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[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER: *The Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, Our Home Town*, one in a series of programs exploring the values and character of life in small communities, produced by Minnesota Public Radio Station, KCCM, with funds provided by the North Dakota Committee for the Humanities and Public Issues.

Although not a town, the Turtle Mountain Reservation is home for the Pembina band of Chippewa Indians and Indians of other backgrounds. It's a small reservation, 6 by 12 miles, located in an area of hills, woods, and lakes in North Central North Dakota along the Canadian border.

The people of Turtle Mountain are culturally rich because the traditional Indian view of the world is blended with a lusty culture of the Métis or Michif, which was created through the intermarriage of French fur traders and Indian women. Although Turtle Mountain is culturally rich, it suffers from material poverty, unemployment, and alcoholism. We'll look at those problems in the second half of our program.

First, we'll hear about the culture of Turtle Mountain, including the traditional Chippewa religion, the powwow, and the Métis violin dance. And at the same time, we'll become aware of the identity problems faced by people of dual cultures. The interviewer is John Ydstie.

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER: One thing with our tribe, they're blond and blue-eyed so they can pass for white really easy. So they have a hard time visibly convincing anyone else that they're even Indian. And that is a problem. If you look like an Anglo, then it's a hard thing for the Indian person to deal with around here.

We've been raised French. We haven't been raised Indian. We're different from the Sioux. They're all Indian down there. They really know their culture and stuff. And we don't.

Most of our culture is French. Our language is half Cree and half French, half Indian and half French. And so it's pretty confusing. All of our fullbloods have mostly died off. You can count the fullbloods here on one hand. And most other tribes, they can count their halfbreeds on one hand. They're mostly fullbloods except for our tribe.

So it's mostly-- it's created a big identity crisis with a lot of our older, older-- the people, our parents-- mostly our parents. Our grandparents are cool. They're Indian. But our parents and stuff haven't gone through BIA schools and stuff, they really messed up with their identity. And they tried to be white really hard.

SPEAKER: I don't think we've ever felt that we were anything but Indian. And hopefully our grandchildren will carry on with the same feeling because I think this is one of the biggest areas of frustration amongst our people, is trying to be something that they aren't. Of course, if you read the textbooks that we grew up with, there's-- changes are just now coming about-- the Indians were made out to be savages and everything else.

So people would go to school and they'd look at their ancestry and say, jeez, I don't want to be one of those. They were savage. They were uncivilized. They tortured the whites and all this. And actually, they became I think prejudiced against themselves as a result of their educational learning.

Fine, you can see yourself as an Indian, you have a good self-image. So you don't care who knows you're Indian. And you feel great about it. So I think in that respect, it's a state of mind.

Then I heard people say, well, I want to be an Indian. And I'll ask the question, well, what is an Indian? And actually what is an Indian? I see myself as an Indian. Now, some people say, well, you don't think like an Indian. Well, how does an Indian think, because what is an Indian?

SPEAKER:

An Indian does have a different point of view. And as you know, most Indians, they're humble towards one another see? And we share with everything we have. Our groceries, we share, gas and stuff like that. I think it's valuable.

The powwow, the celebrations, the Indians are very patriotic to America. And we are proud of our land. If you have noticed the dancers, there's quite a few of the dancers that have the red, white, and blue. If there's a veteran dancing in the crowd, you'll know he's a veteran because he's wearing red, white, and blue.

Like me, I'm not a veteran but I'm very proud of this land. And I wear a flag when I dance. It hangs on my right side. Essentially, being Indian is being yourself, to try and do the best you could in school or at work or at home.

SPEAKER:

Indian people quit their jobs to go powwowing. And we don't have two weeks out of the year where we go on vacation. That's a white man's trip. When we feel like leaving, we'll go. And that's mostly in the summertime. And we go and we meet our relatives.

And we meet friends at powwows. And we meet Indians from all over the country and stuff there. And it's just-- well, it's in our blood. It's part of our culture. There's a lot of people just can't stay away from powwows no matter what. It's really neat. So that's what they're for. It's just to have a good time and to dance.

The traditional dance now, that's the old way of dancing, the old time way of dancing the men's dance. And I really dig it. And the women's traditionals, where the women just stand in one place and bounce up and down in time to the drumbeat, the fancy dance, that's just come in.

And when I first saw it, the women's fancy dance, I was really shocked because-- and there's a lot of old people around here, too. A lot of them, they'll say, we never danced like that. That's shameful, and stuff like that because it really looked like a boogaloo almost.

