

## Interview with Jennifer Bear Eagle

Joyzelle: This is Joyzelle Godfrey. I'm here doing an interview with Jennifer Bear Eagle who is a law student here at the University of Nebraska. The reason that I wanted to have, I invited, or asked, begged, Jennifer to do the interview is because she has such a varied background. She comes from the reservation. She came here to go to college. She worked here at the University. She's on the Board of Directors for the Indian Center and she is now a law student. So.

Okay, Jennifer. Uh, I guess the first thing, let's go back, not to when you were born in a tipi on the prairie but. (laughter) We don't need to go that far back. (laughter) But how about uh, where did you graduate from high school?

Jennifer: I graduated from high school actually in Nebraska. I graduated from Gordon High in Gordon, Nebraska. Gordon is a small town, um, I guess about fifteen miles from the South Dakota border so, pretty close to the Reservation. Um, I went to high school there. My mom... I was born, to go back to when I was born. I was born on the reservation and I grew up, I grew up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Wounded Knee. And my mom moved us off the reservation about when I was, right before, before I started high school. So I went to high school in a small, very small town, in Gordon, Gordon, Nebraska. And graduated from high school in Gordon.

Joyzelle: What was your high school experience like?

Jennifer: High school, high school was not, uh, not very good. Um, the experience wasn't, wasn't very good. Gordon is a... Like I said it's a small town and it has a lot of characteristics that a lot of "border towns," towns that are close to the reservation, towns that have, are close to I guess any reservation and have a large white population and um... Because they're situated next to the reservation a lot of, ah, people from the reservation come and do business there and it's, ah, racial tensions are usually pretty high in these types of town. And, um, it's weird. It's a weird relationship between the people that live in these small towns and people who actually run the economy of the towns. Which would be people from the reservations who come and fuel the economy by spending money there. So, um, it wasn't, it wasn't a great experience because, ah, a place like Gordon, Gordon in particular has a pretty sad history with native people. Um, there were not a lot of Indians who lived in Gordon, but there were some and... um. The town was kind of divided up so you know like Indians would live on one part of town and you know the white, whites would live on the other. And, um, really didn't, didn't really interact with each other despite it being a really, really, really small town less than 2000 people. Um, and, so ah, Indians kind of had a bad reputation in town because those who lived there were fairly, fairly poor. And so I think maybe the white population didn't think much of us. Um, When I was in, when I was in high school I started out, um, school there with about four or five other Indians in

my class. And I was the only one that ended up graduating from high school. Everybody else kind of dropped out through out, um, ah, over, over the course of the, you know, the four years. That was actually pretty common and actually pretty rare for one of us to graduate from high school. So it wasn't, wasn't a great experience because so many people had low expectations, ah, of, you know, what, if you're, you know, "Indian," if you're from the reservation, well not even if you're from the reservation. Just if you're Indian you're probably not going to succeed is what, how a lot of people felt. So, my high school experience wasn't, wasn't great but despite it all I had strong support from, you know, my family, very close knit family. So, you know, I made it through and maybe even out of, out of spite I made it through.  
(laughter)

Joyzelle: You said most, the, well, the other Indian students who started dropped out. You were the only one who made it through. What about your white classmates? Did they all make it, or did they drop out as well?

Jennifer: Ah, mostly they all made it. Maybe one person dropped, um, what happened is that, you know, they'd move away and that's probably one of the few reasons that one of them wouldn't graduate from high school. But pretty much everybody graduated from high school. All the white classmates did. Ah, maybe one or two dropped out but mostly it was people moving away. And I don't know there just tended to be an expectation that if you were Native you wouldn't succeed. And I think that's, that's horrible, that's terrible. Why wouldn't you, why wouldn't you succeed just because, you know, you're... Of course you're going to succeed, why wouldn't you. But I don't know, I think just the attitude of the teachers and the town in general probably made it really, really difficult. Because if you have that kind of negative expectation of, of you, you, I guess it turns out that some people fulfill that which is unfortunate.

Joyzelle: When you came to, ah, Lincoln what was the reason that you came here?

