

An Interview with
Molly Tovar

(Regalia Interview)

at *The* Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Molly Tovar:

...Molly Tovar and I am Comanche descent. The Comanche people are known as the Southern Plains people. We were hunters and we were gatherers and we still practice those traditions today. Currently there are about 15,000 Comanche's in the United States and approximately 8000 live in Oklahoma in the Lawton area. Today I'd like to share with you where I developed my core values and how it really helped me become who I am today and the career trajectory that I took because of the driving forces that I've had around me. Many native people learn their skills and their values from stories. Storytelling is very beneficial and very helpful in creating who we are today. One of the stories I would like to share with you is about the eagle feather story. Before I begin, I would like to tell you a little bit about why native people are very cautious and treat eagle feathers with dignity and specialty. It's because eagles, we believe, are the messenger to the Creator and why do we believe that? Because the eagle flies the highest of all the birds. It reaches up into the sky where it can talk to the Creator so it's very different than the hummingbird. The hummingbird is the small bird, but the hummingbird is very important to us as well because they're the first bird you see when the sun is rising. They're the first bird that you might hear that you want to respect and say thank you to because that's how you begin your day, which is very different, again, than the eagle which is the largest bird. We believe that the eagle is the probably prominent bird of all birds because, again, they're the messenger of people. One of the stories that I learned as a child was about the eagle feather and what does this eagle feather mean to me and my family. I was taught that this beautiful eagle feather, that this center is the core of who we are. It is where our value systems come from. It is our backbone of where we begin life. What can happen, though, in life as we're growing and we're learning, we start to stray away from those value systems. We disrespect our elders. We sometimes neglect our family. We sometimes don't listen when we think we need to be listening or should be listening. We sometimes forget to pray. We sometimes forget to give people credit where it's due because we might be thinking of ourselves. Sometimes we don't give credit where credit is due. Sometimes we bring in negative energy into environments that aren't healthy. Sometimes we forget, again, what our culture is which is very critical to who we are and what we know but as life grows and we continue to grow as an individual, we know that the Creator gave us this opportunity to where you can see that our life starts to break up and we

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start to lose those values that are in us and that we've been taught. But the Creator gives us a chance to rethink and to relearn and to go back and connect with all those teachings that we were taught, what the right thing to do, what was the proper thing to do, what was the good ways to learn. So it gives us an opportunity in life to become one again, to go back to this core value, to go back to this backbone of who we are so we can give another opportunity and a chance because the Creator gave us the opportunity that each of us has a value that we need to provide and should provide to the world and to the environment and for us, as leaders, it is about teaching our youth; it is about going back and being strong and creating the next generation of future leaders. So we always look, and I always look, to this eagle feather as very sacred because it really is what drives my core values that I learned meeting with many prominent women across the United States, one, of course, I mention, is LaDonna Harris who taught me about the four R's and where my core values started from and how I continue to grow and learn from those core values. So I wanted to share with you today that this eagle feather and the meaning of it from storytelling is very important to the way that I continue to grow and to learn as an individual, not only in my tribal community, but in any work that I do today.

Blanche Touhill: Can you talk about your regalia?

Molly Tovar: Yes, okay.

Blanche Touhill: Would you explain? It's so beautiful.

Molly Tovar: Yeah. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the regalia and then the four R's again because it's part of the regalia, okay? Would you mind taking this?

Blanche Touhill: I would love to take it, thank you very much.

Molly Tovar: It goes in that one container.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you.

MT: Thank you. I would like to talk a little bit about my four R's that I mentioned, in the four R's of the Respect, Reciprocity, Redistribution and Responsibility. I learned that from LaDonna Harris, a very prominent Comanche native leader across the United States, across the world. She

works with indigenous peoples. And I remember, and I try to practice, the responsibility piece of it, we are responsible to give back to others, our knowledge, our skills; the respect, to respect our elders but also to respect our environment and respect the world in which we live in. And the reciprocity and redistribution piece also go hand-in-hand because, as I mentioned, sometimes we collect material things that we don't need. We collect too much information and we forget to share so it's important that we go back and we distribute that knowledge. In learning about the Comanche culture with LaDonna, she also taught me the way into which you should dress and the way that a Comanche person wears the regalia. This is called regalia for Comanche people because we were plains people. We were taught and still practice today which is actually kind of a dying art, that we make our own regalia. Most of this is made many times, actually, that regalia like this is you can see the front and the back. It takes about four to five deer hides to make. This piece in the front is one hide. The one in the back, this top piece is another hide and as you can see, all this fringe is another hide. It takes that many deer hides to make this regalia. The reason that the fringe is so long is it's supposed to represent, when we're dancing, it represents the flow of the earth and the flow of the way people live. It should be very smooth and gliding like grass, very soft and gentle when we walk. Many pieces that I'm wearing today are either given to me as a gift or someone's made it special for this regalia. You can see, by looking at it, the colors all match. It's meaningful and it's purposeful in every piece that's designed. This is called a breastplate. The breastplate is an old, traditional and it's contemporary now but it's made of bone and traditionally, you can see that it's glass and glass was traded by the French and other Europeans when they traded with native people. Also, the silver that we wear is many, many years old. This buckskin alone is probably more than 50 years old. I'm going to think about 50 to 70 years old. The reason it looks so well is because after we use it and wear it, we have to put it away and take care of it and clean it and pray for it before we put it on and when we take it off. This scarf...sometimes wonder why do people wear this scarf? It's because, traditionally, the buckskin was made with one of the hides where the deer tail hung at the front. So every piece, as I mentioned, is purposeful. This represents the tail of the deer. Again, the earrings are very meaningful as well because they match the rest of the regalia. You can see on my eyes that I've painted four lines and four lines

