**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Virginia McDonald Rush**

Interview Conducted by

Julie Pearson-Little Thunder

May 2, 2017

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Julie Pearson-Little Thunder

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Virginia McDonald Rush is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 2, 2017.

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**About Virginia McDonald Rush…**

Opened in 1884, Chilocco Indian School was one of the largest federally-funded boarding schools for Native American youth in the country. Located twenty miles north of Ponca City, Oklahoma, the school offered a half academic / half vocational curriculum, focused on assimilating Native students into the dominant culture. Like most boarding schools, Chilocco went through different phases of development, reflecting changes in the federal policy towards Native Americans. These changes were often prompted by the efforts of Native educators, community workers and activists, and shifting attitudes within the larger society. Throughout these shifts, however, the school’s status as a National Guard center as well as boarding school made it unique.

A federal retreat from funding such schools, and rising Native enrollment in public schools, ushered in the close of Chilocco in 1980. By the time of its closing, it had seen close to 18,000 students and had awarded more than 5,500 high school diplomas during its near-centennial history. Today, the school’s land is owned in trust by the Kaw, Ponca, Otoe-Missouria, Pawnee, and Cherokee Nations. While remaining Chilocco alumni do not always agree on the school’s long-term legacy, most share memories of friendships and often marriages that arose from attending the school. They consider themselves part of a Chilocco family, working to share the school’s history, good and bad, and to celebrate the accomplishments of its students.

Virginia McDonald Rush, of Ponca descent, was born in Hominy, Oklahoma, and grew up there until she was thirteen, when she transferred to Chilocco. Coming from a large family with several siblings, she felt it would ease the family’s responsibilities if she stayed at Chilocco, but she soon grew to love the school and what it offered. At Chilocco, she was active in band, worked in the kitchen and the laundry, and studied cosmetology, along with her regular classes and detail responsibilities. She especially loved the cosmetology courses, and after she graduated from Chilocco in 1956, she returned home with a job already lined up at the local beauty shop. Virginia stayed there for a few years and then decided to enlist in the Army. She completed boot camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama, which wasn’t a problem for her, thanks to the disciplined lifestyle she’d learned at Chilocco (although she didn’t much like KP duty). She especially enjoyed the down time when she could go off base to go dancing at nearby clubs. From Alabama, she went to Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Colorado where she was a dental assistant. In Colorado, she also played softball for the Army, which was a fun extracurricular activity because it allowed her to travel with the team. She eventually ended up back home in Oklahoma and worked in Ponca City as an Indian education coordinator, which she found very fulfilling. She now resides in Shawnee and attends the Chilocco reunions whenever she can, appreciating all the lessons, friends, and memories she gained there.

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| **Virginia McDonald Rush**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Julie Pearson-Little Thunder  May 2, 2017  Shawnee, Oklahoma |  |

**Little Thunder** *This is Julie Pearson-Little Thunder with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at Oklahoma State University. Today is May 2, 2017, and I’m interviewing Chilocco alumnus and veteran Virginia McDonald Rush in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in partnership with the Chilocco National Alumni Association. Virginia, you’re a Ponca tribal member. You graduated from Chilocco in 1956 and entered the Army from ’58 to ’60, approximately...*

**Rush** Approximately.

**Little Thunder** *…and I look forward to hearing more about your time at Chilocco, your military service, and a bit about your life since then. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?*

**Rush** I was born in Hominy, Oklahoma, and I grew up there until I was, like, thirteen. I went to Chilocco then. I was only thirteen, and I lived there for four years. Of course, we got to go home in the summertime, and I grew to love it. It was like, to all of us that were there at that time, we were just like a big family because we did everything together. We all slept together, the girls, and then we ate breakfast together. We got up at five o’clock every morning. We had a detail to do before we went to breakfast, and I’m sure that was paying our way. Then after that, I was in the band, so I went from breakfast to the band room. Then we had regular classes. Half of it was vocation, so they were preparing us for our life’s journey. I ended up in the laundry twice when I was a freshman. (Laughs) I don’t know how that happened.