It's a lot of fun. And really, like I say, it gets in your blood. But the fancy dance is something new. And it's something that older Indians right now, the more traditional Indians, really frown upon.

The men, there's and away they go down. They're supposed to be telling a story with their dance. A lot of that meaning is lost. And I've never had anyone explain that to me. I've just had it explained by an old Indian woman that that's what they do, is tell a story with their dance.

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER: The Chippewa religion, they had this what they call Medieval Society. Then they had-- they also had another religion, what they call the Bear Sweathouse religion. And they also had another religion, what they call the Smokehouse, Smoke Teepee religion. And also, they had the Sun Dance religion.

Now, the Sun Dance religion would take part on a dawn, early in spring, this early in the summer in June. Now, this year was-- the family people would promise god that they fulfill in good through torture, and sacrifice themselves and torture-- and then through fasting, different things for the hardship that they go through, the healing and so forth. This was the Sundance.

And they worshiped different gods, many different gods-- stone and the moon and the sun and stars, everything just about. They could name many gods. They had a great respect and what I mean, real respect.

And then the Medieval Society worship was practiced medicine, bad medicines. They were exorcised bad medicines, which is what they call today-- white man calls this witchcraft, where witchcraft was practiced. Powerful medicine, powerful witchcraft, I believe it falls in the same line like seances and things like that, comes about in that same category.

And the Bear Sweathouse also was a purifying-- purifying the body and also worship. And here, there was worship the Bear God. The Bear God was worshipped. That was a real torture. It was a real torture.

They used stones, so many stones, about 80 stones. And it was covered up, made like a hot pot, 8-foot long and about 4 to 5-feet wide, about 3 feet, 3 and 1/2 feet high. It was covered up good and tight. You couldn't get out until it was all over with.

You just go in there just the shorts and stand all the heat in there. I suppose the heat must have been in there close to 300 because I almost cooked a lot of times in there.

And these other ones was the same. They'd sing all night what they call the smokehouse. They'd sing all night. And they'd smoke there. And they talk to god. And they sing different types of worship songs, different spirits-- calling and talking to different spirits. This was another worship. So these are the worships that Chippewa that they had here in the Turtle Mountains.

SPEAKER: So Mother Earth was always given a present. If you took a root or anything from the ground, your mother, you gave a present in return, you see, because out of the Earth, your body came. That's the Indian belief.

And then they worshiped the sun. And the sun was worshiped because without the sun, there would be no life. So it was like a father-mother arrangement. Without either one, there would be no Indian. There would be no animal. The sun was the giver of life. And the mother was the womb, the Earth.

SPEAKER: I was just starting to realize that how beautiful the Indian person was in the old days. They're just getting acquainted with some of the heroes of the various Indian tribes. No person is 100% whatever. All Indian ideals were Indian ideals. They were something that a person wanted to live by to the best of his ability.

I don't need to live in a tepee to understand or to try to be a better person, OK? My idea of being Indian is being a better person. I guess one of the things that I personally, as a person of dual cultures, has had to try to accept both sides of himself as, I'm OK.

I don't give a damn what anybody says. But I have to feel OK about myself. If I'm part white and I'm part Indian, I have to accept those. And I don't know that there is anywhere where people live Indian to what my understanding of Indian is because I think Indian was not a poor person.

He was not a confused person. He was in tune with his environment. He was in tune with nature. He was a beautiful person.

JOHN YDSTIE: Do you think that those Indian traditions, the values, and the view of the world that the old Indians had are valuable to our society as a whole?

SPEAKER: I think they would. You just look at pollution, your environment, and how the dollar can make people totally disregard what goes on with your ecology, with the land itself, your water, how they pollute-- pollute the air, pollute the streams, and tear up the land by strip mining and so forth. I think if they had some of these close ties with nature that Indian people had, they would think twice.

SPEAKER: I wish we could go back to the beliefs and the traditions of our early ancestors because they practiced things that I don't think any of us could practice today, because we are too selfish. We are too society-orientated, I guess. And we could never be like they were, make the sacrifices that they did.

They weren't concerned about keeping up with the Joneses. But they were concerned about sharing with someone who had less. They had a great respect for all life. They didn't damn the whites or damn the Blacks or damn anybody. Everything had life and everything should be cherished because it had life.

It's kind of funny. The Indian practiced some of the greatest Christianity and perhaps were the founders of communism in as much as they shared everything. And we were called pagans for it. So we had white clergy come in and tell us what it was all about. And we lost something much more valuable in the process.