for native women is that you put something on that always needs four directions. It could be the four directions from north, west, east, south or it could also mean the four seasons, or the cycles of life. But wherever we are, we always make sure that we have four directions somewhere in our regalia piece because it's very symbolic. With the Comanche moccasins, they're very different than the Sioux moccasins or other travel mocs. A little bit about the moccasins, the Cheyennes, the Kiowas, the Comanches, many of the similar tribes have very similar moccasins that we wear but the difference with the Comanches, they're one piece. They're made especially for me, for the individual wearing them. But the outside, you can see, when you put them together, is on the outside of your leg versus, some of the tribes are on the inside or some of the tribes, they're just the short moccasins. These are long moccasins and we wear them only for traditional ceremonial purposes. It would not be common for me, nor would I ever wear them in public because it's only for ceremony that we would wear. Also, a little bit about the different tribes that...when a regalia is made, as I mentioned, it's made because the person who's making it had a vision or had an image about the personality of the individual that they're making the dress for. It's in their dream; it's what they believe; it's how they would like for individuals to wear the history, an honor that we wear our regalia. Sometimes the regalia can be 10 to 15 to 20 pounds that you're wearing so when you're out performing and walking, it becomes very heavy and in the summers when we're dancing in the 100 degree heat, it becomes cumbersome but you meditate and you pray during that part because that's not what you're thinking about. Those thoughts that you're thinking, you're thinking about all the positive energy and why you're wearing what you're wearing. The eagle plume that I'm wearing in my hair is very important. Many years ago, women were not allowed to touch or to wear eagle feathers. As years went past, different ceremonies took place and history evolved that women now are allowed to wear the eagle plume in the hair. You can see that I'm wearing it on the left side. For some native people, it's worn on the left side to symbolize that you're either married or you're single. For the Comanche people, the way LaDonna Harris taught me, was that I wear it on the left side because it's closest to the heart and we want as much to go to the heart because when you're thinking every day when you're out in ceremony, you have to really pray for people and ensure that your heart is there for all the people. So,

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again, every piece that we wear is very important, with how we wear it, when we put it on as we're getting ready.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your earrings. Do they have a symbolic meaning?

Molly Tovar: Yes. The earrings, have I believe, are the four directions and you can also see that they're circular. You'll see that the medallion is circular. It's the same design as the earrings. And it has many of the directions in it represents the sun and the sky and the colors. You can see in the colors the same as with the earrings. When they coordinate and put the pieces together, there's many more pieces that go with this but it depends on what you're wearing this regalia for and when you're wearing it and what pieces that you wear during those certain ceremonies.

Blanche Touhill: What are the different ceremonies that you take part in?

Molly Tovar: Generally it would be what we call a Pow Wow and that's where you dance and people might think that it's just a Pow Wow where you do some competition dances, but for many people, it's about being together with your other native people, not just the Comanche Nations, but many of the nations and you do a lot of praying and meditation and when you come into this arena, when you come into this Pow Wow, it is a place that you take away all the negative energy and that's what we call ceremony. You do not bring any negative energy into an environment where there is dancing and where there are drums. Nothing should be discussed, only the good things are to be thought, even in your mind and in your heart, and again, it's why we wear our feathers close to our hearts. It's why we wear our four directions, because we have to look at what is circular and what comes back to us and we always want to think of what we call good medicine and not bring in any of what we call the bad medicine into our thoughts, into our prayers, into any way of our thinking when we do the ceremonies.

Blanche Touhill: Are the Pow Wows brought together to...do they bring the community together to solve problems or just to have sort of a coming together of all the individuals in this culture who can celebrate as one, being Cheyenne, or is it both? Is it a mixture of both?

Molly Tovar: Generally, the purpose of the Pow Wow is to bring people together as a community and really to just come and embrace each other to say hello and to empower each other with positive energy. It's also an engagement

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of all the native community people and non-native community people as well. That's really the purpose of it.

Blanche Touhill: Do visitors understand what this is about?

