



# Gracie Begay

*Great Basin Indian Archive*

GBIA 040



**Oral History Interview by**

**Norm Cavanaugh**

**June 27, 2014**

**Wells, NV**



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Interviewee: Gracie Begay

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B: My name is Gracie Begay. I'm a Western Shoshone Te-Moak member, and I'm from Wells, Nevada. I am now seventy-eight years old. Great-great grandfather was named Captain Joe Gilbert, and was given the name by the soldiers when the soldiers removed our descendants from the great flood, which I presume was the great Reese River flood. I do not know the date. The tribe was then moved to Austin, Nevada, where they made their home. Up until we were all moved to Battle Mountain, Nevada, when I was about three years old, I had one brother and one sister. My brother and one sister, that was part of families, were also born in Austin. There was four cousin sisters that was part of the family of Joe Gilbert. This was told to me by Dan Blossom. The families were moved to the land where the new cemetery now stands in Battle Mountain, and they were moved from the Battle Mountain cemetery to the Battle Mountain Indian Colony in 1937, where it is today. I do not know the date. In my lifetime, I knew four Indian ladies that were into their hundred years old. They were Mary Horton, Annie **Dusang**, Aggie Jackson, and my great-grandma, Edie Gilbert. We all grew up together in Battle Mountain with Dan Blossom and cousin Clara Woodson, who is now deceased. The video that you did on me and Clara some time ago should tell some of the rest of the story that I can't. I want to thank you for all your work you've done, Norman. We need somebody like you. This is a picture of the great-great-grandfather, Captain Joe Gilbert. It was taken in Austin, Nevada. And the clothes that he's wearing was given to him by the soldiers when they loaded up our ancestors in wagons and moved them to Austin, Nevada. He was at that time twenty-nine years old, and the soldiers named him Captain Joe Gilbert. And he had a goiter on his neck. He wore a bandanna. And my mom says that's what killed him, was

he choked to death, because they didn't have no doctors that time. But he was twenty-nine years old when this was taken. I've had this picture in my closet for years, and I thought I'd take it out for you to see, so maybe if you can, maybe put it in the museum—if we ever get our museum. Or the Elko one. And let our descendants know that I have it. I grew up in Battle Mountain. We moved there, I think I must have been three years old. And my dad worked at the Hilltop Mine, so they moved us to little **Ricksie** station, over there in Argenta. They had seven cabins there, and they had a schoolhouse. We went to school there in that little cabin, when I was about maybe four, and Margie was maybe seven, and Ed—Edward, my oldest brother, must've been about ten. We went to school there, and then the **Ricksie** station, there used to be a station there, a gas station, right on the top of Emigrant Pass. That was run by Roy Premaux. It's spelled P-R-E-M-A-U-X. Okay, at that time, there was several Indian families living there. There was my great-uncle Alec Gilbert, his daughter Agnes Gilbert and her two daughters; and there was my great-aunt, Inez Leach and Jimmy Leach were there, living there; and then there was Tom and Annie Premo, P-R-E-M-O. They were also there. So I remember stopping there to visit them when we was on our way to Elko, and I was told at one time that that was Indian land there. However, I don't have the proof of that. But there were Indian people living there. Our ancestors were living right there at the Premaux station. And so, that's my earliest childhood. And then at that time, the Bradys were moved from Austin of course this way, they were in Beowawe. That was Gladys Brady and all them. I went to school with Piffero—what's his name, plays the piano? Lita's husband. Lita Stone's husband. He played the piano that time. Then there was Leonard Johnny Jr., and they went to school with us also at **Ricksie's** from Beowawe, where they originated from. I've