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

JOHN YDSTIE: In the Turtle Mountains, there's also a mesh of culture. Are they separate cultures or is it kind of all mixed?

SPEAKER: Oh, the Métis culture is quite different. It's from the French-Canadian side. It started back in the 1800s when the French trappers came over. And they met the Indian woman. And they married. And that made a métis, a half breed.

And they are different. I think the Métis culture in this reservation, they have the tendency to go out and get an education. I think that's got a tremendous influence in this Turtle Mountain Reservation.

The Métis culture have what they call a violin dance, square dance and stuff. The majority of people living in this reservation know how to play an instrument of some kind.

[UPBEAT MUSIC]

SPEAKER: The people are generally jolly people. They're fun people. They like to have fun and are all easy to laugh. I'm sure you've noticed that everybody ready to-- everything's funny. They can have a ball.

And yet they can get mad so easily. I don't know if that comes from the French or what. [LAUGHS] Probably. They don't hold their emotions. If they're mad, you'll know it. And if they're happy, you'll know it. This is just the way that people are on here.

SPEAKER: Until recently, it wasn't preferred to be Indian. And this affected many of our people because many of them are mixed blood. Many of them are half Indian and half French. Very few of them are half Anglo.

I don't include French as Anglos because they're a little darker skinned anyway. And that's one reason why the French were so acceptable to our tribe back 200 years ago, is because they were different than the white settlers and other people that were moving West.

So they moved right into our society. And they instead of telling the Indian people that they were doing things wrong, that they should do it this way, the French adapted the Indian lifestyle. And they married the Indian women.

And as time went on, the Michif was-- Michif culture was formed. But we were still Indian.

SPEAKER: It was this influence from the other society that brought in a little more competitiveness, a little less clinging to nature, a little lighter skin color, a little more on the Michif part, realizing that maybe they can fool themselves and fool the fullbloods and fool the white people and try to be white.

And it didn't work. And it isn't going to work because our people can still go off the Reservation and be called by white people dirty Indians or crooks, cheats, sneaks, and lies, all that stuff. And I think that's what separated the Michif, the mixed blood, from the fullblood, and that they were for a long time. Many of them thought they could be white

SPEAKER: Just about every night of the week, you could go to a dance. I don't care what it was.

SPEAKER: To keep having dances, they'd have what they called a bouquet dance. And they'd bake a cake and they'd have a bouquet.

SPEAKER: Whoever put the dance on would just walk around in there. And all of a sudden, you'd be sitting there. And you-- they'd hand it to you. And it was up to you to put the next dance on. So I really used to have fun in those dances. It used to be a lot of fun.

Square dancing was a big thing-- square dancing, waltzes, foxtrots, two steps. And of course, our traditional Red River Jig was all everybody had to see who was the best. I'd step de-- the other one but-- and of course, that part of it, still going on.

[GUITAR STRUMMING]

SPEAKER: One of the things on the old time fiddle players, they used to do around here, they used to use their feet a lot when they play. This was their background for their music. And a lot of these old timers are still-- they had monster feet. And in fact, a lot of the guys, hell, their feet sound better than their fiddle playing.

[LAUGHTER]

I'll show you an example what it is when you get the feet going on.

[UPBEAT STRUMMING]

[RHYTHMIC STOMPING]

[LAUGHTER]

SPEAKER: The Turtle Mountains, how they got the name, how they got her name, see, they figure the east part is the tail. They named that [NON-ENGLISH] in Chippeway. And out west, towards the north-- northwest, [INAUDIBLE], they called it [NON-ENGLISH]. That means the head part.

So the rest of it, the body, they called it turtle. That's how it got it, Turtle Mountain's name.

SPEAKER: They have changed names at everything here. Now like that Belcourt-- that creek that runs through Belcourt there, well, they used to call that a long Le Grande Coulée in French. That's a Grand Coulee. And now, today, it's marked on the map as Ox Creek.

SPEAKER: [LAUGHS]

SPEAKER: And the creek of ours here in Dunseith, they call it the Allen Creek. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Things that they call it. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] That's Oak Creek. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Oak Creek.

SPEAKER: All Indians lived this reservation, they always come back here because they-- we're born and raised here. This is our home. And we got no place else to go.

They send us out on relocation. We go up there, different places. We get good jobs. We leave our jobs. We're lonesome for our people.

JOHN YDSTIE: Did you ever relocate? Did you ever go anywhere?