Molly Tovar: Most of the visitors will get some information to understand what it's about. Typically what we ensure that our visitors do, if they don't know, it's okay to ask. So ask any questions: what is the name of that Pow Wow? Why are you wearing that regalia? What do the drum songs mean? We want our visitors to ask those questions because it's the only way that they're going to learn.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, so you want to expand the knowledge of your culture?

Molly Tovar: Yes, of all the cultures but there's so many different tribes. There's 566 federally recognized tribes so when I talk, again, about the eagle feather, there's many different versions and different beliefs but it's a common denominator, a common thought that this eagle feather that we wear is common around all native people about the respect that we give to this eagle and any animal that we take from. So the eagle feather is kind of a standard mutual understanding of what it means to Indian people.

Blanche Touhill: Do you have Pow Wows that are set due to the seasons or due to a certain event, or does the ruling council say, "We will have a Pow Wow next month"? Are they set dates, like; you have Christmas or Kwanzaa or something?

Molly Tovar: There's different types of Pow Wows. Some Pow Wows are the Pow Wows that you gather people together and you celebrate and there are also competition Pow Wows where native people go and they compete and they do competition dancing and you can compete in this type of regalia with other women in this type of regalia, you compete and you get a lot of prize money. There's other kinds of Pow Wows which they call ceremonial Pow Wows or a Pow Wow to honor a person and that might be only for the family; it might be only for that particular tribal nation, and outside people may not be allowed to come into those particular Pow Wows. So they're very different across the country and there's something called Pow Wow Season and that usually starts about March and that's why the Washington University holds their Pow Wow in March or April, because at the beginning of what we call Pow Wow Season where the dancers are coming out to start getting ready for all the

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competitions across the country, they will travel from one state to another state. They know what the schedule is across the United States and they go from one Pow Wow to the next and compete and it can start from tiny tots to the elderly people. So it's just diverse across different Pow Wows in different countries and different nations in the States.

Blanche Touhill: When you have a Pow Wow...I have watched them when I was in...well, St. Louis, we used to have dance competitions, Indian dance competitions and then we partnered with the Missouri Historical Society and we did it together. But the men dance alone and do the women dance alone and then everybody dances together?

Molly Tovar: There's different dances. Some dances are the competition dances which you go in your own category. Some dances they call inter-tribal. That's where they invite all native people and non-native people to come out and participate and learn about the dance and the drum and the song, because, again, it's a meditation and their prayer and generally the songs are prayer songs. So they invite the whole community to come out and do the inter-tribal dance. But then, there's other dances called, like, the round dance and the round dance is one that generally starts in the beginning of a Pow Wow because the purpose of that dance is to get everyone to come out and collaborate or be a community and welcome people. So you'll see in the Pow Wow, sometimes the first dance they do is a round dance because they go in a circle all the way around and around and around the Pow Wow arena because they're welcoming all the people. Men dance separately when they're doing their own competition but also men will dance what's called the gourd dance and the gourd dance is typically for the men who have been veterans and they start the Pow Wow out and women, you will see behind the men. Women are behind the men to honor them and respect them, so you'll see the women back there with the drum beat pretty much just moving like this and the purpose of that is just to honor that veteran that they call the gourd dancer that starts the Pow Wow off.

Blanche Touhill: And the veteran, in the old days, could have been for inter-tribal warfare but the veteran today, could they be someone who served in the United States Army?

Molly Tovar: Definitely. The veteran is any veteran, at all levels, all kinds, all different armed services and could be some of our code talkers, could be from the

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recent wars. They are considered veterans and they start the Pow Wow off with what they call the veteran song or (flag?) song and start what we call the grand entry off because it's to honor the veterans, which, again, are some of the highest regarded individuals in Indian country. So we honor them by having them enter that circle arena first.

Blanche Touhill: Do the women get honored for childbirth or for birthdays? When would you honor a woman?

Molly Tovar: Women get honored in very different ways in different tribes. As I mentioned with the eagle feather, that is one way that we get honored. It's what we've earned or what we have done or accomplished for us. I received an eagle feather when I finished my Ph.D. program so the native women gave me an eagle feather to say, "We honor you with what we believe is the highest award, as native people, we can give you" because one does not go get their eagle feather and purchase it or find it. One gets it because they're giving it to them as an honor. That's the only way we get eagle feathers.

Blanche Touhill: Now, how does the community know that you received a Ph.D.?

Molly Tovar: What we call Indian country to be very small and within your own tribe or your own people, you know how many individuals...there's very few American Indian people, 1% in the country in higher education, so when there is a native person who reaches that highest honor, it's pretty much all over Indian country in the United States. Someone knows someone else, another native person, received a Ph.D. That's a big honor because we value education so importantly. So that pretty much is open for the world.

Blanche Touhill: Now, at what point do you tell stories? Do you do that at Pow Wows or do you do that in the home?

