

**Interview with Laurie (Lorene) Sisquoc, the Sherman Indian School Museum Curator, Riverside, California. Date 6/19/20. This “best effort” verbatim transcript is of the recorded voice interview (33:11).**

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The focus this morning will be on the most important issues impacting indigenous girls and women. The interviewer will be Keri Then of the American Association of University Women, Riverside-Moreno Valley-San Geronimo branch. Laurie, thanks again for taking the time to be interviewed by AAUW and I'll start with our first question.

**Q1: Tell us about yourself and how you became the curator of the Sherman Indian Museum.**

Laurie: I started working at Sherman in 1982. I was in the dormitories for 15 years. Around 1985, I began volunteering at the School Museum. It's one of our historic buildings on campus and it's one of our original administration buildings and dated from 1901. It was turned into a museum in 1970. When I was about 10 years old when it turned into a museum to preserve the history and tell the story of our school. But one of the stipulations was that it would be at no cost to the government. It would be run by volunteers and donations. So I started going to the museum in the eighties and visiting with Mrs. Ramona Bradley, curator and volunteer manager. I started volunteering for her in 1985. She passed away in 1989. We closed the museum for a couple years until 1991. I was then offered the position as Volunteer Curator by the School of the Museum. So I have just been here ever since. I was born and raised at the school. My grandmother worked there from 1951 to 1967. My mother was worked from 1969 to 2000. We grew up on the campus. I was living on the campus when I was born. It was our family history. We lived there in 1969, we grew up here, and lived with the history of the school. Great live for that. I just stayed on. My actual job title at the school is “Cultural Traditions Leader” and the museum is just part of that job. I provide culture programs and activities and classes at the school. It's a long story with lots of roads to it.

Keri: Sounds like you ended up exactly where you wanted to be.

Laurie: Well, it kinda like where I was supposed to be. Meant to be.

**Q2: So, how does the Sherman Indian museum support and interface with the community?**

Laurie: Well, we've always been a very public place. We have about three annual public events. We start off our school year in August. And, usually in September we have our Indian Day celebration, which is usually the last Friday in September and so we have a school-wide celebration. We invite the public to come and learn more about our school and we have different events going on that day. Focus is down at the museum. Following that, we have a alumni event usually in October honoring the alumni and that's also public. Sometimes in the spring we have a craft fair. Recently we started the Earth Day celebration in April yo bring public n campus. And that's just the ones by the museum. The school also has three or four special events.

Keri: Hopefully, when the museum reopens and the women of AAUW feel comfortable enough, we can visit. Usually we try to do an out and about at least once every 3 months.

We definitely want to come and see the museum and learn a bit more about the Sherman Indian School as well as the museum itself.

Laurie: Yeah, yeah, that's what it's for, because so many times people who live in Riverside have never stepped on the campus or know what we're about. That's what the Museum is for-- to tell the story. Gladly, love groups to come. We have alumni that come from all over United States. Our school has Tribal Representation from all over United States from east to west, north to south, as far as Alaska, down to Mississippi, the Great Lakes, the east coast and all in between. People travel to see where their grandparents went to school. Or where they went to school. Lots of alumni as well as public. Looking forward to opening up.

Keri: A lot of uncertainty right now.

Laurie: We're all in that.

### **Q3: How has the focus of the museum changed if at all over the years?**

I think it's pretty much stayed the same. When Mrs. Bradley was there, she was my mentor, and she was an Elder at the time when she was running the Museum. Her focus was to bring awareness about boarding school history, Native American history, local history, and we've always been focused on that. And I think the only thing that has changed more over the last 30 years is making it a more public place, it was a well kept secret, and we've grown in that way. The focus has always been the same. It's not just telling the negative story or a positive story. It's the people's story. Anybody that attended there, they all have different memories of it and different things that happened there, good and bad at these schools. Just to to share that story. Pretty much stayed the same, kinda not a very good way is that we're still operating on volunteers and donations. My focus has been lately is to try to change that. One of the things we did was accepted a grant that UCR managed and they got the grant to do service for us. We had all of our archives digitized. That was really a big step for me as it's always been scary and fearful to do anything like that. It took a long while to accept. I knew the importance of it but it was scary when you know they'll go through all of our documents, files, and photos. It was very, very well done and it was a good project. It ended last year. We had a great project coordinator, Charlotte Dominguez. Her, along with the UCR students she hired, were able to scan close to 10,000 historic photographs, in our collection and then we also had our documents and ledgers from 1892 and up, sent out to be scanned. And, so it turned out really well. It was a new thing for us. A step toward the future, technology, and preservation. So now those items which I would worry about in the past of people wanting to access them and I was worried about their safety now it's accessible online at *Calisphere*.

Keri: Is that an online digital database?