**Little Thunder** *Maybe more than you wanted. (Laughs)*

**Rush** It was the hardest job there was, I think. Then I also worked in the kitchen for a little bit, and I think that’s about the only places I worked.

**Little Thunder** *I wanted to kind of go back to Hominy, first of all. So you were up there in Osage country.*

**Rush** Right.

**Little Thunder** *What did your mom and dad do for a living?*

**Rush** My dad is my stepdad, actually, Harry Childs [Osoto]. He worked in the oil fields. My mother actually worked before she ever met Harry, when she was still kind of with my dad. He was a rolling stone, so we didn’t see him very much. (Laughs) She worked for Indians. The [Shunkamolah] Osages adopted my dad because his mother, Julia (her name was Julia, also) Fast Walker, she worked for them. They took care of Daddy; they adopted Daddy. He played football for the Hominy Bucks, and he was an All State inductee, or whatever you want to call it. Back then, it was something to be one. Like I said, my mother worked for the Indians. She worked during the nighttime, sort of like an LPN now, but they didn’t have LPNs back then. She took care of them during the night, and she also learned how to understand Osage and Ponca. She couldn’t speak it fluently, but she understood what they were saying.

My little sister, Judy, she’d take her to work with her sometime, and they would give her—I don’t know what they called it. The Ponca and Osage languages are almost alike, but they used to give my little sister Judy a bucket. They said it was her [utháshte] bucket, and they’d send her home with food. Actually, she was a little brat. No. (Laughter) I think that’s why Mom had to take her. (Laughter) We didn’t live very far from them, either, so my mom, she’s worked all her life, almost all her life. She worked while we were still in Hominy, but later on she worked at different places. She worked almost her whole life. Then before she passed away, my little sister, Judy, was a alcoholic, and my mother raised her three children. I know it’s awful to say that, but I think she would have lived longer if she hadn’t have had to take care of them, but then maybe they kept her alive, too.

**Little Thunder** *Right.*

**Rush** So…actually, they’re like her children because she had them from the time they were babies. I jokingly say Monty, who lives here also, he could be my brother, my nephew, or my son. (Laughter) Three in one!

**Little Thunder** *Three in one!*

**Rush** Yeah.

**Little Thunder** *So how about brothers and sisters?*

**Rush** My older sister was Thelma, and then me, (I’m second) and then my brother Charles, and then my brother Page. Let’s see. Thelma, me, Charles, Paige, Judy, Patsy, and I have a half-brother named Roland. I also have a half-sister named Fidelis Ann, and that was my daddy’s daughter. He also had another son. He was my brother, and his name was Donald Ray Bussey because Dad didn’t marry his mother. My sister Fidelis Ann, the oldest one of us, she was Osage, also, so she was in Pawhuska. She grew up in Pawhuska. Her offspring was named Bobby Parker. We didn’t find him until later in the years, but then we got real close to him, too. She also has four more children that live in Portland, Oregon. We don’t get to see them very often.

**Little Thunder** *Right. So how about your relationship with your grandparents on either side?*

**Rush** On my dad’s side, I didn’t have any grandparents because they were already gone before we were born. Then my mom’s, she was, they were German. They were okay, but they never did hug us or kiss us or anything like that. Neither did my mom because she came from there, so she was doing what they did. I made it a point, I said, “When I have kids, I’m going to hug them and kiss them and whip them like my mom did.” (Laughter) They say it’s handed down from generation. Back then you could get away with it, but now it’s like a felon, I think. (Laughter) I could have been in jail back then. (Laughter) Oh, my gosh.

**Little Thunder** *You attended school in Hominy prior to Chilocco, or where did you go to school?*

**Rush** Yeah, I went to Hominy, Horace Mann, and I really loved it, kind of, sort of.

**Little Thunder** *What was your favorite class?*

**Rush** My favorite class was probably art and sports was my favorite. This was in grade school. I was thinking about junior high. I liked to play marbles, too, because I would get the guys that I knew couldn’t play very good, and I’d get all their marbles. (Laughter)

**Little Thunder** *Well, how did you end up at Chilocco at thirteen?*

**Rush** Well, my stepdad, I don’t know if he went to school there or not, but I know his brother did. His brother’s name was Roland. That’s my half-brother, Otoe brother. His name’s Roland, and he was named after my stepdad’s brother who got killed at Chilocco. He was jumping barrels, ice skating. He didn’t hit the last one right, and it killed him. Anyway, that was Roland, and let’s see. Harry told us about the school because he knew about the school, and he wanted to know if we wanted to go up there. We said we didn’t know, so he took us up there. Him and my mom took us up there. On the way down, there’s a big long arch. I’m sure you’ve (do you know it?) seen it. Well, when we were….