Molly Tovar: Stories are told generally in the home. The Pow Wows, when I say you don't tell stories in the Pow Wow, really the Pow Wow is about ceremony storytelling because it's what the drum songs are. It's what the songs are about. But generally you learn your stories and you learn who you are and where you come from and what direction you're going to take from the stories that are told within your home and those are stories...the feather story is that I was told from many people about the center of the eagle feather as being the core of who you are and, yes, you're going to

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stray away sometimes and sometimes you learn from those experiences but remember, it's important to come back to the core values and remember it's important because we're always going to be there for you, is what my father said. We're always going to be there for you so it's okay to go out and stray but come back and remember where you come from and take that opportunity to learn from it.

Blanche Touhill: And do you learn the songs from your family as well?

Molly Tovar: Yes, you learn songs and some songs you can share; some songs you cannot share and if you share songs, you want to get permission. It would be interesting or similar to the Western culture where, before you use someone's textbook or use an article in someone's research, you would get their permission because that's the respectable way to do it. The same way with songs and stories, you want to get the permission of that person who told you the story, to sing that song or to share that story before you do it. It's the right way to do it. It's the proper way.

Blanche Touhill: And as far as drums and the music of the drums, how do people learn that?

Molly Tovar: They learn that when they're growing up, when you see that the Pow Wow, there's little infants and babies and they have them at the drums. When they're just born, you start bringing them to the Pow Wow so they can hear the sounds so they can be around this environment at all ages and the sooner, the better. Again, you'll see the infants at Pow Wows. What typically also happens is when you're a child, barely about the age you can walk, a ceremony takes place and what happens is, for my children, is when they could barely just walk, you have a ceremony and you take them into the circle and you have elders take them and very respected elders take your children in and you do a special ceremony so they can go into that circle. Otherwise, you really should not go into the arena of the circle of the dance, if you have not had the proper ceremony and for my daughter, people that she took in were Jack Thorpe's son, Jim Thorpe's son, Jack Thorpe and very prominent elders who took her into the circle when she was only about two years old. Now she's allowed to go in and do competition dancing and be safe and put out good energy. So there's ceremonies where even...before you can even go into that circle, you pray and you do special traditions.

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Blanche Touhill: How many of, let's say, just the Cheyenne, how many of the Cheyenne today practice in some way? Well, I guess there'd be levels. There would be those that would know the stories and not necessarily go through the ceremonies, or do they all go through the ceremonies?

Molly Tovar: No, not just with Cheyennes but with any native nation, not everyone knows the language, the culture, the ceremony, just like I mentioned. Only 1% of the Comanche people know the language and this is a dying out of even creating the buckskin. Today, you'll see that this regalia for the Comanches is made of cloth. It's beautiful and it's elegant but this is a dying art because also, all the bead work you see, this is all incredible bead work that's sewn onto leather which is challenging and hard work, then the designs that go in each piece, and it's not like there's a pattern but they do match. But they create the patterns as they have the vision as they're sewing this. So, like the Cheyenne, like the Comanches, not all of them know the culture, remember when it was the Education to Urban Indian Movement when native peoples in the 1950's were encouraged to move to the urban cities and promised, "We're going to give you jobs; we're going to give you healthcare; we're going to give you these wonderful benefits; we're going to give you training" and that's why you see so many native people in these urban areas. And what happened was, they didn't have the money to go home. They didn't have the resources. They didn't get the jobs that they were promised to get. They didn't get the skill sets. So right here in St. Louis, there's 3000 American Indians in St. Louis that we call urban Indians. They never had the opportunity to go back because they didn't have the money to go back to their tribe. So they lost their culture.

Blanche Touhill: Are they getting it back now? Some?

Molly Tovar: Some, but it's hard. When you live in an urban area and you've been here and now you have a second and third generation of that family living in St. Louis, each generation loses more and more culture.

Blanche Touhill: Do they come back to the Pow Wow that you have at Washington University?

Molly Tovar: They all come to the Pow Wow. All of a sudden, you wonder where did all these native people come from? When they come to Wash U, they're all there. They wait for the Pow Wow because they know it's a place that's a

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safe haven, it's a place they can go and talk to people without having to do what we call Indian 101 because you can have jokes and you can tell stories and everyone knows different cultures but you all kind of have one frame of reference. It's a wonderful place for native people to go to.

Blanche Touhill: Do people put out books as to what these regalia, how you make them and how you create them and the stories?

Molly Tovar: Yes, there are a lot of books and stories.

Blanche Touhill: And records, the music?

Molly Tovar: Many, many stories and each tribe now, as you said, many of the tribes realize many years ago they're losing the culture, they're losing the language that they've now started to archive so much history within each tribe that many, many tribes have their own museums, are teaching the language in the school systems, are teaching their children. So, yes, it's coming back, it is coming back.

Blanche Touhill: But it was in danger of being lost?

