How did you receive support finding a position?

Mildred: they helped me find housing. They'd paid for my housing already and I've helped me find work, with finding work and then I start paying my own rent and place you know. And then, like I said, I met her father there, so he helped me pay the rent and stuff too. So, but most of time he was on drugs and stuff. Which I didn't know about at the first. So if I had known that everyone you know go with everyone nothing but that's what happened. So then he went back to Texas and doing heroin and stuff. So, I don't know. So I was never into that. I don't know anything... was... so I got together with the other people here and we started drinking So, that's what put me down when I first came. Yeah, so I drank heavily after that. But I still hold job and so that's that was my life there.

Interviewer: What kind of jobs did you find there?

Mildred: Motel jobs, a laundry job, a job waitressing. Yes, so, I went to Red Star laundry which was they did mechanic overalls or mechanic and towel where they wipe the grease tall single red white house and blue towel and they had they were starting so they came in big bins great big bins. And all I did was search their colour sort together, tie them up throw them on the belt. And sorting them as fast as you can, that was my job, sorting towels that big bin says but twelve big bins and the twelve ladies that's doing that wrapping them up about the boat just goes like tha. So, then I and there was ladies showing with overalls were the holes. I didn't like that one cuz you know I didn't know how to sort good I tell the... and oh right I'm the towel starting the red ones, white ones, and blue ones. A mountain putting them on the belt as fast as you can. Yeah, tying them up that there's a little machine that... like that ties it up you go. Yeah that was fun. Yeah, did that all day and they're serving guys washing their big big machines every what's all that grease out you know talk grease didn't know that, so if that went on, I was there for a couple of years until they moved then different me somewhere else - totally that's when they had the bathrooms probably crazy said that cloth towels the wrong. Barnes house them so I got pressure they just rolled them up the big old like a run and when into these machines at all rolling machines and I just press press it up with my foot. They start rolling it kept on rolling rolling rolling right all they did was check the two machines. I rolled this one and this one so they kept me busy real quick. So you know, and then, when it's almost through, then I take off take it off another bar yeah roll it again that Pike that one Pittman you know so pay me that big old think we're the guys come. I mean it's full they pack a boy. So, I did that all day that was that towel rolling plant after a red star it was still red star but instead toilet toilet toilet yeah they thought we knew that big plus rollers or yeast and I don't think they use that no more so that was up so and then now I worked to a motel or whatever. I live now it's just down the street. Used to be Best Western Motel. I worked there and my cousin helped me and she worked there too. So we both worked there yeah we did what 17 rooms apiece every day and that was kind of hard you know - make beds real fast if I said you can go strip it. Then, after that, the laundry lady quit. So, I took over the laundry. I like that better and that could be the... yeah and then that's one time and then the corner room there was a

blood splattered room that it was my blood all over so I do go to office and report that. So the police came and investigate. So I stayed away. So, I just discovered what was there. So, I guess there was a killing there or something. I don't know; any I just never went to work there's no more. Did I went to the laundry so everything why be there for couple years then after that about the semiconductor they're hiring Fairchild. So, I went to see about that and I got up to Fairchild Semiconductor. So, I worked there for many years. I got a retirement from there. Yeah and they after that first job it might be they moved to overseas somewhere were cheaper price. I guess for cheap labor for them yeah maybe still running somewhere. I don't know worth that now I got a retirement check from them so I was alright. So, after that, I did a few like wire rap inspector. Today, because I work for petrol. They hired me as an inspector for the wire wrap where where I had to check their wiring for I don't know electronic wires and bigos eight wires like that so they had me I said it's right there you know inspection because this lady still work for Fairchild - and she was inspector secret yeah went to help me so she taught me how that inspect what they do with the wire. So, I take their lady's work all the ladies and they hired that people from Mexico and they paid them a cheap labor so the inspector with coming in straight and then they told us to take a hike. So, we would go somewhere doing something because everything for people illegal people you know that wasn't supposed to be working there so and so we disappear for awhile. They come back then. They could they shut them down after so there are so I was out of a job. That was my last job. I was retired from there. So that was my last job. So, I got on my SSA and SSI. so I've been retired ever since that was in I forgot what year that was. Yeah, so, I didn't work no more. So that was that that. And then I got on housing and that was it.

Interviewer: You had talked about pow wows. Was there other organizations or events that helped you stay plugged in to the Native American community?

Mildred: that's about it yeah, yeah

Interviewer: thank you so much for sharing your story. I wanted to ask you, is there something that you would, that you want to share with the younger generation of Native Americans...that you think is important for them to know?

