



Dennis F. Pete, Sr.

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 032



Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh

April 15, 2014

Owyhee, NV



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Interviewee: Dennis F. Pete, Sr.

Interviewer: Norm Cavanaugh

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P: My name is Dennis F. Pete, Sr. I was born in Owyhee, Nevada, to Bessie Cleveland, and my stepdad was Alec Cleveland. And I got some sisters and brothers over there from Alec and them. And then I have another brother, his name is **Herman** Pete. He stays in McDermitt, Nevada.

C: So, your dad was—*puhadik* [1:18]? [medicine make?]

P: Johnny E. Pete.

C: Oh. And where was he from?

P: He was born here in Owyhee. And my grandmother was Stella **Bean**, who was married to Simon **Bean**. She was from Oregon. Burns or somewhere up that way. That was—I don't know what year that was. And then, Eva, her daughter Eva was my aunt. And Roger **Bean** was my step-grand, grand, like that, something I guess. [Laughter] And then, I got some relatives here and there. They got quite a few here in Owyhee. The Gibson bunch, and then the Humpy bunch, they're all related to them. *Soose noha* [2:42]. [Somehow like that.]

C: Yeah. And so, then where did you begin school? Where did you go to school at?

P: Oh! I went to school here in Owyhee. *Ne towaik* [2:55] [I study.] Owyhee, Swayne School, it'd be, they call it. Used to sit way down here, below where the football field is. That's where they had it. Somewhere on in that area. Went to school, and then they had that big gym, that right over there, where they would play basketball and this thing is still there yet, that gym. Right today. But they don't use it anymore. And then we played football right there, same place, in the football field, where they had it. It was back in 1955, I think. Trying to think—yeah, [19]55. I was start school in the high school. Then

after that happened, got through with that, I just went to work for some ranchers, buckarooing for them for here and there. And then, finally I got a job here in Owyhee hospital, as a driver for the—ambulance driver, and janitor, and work with a maintenance man when I was needed. And then after I get through, I was work there for eight years, and I finally gave it up. When I moved, I moved away, then. I moved clear to—what do they call it—down on Pyramid Lake. Pyramid Lake Indian Paiute Tribes. I was there for 39 years, going here and there. Playing hand games, and going to the powwows there, or rodeos. There's one guy from Pyramid Lake, used to team up with him. When I would get a chance to, so then I went and rope with him a few times when I was there. And then, finally, my wife over there finally passed away. Then I moved back to Owyhee next. And that's where I am right today.

C: So do you have children over there in Pyramid Lake?

P: Huh-uh, no. Just two boys I got here. [Laughter]

C: Who's the two boys you have here?

P: Oh, Kenny Pete, and Dennis Pete, Jr. Those two.

C: And you got grandchildren?

P: I got about four grandchildren, then a lot of first/second grand kid. Can't name 'em all, there're two many of them! [Laughter] That's about as far as I know right now. And I'm stay right here, living here, in my own house, and take care of whatever I need to do. Go to handgames, powwows, or whatever. Basketball game, football game, do all, watch all that stuff. That's about all I could do nowadays. Go to the store and come home.

[Laughter] And that's it.

C: So where did you learn how to play handgames?

P: I used to watch them here. In Fourth July ground, they had that camp down here. Big camp, big campground down there, down where they had the—that's where I learn it. Used to watch them people play that handgame all the time. Well, my grandfather, Simon Bean, he always used to play that all the time. I used to watch him when he played and everything, and then started to learn how to—how they do it, learning slow. And then evening comes, they have a round dance, where people round dance out there in the little place out there where they have a round dance all night long, until in the morning. That's when they finally quit dancing. And then during Fourth of July, we have a big celebration here. We had to have a rodeos and stuff down here. We used to go and go watch that. Every year, they used to come go down there to go watch them. Got a lot of people camping down there, I remember. There were tents all the way around that place down there. Now, there's hardly any people at that camp down there. A few, maybe. That's about it. So that's it, now. And then, there's few of those guys play handgame. And still sing round dance songs once in a while, whenever they can get into it, I guess. There's more to it, but I can't think of all of it.

C: I notice you've got your handgame sticks and bones, I guess. That's what they call them?

P: Yeah.

C: Can you explain the game to us? How it's played, and, you know, what the colors mean on the bones and on the sticks?