Jennifer: I came to Lincoln to, to go to school at the University of Nebraska. Um, I had, I wasn't, I didn't come here as a freshman, as a college freshman. I actually originally um, went to a smaller school before I transfer here. Um, I wanted to go to someplace big. And to me, Lincoln seemed big, and seemed huge, seemed like, ah. I guess, if you come from a small community like Gordon or anywhere else in Nebraska when you think of Lincoln you think that's the big city. Ah, having lived here now I realize that it's not really, you know, a giant metropolitan. But, I've always thought of it as, as a big city. And, um, I wanted to go to a big school because I wasn't really, um, happy at, at a small school since it's just, I don't know. It... I was looking for something more and so I wanted to come to school here. At the University I thought I could get a better education than at a smaller college. Not that there's anything wrong with smaller colleges but, um, I just wanted, um, I guess I just wanted more. So. Ah, and since I had, um, graduated from high school in Nebraska, um, I

could come here for the, to be a, I'd get the Nebraska tuition rate. I guess they also have a special tuition rate for certain Natives who come from tribes that used to live in Nebraska or still live in Nebraska. I didn't know about that at the time. But I figured since I went to, went to high, graduated from high school here, it seemed like a logical, a logical choice and as far as I knew none of my classmates, ah, from high school, went to school here so that was a plus.

Joyzelle: So what grade were you in when you came here and what was your major?

Jennifer: I came here, I think I was a sophomore, I had enough credits that I was a sophomore when I, when I came here and I ended up, ah, being an English major once I came here. Ah, English Literature actually.

Joyzelle: Why did you decide on Literature?

Jennifer: Um... Well, it, it was a class, um. English classes I've always, I've always done well. Then well, I didn't know when I first went to college what I wanted, what I wanted to do I guess. That's probably not uncommon. But, um. But I took a lot of ah, ah, English classes and I just, it seems like a natural fit for me and I, I just, it, I understood and I did well at it. And so, I enjoyed it. And I've always enjoyed reading and so it just... I wasn't an English major before I came to school here but once I came here... It, I don't know, it just happened. Just happened one day I decided I was going to be an English major since I was taking English classes, mostly English classes anyway. And, um, and that's when I, ah, after I decided I would be an English major is when I first found a Native Lit class, so...

Joyzelle: Oh, I see. So your Bachelor's degree is, ah, in English?

Jennifer: Yes.

Joyzelle: Okay. Um, you also worked at the University, right?

Jennifer: Yes. Yes. Um, before I, um, before I started, well actually when I was an undergrad I was a student worker. Worked for the computer, um, the computer lab on campus. Um, and then before I started Law School here I actually worked full time.

Joyzelle: What was your experience, you told me what your experience was in high school as an Indian person in high school in Nebraska. What was your experience in college as an Indian person?

Jennifer: Here in Lincoln?

Joyzelle: Here in Lincoln.

Jennifer: Here in Lincoln, Okay. Um, it was different than, than high school. It seemed like people, um, other students ah, ah, seemed to be more open-minded here and didn't have this preconceived notion that just cause you're, ah, native you're going to fail. Of course, you know, a lot of people did have other kinds of notions that, um, the reason why, it... That if you're a minority student then, you know, you're here on a, some sort of an affirmative action, um, scholarship or something like that. But the attitude, I guess, in general is a little better and people seem to be more open to meeting people of, of different cultures. So, and that was a plus as opposed to being in high school when someone sees you and, you know, you're native so automatically that's... You... There's nothing you, you... You just have, ah... That's already, you know, two strikes against you. And you don't really get a chance to get to know them as an individual. Whereas, you know, in college I think students tend to be more, a little more, open-minded. So it was a little, definitely better than high school. So, I met a lot more people who, who never met anyone who was Indian which is way different from being in high school where, of course, every body knows, you know, the "Indians" who come to town and they all have, ah, whatever notions they have about them whether they're founded in anything. Um, here, I've met people who've never met, who've never met someone from the reservation and probably didn't know that Indians even, I don't know... Maybe they thought they were all extinct or something and so they seemed interested in, learning, in learning about you and your culture. And so that was kind of different, meeting people who are actually interested, like non-natives who are actually interested. So that was, I guess that was cool, I guess. (laughter)

Joyzelle: What about instructors?