Laurie: Yes, I'll provide the information. It was a really a great grant. They hired the project coordinator, get scanning machine, and were able to keep the scanner and computer. Now you can go online and look up photos, yearbook, and different things. People are always requesting and now they can go online to look for it at:

<https://calisphere.org/collections/27124/>

Keri: It sounds like was it was a labor of love, but it also sounds like it needed to be done.  
Laurie: Very much so and I'm very glad I felt comfortable enough to do with it. That was initiated by Professor Trasker/UCR. He worked with us for many, many years, volunteering and sending me interns. Because of his confidence in the project, it turned out good. The time was right. Prior to that, we had prior some of the documents microfilmed, but that wasn't accessible online, you know, so now they're digitized and it's a whole different thing.

Keri: It sounds like the next step to make sure the future can see everything from the past.

**Q4: What is the greatest need of the Sherman Indian museum? I know you mentioned it is still ran by volunteers and donations. Can you expand on that and maybe tell us anything else you might need?**

Laurie: More volunteers are always good. We have a volunteer program. It's hard to say when we'll be up and running with that but even researchers like it we get a lot of requests for research. People that like to do genealogy. That is one of my needs are volunteers in that field especially because we get a lot of requests for research about their great-grandparents went to Sherman. They want information. Research is a big request we get. We want to form a board of directors and a docent committee which we've had in the past. Start things up like that. All kinds of support. I guess it's little things like that. Just people coming and be aware and learning about the boarding school history is real important. So are some things that are helpful. We don't have a 501(c)(3) my hopes are to form that. Especially, when and if I retire. I've been there 38 years so getting close to retirement. When I retire, I think I can get a board going and some things going because I can focus just on the museum not on my other duties that take precedence over the museum.

Keri: That's certainly understandable. You always want to not only have someone to replace you but also have sustainability.

Laurie: Yes. I have plans. I mentioned the museum is in s 1902/02 building. It's a very strong and wonderful but a little outdated. One of the plans that I've been working on and we were going to do it in 2007 and the recession hit and we didn't do it. Focus and campaigning promote a a facility next to the museum an archival research center. We'd like to start a Research Center where we can store our items store our items safely, also have work rooms where we work on items and students can learn. We don't have work room and we don't have building next door where we can store our documents. We'd like get a building next door store artifacts and documents in a state of the art environment. Also a Learning Center to work with our high school students and working with tribal culture and historic resources, locally. and then also working with local universities and museums. Kind of a learning place to work and network with other groups to preserve and document. I want to also thank other interns that have stayed on and volunteers.  
(Audio problems)

Keri: thank-you for extensive answer. We at AAUW are always looking for needs and trying to find out how we can help. That's one of our missions -- gender equity and women.

**Q5: Next question is what impact has covid-19 had on the museum and a school?**

Laurie: [The] Museum has been closed since March 18. (Audio problems) we go under federal Guidelines, so we're still waiting to hear when we can open up and start our programs again. It's been quiet. It's been a time to do other project without the public there. We recently received a collection of baby baskets, of cradleboards and baby baskets, and so we're working on that. We're working on the museum yard. It started to look abandoned so we have a few volunteers cleaning up the parking lot and yard to make it look like it's not abandoned. As far as the school, I cannot discuss the School, as I'm not at liberty to discuss school plans. The museum is the only thing I can discuss.

**Q6: Our mission is for women and girls research, education, and advocacy and we want to know how can we bring more equity to indigenous girls and women?**

Laurie: Well, you know one of the things is we've started this already. You've invited us to the different events and activities. One thing I'd would like to encourage is that you let them have a voice like at the Women's March, things like that. Some of our girls wanted to talk about the missing and murdered indigenous women movement. Things like that. Letting them have a voice. Because [the] Native American Community is really underrepresented. When you hear on the news every other ethic background but not Native Americans for statistics. We're kind of under represented. We're just kind of an invisible people. Just acknowledging them, giving them the time to have a voice in any of your activities is great and inspiring for the girls to see the importance of their voice and being heard. So that would good. You've included us in the Women's March, recently. Letting them know their voice is important.

Keri: I can assure you we will continue to include you both in the Inland Empire Women's March and in AAUW. I think that's has been a common theme that we've heard. We have to reach out. We must bring attention to those that are under-represented. You're absolutely right. The word "invisible" -we need to change that word and that no one is invisible. Everyone should be represented. That's our goal.

Laurie: Also, the land acknowledgement is just a very important protocol that needs to be done. It is being done more at universities and some local, even our Mayor, sometimes he does it. The land acknowledgement is where ever you are, acknowledging or also reaching out to the local tribal Community to start the program off with an acknowledgement of whose land we're on, wherever we are. Whose ancestral land is it? So that's real important too. Mentoring or encouraging work with a lot of the local universities and other programs throughout Southern California that are providing opportunities, including our girls, in these programs in medical and law. Every field you can think of. Any opportunity where they have other high school students coming. Just remember we're here too. Just remember we're not in the Riverside Unified School District. We are separate and a part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, we're federal, so sometimes we're forgotten. And, you know things that the City of Riverside might be working with high school youth, so it's important to remember us there. Just go through our administration and principal- offer for us to participate in things like that.