SPEAKER: Oh, yeah. I went to San Francisco. I stayed there, Oh, about a year. I got lonesome for my friends. You go in a city like that and you put an Indian in the city-- go in a bar there, they all look at you go in the bar. And then they laugh at you. So that's why I came home. And I just stayed there one year.

SPEAKER: I guess the advantages for like staying in one place for me would be that my children would also have roots. I think of some of my own relations who are living in cities and so forth, where the parents themselves move around. I often wonder, where are these kids going to end up when they get old, for example?

They've had no ties to this reservation. Their parents themselves haven't had any ties to any one community. The kids are scattered throughout the 50 states. Where will they go to nest, so to speak? I don't know.

Myself, I feel like when my family is grown, I think that I should be the anchor for that family and should offer them one place to return to feel comfortable, to feel that they belong to. And I know if I had moved to Fort Yates and my parents had moved off to California, I think this would have been really a big hardship on me because I always felt that Belcourt was my home.

And if I wouldn't have had parents or if I wouldn't have had something to return to here, like the roots that they did give us by letting us live here and bringing us up on the reservation, that I would have really been missing out on something. It's not really describable.

It's something within. And I don't really know how you pull those feelings into words. But it's I guess a sense of belonging. When you drive over those hills, like from Fort Yates, the first thing you'd see was the landscaping. You'd feel good about that. So I imagine it's a combination of both.

Like I say, family, friends, and so forth, that's probably the biggest factor. But still, it has to be the place. Like the land where we live now, my mother was raised on this piece of land. And it was given to her by her father. And now we're all scattered there. So I imagine there are some ties to the place itself.

I know one of the feelings that we've expressed as a group, as a family, was that we hope that our little spot of land would always remain with one of the family, with one of the kids, probably one of the grandchildren, and that they in turn would pass it on.

And how nice it would be, say, in a couple hundred years, if there's still a world, that they could look back and just tie us all back into that one little plot of land.

SPEAKER: I just saw the crabapples and the choke cherries and the strawberries and the raspberries and all the other stuff that you can find in the woods around this place. But I'd often missed the place itself because we lived here almost all of our lives.

JOHN YDSTIE: Do you have some secret places out in the woods here that no one knows about?

SPEAKER: I've got a few little camps in the woods out maybe. There's one up on the hill up there.

SPEAKER: Mm-hmm?

SPEAKER: Yeah. There's one just across the road. But they dozed it down to make a yard. Got a bunch of other ones around. There was one up there in the woods and one down in the pasture.

[CHIRPING]

Not all the cats are afraid of it.

SPEAKER: [NON-ENGLISH]

JOHN YDSTIE: That's good.

SPEAKER: [INAUDIBLE].

JOHN YDSTIE: What kind of chicks are they?

SPEAKER: I don't know.

SPEAKER: They're crossbreeds.

JOHN YDSTIE: Does that chick mind if you hold them?

SPEAKER: Well, they don't like to be holding it.

[WINGS FLUTTERING]

JOHN YDSTIE: [CHUCKLES]

SPEAKER: But the first thing I remember about growing up here on the reservation, we were living on a tribal farm out north. I'd say it's about 5 miles north of Belcourt. And the farm itself was not anything big. We had maybe 20-- 20, 30 head of cattle, a few horses, a few pigs, a few chickens.

And I remember helping with the family taking care of the farm. And it was kind of a simple free life, I guess you'd say. Everybody was in the same boat. It seemed that we were all struggling.

And my dad sold wood in exchange for groceries in the store, from people who were burning wood and were getting groceries in a store. I guess it must have been a welfare program or something, where they had something similar to food stamps because I remember he used to bring home these little stamp books.

JOHN YDSTIE: Did you work pretty hard as a little girl then, out in the farm?

SPEAKER: Well, it was a combination of things. I guess we didn't really look at it as work because we kind of grew up with it. It was something we accepted. I know I was milking cows at the age of 5. And my brothers really helped my dad take care of the whole place.

There were six of us children in the family. And we all had something to do. I know we used to go to school up here at St. Ann's. And the bus used to let us off on this-- about a mile from home. And we used to run over the hills.

And we'd get home from school, and we knew we had to get them cows to the barn by 4:00 or 5 o'clock. So we'd have a quick lunch of whatever was there. And we would head off into the woods and look for the cattle and bring them in and milk them, feed the pigs and the calves, and get the cows back out to the pasture.