**Little Thunder** *Is this all the siblings, or you and your sister?*

**Rush** Me and my sister…

**Little Thunder** *Okay.*

**Rush** …my oldest sister, just us.

**Little Thunder** *Okay.*

**Rush** He took us up there because I was just a freshman. I was only thirteen, and she was, I think she might have been—I’m trying to think. I think she failed one grade, so I think she was in the tenth grade when we went up there. On the way, down the arch, there was a guy walking, so we picked him up. His son was Virgil Yeahquo, and so we stayed friends with him the rest of the time that he was there. When we went, we decided, yeah, we wanted to go. Then we came back home and got all ready and everything, and we went. Also at the same time, my two first-cousins who are also Otoe, they went. Joyce was my age, and Jane was Thelma’s age. Then we had two brothers from Hominy that went there named Billy and Dennis James. Then we had these other two kids that were named, her name was—oh, you might know her, too. She’s gone now, too. Oh, gosh, I can’t think of her name. Her last name was Brown, and her nickname was Pumpkin. Her brother, I can’t remember his name. Anyway, that’s all. We were all kind of close.

**Little Thunder** *You had, you already had family and extended family.*

**Rush** Home Three, I went to Home Three. That was the freshman girls’ building, and there I met a whole bunch of my Ponca relatives, Poncas that I never knew because we were raised around my mom’s side. Yeah, we were all real close, all of us, and I was real happy.

**Little Thunder** *I’m just curious because, you know, you’re coming from a public school background, and you make that one trip to the school. Like you said, you meet that young man and remain friends, but what made the decision for you?*

**Rush** I don’t know. … I guess it was because we felt kind of freer, but yet we never had a really big house. I guess it was hard for them, taking care of us. I’m trying to think if my mother worked then. I don’t know. We just decided that we’d go, and then we made a lot of friends. We were kind of like freer, sort of. We got into a lot of stuff up there.

**Little Thunder** *You mentioned having to do detail. What kind of detail did you have to do?*

**Rush** Eww! At home, they just gave us a specific detail to do like, “You’re going to do the halls,” and our rooms had to always be super neat. Maybe that’s why I’m messy now. (Laughter) I mean, the floors had to be shined, buffed. Our beds had to be made, and everything just…. They’d come in, and they’d use a white glove. You could get a bathroom or the hall, the lobby when you first came in. To the right, there was, like, a library room, and someone had to do that. Someone had to do the teacher’s office. There was a matron’s office. What we’d do, too, is if, like, we couldn’t get the buffer, we would get our blankets, and we’d pull each other up and down the aisles (Laughter) to shine our floors. We had a lot of fun, too, yeah.

**Little Thunder** *Who was one of your, one of the teachers that stands out for you? Could be for good or for bad.*

**Rush** Oh, my goodness. Oh, I’m trying to think. Of course, I liked Mr. Dee Gregory, because he was Navy. And Miss [Kay] Ahrnken, she was an English teacher, and I liked English. It was one of my favorite, besides art and…

**Little Thunder** *Sports.*

**Rush** …yeah, sports, yeah. In Hominy High School, too, I played sports.

**Jill Primeaux** Okay.

**Rush** I played basketball, and I was on the A team, and softball. Me and my sister played, not for anyone, but we played tennis all the time, me and her. I guess we could go back to Chilocco.

