



Virginia Jones

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 030B



Oral History Interview by

**Norm Cavanaugh
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Owhyee, NV**



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J: My name is Virginia Jones. I'm a Shoshone-Paiute Tribe from Duck Valley Indian Reservation. I am going to talk about my drums today. The big powwow drums, and the hand drums that I have here. And I like to talk about how I first started singing with the powwow trail. When I first started learning how to sing—that was 1976—I first started learning how to sing with the big powwow drum. They were practicing at the Senior Citizens' Center with Wesley Hall, Jr., was teaching all the Shoshones how to sing on the powwow drum here. And I went there, and my mother went there, and Lucille went there; we all went there, just to see how it was going to turn out. So, I went there to learn how to sing songs. So, Junebug—excuse me, Wesley Hall, Jr. was our instructor. He was teaching us how to sing at that time. So, we did some singing there, and learned a lot of songs from that. And I do appreciate Wesley for teaching a lot of us how to sing at the powwow drum. So, the first thing that I learned on the powwow about learning how to sing, is how to respect—that's the number one thing we have to do, is respect others. We always have to respect ourselves, our drums, the drums that we make. How we did the drums was—how I learned how to make the drum, is—by scraping the hide. My mother helped me a long time ago when she was still living. That was about after 1976. We all started learning how to make drums. We all got interested in making the drums. So, when it came about, how we learned was, we had to—this is how the drum was first. The drum was just a case like this. And then, after that, then what we did was, we came about and we used these kind of tools to scrape our hides. Deer hide we use on our drums, or we use elk hide. That's—oh, and cow hide. We use cow hide, too. This little drum here has deer hide on it. We used to scrape this, the deer hide, first. We scrape the hides. Then, after we

clean the hides really good, we clean the fat part inside the hide. All that stuff, the fat, we clean that really clean. And then, after we get through cleaning that, then we go and turn the hide over, and then we scrape the other side. That's the hair part. So, we get all the hair off. Every bit of the hair, we have to remove off of the drum—oh, excuse me, off of the hide. Then, we remove that off, and then we put it—after we get all the hair off, then we put the hide on the casing. On the casing here, on the drum casing. Then, after we do that, then we turn around, and then we put the hide on it on each side. Then we tie it. We do the tying. We do the drum tying then. And then, after that, after we do the drum tying, then we let the drum kind of dry, the hide dry up a little bit. And then, the next day, I look at it again, then I re-tie the drums again. I re-tie the strings back up to make it just so it's just right and tight. Then, you quit tying it. Tying the hide up. Then you let the drum sit there and let it dry up for about a week. One week. And then, we do the same way with the cow hide. This drum here is made out of cow hide. This one. This drum is a cow hide, and that one is a deer hide. Deer hides made all that drum. And then, after I do that, and then we go and use it after it's all dried up real good. We try it out first, then we go up to the river—that's up to the waters up there, where the running water is. Then we stand up there, and then we pray for the drum. The usage of the drum, we pray for the drum when we're at the running water. We see the running water there, and then we stand there. And we pray up to the Creator, to ask the Creator to bless this drum that we made with our own hands. That we're going to use it, and we're are going to take it out to the powwow circles. So, after we do that, then we could use the drum. We can take the powwow drum into the circle. Any powwow that we go to—the Four Corners, wherever—we can use that drum. Any place we want to, we can take the drum out and use it. But we *always* got

to remember to pray for our drum. Each time you sit your drum out there in that powwow circle, you either smudge the drum with one of these sweetgrasses—which, this sweetgrass is not made by our tribe. The Shoshone tribes, we don't have sweetgrass here on our reservation, on Duck Valley Indian reservation. These are what we get, whatever powwows we go to, we buy these from the *taipos*. And that's kind of sad, that we have to buy something like this from the *taipos*, to smudge our drums off. We have to smudge the drums off before we start singing. And we pray for it before we start singing. So, this is the one that came from a different state.

C: So, when you say “smudge,” Virginia, can you explain what “smudge”—what do you mean by “smudge”?