I can remember when we used to trap-- and I don't remember how much we used to make. But we used to trap muskrats. And it seemed that in our area where we lived right in that little community, we used to pride ourselves with who could come up with a good mink dog because mink were worth about, oh, I suppose 10, 15 times more than a muskrat.

But we'd go out and check traps with my dad out on these little lakes all around where we lived. And then we would bring them home. And in our living room, we would skin all these muskrats and whatever else we came up with. And Dad used to sell them in Rolla somewhere.

But that was another thing that we really get a big charge out of when we sit around now and talk about the-- what you'd call the good old days because Mom said, I can just imagine what we must have smelled like.

[LAUGHS]

JOHN YDSTIE: In some other communities I've been at, I've asked people questions about family and how important a unit that is to the life of the community. Is it important here in Belcourt?

SPEAKER: The family ties here on this reservation I think are as strong as you'll find them anywhere. Families are very close. Families are big with the intermarriage especially. And where they get big, you'll find people calling themselves cousin to this guy and cousin to that guy.

He's my uncle, when actually there's no close blood relationship. But they still identify as family I guess because of the clan relationship, you might say.

My parents and there are three girls in a family. Of three girls, all live on the same 80 acres.

JOHN YDSTIE: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: Right. And you can look over the hills and see any one of us walking over to my mother's any time of the day. So I guess you'd say we're real close.

JOHN YDSTIE: What do you think are the advantages of that kind of a close family life?

SPEAKER: I guess it bring-- it comes about a lot through our little crisis that we have. And we always have somebody to turn to. And it's not just a husband or a wife, although we do have that relationship to turn to. But we have a lot more people to involve if we need something or if we feel good about something.

There's always somebody to either rejoice with or be sad with, whatever it might be. But it's kind of a sharing thing between us.

JOHN YDSTIE: Do you have a poem, right, about your mother?

SPEAKER: Yeah.

JOHN YDSTIE: Would you read that for me now?

[CLATTERING]

SPEAKER: She has given me life. And the world, she has brought to me. Her footsteps are mine to follow. And her love, I cherish. For to have love from someone as special as her, is to have everything I ever possibly wanted.

JOHN YDSTIE: Thank you.

SPEAKER: You're listening to a program titled *Our Hometown: The Turtle Mountain Indian, Reservation*, one in a series of programs exploring the values, concerns, and character of life in rural communities. As is the case on too many Indian reservations, the people of Turtle Mountain suffer from poverty, racism, unemployment, and alcoholism.

Next, the residents of the reservation talk about these problems and the possible solutions. We begin as Norbert Davis reflects on the hard times of his boyhood, a heritage shared by many older Indian people.

NORBERT DAVIS: When I was a boy, I was a boy about 7 years old when I was allowed to go to school with my older sisters and brothers just for the sake of that noon lunch [LAUGHS] for times were hard here. So we'd go to school and all we used to get was a fried salt pork. And from that grease, they'd make a gravy.

And they'd bake a Indian bread, what they called la galette. That's French. Then they'd ask, who wants to drink some tea? There was no coffee in them days. And the tea, the government tea had an awful taste so we-- most of us drank water.

SPEAKER: It was pretty hard times when you were young?

NORBERT

I'll say they were. The Indians didn't have anything. When they were put on this reservation here, they had drove what horses they had, probably one horse and a Red River cart, probably a team on an old wagon. And after we've been here for a few years, our horses were getting just that old and weak that if they should die off, we didn't have no money to buy another horse.

DAVIS:

And the laws were so strict. Like I said about cutting the timber, we had to come-- they had to come to the agent and get permission to cut so many logs for our shack and so many poles for the roof. And there was no way to make a living.

I remember one time, I was just a little kid, the people all got together. And they called up a meeting with our agent. There was no superintendent them days. It was an army man, was put here in charge of the reservation. So they had a meeting with him and asked him if they could clear some land so they could break it up and for a garden.

So they-- he wrote to Washington. And the answer was no. If they did allow that, the people would start cutting a lot of good timber down. He says to try to find an open space somewhere where you could make your garden.

We used to have to go out and dig Seneca roots. They call them snakeroots for short. That's how the people had make a living. Oh, we had some awful hard times. I know there's a lot of people who would be sitting around at home there and nothing to eat.

And they used to give a ration afterwards, probably about 3 or 4 pounds of flour and probably 1 pound of salt pork and probably half a cup of tea. That's every two weeks, twice a month is when they were given, that ration. And that wouldn't last for a family.

JOHN YDSTIE: What do you think are some of the greatest needs for this community at the present time?