**Little Thunder** *What were your, maybe, one or two of the classes that made the biggest impression on you? You mentioned English already, but….*

**Rush** I’m trying to think.

**Little Thunder** *Did you like the vocational aspect?*

**Rush** Oh, yeah, I liked it. I liked it when I got to go to cosmetology class. I liked that. Mrs. [Lucille] Schell was our instructor, teacher. I liked her. I don’t know. I guess Miss Ahrnken. It seems like there was somebody else, another class that we were in that was like…. My brother-in-law, (now he’s my brother-in-law) he ran around with about five guys, and they all had nicknames. It was Flop, Slop, Ears, and I forget the other one’s name. They all ran around together. What we would do, me and Lee Ella [Arpoika] and Anna Willis (was my close friend) and Wyneatta Carey, we would have one person do the homework, and then we’d pass it around to everybody. (Laughter) I don’t know why they didn’t ever get wise, (maybe they did; I don’t know) but it was fun.

**Little Thunder** *(Laughs) Oh, that’s great. How about dances?*

**Rush** Dances.

**Little Thunder** *At the school.*

**Rush** Well, you mean like white-men dances?

**Little Thunder** *Yes.*

**Rush** Oh, yeah, I’d go do that.

**Little Thunder** *Okay, so, were you aware of the presence of the National Guard on the Chilocco campus?*

**Rush** Oh, yes! Oh, yeah, Charlie [Company].

**Little Thunder** *Did you watch the—did they do parades at that point?*

**Rush** You know what? I think they did. They must have went with us when we went on band trips and stuff. My brother was trying to join the Company, and my mother would not let him. She said she signed for me, and she was never going to sign for another one of her kids to go into the service. (Laughs)

**Little Thunder** *Wow. Did she give a reason why?*

**Rush** I guess she just didn’t want us away from her, which I ended up away from her anyway because I joined the service.

**Little Thunder** *But you did travel quite a few places with the band when you guys played?*

**Rush** Oh, yeah, we traveled everywhere.

**Little Thunder** *What were some of the places?*

**Rush** We went to Pawnee. I think it was Pawnee Indian Days down there. We went to Guthrie. We went to—I’m trying to think. We went to the state fair. I’m trying to think of where else we went. It was just wonderful because we got to get away from Chilocco. I said we were like birds let out of a cage. (Laughs)

**Little Thunder** *You got to eat different food.*

**Rush** No, they’d always send us sandwiches, sack lunches, and we’d always go, “We got sack lunches.” (Laughter)

**Little Thunder** *What were your impressions of the food at Chilocco?*

**Rush** Oh, I liked it. I did work in the kitchen, too, where they served. If you liked somebody, you could give them a whole lot. (Laughter)

**Little Thunder** *It made you popular when you were in the kitchen.*

**Rush** It was neat, yeah, except you had to wear those hair nets and all that. Who looks good in a hair net? Right now, their hairdos now, I think that they look horrible. They don’t even look like they’re combed. They just kind of, you know, clump them around, and craziness. I don’t like it.

**Little Thunder** *(Laughs) After you explained that you had the cosmetology course, and after you left Chilocco, tell us what happened after you graduated.*

**Rush** I went home and started working in the beauty shop.

**Little Thunder** *And you got hired?*

**Rush** Yes, before I even got home. I went a week before school was out, and they hired me. That’s why I went to work the day after I got out of high school, and I liked it.

**Little Thunder** *What was that like?*

**Rush** I really liked it. The lady that owned it was really, really nice to me, and there was another girl working there. I can’t remember her name, but she really, really liked me, too. It was really neat. I was saying, before that when I was, I don’t know how old I was, but I worked for this lady named Mrs. White in a little corner café-like thing. Then my mom made me quit there.

**Little Thunder** *How old were you?*

**Rush** I must have been twelve or thirteen. It was before I went to Chilocco. (Laughs) I have had so many jobs, it’s not funny. You name it, almost, I’ve done it.

**Little Thunder** *Well, how did you end up joining the service?*

**Rush** My best girlfriend, Lee, she was going to school at Haskell [Indian Nations University] after we graduated.

**Little Thunder** *But you had met at Chilocco, right?*

**Rush** Oh, yeah, we were best friends, close, close, close. I wish I had some pictures of me and her when we were in the service because we did take some of us. I don’t know what happened to all my pictures. They just kind of went by the wayside. What did we do? What was the question again?