Molly Tovar: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And may I ask about the belt? The belt is made out of the deer skin as well?

Molly Tovar: Yes, the belt is what we call the conch shell belt and you can see that it has the conch shells on it and each one of these patches, you can see even the discoloration of these but they're beaded as well. This has...you can see in here...it has my medicine in it. It's called my medicine bag. Traditionally, that's the purpose of these bags wherefore and all for the medicine and sometimes there was a knife sheath used because, remember, it was survival. They were all purposeful and meaningful. This I still use with my medicine in it. This can be used for other sources but now it's just more of a decoration and not functional pieces but you will see, this is what they call the Conch shell belt.

Blanche Touhill: And what is the...

Molly Tovar: This was a gift and you can see the flag in red, white and blue. Many native people ...again, when we talk about veterans, you'll get these kind of gifts where an individual will ask, "Why do native people wear so many

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of the flags?" and it's because we honor our veterans and this is the symbolism of veterans and this was a gift. All of these were gifts, each one of these was a gift. Again, it's not something you buy; it's something that you wait, that someone would like to give you as a gift and you take it with honor and you always wear it, anytime you wear your regalia pieces.

Blanche Touhill: In ancient times, before the Caucasians came to America, did you always have silver?

Molly Tovar: Silver was introduced early, probably, 1700's, maybe earlier than that and it was traded because the Europeans brought it over.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, they brought it.

Molly Tovar: And brought it over. There were areas in the Navajo Nation and some of that where there was mining and so, yes, there was some mining and silver was created. Much of the silver is Navajo because it's their expertise area because that's where the mining and the silvers were.

Blanche Touhill: And they always go for the blue stone, then turquoise.

Molly Tovar: The turquoise is because that was one of the stones, again, that was mined in certain parts of the region and so, back then, if you think about the colors, it was a beautiful color so they started using it for ornate jewelry. You'll see, in Oklahoma with the Plains people, the reason I'm wearing so much bead work is because we're known for our bead work so depending on the region and the tribe, they have their own expertise. So that's why there is so much bead work on this regalia, because Plains people are known for the bead work and the quality of the bead work. So every tribe is known for the different types of their art that people wear.

Blanche Touhill: The bracelet on that side is very interesting. Is there some reason or is that just the designer of the Indians?

Molly Tovar: This white one?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Molly Tovar: This is the coral. This is a shell. It was a gift. It's very heavy. It was a gift, it's very old. I'm thinking it's probably made, again, with the Navajos. This is what they call a very delicate special bracelet, this silver one. It's very

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heavy and by the symbolism on here, my guess is it's also made by the Navajo people. It's very old. This was my mother's. I'm thinking this jewelry, I'm going to guess, I may have gotten it when I was 10 years old and still wear it today.

Blanche Touhill: So they become family heirlooms?

Molly Tovar: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And passed down from generation to generation?

Molly Tovar: And, like I mentioned with the reciprocity piece, if there is a time that I'm meeting someone and I feel they might embrace a piece, it's important that I give these pieces to whomever that person is. It's not for us to keep. It's for us to give away. So there may have been 50 pieces on my arm that one time and you give these away as gifts when you feel it's time to do that.

Blanche Touhill: If somebody would create something like this in cloth today, that would be acceptable at the Pow Wow?

Molly Tovar: Yes, yes, it's very acceptable at the Pow Wow.

Blanche Touhill: Because it's moved into the modern age?

Molly Tovar: It's moved into the modern age. It's kind of evolved into cloth but also because it's difficult for people to go hunt the hide and tan them the way it has been done. My family still does it but it's a lot of work and it takes a lot of hides to put this together. But, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And the jingle when you walk does the jingle have a meaning?

Molly Tovar: Yes. So when you walk and when you dance, everything, when you dance or move, are symbolic in how it stops when the drum stops. So when you see a dancer at a Pow Wow and you see that they have a sudden stop, you want your sound to stop as well. Everything has to stop very directly right on a particular drum beat. So even though you're dancing and you're moving, the flow of the wind or the grass that you get judged on. You get judged on how elegant and how the movement is of the fringe. That's why what's evolved with this dress is it used to be maybe eight inches and because of the competition dancing; they've lengthened this fringe because it has a better effect out there in the Pow Wow arena

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when you're being judged. So I think that was a very clever, to think, let's just keep lengthening this because you'll see them out there when they're moving. It's much more, I guess, creative or beautiful. So that's actually one of the reasons that it's evolved from these long fringes.

Blanche Touhill: Do your children take part in these ceremonies?

Molly Tovar: Yes, my children dance, mm-hmm, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And you dance?

Molly Tovar: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Have you ever won?

Molly Tovar: I don't do competition dancing. My daughter does, because you don't have to do competition dancing. You can just go out and meditate and pray which is why you go out there in a Pow Wow too, to get together and bring back that good energy but also remember to bring back those core values of where I am and where I come from because it's a time to reflect and put things in perspective for me, personally.