SPEAKER: Meaningful employment. I know we've got to bring in factories, if that's at all possible. But it's pretty tough in this particular area, being we're way the outskirts of America. We're next-door neighbor to Canada.

SPEAKER: I've worked with this prior to coming here as a superintendent. And I don't know how we're going to get people or industry or anything of that nature to come in here and provide jobs. So right now, we have two smaller plants. We have our jewel bearing plant at Rolla that employs several of our Indian people there.

And we also have [INAUDIBLE] right here on the reservation, which employs nearly a hundred people also. And this one is one that could be expanded, might be expanded, I don't know. But to me, we need more of this because those people work. And they earn. Then they're off our general assistance rolls.

And of course, we have a number of our people working at the state sanatorium. And some those that could find employment within a radius of, say, of 150 miles from here are trying to work and commuting. And I don't-- I can't-- I have no answer in how to correct this.

And I don't see it improving for the simple reason we're going to have more young people coming up. That means more employment required.

SPEAKER: There are attitudes in the surrounding communities. People have certain stereotypes about those families on. Welfare They say, well, they are laying around. They're lazy.

SPEAKER: They're out there earning a quick buck if they would put their back to it. But you tell me how many jobs are listed for those that could get it. I've been trying to get a job for the last three years, I can't even get a job. And I certainly won't pick up a bedpan in the hospital and carry someone's crap around because I'm above that.

SPEAKER: OK. For instance, I have cases. And I've got-- I don't know how many cases I have. But let's just take Jones because I don't have a right to release that information.

Mr. Jones to me was told that he had been on welfare since 1957. And he was shiftless. And he was a bootlegger. But I did the research on Mr. Jones. When he was 11 years old and he was building a log house, a log fell on him. He had a very severe back injury and kidney injury.

All these years, he'd been without medication. So when he got around 50, he became lame because-- with this old injury without any medication. And the reason why I know he was injured in 1957 is because Dr. Viret, an old doctor in Rolla, his father took him there one day when he couldn't walk.

And it was from this spinal injury, kidney injury. And he said in big complications, there is no way that man could work, no way. So I wouldn't call him shiftless.

You can't expect a baby two-months old to work. You can't expect a blind man to work. You can't expect a cripple to work. When we speak of welfare, a lot of people think welfare is the shiftless ones. For heaven's sakes, Nixon collected a welfare check. What's wrong with him?

SPEAKER: It's hard for us to understand why people would have these stereotypes or these hang-ups about us. When we see ourselves struggling day by day to survive, you might say-- I know that there are a lot of people who don't feel that anything is going on these reservations, that we're all sitting back, waiting for a monthly check and thanking the big great white father for sending it, and that all we do is go to powwows and rodeos and spend our welfare checks in bars and so forth.

I think that before they would stereotype an Indian person, I think that they ought to spend some time on a reservation, that they ought to come in and meet us on a one to one and see what we're actually doing.

SPEAKER: I don't know that you need to deny the fact that some people are on welfare. People are on welfare. There's no denying that fact. And there's no denying the fact that people are different. Many, many people have an attitude that they don't want to work.

I had that attitude. And I still have it. I really don't care for work. I think it's just something I have to do. And anyway, there are people out here in this community whose lifestyle is to live on welfare, to drink, to have fun, to shack up, you want to call it that. That's the way they live.

And it's a small portion of the community that lives that way. But who can change the stereotypes that we have for whites? I've got a concept of a white man. I am aware that he is a shrewd businessman, and he's going to make-- he's going to make his profit. And what is profit to me? Like I mentioned once before, profit is getting something for nothing.

SPEAKER: About two weeks ago, we had a Title I committee meeting at the school. And one of the purposes was to review applications for teacher aide positions. Now, these would be all paraprofessional. There were about 50 applications for three jobs. I think that can give you the best idea of the attitude there is toward work. So people do want to work if the jobs are here, you'd see a lot more people working.

JOHN YDSTIE: I talked to one man who said he saw the BIA funds dwindling and federal funds to the tribe dwindling. Do you see that in the future? And do you think that the Reservation is going to be ready to support its population?

SPEAKER: Right now, we're so dependent on federal programs. I don't even like to think that federal programs would end. I think of the number of years that we've had people on welfare. And now we're seeing some of these families able to support their children because they were able to get a job on a federal program.

I don't know if the white society realizes what we went through on reservations for a hundred years. When we were placed on reservations, we were more or less robbed of our leadership. We were robbed of our chiefs. Our governing bodies were changed.