Jennifer: Instructors? Um... Well, ah, being in college in general, way better than high school. Um, the teachers, ah, cared about, for the most part cared about, teaching, um. So you felt like you got a better education whereas, you know, in high school, in a small town, I had a... ah, my history teacher was the football coach and didn't really care about teaching history, he cared about teaching football. Even in history class he would write, you know, football plays on the board. And, um, this may be a little off topic, but, um, in high school my, my American History teacher was the football coach and he decided, um, and this is I guess another example of how people really didn't care about your culture. He decided that nothing that happened before 1900 in American History was relevant and so he wasn't going to teach it. And so he started the year about 1900 and that's where he started American History, as if, um, any, anything that happened before then, everything that shaped our country didn't matter, and so he was going to start there. And he kind of avoided talking about diversity of any kind whatsoever throughout the whole year. And we started in 1900 and ended about, I don't know, right before World War II. So over a nine month period we didn't really cover a lot. Like I said, you know, football was the main concern and not, I guess I would say it

wasn't just because he was the football coach but a lot of it had to do with, you know, small towns being concerned with football. And, you know, we didn't make it to the state tournament that year so... It's possible that had something to do with it but he didn't, um, he didn't talk about diversity or, you know, anything other than what was in the textbook. That really bothered me because, um, ever since I was young, every year at the beginning of the school year when we get our books, this goes from elementary school on, the first thing I would do is open the books, look in the index and see where it said "Indians" and find out what it said because I was just so thirsty for any kind of mention or acknowledgement. And this was even going to school on the reservation. We didn't have like books that talked all about Indian History. It was probably the same stuff that everyone else read. And, we didn't learn anything about ourselves that way. Um, but I would always open up the books and see what it said and get a little, slight thrill from reading it. I grew up in Wounded Knee so maybe there'd be a mention of Wounded Knee by name, which I don't know, I like to see. Um, But I was hoping that when I was in high school that maybe we'd actually, ah, talk about this. And so this would be the chance for me as a student, yeah as an Indian person, to, I guess be acknowledged but that was something that we completely skipped over so.....

Joyzelle: What about in your college classes? Were there any, ah... hist... Did you take any history class

Jennifer: Yes.

Joyzelle: that dealt with Indians?

Jennifer: I did. Ah, I took, I took American History but of course it wasn't, it didn't really focus on Indians but at least we got a mention, which was good. I took, I took a native, uh, Native American history class which was more of a survey so it was really broad and very, very general. We didn't learn anything specific, uh, but it was a good over view of um, of Indians of North America. I think it would have been better if the class itself were spilt up maybe into regions of America. I think it could have been more effective that way. But it was really, you know, here's a survey of Indian History which spans thousands of years. But, you know, we're gonna, put it into a three times, three hours a week for four months or whatever, for fifteen weeks class. So... I mean it was better but, um. It was better and that I guess is one good thing about college is that if you... If you're interested in a topic you can probably find something on that topic, um. I just wish there were, um, more..., more course offerings.

Joyzelle: About Indian people?

Jennifer: About Indian people, um. My minor was, um, Native American Studies. And so I took what was offered which wasn't a lot. But I'm glad that there was something. I'm glad that it was there. And I wished there was more. But one

thing that was very, extremely, unbelievably disappointed by was: when I came to school here at the University, um, I looked in the course catalog and they offered the Lakota Language, um, as a language class that you could take to fulfill your language requirement. Um, but that year was the last year they offered it and so... That (sigh) sucked to put it, to put it, um, bluntly that really sucked that I couldn't take it and that was the one thing that I was really looking forward to. I had, you know I took Spanish in high school and... I mean I guess that, that's great and useful and all but what I really was excited about was the opportunity to, you know, to be able to take, take, take my native language I guess. But, um, that was the last year it was offered, the year I got here and, and that was it. And I haven't been able to take it. I was very disappointed that they discontinued it. I'm, I wish, I hope they bring it back some day.