got pictures in there that I will dig up later on. But there's a lot of white kids were at school there, too, with us. Now, there's nothing there but the mining things that they have, that that was all where the schools used to be. Then the Premaux station burnt down. Burnt to the ground, and that's when the Premos moved to Elko. But I was going to say that Billy Joaquin from Battle Mountain and Tom Premo were the ones that took the 1940 Census of us in Battle Mountain. And they were—I remember that. Then I was seven years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1942. I was in bed with the mumps, and my dad came in with a package of my first low shoes and my first anklets, to go to school. And I remember that they announced on the radio that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. So that's when they rationed the sugar, the flour, the tires, the gasoline. I don't know what else—oh, shoes. Leather. And then we had to be on food stamps. They had little stamps that we had to go by for rationing. They rationed all our stuff at that time. So then, from there on, we lived in Battle Mountain, went to high school there, and we moved to South Fork in 1951. And I never got to finish high school. I went to my junior year and we moved, so I didn't get to graduate. My brothers went to school in South Fork, but then they had to move into town to finish their grade school, because they didn't have high school in South Fork. So I lived there until I was twenty-one years old, and then my dad and I, we moved to Elko. And from there, I worked at the Elko hospital for thirteen years in the laundry. I knew a lot of people there. Then I met my husband John. We got married in 1960, and we had our children. Now we have our—I lost three, and I've got four left. And there're about ten grandchildren, about thirteen or fourteen great-grandchildren that's living today. And which I'm very proud of, because I can grow up with them—they can grow up and know me, and I'm going to try to do a

history for them, for the kids. They've been after me for a long time to do that. But I'm going to continue on doing that at this time, and when I learn to computer better.

[Laughter] And that's about all. I've been on several councils, as you know, through the years. And now these people, lot of them are gone now, that we worked with, when we went to Washington, D.C. on a caravan. There's only few of us left that went there to Washington, D.C. with the Danns, at the federal court building in Washington, D.C. on their land claims. And we made two trips to Washington, D.C. with the Danns. We got there in Washington, D.C. at night, and the people put us up in one of these old churches, basements. And so we were in there, and Virginia Sanchez's family was with us: Joe, and what's her name? Irene? Her mother's name? Anyway, they started cleaning the place and the cockroaches started jumping up out of the toasters and everything, you know? And boy, by the time the elders got that place cleaned up, there was no sign of any cockroaches! So we all slept there, and the next day, we went out to the federal courthouse. We were all standing outside, got our pictures taken and everything. And we went into the courthouse, and we're all sitting down in there—everybody said prayers outside first. There's Eunice Silva, and **Mae** Hicks and all them were praying outside. We went into the courtroom, and the seven Supreme Court judges were sitting up there. So then, our attorney, who was Tom Luebben, got up and told about our history. And the briefs were about that thick that he had in his hand, and he had given one to each of the Supreme Court judges. They hadn't even looked at it. All they said, well then—they talked and took our testimony, and then we went for lunch, and then we came back in again. We weren't there very long. The justices came back in, and told us, told—John O'Connell. Said "John O'Connell," he said, "Mr. O'Connell, we can't do nothing for you

here, because you Indians took your money, and you have been paid your claims money. Case closed.” And they got up and walked out! That was the end of our, the Dann story for the Supreme Court. And then we traveled back. We had a good time with our elders, and sang, and did everything, you know. I mean, it was just a happy occasion from what it is today, our people. You know, I can’t believe that people are so hateful. Our own people, our own *nanewes*. Young man standing behind, he’s part of us. You, too! And Dan Blossom. Dan is really good about this history. He’s the one that told me about the four cousin-sisters, which all, we are all descendants from. That were scattered, you know? But I would like to know, and have the people, our ancestors, know what’s going on. My grandma has two surviving nieces that lives in Elko, it’s Theresa Lespade and Ethel Gallardo. That’s the only two that’s left. The two nieces that she had in Fort Hall was Edna Hernandez and Lyda Kniffen. So, there’s relatives up there, too, in Fort Hall, that’s part of us here. Also, Jay Joe and Jeanette Joe. Their mother, Elsie Joe, was part of our family, too. So there’s relations, just scattered. But I want them to know where we came from. And this is only way I can do it, is starting from this photograph here. And I can keep it, or I was going to ask you—if we ever get our museum, or if you could put it in your archives—

[Break in recording at 14:07]

C: Can you elaborate on your sisters and brothers?