We were put on handouts. We couldn't hunt and we saw people just dwindle down into I guess to nothing, where they waited for nothing but that handout whenever it came. We also were not introduced to the 8:00 to 5:00 system.

For years after that, I know they talk about the depression and the CC camps. And I've heard people on the reservation here that say that that was the best thing that ever happened for Indians because it was the first chance that Indians got to work.

And one of the most important things, I feel involving the 8:00 to 5:00 system is the-- not only the fact that the person does become introduced to the world of work, but say that you've got a family man who has children. And these children see their father going to work in the morning and fitting into that 8:00 to 5:00 system.

There's a certain amount of pride there. But if you see-- if children see a father who has to accept welfare, who's dissatisfied, and who's always around the house grouchy and crabby because there's never enough money, enough food, a mother who usually has to go into the Welfare Office to ask for more funds, to ask for clothing allowances, and so forth.

You rob this family of their pride. The children I think are affected emotionally by this.

SPEAKER: But the worst of all now that I know for sure, when the woman started to work, that's when the kids start to go wild, real wild, too. And they do damage to the neighbors, to anybody. That I'm all sitting home, I can't take a chance to go outside. You don't know what they're going to do, run over me or do something. That's one thing that I like [INAUDIBLE] most of all. That's my reason.

JOHN YDSTIE: Just because a woman didn't stay home and raise her kids now, is that the problem?

SPEAKER: Yeah. Sure, they don't stay home. They really go in a bar or they're out someplace else or working, pretending working. And there are big fat guys laying around, doing work, and make a living for their family.

Or these women, they have babies without a husband. And another fat man goes and live there, not married, nothing. If something comes up, the man takes off. That woman is getting checks. That's one reason.

I wish I would run the law for about five years. You'd see all these [INAUDIBLE]. They'd behave themselves. And all those that has babies that work for their living, I wouldn't give them anything.

JOHN YDSTIE: You've dealt, for the last few years now, with the alcoholism problem here on the reservation. Could you tell us a bit about the extent of that problem and why there is that problem here?

SPEAKER: Well, from comments throughout this community, again is lack of employment, nothing to do. And the Indian people are a proud people. And I guess a woman can get a job easier than a man can.

For instance, [INAUDIBLE] down here, most of them are women. And the laughing part about that is from the non-Indian people laughing at the Indian male about the Indian male parking around [INAUDIBLE] on check day, picking up their wife and their paycheck and going out and having a celebration, and boozing it up.

And this really hurts the male population. And really it's not their fault if they can't get a job. But they have to survive somehow.

JOHN YDSTIE: Is there a higher rate of alcoholism in this community than a normal community?

SPEAKER: Oh, definitely, definitely. This reservation is only 6 by 12. And there are-- within the reservation, there are approximately 7,500 people. A survey was taking in this particular community about two years ago. And they figure about 80% of the population in this area have alcohol problems.

You take one alcoholic will affect anywhere from 10 to 13 people. And being alcoholism is a family problem. It will affect the whole family.

SPEAKER: I think there is maybe a smaller portion of true alcoholics in this community, who are anytime they leave here drift off into skid row in the cities. There are a few of these kind of guys. I consider these guys the true alcoholics on the reservation. I think most of the people here who are problem drinkers are drinkers because of the social system and just become accustomed to that way of life.

SPEAKER: We know what actually our problem are. And only I-- ourselves can do it. We don't need the outsiders to try to dictate to tell us how to do it because we're aware of what we need. But our ideas, they try to shift them all over. Turn them all around, you see, and to make it look like something else where what we-- we know exactly what we want and how we should go about it.

SPEAKER: The Bureau of Indian Affairs is one outside group that's in here just to fatten their own pocket. They're not here to help the people. They want to-- it seems to, me they want to keep the situation as it is.

They don't want the tribe or the people to do anything for themselves. They all started looking at you like you're a subversive group or something. When you try to do something like our group now, we had more law and order investigation in our group than anybody figured we were communists or something. I don't know.

SPEAKER: In other words, they figure that they don't want the Indian do their own thinking. Let's be realistic. Indians are getting a little smarter nowadays. And if they-- naturally, if they start doing their own thinking, there goes BIA. We don't need them, you see. And they're not about to see that happen.