P: Okay. When the handgame—well, the people choose their, what kind of, they want to get when they play. There's two kinds. One's got this red on that, the other one's got that blue, I guess, what you call it, black or blue. So these is—and then, this one here is what they hide. They hide this, the ones on that other side will guess the white one. This white

ones they guess, this one's the one they don't guess [indicating the striped bones]. So if they would go like this to it, and then... then they'll hide it, and then they'll put it away someplace. And in their hand. And they playing and they'll singing, and they, when they guess, maybe he bet go, went wrong way. And maybe they get the white one, so they'll show it, and then they'll throw one of the stick to you when they missed. Like, put it over here like that. And then they go again. Sometime you get two, they miss two of them. Two of them, and then they'll give you *two* sticks. That's the way it goes. Do that all night long. They play, they sing along, and every few—sometimes they play longer, sometime they get guess right, right at the first song they playing. They'll guess both sides same time, and then sometime they only guess one. One side. And then the, and then they'll throw this back to you, across to where them other guys are at. And then they'll, they going to try to match. Sometimes they'll try to match you with this one here. If you got it on this side, or this side, or whatever side they think it is. And then they'll match it with you. And then you'll hide it again, and you keep it for a while. Pretty soon, they'll show it to you. Okay, *tsa'i* they want it, and then you show it to them. And if they on this side, they'll get you then. But if they're on this side, then they'll miss you. And then they'll give you some more stick back to you. Then you keep going. Maybe you might be lucky, you get three times, you don't get guessed. [Laughter] And then, finally, they'll guess you. Then you throw this back to them, all four of them. And then they going to hide theirs, they going to hide their bones, they call it. And then, you play again for a while, and then a lot of them get warmed up, and then *you* start guessing them. Sometime you'll guess them right away, and sometime you don't either. And then they just go back and forth, until all these [picks up the sticks] goes to one side. And then

you'll win. And the other side will, finally going to stop playing game. And then they'll bet again. Then they would start another one, another song. Then they'll play until whenever they get guessed, or quit playing, or whatever. Get tired. Or they've got to get a rest for a while. Get—drink something, I don't know. [Laughter] Drink something they like to drink, I guess. So that's the way I learned how to play, and then I still play right today. Go to handgames here and there, sometime go to Elko. Play handgame over there. But not really—sometime we don't. Go to Fort Hall, up that way. And we don't do too much in Burns, Oregon, or Warm Springs. We just go to either—oh, family reunion, what do you call that? That's where we go, we're going to go again next months. To go, we'll see them people over there again. So we'll be going that way, I guess, sometime next month. *Ho'aishe* [14:32].

C: So, how many sticks do you have? Well, how many sticks does each team have to guess with?

P: Oh, they got five.

C: Five sticks?

P: Five sticks. Oh, and then, when they get—sometime they'll, they'll give all this to you back, and then you give them three more. Three more stick to—the first round they play, if they missed, if you missed, they'll give you back to you a stick, but if you got them—any one of these, both of them, and then you get your stick back. And then you start singing again. And then they'll try to take it again. If they miss both of them that time, then they'll lose their game. And the game's overwith. So they'll have to start a new game again. Start betting whatever they want to bet, how much they want to bet.

C: So with those two bones, when you were explaining how they hide it, if you're—like, how many people are on your team?

P: Oh, whatever. Well, on a, when they have a team, like maybe three guys to a team. That's the way they play it over there, in Fort Hall. They'll, three guys playing. Maybe about fifty teams, different ones.

C: So that's like in a tournament?

P: Yeah. You have to go for maybe about 2000 or something.

C: Oh. So how do the people bet, or how much do they bet, or how does that work?

P: Mm, when they first started for the tournament like that, well, they pay about \$30. One person paid \$30.

C: Oh, for entry fee?

P: Yeah. Just the \$30 for three of them, what that will pay. Pay for first round. If they win, they keep winning, they'll keep going, but if two or three times they lose, then they're out. They don't play anymore. They keep going all the way around. They all goes round and round. And then for the finally, going to the end, towards the morning, I guess. And then they'll see who's the winner, and then they're the ones that will get all the money, whatever. Whatever the bet went to.

C: So those sticks that you have there, the bones and the guessing sticks. Did you make them yourself, or did you buy them somewhere, or where did you get 'em?