Blanche Touhill: Do you feel better when the Pow Wow is over?

Molly Tovar: I always feel better. I always feel better during any type of ceremony.

Blanche Touhill: It renews who you are and what you believe in?

Molly Tovar: Yes, I always keep my medicine pouch with me. I keep a medicine pouch in my glove box. I keep one in my office. I keep the feather in my office when I'm feeling what we call might be stress or not good energy, I ask a friend to take care of that eagle feather and I remove it from my office and I put it in another person's office because I don't want the eagle feather to have any negative energy in the feather. I don't want any of that negative energy in my office within that feather because it's that feather that I use to pray with. So that's a practice that I do. I think probably a lot of people do. You want to keep it away from anything that might bring in bad energy.

Blanche Touhill: How is the Cheyenne Nation trying to keep the language going?

Molly Tovar: I would think the Cheyenne Nation, like many of the nations, is interviewing their elders [inaudible 40:31] and I believe they're very

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active in instituting the language with their youth. There is a Northern Cheyenne and there is a Southern Cheyenne.

Blanche Touhill: Do they have a different dialect?

Molly Tovar: They have a very similar dialect. Just some migrated towards Oklahoma because you'll see the Cheyenne in Oklahoma near the Comanches and you'll see the Cheyenne in the north as well. But they're very similar because it's just two different bands that kind of split. Some stayed and some went south.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, of course. Well, I know that language is very important to a lot of these Indian nations and I know they're trying to get it back but in some of the cases, there are only three or four people who know the language anymore. Is that possible?

Molly Tovar: I've never heard of three or four people.

Blanche Touhill: Four...but just a small amount?

Molly Tovar: A small amount that know the language and there's some controversy on that, that some of the elders think we want to keep it just within our community, within our...let's say Cheyennes...and not have other non-Cheyenne people with the language, but then there's some people who think as many people as can learn the language, the better because it's keeping it alive. It's just like anything else, we don't want it to be distorted or changed or modified because then it's not the correct language; it's not pure. So it's very important for elders to teach the pure language in any of the tribes.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. And how do you elect your elders? Do you elect them?

Molly Tovar: No, elders are defined very differently. Elders in the Western term, by age. We call our elders, depending on how they're honored or how they're valued or respected by the tribal people. It's not about being 70 or 80 years old.

Blanche Touhill: So you could have somebody 50?

Molly Tovar: Yes, absolutely and honor them as an elder because their knowledge is so powerful and so big and they're highly respected, that you honor them as an elder. So our definition of elder is different.

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Blanche Touhill: I have heard that a lot of Indian or some Indian tribes...what I was told was the Navajo, in particular, but it could be true of other tribes as well, that they will often identify very bright children and make sure that they go to college and attain a professional status to come back then and help the community.

Molly Tovar: We all start, as a native person, to say we don't want to speak for other tribes so I don't want to speak for any tribe. I just know of my friends or families from all different tribes, not just the Navajos, but the Navajos do have a very sophisticated private school system. Some of the tribes do. It depends on the size of the tribe. Also, it depends, with the Pueblos, they value education very highly so, yes, as children, they work hard to sell their art and their jewelry and the pottery to ensure that their children go to private schools. So it's different in all tribes but it depends on what they might think as a priority as well as what resources they have for these individuals, for their children, because some of the tribes have very good school systems and others do not.

Blanche Touhill: What role does the woman play in the tribal governance?

Molly Tovar: For me, my understanding is...and again, I'm going to speak from the Comanche culture...as women, we're very highly regarded and sometimes there's a stereotype or image that the women were the people that were in the back and the men were at the forefront and it actually is not a true scenario. It was the women who were the decision makers, who were right at the table with the men who had the visions, who were there to be big supporters but they were very valuable to the decision-making process when there was tribal council. So the women were, yes, the child-bearing people but they were the ones that really worked to create consensus around leaders and decision-making. They were...the women, the strong ones who were there to honor the warriors when they came back. They were there to help create what you call today policies and by-laws and direction and leadership. They were really at the forefront traditionally and very highly respected and they still are today. They've always been. They've always been the leaders.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I always heard...and there again, it might have been one tribe versus another...but I always heard that the women were the decision-makers, with the men, but that it wasn't known, or at least it wasn't promulgated. It was sort of the men were making the decisions and the

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women weren't. But I always heard that it wasn't true, that the women played a role in those policy decisions.

Molly Tovar: The women played a large role, and again, it goes back to those kind of core cultural values about being humble and not needing to take credit for those, but knowing that you have done your due diligence and you've made your impact and you've made your contributions but you don't have to do what LaDonna taught me, wear it on your sleeve because when it's all said and done and there's strong and good positive impact, yes, you are at the table to make those decisions but you don't need to tell anybody. People will figure out who you were or what part and role that you played in those types of...