Joyzelle: Did you see or did you feel any difference between your time spent on campus as a student versus being an employee?

Jennifer: Um, yes. Ah, definitely there, I mean, just the dynamic of being a student versus being an employee, there's a huge difference there. Um, so... ah,... yes, there... I don't... there....

Joyzelle: Yes, but it mainly had to do with the difference between being a student and being an employee?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Joyzelle: Okay.

Both: (Laughter)

Jennifer: Which I know that makes sense cause, um, working on, on a campus is different than I imagine working out in the "real" world or, you know, not on a campus, is that a campus is very student orientated and probably more, um, laid back and ... There seems to be more of a commitment to diversity on a college campus than... I don't know what it's like out in the real world. I've been a student and a university employee my whole career so I don't really know what it's like out there. But, um, definitely there's a difference in being a student and being, being an employee.

Joyzelle: You came here really, ah, as, almost right out of high school. There are other people that, that come, other Indian people who come here, that come later in life and who might come here with children. Do you think that... could you compare your experience to theirs both in terms of being on campus and in the city?

Jennifer: Um, sure. There's definitely, there's absolutely a difference between a student and coming here versus coming with a family. A lot of the Indian people that I know here in Lincoln have families and they've experienced a lot of, a lot more prejudice than I have. They've had a much harder time, uh, because like I said the University is not the "real" world. I don't really know a better way to say that. It's definitely different being a student versus being a part of the, the Lincoln community, the larger Lincoln community. Um, I have friends with children who experienced, who faced a lot of hardships um, being parents, parents of Indian kids and the kind of discrimination those kids face at school or just, you know, in town. It's, ah, it's really hard and I can't imagine, um, what that would be like. Um, and... And I also can't imagine what it would be like to come from a, come from a primarily Indian community like I did, from the reservation, but to have lived there nearly your entire life, to come to a place like, like Lincoln. I imagine it'd... it'd be like culture shock, is how I would imagine it. Even moving from Wounded Knee to Gordon when I was a teenager, that was culture shock. Just coming from, you know, coming across the border fifteen miles away, it was a huge shock. And of course the difference between even a small town to some place like Lincoln. I can't imagine what it would have been like if I had come directly from the reservation. Um, when I was, when I first moved off the reservation, ah, kind of reminds me of what it was like when I first moved away from the reservation. I mean, granted I lived close to the reservation, I still had my family and there were still other Indians in town but it was... It was, it was a horrible experience for me. I really hated it because when I was in... When I was in school I was like the best student, or whatever, in class. And I was used to being, uh, supported by my parent, and you know, the teachers, well some of the teachers. The Indians, the teachers who were Indian in my elementary school were, ah, were great and very supportive. Course I also had white teachers, some of whom were good and some of them were, um, not so good. Ah, but I was used to have, being in a certain environment but then I went to, ah, ah, this white high school where everyone had extremely low expectations. That was weird to be like the smartest kid in the class, okay maybe like the second smartest kid in the class, to this, to the environment where you're just not even expected to graduate from high school is horrible and I cried every day. And, ah, one of my former elementary school teachers lived in Gordon and, lived there and just drove to the reservation to work. And, I went to her house like once a week and, you know, to tell her what a horrible time I was having and I cried to her that "Can you just drive me to school with you? Can I go back to school on the reservation?" It was really hard just being, you know, from, to going from the reservation to even this small town which wasn't all that different, just superficially, not all that different in size or whatever. And even that was culture shock so I can't imagine being, going through that at an older age and coming straight to Lincoln. That would be... I don't even know what that would be like. Did I answer the question? I don't even know what the question was.

Joyzelle: Let me ask you, you know, you said that when you were going to Gordon the teachers had very low expectations. And then we talked about the kids that are here in Lincoln, you know, and that the people that moved here with kids, their kids have problems in the schools here. Does it sound like the teachers have low expectations of Indian kids in the Lincoln Public School system?

