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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Account of Longhouse ceremonies and beliefs.
- Account of Longhouse funeral practices.

Ranald: Tape number RT 82.8. This is Ranald Thurgood and I am interviewing Mrs. Ella Rush in her home in Vaughan Township, just outside of metropolitan Toronto, on August 4, 1982.

Ranald: Mrs. Rush, can you tell me where and when you were born please?

Ella: Yes, I was born on the Six Nation Indian Reserve in 1911, and sixth of June, 1911. And I was more or less brought up with my grandmother. And I don't know why, because my parents had moved away at that time. I think it was to the States for a little while. And they were married in the Longhouse. So when they came back, something happened and they separated, which again is one of the customs -- that they go to their parents and if each side agrees that they, that the children should part, well, it's quite all right. They go back to the Longhouse and have a ceremony and have it annulled, you see. But this went on for about, I guess I was about three, four years old when that happened. But anyway, my grandmother brought me up and all my life was -- really, from then on was

surrounded by her, from our surroundings.

And we were brought up in a log cabin and had say three, three rooms upstairs and there was a little stairway going up. And the downstairs was a big kitchen, and a big living room, and of course we had a bed down there as well. And a wood shed outside where we could cut our own wood, and we had our own little bush out not too far away from the house, so we had our own wood.

And in the summertime, or in the springtime, we had our own... she used to plant, have somebody come in and till the land, and from then she used to plant her corn, beans, cucumbers, whatever, and cabbage, and all the vegetables that would see us through the following winter. And it was her custom to tell us that we always had to work to keep this here food, I mean the plants clean outside so they as well would be looked after. And therefore we'll get more food from it to sustain ourselves, you know, to make us grow as well.

And by that time we had another little girl with us, and she again was deserted by her parents, and there was the two of us there. And, well, from then on we, when we were about, say, seven years old, I think it was, it was always, you always had to make sure that you had to, could dress yourself, and look after yourself before you went to school, otherwise you had to walk. And two or three miles to school, and you had to -- there was no way of no one looking after you, so that's what used to be with us. We went to school and we had Indian teachers as well as non-Indian teachers, and we had, in all the schools...

And in the spring the Indian Department used to give us maybe a dozen eggs, and some vegetable seeds and tell us to go home and look after these, plant these seeds and we'd have to look after them all summer. And my grandmother, of course, is a good hand at that, because she knew what to do and she told you how to do it, till the land, knew how to grow things and how to look after it. But in the fall we'd have this competition, go to the fall fairs and take our little vegetables and whatever we had and had competitions, like, from the school. And I think that was a very good idea and very good way of telling the children how you should have your own vegetables.

In the meantime, maybe in the springtime, we'd have a chance to go out berry picking, which was something great for us because we'd have our own money. So the trucks used to come along and pick different people up and away we'd go all day and pack our own lunch. Of course, we'd stop at a little, what do you call, little store, country store, on our way maybe to Waterford or Boston, whatever, and Simcoe, around about from our reserve. And we'd stop at this little store and buy our, we used to

call it our Indian ham, and it was baloney. So that again was already sliced, and had our own pop, and we enjoyed that very much at lunch time. So at night they used to take us back in a

truck and take us home again. And on our way home maybe we'd stop again at the same little store, and our parents used to give us pop again and ice cream -- that was our big pay for the day, whether we worked all day or not. But usually we did and usually we wanted to make sure, and let them see how much we could do.

And in turn she'd tell us, "Well, you keep that money now and you have to go to store, you have to go into Brantford. And someday we'll hire some one with the wagon or buggy whatever, and buy your own clothes." And that's what we did. And from that I think was why we had to look after our clothes. And we also had to look after all our shoes, and keep it nice for the Sunday; and Sunday was the day of rest and nobody worked. So, therefore, we had to clean our shoes on Saturday and put them beside our bed, because my grandmother said, "Having to put all your clothes beside your bed in case of a fire, or anything happen, you just could get right up. You knew where everything was and away you'd go outside."