J: What we have to do is, we light the—see, we light the sweetgrass up. And then, what we do is, we put—the drum is sitting in front of us, and what we do is light it up while somebody is praying for the powwow out there. At the same time, an elder is standing out there praying at a powwow. We have to burn the cedar the same time an elder or whoever is praying to the Creator. So that way, we could have good powwow, and we don't have no droppings of an eagle feather out there on the powwow circle. So, what we do is, what I mean by “smudge” is, we light the sweetgrass up, or we light the sage up. And this is, this sage is from Duck Valley. This is our own sage. So, what we do is, we could light either this sage up, or we light the sweetgrass up. And what we do is, while we light it up, while the person there is praying, we go and light ours up, then we run it around the drum. We light it and pray at the same time when that man is praying or lady is praying. Then we light this up, and we do *our* praying for the safety of the powwow drum that's sitting in front of us. The powwow drum, it means a lot to us singers, because I was

always told—long time ago, way back, I was always told this by my aunt: “If you are the maker of a drum, whatever you make,” she said, “You’re the maker.” And my aunt used to tell me that. That’s Edith Shaw. She was my aunt. And she taught me a lot of things about things today. What all the things about, a lot about our living things, you know, and—even about the drum. My aunt used to tell me, “You’re the maker. You take care of it. Take care of it! Don’t leave your drum sitting anyplace! Take care of your stuff. You’re the maker. Take care of it!” So, that’s how I learned by my aunt. And I’m thankful today that I learned a lot of things from my aunt. Because she was the one that taught me a lot of things. So, I want to thank my aunt for that. And I know she’s not here, but I want to thank her wherever she’s at. Like I say, lot of times, us people always say—we still pray, and we still say “Thank you, *Appe*.” Up there. *Appe* is same thing as Jesus. We still pray like the *taipo* pray. And we pray in our own ways, and we pray for our drum. And when we pray for our drum, then we feel better. We know we’re safe. We’re protected by our grandfather up there. And we pray for our water at all times. We always buy water. I know lot of times we don’t get it from the spring waters, but we get our waters all the time, from the store or something like that. And then, we spill some water on the drum to make the hide feel better. Because I was told long time ago that that drum that you make—you’re the maker, take care of it—and lot of times, my aunt would used to say to me, “Give thanks to the *Appe* up there. [**Shoshone at 12:30**] That’s what my aunt used to say long time ago. So, that’s what I follow today. I pray to my Grandfather up there every day. I pray to him. I give thanks to him. Just like, maybe, the *taipos* do. But I still pray to him, and I thank the Creator for all the things that I’ve learned: how to sing, become a singer today. And I sing with my powwow drums. And I thank the

Creator how I learned how to do everything. And the sticks I made myself. When we used to sing long time ago, that was about, we first started with Wesley Hall. Then we all started getting bigger and bigger, and all the people started liking it. So, Winona started—Winona Charles, Sylvania Charles, Carmen Jones started, Lucille Jones, and myself. We all liked singing, so we all joined Wesley Hall. So, after that, then that's when I started. On 1976, I started singing. And then, still up to this day, now it's 2009 and I'm still singing. And I enjoy singing songs. Sometime I make my own songs, Shoshone songs. I make my own songs. And lot of times, we sing it at different powwows when we go to different powwows. And when I used to be a singer with the Four Winds group, that's how we became—after Wesley Hall taught us, then we were the Four Winds singers. So, that was Winona Charles, Sylvania Charles, Lucille Jones, Carmen Jones, and myself. We were all a woman drum at one time. So, up to this day now, I'm still a singer. I still sing at powwows. And I enjoy singing. And lot of times, I go and sing with the hand drum songs. I've always get called to go and sing it, you know, different places. So, I enjoy all that, too. So, all the things that I do, I enjoy, and I make my own sticks. I know that was Wesley Hall, showed us how to make sticks. That was 1976. He said, "This is how you ladies are going to make the drum stick!" He said, "Go over there somewhere, and find some fishing poles somewhere," he said. See, this is like a fishing pole. At the end of the fishing pole, he said, "Go over there and go get some!" Some of these, he said. "And then we'll start from there. I'll bring—or either all of you come the next class. All of you come to the class next time, and bring a sheep wool. Bring something like that. And bring needles!" he said to us. So, we said, "Oh, okay! So we're going to make sticks, drum sticks, like this, so we can sing on our drums." So