B: Oh, yeah. My brother Edward is still living in South Fork, he’s eighty-three years old. His name is Edward G. McDade. And my sister Marjorie Harney was married to Corbin Harney for forty-four years when she passed away. And she, a lot of them remember her in Owyhee. At her funeral, Bill what’s-his-name? Thacker. Told how Margie’s garden

was so beautiful, that she was self-educated. She had the best strawberries you ever wanted to see! He said that she used to call us when we were riding by on our horses, “Come have some strawberries,” she’d say, “you guys!” And they’d get off their horses and go test the strawberries. They said she had a green thumb. She had a beautiful garden. They lived in Owyhee for quite some time, and then they moved to Battle Mountain. From there, the history of Corbin as we know him, as our spiritual leader, went on through the years. And she stood beside him, and never interfered with what he’s doing. She just did the cooking, set up the camps and stuff, and was quiet. And so, that was her. And my grandma, of course, died at a hundred and four years old.

C: Who was your grandma?

B: Edie Gilbert. And she’s from Battle Mountain. And my mom was Kristi McDade, and she passed away also, 1974. And the rest of the relatives are all my nieces and nephews, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, and my four brothers. Joe McDade, who is the superintendent of the BIA at Elko; Ernie McDade, he drives the cattle trucks from Gooding, Idaho; and Marv, Marv McDade, he’s still driving the school bus in Elko County. So he hasn’t retired from—and that’s about, that’s all of our family. *Immediate* family.

[Break in recording at 16:37]

B: When the Elko Colony, old Elko Colony was built, I think in 1932, there was a white building there that’s still standing by the Peace Park. It used to house the Superintendent of Indian Affairs agency, and the public health nurse. It belonged to the Elko Colony. That’s where we used to go for our health needs. From there on, we had the doctors come from Owyhee and held clinics over where is now the Diabetes Center, where they used to

hold clinics there for coming from Owyhee. At that time, I was a CHR, a Community Health Representative, and I was hired from the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada at that time. I started transporting patients, and I worked from here and Wells. And I, after the ITCN program went out, Te-Moak took it over. Te-Moak Tribe. And then, Larry Piffero, he was my boss. And I worked for the tribe for thirteen years here in Wells. We had a health board at one time that was run by Don Davis and them from Phoenix. And there was Lillian Garcia, and she was a CHR. She was head of the health board. There was Delores Conklin, she was a CHR with me. And then there was Angie McDade. She was a CHR also. And Whiterock from Owyhee—Alberta Whiterock from Owyhee. We all four CHR'd together for years. And so, I asked Davis several times, I said, "Where's our health board that we had?" He never answers my question, but we need to have this health board back, because there's a lot of problems that's going on with that Indian Health Service clinic up there. Lot of people are complaining, but yet they don't want to say nothing. But if we could establish that again, another health board, we could help our people more. And the health department for thirteen years, I went through a lot of problems here with people that didn't want me, or people that were neglecting me, people didn't want me to help them. They threw papers in my face, they wouldn't open their doors for us, they told stories about us, about me and everything. But I been doing it for thirteen years. And now, I'm still involved with politics and Indian Health Service and everything else. I can't seem to get it out of my system. My kids tell me, "Don't you ever get tired of the politics?" I said, "No, it runs in my blood. I have to keep going with it." And I keep on being involved with things, with programs and stuff. Like, down here at our administration building and stuff, I'm the vice-chairman for the Wells Band Council

here. And we've got a nice administration building there. And I asked Marla, if you have time, when you get done here, if she could give you a tour of our facilities. Because I don't think you've ever seen it. And you'll be surprised of what we have accomplished here for Wells. And so, you can also maybe get some information down from her. She knows a lot. She's from Ely, and she's an old-timer, too. [Laughter] And we talk a lot together. She tells me a lot of things, you know, from Ely, and stuff like that. And some things I know that she knows. The people. The people almost bound together. Even our relatives is, some of them in Duckwater. My daughter was telling me, she says, "How are we related to the Milletts?" Kristi. I had to tell her how my grandma told us how we were related to the Milletts. And over in Duckwater. So, our relatives are all over the place. Now, I mean, there's like a tie, or a chain, that if you put it all through in a line, it would encompass the state of Nevada. Because that's what they said. If the Long Walkers that time, the Sioux? They said if we stretched the line from where they were, clear across the United States, it would encompass all that land over there. All of it. If that was to be the, you know. So there's a lot a lot of history that we don't know about. And it's too bad that we lost a lot of it, but then, there's still enough of it to get along. Said, like me and Clara now, with that video, one of these days I'd like to have a memorial done for her, and share this video of us, and the plaque. I didn't get to attend her funeral, but Kristi still has the plaque you gave us with her name and my name on it. I'd like to present that to Clara's family. And I'm going to talk to Crystal Love and see if she can set something up for us. Then we'll let you know when we have that memorial. Because there's a lot of things Clara knew that she couldn't tell—I mean, she didn't have time to tell on the video. Lot of things. It's too bad that we had to be, had a certain time to tell it, but she