So I think from then on she was just great, so we attended our little country schools. And when I was say around about twelve, thirteen, no, it was about thirteen, there was no continuation schools at that time there, or any advancement, so my grandmother always told us that, "Some day you're going to a big school, a bigger school," and she says, "it will be over the water." And I don't know why but she sort of was partial to the States, and said, "Some day you'll go to the States. And maybe become a teacher, or look after, read the stars and come back, and tell your children how you read the stars over there." Why stars, I don't know. But she had quite a yen for stars in fact in the evenings she used to take us out and show us the different stars, what they were, and it was just...

My childhood with her was just wonderful, I think, that way. Because in her own way she was also had medical intentions herself, because the people used to come there and ask her how to make things to make them better. And she used to mix up medicine for them, and give it to them and they'd come back again and say how well they were, and how nice they felt themselves, that's another thing. And then she used to also take us out and -- this other girl and I -- and show us a few things in the woods that will, and what we should do, how we should scrape the bark -- steep it, and drink it. And things like that I think were so good for us.

And then she used to take us to the Longhouse. The Longhouse again was a religious affair. And in the spring you went there and you were thankful, because you had overcome the winter and the first thing that came in the springtime was stawberries. So each one, soon as the first few stawberries would appear in the fields, we would go and gather whatever few we could get. From then on we'd take it all to the Longhouse, all these little cups of stawberries and the wee pails, and they in turn would make scones, and take it to this here big building, which is the Longhouse. And we had the chiefs come in there and they

would have a ceremony just like you would for Thanksgiving, or something like that, you know. And that again, I think was another good thing, because it taught you how to respect your food that you got and how it, how it sustained you, how it made you grow; and how it made one another think about what you were eating; and what to do with it; and how to preserve it for the following year. And all these here different vegetables always preserved. Like corn, we would have dried, and there's so many things that we used -- that was one of our main staples of life was corn. So corn to us was one of our main, well, things that we did use and eat, because it made us bread, made us soup,

made us porridge for the morning. We'd bake it in the oven and that was ground up again and had it, what do you call this porridge in the morning, as well as wheat that we had. And we'd take that to the old mill and they'd grind it up for us, whatever we had, and we'd put it in bags and dry it up, and hang it up. And the pumpkins of course, when they'd come in, were ready, we'd cut them up in slices and hang them up in the oven, dry it out, and put it away again, same with the meat.

We used to be all like a pool -- different ones had different porks, different... or beef, and some maybe had three or four pigs. Well, they in turn would kill these pigs in the fall. So I think one of our biggest thrills with the children was we'd go there and we'd all get our first (laughs) fresh piece of meat, and go home and bake it on the stove, which my grandmother always let us do by ourselves, so that was just great. And we in turn, again, she'd tell how to preserve that, which was put down in a brine, or, or baked, or put in jars, whatever. Something that was going to keep you the whole winter through, after you didn't have any other work to do, or through work; and you didn't have any other, much money coming in during the wintertime.

So that again, I think that was another wonderful thing that we were all taught how -- how to look after your animals, and how to bring, how to feed them. So I think from then on it was just wonderful, because we had all these different feasts come along that you would be thankful for, with each, like, vegetables first and the fruits, and then the meats coming on last; and that again would see us through. And I remember my mother, my grandmother what do you call it, buying so much flour. She knew how much to buy to last us through the winter, till about May. And before we had a chance to go back out to work again, or plant again, and she always kept enough seed behind so we could always replant again. Another, what do you call it? Field of seed, that is vegetables, and potatoes, and again to start the cycle all over again. And I think, therefore; when of course...

When I left then that was my, one of my biggest break, I think, when I left the reserve and I went into a boarding school. Of course, I guess, that was one of my grandmother's main ambitions was to put me someplace in school so I could maybe learn something else and come back, and maybe take hold.

