

Connections to Land and People - Lowell Amiotte - OSEU #1

We're very connected to the land here. I've been really lucky. I got to spend ten years in Spearfish working at Black Hills State, and I went to school there. So I kind of feel that that's home. I'm connected to that. I am from Pine Ridge, and I'm connected to that through the people, the animals, and everything. And then to Rapid City. I went to school here and so I'm lucky, you know, I have all those connections to the land here in this area. And I think the inner connection with the people has been very important to make that connection to the land. All the people are the ones who make it worthwhile to be in a certain area. And I chose to identify with Indian people. A lot of people look at me and say, "Who are you, Indian?" I say, "Yeah, I mean, you know, I wouldn't know that, you know." So it's been the Indian people who I've really enjoyed and wanted to be with. Just a little story on connectedness. I don't know if you don't, Lionel Bordeaux, but he's president of Sinte Gleska University. He and I first met in 1960 at Black Hills State College, the very first day of college. I walked in the gym where they had all the freshmen, and he was sitting there and I went and I sat by him. He turned away from me a little bit and, you know, he saw me coming. He kind of turned away, but I went and got around, shook hands and sat down by him.

And we got talking. I mentioned my name was Amiotte, and right away he was able to connect that with the area at Rosebud and Pine Ridge. So he looked at me and he said, "Are you Indian?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "I knew it." And ever since then he's called me "brother." And we can go. We graduated college and we went three years where we didn't see each other. I was registering at the University of South Dakota for my master's degree, and a big shadow came over me and I looked out and Lionel was standing there. We haven't seen each other for three years. We shook hands. He sat down and started filling his papers out. Eventually, our three-year stories came out to each other. But there's that connection with people where you don't have to be with them every minute. You know, you. You know them, they know you. And I thought this was a trait of Indian people. And then as I got older, I had many non-Indian friends who we interact the same way. And I noticed they interact in the same way with some of their non-Indian friends. So, it's a people thing. I think once you've established a relationship with someone like that, it's always there. And sometimes, you know, with family you

can't choose your family, but it's still there because it's family. And family is very important.