knew a lot. And I think these, her grandchildren, her ancestors have to know all that. About like him. I'm glad he's with you, because he can pick up a lot of this stuff. And he's a good kid. He's always friendly, and with—just like **Amelita** and Dan. **Churchkin**. **Churchkin's** what we called him. And he's grew up with us in Battle Mountain and stuff, and we all knew a lot about things. So. About all, you know. I talked about the health board. It would be nice, like I said, if we could have the health board back again. I used to—when I was in Winnemucca, I used to be contacted by Stewart to take care of the Indian people in Winnemucca. The Winnemucca Indian Colony? I used to set up clinics and stuff. So my CHRing started way before I moved here. The early [19]70s when we were in Winnemucca. And they used to contact me, and I used to set up the clinics for them and everything. But I got taken with the Indian Health Board to Tacoma, Washington. And we had, they had a big ceremony for us over there. And that's where I met Lillian Garcia. She came as the head of the health board for Te-Moak. And she's riding in a nice, fancy car, you know, she got to rent it. And I said, "How do you rate a fancy car? We have to walk!" Urban Indians had to walk, and she had a nice big car she was riding in. "Well," she says, "I'm head of the Indian Health Board in Te-Moak." So they were getting in the elevator, and I said, "Why can't I come and listen in?" She was calling the Te-Moaks together to have a meeting. And I see them get in the elevator, and I said, "Well, why can't I come, too? I'd like to listen. I'm from Elko, too. I'm a Te-Moak." "Well," she says, "you know, you don't live there anymore. You live over on this side, so you can't come here." [Laughter] But that was my first airplane ride I took with the urban group I started, I would say, around the [19]70s. And I was always consulted for health things, you know, setting up programs and things like that. So I'm still also

involved in those things. And I guess that's about all I can say about the health board. That, we would like to have it back, of local people. And Phoenix. If Don Davis is still available; if not, whoever's his place. We need to have that brought back in. We have our summer youth program down here. My granddaughter's part of it, but she's taken off today. But they'll be laying sods down there, and they're working for Barrick. And there's a lot of—we have the Shoshone class, which Marla is in charge of, but we don't have that many young people coming in. They're all adults who comes. She's in charge of that, for the youth to go down to Salt Lake City, isn't it? Or have they already gone? For the Shoshone class. She's in charge of that. And Alicia Aguilera down there, she's got the alcohol and drug program for the Wells Band, and she's working with the kids, a lot of the kids there, on alcohol and drug programs and stuff like that. She has movies and things. I'm glad these videos are being made, because I'm going to have them show it down there. And a lot of these kids are never grown up with that. Like May Holley's kids? They never knew their ancestors. They're going to have a family reunion here this coming July. And May Holley had a lot of history, too, because they used to live in Palisade Canyon. That's where the Indians used to camp, there. They had a big camp there, and that's where they lived with their families before they moved to Battle Mountain. And she said that Palisade, some of the buildings are still standing there. But see, her grandkids and her great-grandkids, they don't know these things, because we never had these things when she was alive. And just what we talked about when we sat together, and that's about it. They would like to know that if we can get maybe Delbert—you know, Delbert Holley, that might know something. And Delbert's only one that's alive right now. Plus, Phyllis is in Twin Falls. But Delbert is the one that would know a

lot about that, too, on May Holley's side of the family. So, it would be nice for the kids to see.

[Break in recording at 28:32]

B: Just glad that my family's here with me. My son Albert, he stays and takes care of me. And my other son, Buzz, he's starting a business here. And my daughter Kristi's working with Barrick. And my granddaughter here is working with the summer youth program for Barrick; she's taking a day off today. And all the rest of my grandkids, my brothers and everybody, I'd like to have them see this video. That's about it, all I have to say.

[Laughter]

[End of recording]