Because she in turn, herself, used to read, and she used to read, well, not only heavy things but light things so she could tell stories to the children and ourselves in the evening. And she'd, she was so good to everyone else that no matter, no matter what happened -- if any child was ever put out from their homes, or anything happened she was, she always had the door open. Whether we didn't have any room on the bed, there was always a quilt that she could put on the floor and tell them to lie there until the morning. "Then we would take you home and see your dad and mom, and see what happened."

So from then on, of course, my life changed and I went into a boarding school, and that was five hundred miles, well, maybe more than that, from my place to Chapleau. And that was a regular -- there was about one hundred and fifty children there. And that again was a different life altogether, because I was away from my own surroundings and put, and then brought up into an Anglican school and brought up in the Anglican faith, and brought up the way they want us to be brought up. And from then on...

Ranald: How old were you then?

Ella: Pardon.

Ranald: How old were you then?

Ella: Thirteen, yeah, just going on fourteen. But, so, by that time I was around, I think it was grade seven I was in,

which wasn't too far. And, but once I got in school I had very good teachers there. And they were all, I can remember, all more or less English teachers and they were very good to us, especially the girls. Well, I can't say much for the boys, because we didn't see anything too much of them, because they were on the other side of the, the other side of the building, and we were on our own side.

And they sure looked after us and gave us all, I think, the guidance they could, you know, give us in any way. But, but no Indian... nothing about Indians was ever brought up. I could never remember anybody talking about Indians to me from then on. I could remember where I was from or who I was, but that was all. Because we were all mixed, of Indians from up north, you know, from Quebec, from Caughnawaga, from... and James Bay, and Moosonee. But there was all different... But we were never, there, they never... no one ever told us, you know, say, "Well, they are this and you are that." We were always just one, as children, and it was that way right to high school.

And we had competitions, we played baseball with them, walked to high school and walked back to school. And my residential life, to look back on, I think was a very happy one. I know it was because I have talked to different girls that I graduated with and had left school. Of course, I, you're allowed to leave when you're around seventeen so I didn't have too much time there, and I only got as far as, went as far as grade ten.

And I could have gone, of course... They were disappointed because I didn't stay and my grades were good. But I thought, "Well, I'm that age now. I'll have to go out and do something for myself."

So the first thing I did was leave school. But my first job was to go out west, to go into another school, which again I was on staff there, thank goodness. And I don't know why they should choose me to go on staff, but I was chosen and I didn't have to

take a special course for that. Because I guess being brought up in a school you had more or less all the ideas on how to do things, and how to look after girls yourself. And so I was supervisor there, out west, until I had a slight accident. There, one day I had the girls for a walk during the wintertime and, of course, we were on the big toboggan down a big ski hill. And I landed... I couldn't manipulate the, what do you call it, toboggan very well, and landed into a tree. So, nevertheless, I had to look after my leg from then on.

And in the meantime I took up Chicago School of Nursing course through the magazines that I've seen. And they sent me, told me how to sterilize, and how to... send me equipment, sent me how to sterilize needles, and also told me what to do, sent me a little knife. But I never realized skin, I think, was so hard till I had to break open my own, cut my own leg open again to let the... It was starting to fester then, and I could see that... And my leg was swelling. And of course, there were other, there was four of us on staff then. And I was the only Indian, but still, that's beside the point. Because I was looking after the girls, and I was with the girls all the time, so it was really up to me to do as much as I could for myself and not make too much of it. So that's, so that gave me an idea that maybe if I went in nursing, or take up a nursing course, that I could come back some day out west again to this small school and be of help more to them.

So in the meantime I came back out to Toronto, took up a nursing course -- three year course -- and on my own again. And there's only one of the supervisors that I met again at Chapleau. And she met me, and I told her what I wanted to do. And she said, "Fine, I'll take you there, I'll go with you." So that's how come... And I never got any, any help from the government as far as that goes, and I never asked them for

anything. Then, I'm... I was on my own. So I, we just had maybe four dollars a month, and then it went up to eight dollars to pay for our books. And that's how I paid for my books. And there was another non-Indian there in the city who knew one of the supervisors at the school and said, well, seeing that, you know, it was of her sisters, Mrs. Bulbie, who was one of the supervisors there at the school. And she had two sisters here living in Toronto. And they said, oh well, they'd take me under their wing and look after me, and look after my dental -- all my dental bills, which was very nice and I guess that's why today I still have my teeth even at seventy.