**Little Thunder** *How you ended up in the military.*

**Rush** Oh, her, it was her fault. (Laughs) I told you, I think, her boyfriend, now husband if he’s still alive, he didn’t like me because he thought I talked her into it. She probably told him that! “Oh, Gina wants me to go, so I’m going to go.” She’s the one that made me go. We thought we were going to be buddies all through, and we’d go the same place. Oh, we had these big dreams about how we left because we were older than our boyfriends, [Mickey and Keith Franklin]. We talked about how we were going to live next door to each other and raise our kids together, and all that, but that didn’t happen. They found somebody else, I guess. We did, too, I guess.

**Little Thunder** *But you both ended up in the Army…*

**Rush** Both ended up.

**Little Thunder** *…and went to boot camp where?*

**Rush** Fort McClellan, Alabama. That was a trip, too.

**Little Thunder** *What was that like?*

**Rush** It was kind of fun because that’s the life we lived at Chilocco, so it was just kind of like an extension to that. We did some fun things. We marched at night, and we had to do that crawling under that barbed wire and all that stuff. See, what else? KP, I got KP one time, and I had to sit outside and peel potatoes, and there was this huge pile of potatoes, about as big as this ceiling. I was just sitting out there, peeling potatoes, potatoes, potatoes, potatoes. (Laughter) Oh, it was awful. We used to drink, too. We’d go to clubs. I met this one guy that really….

**Little Thunder** *Off base…?*

**Rush** Yeah. I met this one guy that he really fell in love with me, too. His name was Phil Simms, and he was from California. He could dance real good, too, so I really liked him. Lee Ella had her boyfriend then, too, and it was just really neat.

**Little Thunder** *So you two did manage. Were there any other Native women in your boot camp?*

**Rush** Yeah, there was. There was a girl named Joan Chasing Hawk who was Sioux, and I really liked her, too. Oh, we had a lot of fun together! Then there was another one named Virginia Half a Day, but she was real quiet and standoffish and stuff. She wasn’t loud like us. I was loud. Lee was kind of, she wasn’t as loud as I was. She was really beautiful, too. Lee Ella was. She comes from a family of twelve brothers and sisters. I still haven’t been able to get ahold of her. That just irks me. I’m determined to find her. We’ll find out what happened to her. That would make a neat story. We could film that. (Laughs)

**Little Thunder** *Yeah, I hope you are able to get with her.*

**Rush** Yeah.

**Little Thunder** *So what about after? What happened after boot camp?*

**Rush** We got to go home. We flew for the first time, in a [prop job], and we didn’t want to sit by the window, neither one of us. Finally when we got up there, we were fighting to sit by the window (Laughter) because we wanted to see out there what was going on. That was fun, and then….

**Little Thunder** *What was your mom’s reaction when you came home?*

**Rush** Oh, she was happy, very happy, yeah. They were all happy. Then, let’s see. From there, well, from there I went to Fitzsimons [Army Medical Center], and I liked it there.

**Little Thunder** *And you worked there in what area?*

**Rush** I worked in oral and operative dental assistant, dental, whatever you call them, interns. I don’t know. I really liked both of them. I was just thinking about the clothes we had to wear.

**Little Thunder** *It’s almost like…it’s really kind of a switch, though, from cosmetology to dental technician, sort of, but you enjoyed that. too.*

**Rush** Yeah, so then….

**Little Thunder** *How about Denver?*

**Rush** I liked Denver. I really liked Denver. We used to go up in the mountains. There was a bar up there we used to go to called Sam’s Club, and it was real neat. Let’s see. Oh, like I said, I liked to dance, really a lot, and I met this one black guy that was…. Oh, he could really dance, so me and him danced a lot together. We were good friends. Let’s see, what else. …

**Little Thunder** *So you got lots of opportunities to go dancing.*

**Rush** Oh, yeah.

**Little Thunder** *What about playing softball for the Army?*

**Rush** I did that when I got to my home base at Fitzsimons. I played softball there, and I loved it, loved it. We traveled by train to go to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, which is where Lee Ella was stationed, and I got so happy. I was just overjoyed because I knew when I got there I was going to get to see her. Well, no. She went on leave to Oklahoma, so I missed her there.