Jennifer: Yes. I, I imagine that they're going through a lot of the same things, maybe on a larger scale. I have friends with kids, like I said, who, you know, who have kids who go to school here and it seems like that's exactly what's going on is that, um, their kids, um, maybe get treated differently by teachers. Maybe teachers don't, are stricter with them, or they have lower expectations like academically. Or, if any of them got into trouble, maybe got into a fight with another kid, they would be disciplined differently. Or, the teachers have an idea about how, um, expectations of the parents maybe if they, if they came from like a single parent household or something like that they would, or they were from, you know, had a lower income bracket or something they were just... I think teachers treat them differently. I was listening to friends of mine and different things that they've experienced. It sounds a lot like what I went through in Gordon but again on a different scale just because, um, I don't know, just cause of the size of the town. Um, I think that people in like the smaller town, maybe there was a lot more, um, outward racism. People were more up front about it. Like you knew they were racist cause they, you know, would say things right out to you. Whereas in a place like Lincoln or a larger area is where its less, um, piecey or you know, whatever. The people maybe are a little more subtle with it. But they probably do experience the same thing. Um, I think the more subtle racism, I don't, I think that would be worse.

Joyzelle: Well it sounds like... Do you think that the kids who are going to school here in the public school system in Lincoln have some of the same feelings that you did when you were going to Gordon? That they would feel like crying a lot?

Jennifer: I would think so. Um, maybe more so if they, if they came from like a reservation or a largely Indian community and they could just see the difference so they'll know, you know, how its different. Or if maybe if there were kids here, Indian kids here who grew up in Lincoln and have gone to school and were used to being, ah, treated differently their entire life that... That would be horrible, I can't even imagine what it would be like to not have that, um, experience that supportive community, um. But I imagine that they go through a lot of the same things that I did, um, here in Lincoln.

Joyzelle: You said that it may be different for kids who grew up here than for kids who come directly from the reservation. Do you think that there is a difference between urban versus reservation Indian people?

Jennifer: Um, yes. Yes there definitely, definitely is, there's definitely, there definitely are differences. Um, because, ah, because... There definitely are differences



between, um, urban Indian versus reservation Indians just because, well simply because the, the communities are so different. When you're in a tribal community, ah, you're used to being around people, a lot of people who are similar to you. You're used to having, um, to having the whole community back you. Maybe you're used to having a big family around you, supporting you and maybe you're used to a different life style. And you also have, um, you're exposed to, ah, your culture and, you know, your heritage more on a direct basis because you're there around people and maybe you're not experiencing as much racism on a day to day basis. Probably, obviously if you go off the reservation to a border town you're going to experience it but it's not something that's in your face like every single day on the reservation. And so... I think that would shape you differently and maybe you, ah....

Joyzelle: What about access to, ah, to religion and spirituality?

Jennifer: Well there's, ah, definitely, definitely a difference, um, between someone who grows up on the reservation where it might be more a part of your daily life versus somebody in a more urban community where it would be, ah. Where you might not have access to the kinds of practices that you're used to.

Joyzelle: And in shaping people, um, shaping people comes down to how we identify ourselves. You know, what defines us as Indian people. Is there a difference in how reservation people define Indian-ness versus urban definition of Indian-ness?

Jennifer: Uh, I would say, I would say yes to that. Ah, It seem to me from my experiences and from what I've, from what I've seen, and I can't speak on behalf of anybody except myself, but it seems to me that there, there appears to be a difference with how you're identified. Um, when you come from the reservation or, you know, a tribal community versus um, living in an urban area. When you're in a tribal community you, it's, it's ... you're constantly surrounded by your culture and your own people so I guess it's less of a, of a big deal. You know who you are. You don't need to constantly say, you know, "I'm Indian" or "I'm whatever" all the time because you are and everybody knows it and you're a part of this community and that's reaffirmed daily. Whereas maybe if you're in, if you're in an urban community there are other Indians around but they might not be from your tribe. So the larger non-Native community sees you and identifies you all as Indian, kind of clumps you together so it might be harder to assert your own tribal identify, ah, your tribal identity versus being, you know, being Indians in general. And so, because you don't have, um, access to... just being around other, a large number of other people from your, ah, from your tribal community I think it would be harder to hold on to the kind of little things that make up, that all attribute to, you know, part of being who you are. Not that you're not Indian if you don't live on the reservation cause you are. I just think it's just harder for people away from the reservation to hold on to the kinds of things the people