(laughs)

So, and I, to me I think I have nothing to regret, only that I've lost my teenage, whatever they dead, whatever they do. You know, just that little piece there that we were in school, and of course we weren't allowed to leave the, do as we like, or go out and leave school at all, we were always in residence.

But the supervisors there, I think, were just wonderful to me and wonderful to the rest of the girls that I know. And some of the girls that was in my same class have gone through for teachers, and others had very good jobs after that as secretaries. A couple of girls went back to Oka(?), Quebec, and Caughnawaga and became teachers themselves. And we still correspond, like I do with my own classmates here in the city that I went to... took up nursing with. And we grew up together and we were just like sisters, and there again there was never ever anybody saying, "Well, you're so and so and you can't come to our party." I was always with them and enjoying myself just as one of, you know, just like they are, and there was never... I never, I don't know why, because some of the girls have said they encountered about being non-Indian. And why it should be I don't know, because I think, "Well, you have just as good of right, you know, to mix as anybody else. If you can, well, it's up to you." And what you do to your own

life I think is just, just to go out and get what you want and do it. And I think to me, I think it's... I have nothing to regret really, I've just had a wonderful life.

Ranald: Did you ever move back to Six Nations?

Ella: I have never gone back, because... I go back to visit the odd time. I knew of another family here in the city, an aunt of mine lived in the city. And she again was very good to the young people; I went there and the door was always open. And there were two, three other girls, and the girls, and the boys that went in for Normal -- teacher's college -- we all seemed to meet there. And then from there when she went back to the reserve to, to live, well, we still went back to visit her, and it was always home to us. In the meantime my grandmother had died and I couldn't go back to the, to her funeral. I had a very bad cold at the time and my hospital wouldn't let me go. And besides, they said, "Well, you have to realize that's life. If anything happens, regardless whether it's your parents, your nursing comes first. And that's why you have an obligation to somebody else as well." So, and they were very strict with us even those days, when we were nursing -- not like nowadays. But of course, I think, well, it's something, too, was very good for us, because in fact I never had to look for a job when I was through nurse, through my course, through nursing, graduated. They just kept me on at the hospital and I just worked through until, until I was married.

In the meantime, of course, I met Len through one of the dances and in 1940 we were married. Went to a farm, had no children;

but we worked hard. (laughs) And lived up there in Stouffville for, I'd say, for nine years. Then we moved here in '49 to '50, and made this our real home; it was done very well. So I think that is my life.

Ranald: I wanted to ask you a few questions about things you brought up. When your grandmother was teaching you about the stars, did she, did she give the Greek names or did she have the Iroquois names for them?

Ella: No, she told us in our own dialect, yes in our own Iroquois dialect. Like the dippers and, you know, the different collections.

Ranald: Did she have stories about the constellations, do you think?

Ella: She told us about the Milky Way, you know, in her own way.

Ranald: What did she tell you about it?

Ella: She, well, well, it was quite a lovely story and she said, "Well, there was a person that was good and had been taken up, and because they were good they had so many of these here followers with them. And that's why it was such a, the Milky Way was a white path and all these stars here were following them to go back and forth, you know, around." And it was, I don't know, eerie in a way, but I liked the way she told it, different little things like that. I don't remember too much in what other stories she told us. But I know she did tell us quite a few things, you know, but more or less things that was going to benefit us later in life.