Blanche Touhill: What do you do now that focuses you to keep the Indian culture alive?

Molly Tovar: Me, personally?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Molly Tovar: I go back and practice my four R's probably every day, every single day. I make sure my eagle feather is in my room with me, that I carry my medicine bag and so is it something I talk about to people? No, I don't mention it; I don't talk about it. I just do it and it's what you're taught. It's just what you do because it's how you feel at the end of the day. I've always really tried to practice it. Yes, I stray away, like I mentioned in the eagle feather story, but then I remember I have to come back to that core value because it's so important, because if not, it just drains your energy, if you carry these negative energies across life or in your office or at home. It's so important to come back to that center, to balance because it's very important to balance your culture, your life, your family. I feel like I really try to practice it.

Blanche Touhill: Do your children practice it?

Molly Tovar: Yes. My daughter knows the rule, if you're going to vent about something at work or individuals, you have to say three good things. Yes, she did last night when she called me and she was frustrated and then I don't have to tell her, she knows and then she said three great things about the individual because you've got to bring back that good energy back into your body about that human being. It's what you practice. It's what we do. It's what I do. It's what I taught my children.

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Blanche Touhill: Now, talk about your job at Washington U.

Molly Tovar: My job at Washington University is the director of the Budar Center for American Indian Studies and we recruit and retain, gradually...I say gradually, some American Indian students in social work. We have 27 American Indian students enrolled this academic year which I'm very proud of and they come from 15 different nations. They're organizing the annual Pow Wow this year for the 2016 Pow Wow. It's going to be phenomenal. They're great students and come up with wonderful programs and projects for the university, not just the Brown School but for the whole university. At the School of Medicine, they collaborate with other programs and I'm excited to be part of this incredible school, number one School of Social Work. What I find with the students is when they get there, because they come in from all different nations, they don't understand sometimes it's the number one school in the country. The reason they came there was because they knew someone else who came there or had friends or a friend is coming there. So when I embrace them and tell them how proud I am that they're at the number one school, that then sets off an alarm for them and I feel really bad because then they think, "Oh, my gosh, I didn't know it was the number one school. I came here because it was a safe environment for me to come to."

Blanche Touhill: But then they're proud of that.

Molly Tovar: Oh, they're very proud of it, they're very, very proud of it.

Blanche Touhill: And when they graduate, where do they go? Do they go back to...

Molly Tovar: They go back home. When they graduate, they go back home. That's the intent. They go back home wherever home is and sometimes home, as I mentioned, could be an Urban Indian Center in Denver or New Mexico or Seattle. Wherever home is it's back in Indian country and Indian country doesn't just mean reservation; it means where the leaders are.

Blanche Touhill: So you've broadened the definition?

Molly Tovar: It means where the native people are and native people are right here.

Blanche Touhill: Now, what percent of a person's background has to be Indian before...

Molly Tovar: Every tribe is different.

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- Blanche Touhill: What about the Cheyenne?
- Molly Tovar: The Cheyenne I'm not familiar with. I don't know if it's a quarter or half or an eighth quantum Indian blood. Every tribe is very different. The Cherokees are by descent; the Potawatomis, I think, are lineage. So every tribe is very different with what percentage of lineage that you have in order to an enrolled member of that tribe. They're very different.
- Blanche Touhill: Okay, so there would be a difference between if you're an enrolled member of the tribe or you're of Indian descent, at least a part, and you want to know about the Indian culture, so you might attend the Pow Wows; you might adopt the regalia for the Pow Wows; you might take part in the value system of your particular tribe, but you might not be a registered member of that tribe?
- Molly Tovar: Correct. What I go back to is what Wilma Mankiller said, "Remember that it's the federal government who defined who the native people were. It wasn't native people who defined who we are," and what she said was, "If you are native, you are native. Don't allow the federal government to define if you're native or not native."
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you define that yourself?
- Molly Tovar: Yes, mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: Could you be actually, with no Indian culture in your background and embrace the Indian values and take part in the Pow Wows?
- Molly Tovar: You could, to some level.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you might not enter the circle or something of that nature?
- Molly Tovar: I think most Pow Wows, you have to be registered. You have to have an enrollment. Some Pow Wows do. Most Pow Wows do, so yes, a non-native could embrace it but to compete would probably be a little difficult, I think. I don't know there are many who compete, but you're always welcome into the circle and you're always welcome to dance.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, because I attended one of these Pow Wows and all the members of the audience were invited to dance the circle dance and when I looked around, the people that were dancing with me, there were an awful lot of them that really looked like I look but they did have an Indian ancestor.

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Most of them had some, whether it was a quarter or a half or an eighth, but they had John Jones or something as their name but they did then have sort of an Indian name or an Indian...I don't know how to say it, whether it was a pet name or a legal name, I don't know, but they would say, "Well, I'm John Jones but I have some other name" and I always thought that was fascinating.