on the reservation have. And, maybe it, it, because it becomes harder, you, you kind of, you know, you're more likely to see people from different tribes and so you try to find something in common to hold on to so there comes, there develops a more pan-Indian-ness which I think is defiantly a different kind of Indian identity versus what you would have if you were on the reservation.

Joyzelle: Okay, I think I understand what you're saying. Um, The ah... I had a question while you were talking and then it just kind of slipped away there. Oh, I know. What about ah, priorities? Do reservation Indians have different priorities, ah, or does living in the city cause you to reorganize your priorities?

Jennifer: I think so. It definitely, I would, I would say definitely. Um, well for one thing when you're on the reservation it's likely that you're near your family. There's that which is different then being in the city and I think maybe it's possible... depending on your situation in both places it's defiantly different but.... In, for, if you're living off the reservation in, you know, someplace like Lincoln, or you know, in Lincoln I think it's, it's, you have your.... For a lot of people that I've seen maybe the struggle is more to survive on a day-to-day basis just to make it through, you know, your paycheck. To... To just survive generally without having to think about all these other things, whereas, if you were back home, um, you have more access to, you know, your... You have more, more access to support, um, both spiritually and, you know, probably financially cause I'm sure you're around your family members and just general support for each other. And, I would imagine there's a lot more cultural activities that... I don't know, I think of cultural activities in a different sense when you live on the reservation versus when you live in the city.

Joyzelle: What would be the difference in cultural activities for reservation versus urban?

Jennifer: Well, for urban you're surrounded by a lot of people from different tribes so whatever cultural activities exist might be more pan-Indian, or it might be from different tribes. And you have different people at these events and, which, and maybe it's more of a... I don't know, more of a ... I imagine that back on the... Ah... Well, I don't really know how to answer that question.

Joyzelle: Is it more... Would it be that um, on the reservation it's more spiritually geared and on urban it's more social geared?

Jennifer: Yes. That's ah, that's probably defiantly... Well, defiantly one way to look at it. Again because there's so many different people living in the city maybe you don't all have the same,... you're not from the same tribe so you don't all have the same beliefs so you're more interested in the social activities that pulls you all together. Like, like something like a pow-wow whereas on the reservation we'll have, um.... Well, there are pow-wows but there are also a

lot of other different things going on um, for you, with a lot of, a lot more spiritual activities, which definitely are different from social activities.

Joyzelle: Let me, ah, tell you a, a little bit about the... uh, a little history of the Indian Center, primarily because you're on the Board at the Indian Center and I want to talk, have you talk with us about, a little about that. When the Indian Center was first starting, or when the Indian community here in Lincoln was trying to get it organized, a friend of mine, Floyd Taylor, as a matter of fact they have a Floyd Taylor Award that they give through the Indian Center now. But he worked for EDA, Economic Development Administration, out of Denver. This was, Nebraska was one of his responsibilities. And ah, he came to a city council meeting, this was way back, you know, in the early seventies. Ah, he came to a city council meeting here when the Indian community had made their proposal to the city council to get the land and the place so that they could apply for an EDA grant to build the building. Ah, when Mr. Taylor, who is from Standing Rock, he's very, very dark complexioned, obviously an Indian. When he came to the city, Lincoln city council meeting he came in the room but he was way in the back. And no body really paid any attention to him but he could hear, you know, the council meeting. He knew what was going on and it came up, the Indian Center issue came up, you know, not that it was already build but they were in the process of doing it. And as they, the city council members were talking about the Indian's request for this property and the general consensus was no. They didn't want to give that land and they didn't want to do anything to support, uh, those, those Indians. "Those Indians" kind of a thing and ah, they discussed among themselves how they were going to get rid of these people so that when they came in, cause the Indian delegation was going to be coming into the meeting. They wanted to know how they could, you know, gracefully get rid of them because they had other plans for that piece of land. Okay, so Floyd was sitting in the back of the room. So as they're discussing this and it's a big discussion among city council members, big discussion about, you know, getting, getting rid of these, "those people." And finally one of them said "Well, it doesn't make any difference because the guy from EDA, the Economic Development Administration representative will be here and he'll see things our way. He won't let those Indians have it." (Laughter) So, and one of them said "Well is he here? Maybe he's not even here. Is he here?" Floyd stood up from the back of the room, walked forward and said "Yes, I am here." And they saw that he was an Indian man, obviously, very obviously an Indian man and he said "And, I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure that those, "those people" get their center, or die trying." Ah, Floyd did die shortly after, not too long after the center was ah, was built. But it was one of things that, he was really adamant about having this place. When he heard the discussion of the city council members, their attitude about Indian people here in Lincoln, he knew that the Indian community here had to have a place of their own where they could come together in a safe place. In your opinion, has the attitude of