In the meantime, when Christmas day, or was it, no it was New Year's Day we were passing, and she was going to see her sister. And I was about, oh, say about six years old, I

guess, or five and she was trailing me on a sleigh and I had a sleigh beside, and she was dragging me of course. And she said, "Oh, there's a black ribbon here on that house. We better go in and pay our respects." So we went in there and the father was very distraught. He had a little bundle underneath the table but nobody wanted it. And he said, it was, that's why his wife had died, apparently, from this little baby, and was left behind. And he says, "Nobody wants the baby," he says, "because I belong to the church and," he says, "my wife belonged to the Longhouse." So there's that mix-up there and my grandma says, "Never mind," she says, "when we come back in a couple of days," she says, "We'll take the baby home." So that's why, we brought, we took this baby home -- a little boy -- and brought him up. And to this day we still call one another sister and brother. And yet we were no relation whatever, but that doesn't make any difference.

And that, my grandmother was just that way. She was just so anxious to help someone else, in fact she brought another girl

one day when she was to Muncey, and brought another girl when she was about eight years, yeah, eight years old I guess, before I left for Chapleau. And so she had the two of them there, the boy and a girl. But I didn't have too much time with the girl because I was older than her and then I was, I was in Brantford quite a bit, visiting another aunt, because she wasn't any too well. So I looked after her and my grandmother said that was her wish, for me to look after her. So anything she said, well, I think I was just took it. Anything she said well, well, yes, you would do it. (laughs)

But that was all and, but... She was all, always had this in mind that we would go back to this, well, to the States, I don't know why. And to go to some big school and learn all about the stars. Why I should, I never went back to really ask her why, or anything more about it, you know. I should have, maybe. Like the medicines that she taught -- the different little medicines. I should've, there's a lot more

that I could have got from her, because she had a lot of things written down, too, in books, and... Like little recipes that she had written down herself -- what roots to get, what to mix, what's good for your heart, and what's good for backaches and all that. And, which, I was, you know, being sorry to this day because once I left you just sort of thought, "Well, oh well, that's gone," you know. Just never thought of going back or doing anything more to go back, to take you back there; there was nothing to go back for, really. Once my grandmother had gone, too. And, of course, the boy -- by that time there was the Great Depression, too. And it was hard to get something to do I guess. And he left, but he went out to the States and made a nice home for himself out there; brought a family up.

And, but there's so many things that go back to their nice way of living, I think, in the community. There's so much, too much, so much togetherness that when you went to the Longhouse and they had the ceremony, everybody... If there was anybody wanted anything, or in need, or had a fire, everybody was there to help you, and to rebuild again. Same with if there was any illness, you were supposed to go and help them too, as much as you can. And so I guess that's why I sort of leaned to the, what do you call it, nursing profession, and wanted to do as much as I could there. So I didn't go back out west. I had great intentions, of course, and of course, I guess when love comes along it, it changes your mind a lot. (laughs)

So that's why I could have gone back and I know when I was there, all the different supervisors said, "Oh, you'll be back, I know you will." I said, "Oh, I know I'll be back but you never know." But when they found out I was getting married I think they were a little disappointed. (laughs)

Ranald: Where was it that you were nursing out west?

Ella: Well I didn't, I wasn't nursing out west. No, I

nursed here in Toronto, but I worked out west....

Ranald: Teaching?

Ella: In the... teaching, with the, with the girls. I was a girl supervisor and...

Ranald: And where was this?

Ella: It was in Grouard, Enilda, near High Prairie, in the Athabasca district, north of Edmonton about five hundred miles. And I had a chance for a bigger school, but I said at the time... When you're first starting out -- I didn't want to go into a large school, like Alert Bay, and then there was one at Hay River -- we had an opening there... But these were just small schools. There was St. Peter's, Fish, yeah, White Fish, and, and Enilda. So I just took one of the small schools, because there was only about thirty, thirty to thirty-five pupils there. There was about twenty-nine when I was there, and there was only a farm instructor and the head instructor there, Reverend Kent. And Mrs. Harvey, and she was the head supervisor. So there was only the, just the four of us. And of course we -- I was in the kitchen, looked after the girls' side, and supervised, looked after the laundry for them, and looked after their... But I didn't have to anything, all you had to do was just let the senior girls do everything, because that was their work to do, and you just had to supervise them. And it was nice work. And there was all this opportunity. I could have gone back, but I didn't. But I think I might have gone to a larger school, a much bigger school than that after, but the small schools were soon discontinued, because...