**Little Thunder** *You just missed her! Oh!*

**Rush** Yeah, I was not happy.

**Little Thunder** *But you had stayed in touch this whole time throughout your service, and you were staying in touch.*

**Rush** Yes, yeah, so that’s the last time I saw her.

**Little Thunder** *Well, how did the game go?*

**Rush** I don’t remember. I just know we had fun. This one black guy was with us, a coach, and he was hilarious. Me and him used to just laugh and laugh and laugh, oh, my gosh. That was fun, traveling, too, because we had those bunk beds on the train, all of us in there, boys and girls together. I slept on the upper one, I remember, and it was really a lot of fun. It’s the first time I ever did that. Fun, fun, fun.

**Little Thunder** *And I think I read that you took some art classes in Denver.*

**Rush** Yes, I did. I took art classes. I mostly did charcoal, and I really liked it a lot.

**Little Thunder** *And you kept up your drawing after that.*

**Rush** I think I could have been a really neat artist if I had another thing. … This is jumping way up, though, way up, the art thing. I went to an alcohol rehab program with my husband because he was sent there by the—I’m trying to think of the word for it. He was sent there because something to do with the law….

**Little Thunder** *With part of the…*

**Rush** Yeah, it’s where they send them there.

**Little Thunder** *…court ordered.*

**Rush** Yeah, court ordered. Yeah, so anyway, he got all worked up and everything. He said he’s not staying there; he’s coming home. I said, “Well, what if I come down there and go through it with you? Would you stay?” He said, “Yeah,” so I went with him and stayed there with him. That’s when I did another art class…

**Little Thunder** *Okay.*

**Rush** …there. That lady, I did this painting, and she liked it so much she asked me if she could take it around and show it to people to see what could be done in rehab, too. I had that for a long time, and finally it got messed up some way. I still remember it and everything. Also, when we were in there in that rehab, there was I think this famous artist named Kevin [Thomas]. He was supposed to draw me a little picture, but I don’t think he ever did. He was real well known. I don’t know if he’s still alive. I think I heard he died.

**Little Thunder** *You definitely were artistically talented. Well, how do you think—as you look back, you said you’ve been doing many types of work since you were young.*

**Rush** Yes.

**Little Thunder** *Once you got out of the service, was there an area you kind of focused on? Of course, you were having a family then, too, at that point.*

**Rush** Yeah, I worked for a dentist in—there’s a little town…called Astro, and I worked for a dentist there. I think I met him through church, and he wanted me to stay. That’s after John was born. I just felt like I didn’t want to do it. I wanted to be there with John and see him, his baby stuff. My babysitter wanted to take him away from me. She liked him so much. (Laughs) I went, “No way, Jose! I’m coming home.” (Laughter) I also worked for a chiropractor. It’s funny because the dentist I worked for, his name was H. H. Merle, and the chiropractor I worked for was H. H. [Shuttleworth]. (Laughter) I think he’s still alive. It just so happened that his son came to her wedding in Bartlesville. It’s a long thing. I could just go on and on about everything.

**Little Thunder** *So how do you think your education at Chilocco helped prepare you for some of the things you’ve done since?*

**Rush** Because it taught me how to be strict and how to survive and how to get along with people. Then taught me all the cleaning stuff, plus all the people that were there were part of my life. Now when we see each other, we still run and grab each other and hug each other, and our alumni’s coming up!

**Little Thunder** *Yes, it is.*

**Rush** Yeah, my brother’s got me a room again. Last time I won a pin, you know, when you buy tickets and stuff. I got a pin and gave it to my niece that really helps me a lot, my sister’s daughter. Then the year before that, I won a whole bunch of stuff. Now I’ve got to do something, donate some stuff this year, pay it back.

**Little Thunder** *Are you a member of any Native veterans groups?*

**Rush** No, I should be. They’ve been asking me to. They wanted me and my son to join. The guy that called me and said that they would even waive the fee, (which I think it was only ten dollars or something like that) he passed away. I never did join. I need to, though. Yeah, I need to do that.