Lincoln city government or Lincoln powers that be, has it changed from that time when the attitude was they wanted to just get rid of “those people?”

Jennifer: Um. I...Yes. Yes, I would say it has, um. Definitely the dynamic of Lincoln's relationship with, with the Indian people that live here I think, um, definitely changed since then. I didn't live here, I wasn't alive then um, but even in the time that I've lived in Lincoln I've seen, I've seen it change and it sounds like from your story that that kind of attitude is closer to the kind that people in smaller communities, like border towns have in that it's like a very direct anti-Indian. And like I said I see difference, a big difference between a small town like Gordon and Lincoln. So I'd say yes, there's definitely a change in the, in the attitude. I'm... It's still... Racism still exists. It's probably a lot more subtle now and ah, stuff that does exist, I mean there's probably a lot of institutional racism in, you know, in city government or in LPS towards Indian people but I definitely think that it's gotten better. Definitely it's gotten better over time and I think a lot of it, um, and I think change is good and I'm glad that it has improved. Um, so I think having an Indian Center is a good thing. We didn't have an Indian Center in Gordon, ah, but I can't imagine what it would be like to have a place like that in a small town. But we didn't have one in Gordon and so I think it's good that one exists here it lets Indian people know that hey there are other Indians in town and the kinds of services that the Center provides today I think are good and uh, and necessary. It's kinds of, it's a human services agency and um, it provides a lot of services to not just Indians but a lot of um, different people who live in Lincoln. Different nationalities and, you know, backgrounds and ethnic backgrounds and whatever. So I think that, I think that the services that the Center provides are good and maybe that kind of support is a good proxy for the kind of community support that you would get back home. So, that's good. Um, I think that the attitudes in the city government have definitely changed and I think a lot of it has to do with Indian people, um, standing up for themselves and saying “Hey we need a place like the Center,” or, you know, “you can't really ignore us,” or, you know, other things like that. So I think a lot of the change has come from Indian people themselves, which is good. Which is where all change really needs to start. I hope that answers the question.

Joyzelle: Yes, it did. That things are better.

Jennifer: Yes. Yes, they are better than they were back in the

Joyzelle: In the early seventies, or back in the late sixties, early seventies. No, it was in the early seventies. Um, the services that are, that are provided by the Indian Center... How long have you been on the Board?

Jennifer: I have been on... I joined the Board in 2004, almost three years. I'll be coming to the end of my term in September. You're elected to a three year term. The Board is made up of elected members and appointed members. The

elected members are all from the Lincoln community. They're voted on by the members of the Indian community and the appointed members can either be, you know, can be anybody. But usually they try to find someone with some area of expertise um, in one of the services that the Center provides like housing or maybe finance or attorney, stuff like that. Um, so the... Right now the Board is all, is comprised of all Natives. And so... And I'm one of the, and I was elected to the Board and my term ends in a couple of months.