And another, I don't know, the biggest thrill I think I got was in June, about the 27th of June, when the children... It was

their last day of school there, at this school where we were. And they looked over Buffalo Bay and all you could see was just all kinds of boats coming across there, and then the Indians getting out of their boats and they all had... Of course they didn't wear anything else but moccasins, and, with their packsacks on. And there was a great reunion with the children. The children all knew when... and they all left. There wasn't one child left in the school after, they all left and went home. You often wonder whatever happened. Some of them, that was their last day there, because they were sixteen and wouldn't come back again. But that was their way of life and you often wonder after, wonder what became of so and so. Sometimes we'd wish you'd gone back and seen where they are and what they were doing. I think it was just great. So that left just the four of us behind, and of course, then there are holidays took place and that fall I left. Came back to Toronto and went in training for a nurse.

Ranald: What was your name before you got married?

Ella: Green, Ella Green.

Ranald: Where did that name come from, do you know?

Ella: Only from my dad as far as I know. (laughs) From the family. Yeah, there's quite a few Greens in our reserve -- Hills, of course. I think there's more Hills than anything. But of course there are quite a few other names there now, but you more or less know when you hear a name just about where they're from, you know. And then our greatest pet things I think when we know that they're from the Six Nation. If you meet them again, and say, "Oh, hi. Have you been down in the bush lately?" That's being down, back to the reserve, you know, and which no one else knows what you're talking about,

or what... In our own circle we know what it means. And they'll say, "No," or, "Yes." And it's always nice to meet one another because there's that, I don't know, a different feeling when you're with one of them. You shouldn't, maybe I shouldn't say that, but... Because I mix more or less with everybody, you know, now. But there is that certain feeling. I think it's in everyone, no matter where you're from, like even the girls from their own different islands. And if they know there's someone from that place particular, or a different island, they're so happy, you can just see it their eyes. "Oh gee, you're, you know, you're from my place," you know. (laughs) So they go on talking, and it's the same with us.

And I think transportation has made such a wonderful thing now, that it's opened up, fields to know one another. Before we didn't, we were more or less to ourselves, and it wasn't good, because you become prejudiced. There's... you're prejudiced in your own way, in your own way of life. You didn't want to be mixed with them, or, you know, doing what they want to do, or be with them. But now it's different. You say, "Well, why feel that way? We're all one, we're all fighting for the same thing and if we don't stick together, well, we just, we'll fall apart." And that's what I think is the best thing to do, if they ever can. But I don't think I'll ever see it. (laughs) We hope so.

Ranald: Are you named Ella after someone?

Ella: I don't think so. I don't know how I derived that name. (laughs) Ella, Ethel, Linda -- I had three names, but there again none of my aunts, or even my mother, my grandmother's name, because her name was Kathleen, and... No, there was nothing there. So I don't know, I think they just more or less like a name, or even more or less take it from a non-Indian, you know. Maybe somebody they liked with that

name. I know the little boy -- how we got Moyar is because we were in a train once going to London, and my grandmother again was going out to see someone that was ill. And we had this baby with us and a conductor come along and he says, "Oh, you have a little baby." And, oh yes, he made quite a fuss with it. And my grandmother say, "And what is your name?" He says, "My name is Moyar." And she says, "Oh, that's a lovely name."

And from then on she called the little boy Moyar. (laughs)

Ranald: Do you have an Indian name?

Ella: Yeah, but it's in Tuscarora, and I don't think it's highly, you couldn't pronounce it and it's a long name, and it's (Indian name).

Ranald: What does that mean?

Ella: I don't know, I'm not, I don't know. I don't think it means... I don't know what it means. I would have to find -- I have never found out what it meant, because quite a few of the things, quite a few of the... My clan is Cayuga, but then my grandmother, I think it was, what do you call it, Tuscarora, more or less, from the, from the States. And so she liked that name and she gave it to me. And I was -- in fact, I was again christened at the Longhouse, which you call, I guess you'd call it christening with our own church. But there they take you, and they have a ceremony, and they, what do you call, burn tobacco, and they have a little speech. And they'd give you a little pair of, little white beads when you give you your name. Same with the different boys and girls that go there.