SPEAKER: Well, I think if the Bureau serves its function as it's supposed to serve it, in our opinion, their role is as technical advisors, as someone providing guidance, not actually a group of dictators, which we see them as. And then again, in this letting the tribes take over many of the federal programs, that's kind of a big joke around here because they're willing to let you take over as long as it's set up to fail. If it's going to succeed, then that's something else.

JOHN YDSTIE: You've worked in the BIA here for while. You've been superintendent for about three years now, right, going on four years? What's the purpose of the BIA on an Indian reservation?

SPEAKER: That role is changing every year. Right now, we're more of a service unit, service-- providing service and technical service to the people that we serve. And for instance, years ago, the superintendent had a lot of authority, had a lot of-- well, he was the man that made the decisions on the reservation.

Today, we're slowly breaking away from that. We feel that the Indian people themselves should be making the decisions. And we should be putting ourselves in a position to help them every way we can, to help them make the right decision.

SPEAKER: If you're going to live here, you've got to have your feet on the ground. And you're going to be faced with a lot of problems, a lot of hurts. I don't think this community is any different than any other community, where you have a pocket of poverty.

But I do feel that living here and trying to work in this area has made us all better people because we've been faced with a lot more problems than people perhaps of a middle or upper-middle class society's ever been faced with. We know what it feels to hurt, to go without, and to be unemployed. And I think we can recognize these as some of the symptoms that the people are faced with.

And we are not critical of the people like we would be if we had grown up on the outside in a middle class society. I think we have more feelings for the people.

SPEAKER: I think it's a wonderful place to learn about life. I think the varied cultures has contributed a lot. If you want to be personal about it, to my personal growth, my personal knowledge about people would have been different if I'd have lived in wherever, Chicago. I might never have survived maybe.

People accept me. And when I say accept me, I say it with a sense of gratitude because there's plenty to accept. I've been an alcoholic. I've been a convict. I've been many, many things.

And the community is aware. And they've accepted the fact that a person can make mistakes, can live a different kind of life. I was sober I think six months. And the guy said, hey, you're a good fella. How about going to work for me? And I said, crazy.

I'm like, I'm crazy-- I'm not crazy about work. But I know I need to. OK, I'll take it. And I think that's-- the thing I appreciated most about this community was the fact that they didn't say to me, you're an ex-convict so you can't work. Or you're an ex-drunk, I don't want you around.

SPEAKER: I'm a family of 10. And I'm the only one that's nuts that's back here. So evidently, I come back for some reason. But I am in business, back in business again. And tell you the truth, I really enjoy it because I live a day at the time and it's just problems every day. But I seem to survive through them.

Some days I'd like to put my hat on and walk down the State Highway and keep walking. But I'm still here. So I guess I'm a glutton for punishment. [LAUGHS]

SPEAKER: After I graduate, I'm going to UND. They got this one program INMED. It's called Indians Into Medicine. And I'm going on that. And I plan to get my-- go into a field of medicine and then come back and work around here.

JOHN YDSTIE: Why would you want to come back?

SPEAKER: Well, mostly, I like this place. I grew up for-- since-- I've been here since 1961, living here. And I just like the land. I like the people. And I just want to work here. I want to stay here.

JOHN YDSTIE: You going to come back and live in this community, do you think?

SPEAKER: No way. I'll be living someplace else.

JOHN YDSTIE: Why? Why not come back?

SPEAKER: Because nothing to do around here.

JOHN YDSTIE: How about you, Joe? What are you going to do when you get out of school?

SPEAKER: Go to the Marines.

JOHN YDSTIE: And then?

SPEAKER: Come back, find myself a Squaw so I can settle down. I'll come live off welfare if I can't find a job.

JOHN YDSTIE: Would you guys miss Belcourt if you had to live somewhere else?

SPEAKER: No, no, no way.

JOHN YDSTIE: Why not?

SPEAKER: Because who likes to live in the dumps?

[LAUGHTER]

GROUP: [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER: I'm right here in the Turtle Mountains. I was born here. And I lived here all my life. And I love it. I like it. I want to live here just about all my life. I want my kids to grow up here the way I grew up here, too. I want to keep letting the generations go on and on in Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation.

JOHN YDSTIE: What do you see for a future here?

SPEAKER: Well, I think it's going to change. So I really can't see what's going to be in the future. But it's changing now. And it'll keep on changing probably for the better.

GROUP: [NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

SPEAKER:

You've been listening to a program titled *Our Hometown: The Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation*, one in a series exploring the values and character of life in rural communities. It's produced by Minnesota Public Radio station, KCCM, with funds from the North Dakota Committee for the Humanities and Public Issues.

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