Joyzelle: Have you seen much change in the, in the Center?

Jennifer: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, and, um, I'm happy to report that it's all, you know, positive change that I've seen. The difference that I've seen from when I started three years ago to today, not just on the Board but um, at the Center in general has been, ah, enormous. Um, it's... I think the Center now is a lot more focused and, um, doing what I said before about how Indian people need to stress about change themselves and I think I see that happening at the Center. Where the Center is going after more, um, trying to get more programs and realizing that we can't just attempt to stay afloat but to actually have a larger vision and to see that we need to provide more services, um, for Indian people than just the stuff that we do. We need to try to expand the Center and, you know, try to help more people and to be... not just that place in Lincoln where you go... if you don't have any, you know, if you need to get, ah, commodities, you know. And you... My vision for the Center is I would like it to be like the "Must Stop Shop" for any Indian coming to, coming to Lincoln. Like I want it to be where people want to go. And I want people to want to be there and to want to hang out and to not just go there when they need help. It's great that we can provide help but I think that if you limit it to just family services or, you know, things like that that then you're limiting the, ah, support you can provide for all Indian people. When I first came to Lincoln I never went to the Center. I mean I knew it was there, it's located very close to the University. And I, I knew about it but I, I never went to the Center ever. And I never went there until I became a Board member. And the reason is that, it's like I said, it's a human service agency and it provides, um, services but I didn't fit into any of the categories that they provided services to. I don't have kids. You know, students, um, like there are income guidelines and yes, I'm poor but being a student kinda tends to disqualify you from income-based services. Um, I guess you don't want every college student applying for what ever. Ah, so... And I know there are a lot of people who are a lot more in immediate need than me. Um, so I'm glad that they're able to get help that they need. But then and even now the Center doesn't offer anything for someone like me other than to be around other Indian people. So I, I would like the Center change to be a place where all Indian people can feel welcome and not have to face all the kinds of, you know, terrible things that I mentioned that could happen to someone, you know, living, living in Lincoln or living anywhere outside of their reservation. But, um, since I got on the Board three years ago to now, there's definitely a change to try to kind of

expand the services at the Center and to provide more of a positive outlook not just in how can we immediate help poor people in Lincoln but how can we help Indians better themselves. Like the homeowners program to help, you know, Indians become homeowners, you know, things like that.

Joyzelle: Yeah, I went through the homeowners program. I thought it was very good. Um, is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to share with us?

Jennifer: Um, (laughter) Um, I don't know. Just about Lincoln, or... things that I've experienced in Lincoln.... Or.....?

Joyzelle: Like that. Um, you'll be back here next year to finish your law degree, right? Are you going to stay in Lincoln when you finish?

Jennifer: Um, I don't know. Um, probably not. I think Lincoln is a great place, I, I've really come to enjoy it. I mean there... It's not perfect but um, I think there's room to grow and it's very friendly, friendly town for the most part. But I don't think that I'm going to be, um, staying in Lincoln because what I would like to do, when I graduate, I would like to, ah, work for my tribe. I don't know in what particular capacity but that's something that I've always wanted to do, to go back home and help my tribe. So I don't think that that'll be in Lincoln but who knows, you know. There are tribes in Nebraska and of course there are Indian people everywhere and Indian people who live off the reservation who need, you know, help as well. But I'm thinking that I'm probably going to either head back home or maybe head to like to someplace where I, I can impact more people like in Washington, D. C. and work on, you know, Indian policy at the federal level which is what I would like to do.

Joyzelle: That's a very good goal.

Jennifer: Kinda lofty so I.... Who knows. Who knows what I'll do but that's my dream.

Joyzelle: Well, I don't think that's lofty for someone who came from the kind of high school experience that you had to finishing law school. I think going to D. C. is right up you're alley. (Laughter)

Jennifer: I hope so. (Laughter)

Joyzelle: Well, I want to thank you for your time and ah, if there's anything else that, that you think of later on, we can always add to this interview.

Jennifer: Okay.

Joyzelle: All right and thank you.

Jennifer: Thank you.