that's how Wesley taught us how to do the sticks, too. So, I want to thank Wesley *again* for teaching us ladies how to do a lot of things, too. He taught us a lot of things. And I want to thank him. And, this is one of our—our tobacco. We have a tobacco here, we can get these up here, up in the mountains, up here in the Duck Valley mountains up here. We go out there and get some of these. I don't know what the white name is, but a lot of times we just call it tobacco. But the Indian name is *totsa*. And we smoke this a lot. And we use it a lot at powwows. We smoke this, we do our prayers with this. A lot of times, we pray for our drums, we use our *totsa*, and we smoke this tobacco. A lot of times, we use it for colds, too. And it's really good. So, this is our Indian tobacco, the Shoshone Indian tobacco here. We use it for lot of things. It can be used for a *lot* of things, if you know how to use this *totsa*. And this is one of our Indian teas, too. We drink this lot of times when we sing. Indian tea, here. It grows around here in Owyhee. Sometimes it grows up here by the Cleveland Trail. I don't know what the English name is, but they call it *antapittseh kwana*. They call it an Indian name. But the only thing I know is the Indian name. But I do not know the English name. Because my aunt was the one that taught me how to go and get the Indian tea. So, I go up there in them hills and go get this. And we can't just go and get this, either; we have to wait and stand there. My aunt would pick one first, down there on the ground. Then she stands there and hold it, and she stands that way, the way the sun's coming up. And she'll tell me "We'll wait until I do my prayers." So, my aunt Edith Shaw would do the prayers first, and then, after she gets through praying for this, then we could pick as much as we want. And we drink this. This is our Indian tea that we can drink every day. Some people use it for diabetes. Some people just drink it just to be healthy. And it's very good tea. It's just like the tea that you

buy in the store. But they're very scarce. They're very hard to come by. You can't really just go and go get it anyplace. You got to know where they're growing at. They grow at the spring. Spring water, somewhere, you know. You have to find it. We usually go up to Cleveland Trail. Cleveland Trail up here.

C: So is there a certain time of the year that you can harvest that?

J: Yeah. We could only get this *antapittseh kwana* on July. July or August. Second week of August is when we have to get them, is when they have a little flowers, yellow flowers. When they have a little yellow flowers, they're ready to pick. Then we could pick 'em. Then we could drink it.

C: Virginia, you mentioned earlier that you should always watch or look after your drum, and that you shouldn't leave your drum unattended. Can you explain as to why that's important?

J: The reason why I said it's very important to watch and protect your drum is because you're the maker of the drum. And when you're are the maker of the drum, you're supposed to stand up the drum—like this—all the time. You always have to stand this drum up. This means when you stand this drum up like this, and here's the casing on the bottom. So this is what it sits on, and we made this one out of wood, and then the reason why we have to stand this up is because the powwow is not started yet. So, when the powwow is starting, then—and then, we go and then we put our drum on that casing. And then, we put the drum on the casing, and then, you're the maker. So, I'm the maker of the drum. So what I do is, I do not leave my drum at the powwow circle by itself. I always have to have one person sitting at the drum. That's to watch the drum, because we have like, maybe, fifteen, sixteen drums there at a powwow, or twenty. We have a lot of drums