Mildred: yeah okay well I think they should cuz they still connect with the their tradition you know. But like me, I lost it you know and it's all my my kin folk are all gone. So, what could I, you know, I'm kinda loss to you know. I don't know too much about my tribe anything so so I would like to have them still you know connect on connect to their culture...which is possible you know. So, that's what I'd like for the interested...like my grandkids. I like for them to continue to. But they don't know anything about it. So, into English and public schools and all that they don't know even know what the reservation is doing with a tribe is but they try to hang on to it you know it. Went to it's possible yeah my grandson Robert he he likes to hang on to that culture. Yeah, his long hair there for a while. I have pictures of him with love yeah yeah. He he buys the Indians shirts and stuff like that. Yeah, that's my daughter's son, yeah yeah

Interviewer (Teri): May I ask you a question? You graduated from high school and then you worked in Reno, when did you decide to participate in the urban relocation program.

Mildred: I didn't decide, they decided for me.

Interviewer: and how did you feel about that?

Mildred: I liked that cuz you know they paid my bus fare and had someone there to pay my bus fare and tell me where I'm going. so, I didn't know. I was going they just told me it was relocate me to San Jose

and there was other people there too that was to go to San Jose and from San Jose this I went to meet them there to send them somewhere else but a couple of us stayed here in San Jose and I stayed and they got me a motel hotel or whatever. It was before torn down now Martell Hotel, Martell Hotel

Interviewer: and compared to Reno what did you think of San Jose?

Mildred: What?

Interviewer: you were living in Reno and then you got to San Jose

Mildred: uh-huh

Interviewer: what did you think when you got here?

Mildred: oh just another town, city so far you know so they don't gambling there. So I mean I'm from the government state so in the right anyway you got me you know but why is this no government yeah that was kinda strange they go oh well there's no gambling. Anyway, I still don't know. I still don't want to gamble you know; just spend money maybe win here and there. But that's about it. So, that's what I think about gambling. Yeah yeah in fact my daughter the one that was here a while ago, she went to you know where the weekend with the her daughter - I mean with her own daughter. So, they came back last night. Okay, I didn't want to go - too boring. I don't know why they obviously got the income tax money. That's way different. Yeah, they won a little I guess. But my daughter, there was nothing she could think go back to pay payment him she got her money back so that was it.

Interviewer: When you came to San jose did it take a while to to find your way around and adapt?

Mildred: oh yeah yeah mm-hmm I stayed mostly with the one I came with me on the bus. Yeah, you know a brand new city. I don't know where they go. We walked around downtown and the police station use to be where were Cesar Chavez park is that's where the old police station was. There was a motel hotel there called 7 motel. That's where I used to live too. Then at night. I'd go there and see people going in and out. So, that was my view from that but it's all gone though. It's Cesar Chavez and the big bank. It's all gone.

Interviewer: Things have changed a lot since then.

Mildred: Oh yeah, change right yeah a lot and these have prune trees and there were the bankers on San Fernando used to be numbered countries and where else. Oh, what's a pruned I guess. It was and days to pick there because I used to live down in San Fernando. That that building is still there still there. It's old but it's still there. Yeah, I go by this once in a while look at it because I used to go upstairs. I like to go inside and look and see that's why I do thee was you know I had to go to the hospital first or hide over there that's right. My mom came with the taxi and to take me to us oh yeah sure it's. Yeah, so that I so they all left home back home with something. I don't know where they all disappear to, but, I stayed because I got used to it and I like it.

Interviewer: How did you build a support system here?

Mildred: I supported myself there used to be a lady from the Indian Center, gone now I forgot her name. Mrs. White, I think and she helped me a lot. I'd go here a lot too just to sit around you know; drink coffee and talk and she helped me quite a lot to adapt around here. She says oh they have a little social



gathering here. So, together in their policy sent me to a person who did talk to ya. And there was another lady that used to live in my building. Was she she was Indian too. But, she helped me learn how to take care of my little baby. I like help me fold the diapers, fold the diaper cloth diapers. It was there's no that was right now time to fold the diaper and put pins it was to repent cloth diapers and the plastic to go over it yeah she showed me I would do that. Cuz, I didn't know nothing about babies or anything. They still breastfeed. I didn't make formula anything. So, I rased my first time my breast milk. So, I didn't know. I didn't clean a bottle. So nothing until she got her teeth. Then, I had wean her because when they both so yeah yeah and yeah so I took her off that so started eating, growing her teeth and stuff. So that's the way I raised her cloth diapers and homemade and nightgowns and stuff like that. Just, I mean, I learnt how to buy clothes and stuff er yeah she's that baby the end there lady she gave me letters clothes and just teach me how to put diapers on a wash; hang them out; yeah that's the way it was,

Interviewer: Is it there anything else that you would like to share that you feel is important?

Mildred: can't think of anything else. I wish I could just hold on to my culture a lot longer than I did. I don't know much about my own tribe so to pass on to my grandkids that that's alright. I know. I don't know. I haven't been among the Indian people that much. It's been out here so that's just about it you know. I don't know what else to say, yeah, okay.