Keri: I'm glad you said that because AAUW sponsors 8th grade girls to go to a science, technology, engineering, and math camp every year. You are absolutely right. We have worked with multiple Unified School Districts and of course with the COVID situation, this year's event was canceled. And unfortunately, we believe that because the universities that host us, they have not come up with a plan to reopen their facilities next summer, so unfortunately, we are seeing, potentially our STEM program where we actually fund the girls to go to Camp-canceled for the next 2 years. But, but there has been some discussion and I'm hopeful that that discussion will be maybe we'll find a solution to this problem. But one thing we need to do, and we will, is to reach back out as you suggested to the Sherman Indian School principal and let them know about our camps that we host and also make sure that we do include the Sherman Indian girls because we have been working with Riverside Unified, Moreno Valley Unified, Alvorde Unified, and Val Verde Unified. So you're absolutely right. We need to expand our horizon as well.

Laurie: Yeah our counselors, Karlene Clifford and Stephanie McMorris, are always looking for those opportunities for our students. The principle, and our counselors, and I can send you that information by email.

Keri: please, yes.

Laurie: I'll also send you the *Calisphere* website, I don't know the exact web site, I'll look it up. I also would suggest that during the summer the kids are all at home for the summer but there is a lot of local Native American youth that do attend the public schools. And then there's also Noli Indian school on the Soboba reservation. It's a day school and they have a junior high to high school kids. I think it's 7th, maybe 6th, to 12th grade. It's Noli (N-O-L-I) Indian School on the Soboba Reservation. And so they also have Native youth. And so we do have many Native youth that attend public school. Not just those affiliated with the families at Sherman but others that are native to the area or have related out here.

So there is a big Native American community, you know network, and even identifying or targeting some of our native students that are in public school, we could work with you on that to. If we can get it out to the community when you have some opportunities we could let some of the families know that are residents of Riverside.

Keri: Our Branch covers Riverside, Moreno Valley and San Geronimo.

Laurie: There is a big Native community here and you'll see that in the 2020 Census when it comes out and you'll see that it's a big population.

Keri: I'm happy to hear you say that too, the 2020 Census. I was going to say that but that's fantastic as well that you're promoting that and encouraging people, to Native American people, that live in our community to make sure that they get counted as well.

Laurie: There's a Native group working with the Census Bureau, Native group, and Native Department and they're really promoting it and you know that we need to be counted. That's so important. Hopefully, many have already and I know we did-our family has.

Keri: Great, That's good.

**Q7: The last question is there anything that you think are important issues that impact indigenous girls and women that we have not discussed, something else that we need to be aware of.**

Laurie: There are many. The missing and murdered indigenous women is very important. I think many of the same issues that are with all women, all young women are opportunities to break through those barriers of equal rights, equal opportunity. At our school, we've had girls on the football team, we have girls in welding, and taking any opportunities. We are pretty open to providing them equal opportunity. But it's just out of the mainstream, you know, just that support for the girls that they can do anything. They can be whatever they want. Just supporting them and what you're doing now, reaching out and networking, and that support. I think that once things get back to some normalcy, we can look further into it even speakers, and a speaker series, mentorship. All kinds of things we can work on through our administration and it will provide opportunities for the girls.

Keri: you said speaker series and that again is something that we at AAUW have been hosting for many years now and you're absolutely right. Now that we have a great established relationship, I think I'm going to ask our new incoming presidents to reach out and set up a time to come at once we have the COVID crisis and as you said, we're back to normal. Laurie: Or figure out how we could work with it.

Keri: We would like to come visit the museum and and also set down, if possible, with the principal or others and find out how we can help.

Laurie: I'd be happy to set up a meeting once we're settled.

Keri: Laurie, I want to thank you very much for this interview this morning and I hope you don't mind that I will be sharing all of this information, publicly. I want to make sure you're okay with that.

Laurie: yes, that's fine.

Keri: I have a recording of our conversation for prosperity and to make sure that people can hear your voice and hear what you have said to the membership at AAUW.

Laurie: Okay, cool. Thank you for thinking of us and I look forward to our next meeting or project. Whatever we can get going.

Keri: I will definitely encourage people to reach out directly to you to just expand. Like you said, nobody should be invisible and we need to expand the information about not just girls and women, but men as well, from our Native American population. So thank you Laurie Thank you, very much.

Laurie: Once I get off the phone, I'll email you the links to the councilors, the principal, and also where the people can look up the history of our school on *Calisphere*.

Keri: I'll definitely be sharing the link about the history of your school and I'll keep the other information within our community.

Keri: Okay, thank-you, Laurie. You have a great day. Bye. Bye.

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