there. We have a lot of people from all over the country at the powwows. So the reason why I'm saying, is that people, when we take our drums out, we have to protect our drum. And we have to protect ourself. Because we're the maker of the drum. Lot of times, there's a lot of bad medicine flying around. At each powwows. No matter where, what powwow you go to, you can hear about it from other people. Talk about bad medicine. So, when that is going around, what we usually do, is we go and put one of these—for protection, we put one of our little cedar pouches on the drum. We hang it on side of the drum for protection like that. That's to protect our drum, and protect the maker of the drum, and the rest of the singers. So, that's why it's very important that we do not leave the drum at any time. If I'm going to leave it, I'll leave one of the ladies in charge. I'll say, "You take care of the drum. I've got to go drink water," or go drink pop, or got to go do something. So. So that's why I said I had to protect this drum in that way. Because this drum here, what I'm talking about, is just like a grandfather to us. This drum is like a grandfather to us because we pray to this drum. All over, powwows that we go to, you can see other people smudging their drums, praying for their drums. And this drum is a big thing at a powwow. Because we go and sing songs with it. We sing for the Flag Song, we open the powwow with the Flag Song, Victory Song, Honor Song, for the men fancy, men traditional, women traditional, all the childrens, clear down to Tiny Tots. So what we do is, in that way, I said, we always, always have to take care of our drum, because this is the circle of life that we live in today. This drum means a lot to a lot of us, because, in—when I first started singing, the more I got into this drum, singing, and I'm still singing ever since 1970, I still haven't let it up, the songs—sometime I go and sing with Martina Littleboy's drum, her and her sister Linda. So I go up there and sing with them

when they ask me, or call me, to go up there and sing with them at the Te-Moak Indian Powwow. So I go up there and sing once in a while with them. But like I say: if you're the maker of the drum, you're to protect it. And every time you go to the powwow, and the powwow's through—I don't care wherever you go, you could go to Fallon, Reno, McDermitt, Idaho, all around us, all different—Fort Duchesne, Utah, Cedar City—all over the place. I've been all over the place with this drum. This drum has gone to Fort Duchesne; Cedar City, Utah; McDermitt; and it has been to Idaho; it's been to Fallon, Stillwater. All over the place in state of Nevada, Utah, all over. This drum has been all over the place. So, when I was singing, when we went all over, then I told my mom that, well, I liked singing, so I just continued to sing with the powwow circle. Which I'm *still* in the powwow circle, and I enjoy being in this powwow circle. So now, when I'm talking about this drum, it means a lot to me. And this drum here is made out of a cow hide. This one. This drum is made out of two calf hides. My cousin gave me the two hides to do. That was my cousin Wilbur Shaw, he gave me these cow hides, and I scraped the hides, two calf hides. Me and my mother did that here, right by the shed. We scraped these out, we took the hair off and clean it real good, then we put it on our casing here. And this casing is what I bought. I just got lucky and bought this. Somebody that was going through with the powwow trail had sold the casing to Idaho, one of the pawn shops. So I bought this casing there, and so it didn't have a casing. It was just an open drum like that blue drum there. So my mother said, "Well, let's ask brother if he has a calf hide, and we can fix it up." So Wilbur—my cousin, Wilbur Shaw—gave us the hide. So, we went and did that. And so, we fixed this, and this is made out of two calf hides. And this drum also went to Cedar City. This drum. And I really do enjoy this drum, what

my brother Wilbur Shaw gave us, and we fixed—me and my mother. So we, my mom and Winona, and Sylvania Charles, and Lucille, we all took this up to Fort Duchesne when we went up there to host the powwow in Cedar City. We took this one to Cedar City. That was about, oh, after the [19]70s. After 1970, something like that. So, I enjoy using this drum, this drum has gone a long ways, and I do enjoy it. I've already had washed all my drums. I keep my drums clean, because I use it all the time. You're the maker, you have to take care of it. It's my responsibility to take care of my drums.

C: Virginia, can you maybe elaborate a little bit on, you mentioned if you leave your drum unattended, bad things could happen. What did you mean?