**Little Thunder** *Be that representation by women.*

**Rush** Right.

**Little Thunder** *Well, is there anything else that we should talk about that we didn’t get to cover?*

**Rush** I don’t know. What about you, Jill? Do you know of anything?

**Little Thunder** *This is Virginia’s daughter, Jill.*

**Jill Primeaux** Of your Chilocco days, like your best friends or….

**Little Thunder** *What do the reunions mean to you now?*

**Rush** Oh, they mean everything to me. The thing of it is, though, until this year, (and I don’t know about this year, either) I could only go to a few things because of my condition. That’s another thing I’m kind of looking forward to, too, is I’m on the list to get a electric wheelchair. At first I didn’t want it, and then I thought, what made me think was, like, well, I could go to dances and have my chair. Could get out of it and sit in my other chair if I wanted to. I’ve never been able to go to the South Arena, I mean—what’s it called now? Not Tommy, but the other one. Gus McDonald.

**Primeaux** Gus McDonald, yes.

**Rush** That is my uncle, my dad’s brother, and, course, he made us famous. He made White Eagle [Park] famous. I forgot what I was talking about.

**Little Thunder** *With that chair, you would be able to….*

**Rush** Oh, with my chair I’ll be able to go to the South Arena. Jill’s always wanting me to come because she—I’m trying to think of what the word would be. She opened up a women’s cloth contest, a old-time women’s cloth. She always wanted me to judge, and I couldn’t get up to the South Arena. Last year, didn’t he have it in the [Thomas] Roughface Arena?

**Primeaux** No, that’s what Donald….

**Rush** I didn’t go last year, did I?

**Primeaux** No.

**Rush** The only year I got to judge was when they had it at the South Arena. They have that every year now. It’s only about the fifth year, isn’t it?

**Primeaux** Yeah, it started with five. There was so many participants (I think they had, like, forty contestants) last time…

**Little Thunder** *Oh, my gosh.*

**Primeaux** …they almost didn’t have enough to give away, but they pulled it off.

**Rush** So, donations! No. (Laughter) We need to go around to the stores, like I used to. I did work, the job that I really, really loved was working for the Ioway and Perkins-Tryon school district as a Indian education coordinator.

**Little Thunder** *Oh, okay.*

**Rush** So I met all those kids, who I still love them. I just adopted one of them, named [Deanna McOsatoe], because her mom just died about a year ago. We were close. We were close. Me and my husband were close to her mother. … Somehow or another, we ended up, me and Jody, my husband, we ended up adopting Tony as our brother. Then I ended up working for Ponca City, Indian education coordinator, and I loved that job. Some of those kids, I can’t believe it because now they’ve got their kids.

**Little Thunder** *Exactly. (Laughs)*

**Rush** I did a fashion show every year that I worked there. It was Indian Education Week. I did that, and I loved that. It was so neat. I thought about having one at Chilocco reunion, but it takes a lot of organization to get it going and stuff. I thought about it, and I just kind of forgot about it last year because I thought…. I didn’t get around, I couldn’t get around that easy. Yeah, I loved that.

**Little Thunder** *There’s designers, a lot of good designers out there. Adeline, in fact I interviewed Adeline [DuBois] not too long ago.*

**Primeaux** I thought of a question; I thought of one. If there was a young person, a young Ponca, that was going to go through to a boarding school and also to go into the military, what would you advise them?

**Rush** Stay home! (Laughter) Oh, gosh. I would say go for it. In fact, I’ve tried to get both of my granddaughters to go because my oldest granddaughter….

**Little Thunder** *To join the military?*

**Rush** No, to go to Riverside [Indian School].

**Little Thunder** *To go to Riverside, okay.*

**Rush** She kind of got in trouble because she’s that kind of way. They ruined her because they kept sending her off and off and off. She came back a totally different person than she was. She was so sweet and loved me and wrote me some of the most wonderful letters about how she loved me and how I was number one to her. Then when she came back, she was different, like, real rough and like that. She’s still kind of that way, too, but she can be sweet. I showed you her little girl, didn’t I?