P: Yeah, these I bought, I buy these from... Somebody sold me those that time. I think it was the Kellys or somebody bought that one. Or was it my present, they give me present?

[Laughter]

C: So in the old days, did they actually use bones? Is that why they call them bones?

P: I don't know. These are bones. No, the ones they used to make was made out of willows, I guess. They're round, they're kind of almost same size as these. They cut them up, and then they trim them up like this, or they trim them like the half of it, like, cut and half of it they stain. And these kind all made out of that willows, too. They don't have this kind on it, colors or whatever they got all nowadays. They just trim 'em up, take all the white stuff or whatever on there. When I seen them. I don't really know too much about the old peoples. But, yeah, they used to have, a lot of them, handgames. Them didn't used to have tournament, just the regular people playing games all night long. Singing and whatever. So when I used to hear them, when I was young here. And then finally, I gave it up, go to sleep. [Laughter] Children. In the morning, get up, see what's happening. Yeah. So, yeah, I guess I remember playing. Singing it.

Antelope [**speaks mostly Shoshone from 19:58 to 20:04, I think**]. I just want to sing a round dance song first for, first song, I guess, few times.

[**Begins singing at 20:27**]

[**Concludes singing at 21:12**]

That's a eagle flying up there. In the air, we sing with that. This other one just, just a regular round dance song they sings around here. It's about a willows and stuffs growing, I guess.

[**Begins singing at 21:38**]

[**Concludes singing at 22:24**]

Tease? [More.]

C: *Tease* handgame song [**speaks Shoshone from 22:31 – 22:33**]

P: Oh.

[Begins singing at 22:34]

[23:15]

Lost out. [Laughter]

[Resumes singing at 23:20; Sounds like mostly chanting, few lyrics]

[Concludes singing at 24:01]

To'weyoha [24:02]. [Mountain side.]

C: Yeah. You, do you ever enter in those **handgame** contests?

P: **Handgame** contest. No. Just that one where three to a team.

C: Oh.

P *Tewe yekwite?* [24:23]. During Fourth of July, we used to sing for them for little while.

Only two guys out on a team, though. [Laughter] Me and this, one of them Kelly boys,

[__inaudible at 24:41__] but he was busy doing something else, he didn't show up over

there. There was only two of us that, playing that, sing and that. And let's see...

C: Yeah, you have a favorite song you like to sing?

P: Mm, let's see... Can't think. [Begins humming out a tune to remember it.] No, not really, as I think.

C: [Shoshone from 25:28...

P:

C: ...to 25:37]

P: [Begins singing at 25:40]

[Concludes singing at 26:29]

[Shoshone at 26:30]

C: Mm. So that was a pinenut song?

P: Yeah! [Laughter] Pinenut song, [**Shoshone from 26:36-26:38**].

C: So did you used to go to the Pinenut Festival?

P: Yeah.

C: What all did they do there?

P: Oh, they just dancing, and dance, whatever. Just like they do during the Fourth July. Just sing and dance. Pinenut dance. Well, different singers, different kind of songs. [Hums out the beginning of another song.] [**Shoshone from 27:15 – 27:17**] I'll try another one, I guess. [**Shoshone from 27:25 – 27:27**].

[**Begins singing at 27:29**]

[**Concludes singing at 28:10**]

C: So where did you get your drum? Or did you make your drum?

P: No, the—these was made—my grandkids, I don't know where they got it from. Somebody must've made it. And then they, I did have another one, but I don't know where it—I lost that one. Bigger one. This the smaller one, the other one was a bigger one, too. So, I'll get me another drum sometime. This is too loud for singing, this is good for a handgame! [Laughter] **Thought was a crazy old thing**, just like, to sing the handgame song with the big loud ones. Make a lot of noise. Well... Might as well sing one more round dance song. Owyhee song.

[**Begins singing at 29:27**]

[**Concludes singing at 30:05**]

That's it. Well, I hope you people were learning how to play handgames **for these days kids**, and the round dance songs I singed, and I could sing some more but I can't think of them. Lot of song there is, used to hear, but if I remember, it'll probably come later.

Think about it. They I would say, "I should have sing that when I was getting recorded!"

Well, that's about it. All I can do today. Thank you, and God bless you. Goodbye.

[End of recording]