Molly Tovar: Many native people are given an Indian name, many people are.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but then when they come into the [audio glitch 53:59] use their names?

Molly Tovar: No, it's their name.

Blanche Touhill: It's their name, okay.

Molly Tovar: Sure, it's who they are and back to that part, there's many names that we call unidentifiable native people. It's because you wouldn't know who is native or not native because they could be blonde hair and blue-eyed but they're a member of a tribe because they have the amount of Indian quantum necessary to be an enrolled member of that tribe.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and I found several of those people, I think.

Molly Tovar: There's many, many.

Blanche Touhill: But they were embracing the program.

Molly Tovar: Because they were probably an enrolled member.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Now, does the Indian...let's say, I don't know whether it's your center but there must be an Indian center in St. Louis that knows who's Indian?

Molly Tovar: No, there is not. There used to be about 15 years ago a center here, an Urban Center and [inaudible 54:51] was on that board of directors but no longer does it exist. It doesn't exist anymore, unfortunately because of funding.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about some good authors or people who have written or created music. Give some leaders' names, of this movement to keep the Indian culture vibrant and alive.

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- Molly Tovar: There are many individuals across the country that are keeping the native culture alive from all different perspectives, from the political perspective. Again, I'm going to mention mostly women because it's whom I use as my mentors or have as my mentors, is LaDonna Harris, Joy Harjo, a poet.
- Blanche Touhill: How do you spell that, Joy...
- Molly Tovar: Joy Harjo, H-a-r-j-o. She's a poet. Alice Azure, right across the river here, a poet.
- Blanche Touhill: How do you spell that one?
- Molly Tovar: Alice?
- Blanche Touhill: No, I know Alice...
- Molly Tovar: Azure, A-z-u-r-e.
- Blanche Touhill: Thank you.
- Molly Tovar: Mm-hmm and there's prominent people across from...there are artists, Julie Littlethunder in Oklahoma; there's incredible musicians. There's all kinds of writers as well...Teresa (Lofabrice?), again, Joy Harjo is the poet, has produced and written a lot of literature...Michael (Payval?) and the academic part would be...I'm trying to think of other...
- Blanche Touhill: Well, have you written?
- Molly Tovar: I've written a lot, yes. I have written and published on veterans, on elders, on financial capabilities and Native Americans, yes. It's very diverse in my publication.
- Blanche Touhill: So it's a growing field?
- Molly Tovar: It's a phenomenal growing field...(Vinda Lorea?), Sandra (Lorea?), very prominent individuals. They're attorneys across the United States. I'm trying to think...(Eckelhawks?). The Eckelhawks are a very prominent family here and Sherry Eckelhawk lives right here in St. Louis. I think her brother's a JD, so very prestigious people.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me ask, what is the relationship... do you have someone who is in the Congress or links with the Indian communities with the government?

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Molly Tovar: The top people that I know of is Sarah (Kastelic?). Sarah Kastelic is Alaskan native. She is the director of the National Indian Child Welfare. She's actually a Budar Scholar, Wash U alum. That's one of the top positions in the United States. We have our Cheyenne person who's the national director of the American Indians in Washington, D.C., national director of the American Indian Museum in Washington, D.C. We have top leaders in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Education Affairs. We have very prestigious individuals in top levels of all government agencies, I believe.

Blanche Touhill: And so what do you think is the future of the Indian culture, in particular?

Molly Tovar: I believe the future of the Indian culture is coming back full circle. I believe we're learning our languages, we're learning our culture, we're back to being proud of who we are. There was a period in the '50s...in the '40s... '50s where you were shunned if you were native so a lot of people hid that they were American Indian and now that it's come back to say you're a proud person to be an American Indian, I think that is very significant. People don't have to hide it. It's kind of what you mentioned; people were more of a Western name than a native name. So even they were changing and trying to be more white, Western than native. So I think, because of those kinds of movements, the Indian culture is back. They're very tech-savvy; they're very involved with the Facebook and videotaping and keeping information up and alive on the media systems. So I just think it's important. You can Google almost anything today and find stories about cultures.

Blanche Touhill: I said something during the interview that I don't know whether I'm right or not. Do you consider yourself Caucasian?

Molly Tovar: No.

Blanche Touhill: What would you call your background then?

Molly Tovar: I'm American Indian.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, that's what you would say, "I'm an American Indian"?

Molly Tovar: That's what I always say, yeah. I have no Caucasian in my blood.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, and so the Indians are basically in North and South America?

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Molly Tovar: The North American Indians are in North America, what we call as indigenous peoples. Those are people in Australia and New Zealand, Canada.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, yes, of course.

Molly Tovar: Indigenous people.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, okay. Well, I really enjoyed our interview and I want to thank you very much for bringing in this historic outfit and it does display the Indian culture and what you consider your values of your life.

Molly Tovar: Thank you.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.