**Little Thunder** *Yes, yes.*

**Rush** You should see her, Jill. She’s in that one with her and [Brianna] and baby. It looks so cute, but when you pull it up big, she’s sticking her tongue out. (Laughter) She laughed so much. She’s a crazy little girl.

**Little Thunder** *Well, I really appreciate you sharing all of this with us.*

**Rush** I’m going through that with my other granddaughter. She’s thirteen. She dropped out of school because one of the teachers was bullying her. We tried to get her to go to Riverside, too, of course, or to that other one, Sequoyah, and she didn’t want to go. She didn’t want to go, so we couldn’t force her to go. Now she’s being homeschooled, but she’s not keeping up. Gina told me they’re going to try to get her started in the eighth grade. She has a counselor, too, and she’s going to try to get her started in the eighth grade. As for me, this feeling just came over me that I don’t think she needs to go to Ponca City school system. I wish there was some way she could go to—what’s the name of that school in Otoe? Anyway, there’s a lot of Indians. You know where I mean?

**Primeaux** Frontier.

**Rush** Yeah, Frontier school. See, they both went there for a while.

**Little Thunder** *Where they would have that background and Native….*

**Rush** They both went there for a while, and all those teachers used to tell Brianna she was the prettiest girl there, which probably did help her. (Laughter) She’s a case, that girl.

**Little Thunder** *Well, I hope that—you’ll be in our thoughts and prayers.*

**Rush** Okay, thank you. I appreciate that.

**Little Thunder** *She has a wonderful role model in you, so I’m confident that that will play out well.*

**Rush** Yes. We did live in some big olʽ houses. I know Jill will want me to say that. (Laughter) In Ohio, we lived in this big olʽ farm house, and it was really neat. Then we moved in town to this historical house. At that time, it was ninety-five years old, so now it would be (how old) almost two hundred, getting close. It was so neat. I think about it a lot. I really enjoyed living there. I moved from there back to Oklahoma.

**Little Thunder** *Back to Oklahoma.*

**Rush** Yeah, but my son, my oldest son, actually went back there. The couple that was living there let them come in, so he got to go in and tour the house. Course, they had updated it and all the…. They didn’t update it historically. They did other things, but it was neat.

**Little Thunder** *Fun to be able to walk through those memories again.*

**Rush** But through that, through it all, though, I am a born again Christian, and that’s what’s kept me going all these years, and still. We have some strong Christian people in our family, too. I appreciate that, and I appreciate Jill.

**Primeaux** I have one more question I want to ask that’s important. How do you feel like, (I hope this doesn’t make you cry) how do you feel like being a veteran mixes with the traditional values that you have, that we have as Native people, as Poncas?

**Rush** I don’t know. I don’t know what you mean. (Laughs)

**Primeaux** How do you feel that being a veteran is—what does that mean to you as a Native?

**Rush** I don’t know. It’s structural, and that’s the way our tribe is supposed to be.

**Primeaux** Let me ask a different way. How do you think being a veteran, do you think it makes you be, as a responsibility, as she was talking about, a role model?

**Rush** John used to always say we were the way we were because we were veterans, me and their dad. We were structured, you know, like, we would make them—like they’re an army. (Laughs) You’re in the Army now. Both your parents are veterans. Yeah, it means a lot to me, and it means a lot to me that some of my other brothers, two of my brothers were in Vietnam. … My younger brother was an engineer over there, and he saw a lot of stuff. They would build a bridge, and they would turn around, and it would be bombed. He lost one of his best friends in a…. They were in a dugout. He got out to do something, and it blew up and just blew his friend all to everything.

Then my other brother, I guess he was, he was so honored. They said he was more than Billy Walkabout. That was one of the guys in the book. His name’s [Ray Camp]. He’s going through a time right now. I try to call him because he just lost his wife in November, I think, and he just had knee surgery. He’s going through a time with that, with his knee. He gets real lonesome because he misses Belle. I told him I miss my husband every day. I don’t know if you’re supposed to do that or not, but I can’t help it because I keep thinking, “I wish he was here so I could help him more,” but it’s the life he chose.

**Little Thunder** *Thank you, Virginia.*

**Rush** You’re welcome.

*-------* ***End of interview*** *-------*