J: Bad things—like, what I'm saying, bad things could happen to you is, like, somebody that—whoever's in the powwow circle might not like you. They jealous you're singing. Because you might have sing a real pretty song at one powwow. And then, they've heard you sing there a pretty song. And lot of times, people get jealous of your singing. And that's why they put bad medicine on you, with whatever medicine they have. We do not know what kind of medicine other people, other tribes, carry. We do not know that. But the Shoshones, as far as I can remember, I don't think we had bad medicine here. Because my aunt used to tell me that, "What is that, bad medicine?" They don't know what that is. But, so that's why I'm saying, that's where all that comes in, is when you go to different bigger powwows, you know. There's always people jealous. Jealous one another because of their songs. So, that's why I'm saying they put bad medicine on you.

C: Okay.

J: So, okay. Now I'm going to come over here, and talk about these drums. This hand drum right here, this hand drum right here is made out of elk hide. This one, right here. This

one is a elk hide drum. It has a different sound to it. Sound. You can hear the different sounding of the drum. This is elk hide. Okay? Now, we could hear a different sound in this one here. This is the one I made about a month ago. So, I fixed this whole drum up. And I never really used this yet to any powwows or round dance. Oh, I think I *did* use this—I take it back. I did use this in Great Basin College. That was about last month, I took this drum in there. Up there to Great Basin. Which, I enjoyed myself at Great Basin. I was asked to be up there. Victoria Jackson called me one day and asked me if I could work there and teach the people how to sing round dance songs. So, I told her yes, so that's when I went up there to the Great Basin College. And that's when I first used this hand drum there. And I enjoyed it. So, this one probably has a different sounding, too. [Plays drum at 33:20] See? You could tell the different soundings of all these drums. It depends on what sticks you're using, it makes a lot of difference on all these drums.

C: So what type of hide is that one?

J: This hide is deer hide. This one is deer hide. I made this one out of deer hide. This was a part of a casing to that big round drum. I didn't really finish it, so I took it apart, and then I cedared it off and just left it. Let it stand in the back, in one of my rooms. I just left it because I have to wait until I find a white, like an elk hide for that drum. So this one is done last month. And I'm thinking about using it when I go up to Elko on August. That's when they going to have that handgame tournaments for the youth, up in Elko, Nevada. So, this will probably be going to Elko. And then, this one here is my special drum. This was given to me by Mr. Joe **Caskey** and Lucy **Caskey**. This was given to me when we had that—we had a powwow in Owyhee, at the Fourth July grounds, that was honoring the elders. Then, I signed up for a contest. They said they were going to have a Round

Dance contest. So, I signed up in it, and this is on Labor Day. Labor Day, 9-7-[19]96.

And it was made by Joe and Lucy **Caskey**. And this is what I won in Owyhee, Nevada.

Round Dance, first place. And Joe and Lucy **Caskey** gave me five hundred dollars. And I really appreciate this drum. This drum means a lot to me. It was freshly-made when it was given to me. And I really do thank Joe and Lucy. I know they're not here, they're in the spirit world, but God bless them wherever they're at.

C: What type of hide is that one made from?

J: This is a regular deer hide. Because when it was freshly made, Lucy and Joe gave it to me at the campgrounds when they were honoring the elders. So, this is what they made with their own hands. So, I enjoy it. I've been using it a lot. I'm going to thank Joe and Lucy for the drum making on that. [Begins drumming at 36:29]

C: So Virginia, you're going to be singing some songs. But, can you tell us the reason for the song before you sing it, or what it's going to be about?

J: I'm going to sing a song about a woman traditional song. And it's sung like this, like all the womens dancing out there with the buckskin dress. That's the song. [Sings from 37:04-40:50]

C: Good job, Virginia!

J: Thank you.

C: So, are there other songs? Like, what's the Flag Song all about?

J: The Flag Song—I could sing one of the Flag Songs, but one of our ladies sing it from Fallon. But I'll just sing that one, because I'm still working on the one that we were doing at Great Basin. So, I'm just going to go with the song that we sing with **Gill**

Hansen. So I'll sing that one for now, until we get the other one learned more. I have to work on that one. [**Sings in Shoshone from 41:40-44:10**]

C: Okay, Virginia. You're going to be singing another song. Can you tell us about this next song that you're going to be singing about?

J: Okay, I like to sing this one song that my brother long time ago, I asked him if I could sing this song. And the brother I'm talking about is gone today to the spirit world, and that's the brother that I'm talking about, that I think a lot of, that goes a lot of places and sing Round Dance songs, is Art Cavanaugh. I will never forget Art Cavanaugh. He's a relative of ours, and I've always thought a lot of Art Cavanaugh. All his singings that he done everywhere, I hear his tapes everywhere from people. I just love his songs. And I asked Art—I like this one song, that I always say—so I ask Art could I sing that song one day, anytime. He said, “Go ahead and have it. You can have any of my songs. Whatever songs that you want to sing on those tapes that I record, if you can pick them up, sing it. I'll be glad that you're going to carry it on for me,” he said. So, I want to thank Art Cavanaugh for this. And I'm going to sing this one song in memory of Art Cavanaugh.
[**Sings in Shoshone from 45:44-48:36**]

C: Okay, Virginia. The next song that you're going to be singing is a handgame song, I understand. And can you explain a little bit about it before you sing it?

J: The reason why I like to sing handgame is because long time ago, we used to do some handgame songs here in Owyhee at the campgrounds. So, from there I started my handgame, and I used to play with different people, handgames. And for the last, past four years, I've been called to Elko for the—I think it's September or sometime they have their Fandango up in Elko. And it's very interesting, that they have a lot of kids on their

Fandango. They have handgame tournaments. They have card games. They have horseshoe pitch for the men, and the younger boys and girls have horseshoe pitch. They have—at nights, they have Round Dance songs. That's when Tom **Sole Sr.** comes in, and he sings there, and **Keith Andren** sings there, Round Dance song. And they do a lot of good things up there during their Fandango days. So, maybe the other people would like to go and check their Fandango Days out, and I'm pretty sure that was on September, and I can't remember what. It's in the fall. Maybe October. But anyway, they do good things up there. They play handgame with the children, and the childrens are learning from all that, and doing that handgame. They start the kids off the first night. They have all the children's handgame tournament, first night. And the kids are playing for money. And then, after the kids is done the first day, then the next day, then they come in and the adults start their handgame tournament. Lot of them, too. So, I've been up, going up to Elko the past four years. So I've been singing for the children, and teaching some of the children how to sing handgame songs. There's about four of us instructors down there doing that. So one is Gertrude, and Judy **Hoover**, [__inaudible at 51:20__], just different people that want to donate their time and help the youth, and help one another up there, and to teach the kids a lot of things, you know? What they need to learn about our history, our stuff that we have to do to teach them, so that they can learn. Learn all these things. So, I'll be glad to teach someone, whoever is interested in learning songs for the powwow singing, or hand drum. If you want to sing Round Dance songs, if you want to learn, I'm here. Just come here and ask me to teach you, or—adult *and* children. We can pull the drum out, and you can sing and learn. Learn a lot of things together. And know about our history, and keep our culture here upon the Mother Earth. What we do, and the

Four Directions, what we do every day. So, I want to sing a little song for us before it starts raining over here by my house. I'm going to sing a little handgame song that I was teaching some of the kids in Elko. So, I'm going to sing one of those songs. It's a different beat. It's a little different beat. Like, the Round Dance is just a stroke. But this one is a faster hit for the hand drum. See, faster. [Sings from 53:12-56:34]

C: Is there anything else you'd like to say in summary today, Virginia?

J: Only thing I can think about is, I want to thank you, Norman, for coming today.

Interviewing me today. And I'll be glad to teach anybody, if anybody want to sing at the powwow drum. And like I say, it helps everybody in a good way. You know, when we go and take time, go to the powwow, you feel good. Smudge yourself down with sweetgrass. Everybody feels good. Pray to the Creator. And that way, we don't lose our history. We need to keep it up, and stay in the powwow circle.

[End of recording]