Ranald: That's when you got the Tuscarora name?

Ella: Pardon.

Ranald: That's when you got the Tuscarora name?

Ella: Yeah, yeah.

Ranald: Can you remember more about what the naming ceremony is like?

Ella: Well, I think it's... It is more or less like, like our own church ceremony, because with this here gathering you have, they have the chief stand up and they're like your elders, and they preach to you, and they teach you. You know, tell you the good and the bad and everything like that, how you should live. And just a regular ceremony like. And then any, when the children are grade eight you take them up, you take them by... And they take them, take them over to the stove and they have this ceremony. And they have this here tobacco, and they put it into the fire and make another ceremony. And then they'd go back again; they hand you back the baby, and then you, that, that is it. And there's a little stick, I don't know what they used to have, I think they put a little notch in there beside your clan, but I'm not too sure lately. Because it was such a long time ago that I, you know, went to the Longhouse and in fact, that was my first religion, like. And that again I shall never forget, because it was the only thing my grandmother ever took me to, is to the Longhouse. And I think their philosophy and their way of living is just wonderful, because there was never ever...

(END OF SIDE A)

Ranald: This is tape RT 82.8, side B, a continuation of an interview with Mrs. Ella Rush at her home in Vaughan Township, on August 4, 1982. I am Ranald Thurgood.

Ella: The Longhouse people, yeah they're... Well, I think their philosophy is wonderful because they really live for one another. It doesn't matter who you are, or what you are, as long as you go to their Longhouse and have their faith they, they'll look after you. Because they'll help you build your homes, they'll help you through life, I think through no matter what happens they're always there helping one another. And they're never one to put anyone down, and they never... I, I don't know, I think it's just... their way of living is just wonderful.

But the only thing is that they want you to have your own dialects, have your, speak your own language all the time and -- which I don't see anything wrong. But I think once you start school there, there's just a little hinderance there, because you should know your English when you, when you start school, then you have a quicker way of learning. Because knowing only Indian, it takes you longer, because it takes so much longer to forget the other. Not that you're going to forget it, when your brought up that way, but you'll never forget it. But because it's drilled right into you, because you go there, you're with them, you're with the adults all the time and they teach you the good and the bad, and how you should live.

And they, of course, don't like drinking and they don't like the fiddle playing. Anybody that plays the fiddle and throws up their legs that way, about, is not, is not a good living person. They just believe in their own way of rejoicing and that's through dancing, and with their moccasins, with their Indian costume. And that again is...

So many of these here little ceremonies are sacred! You don't go there and make fun of it. Like the False Face they have, it's a very sacred thing. I think these people that have put on the False Face, like the Red False Face and the Black False Face. The Black False Face is, is just a little higher

standing than the Red. And, of course, in our, in our younger days the woman was always the head, head of the household, anything she said must be. And if, she was like the head chief and she selects another chief, if anything happens to your chief that you have... And it's... they look up so much to their elders, especially to the women. Because the Indian, the women do so much, I think now it's more or less going away. Of course if, just now, to this day it is, it is still carried on, that they do think, you know, they always ask the women first what they should do and what they shouldn't do; because they have that standard still. But I thinks it's... they have certain regard for their womenfolk, more or less. I think more so than the people that are being brought up in a church.

(laughs)

There's just a little something different, and I think, well, it's something that you, you just don't want to say anything about, because it's their way of living and it's, it can't be changed, that's all. And I think it's a wonderful feeling to have, no matter if you've grown up like I have, been so many years away from it, there's still that something... That's, that was first told to me, you know, from the Longhouse, I shall never forget. And there's something there that I still think it's, it's a sacred place for me, you know, to go to. There's something about it that you just feel as if it's away from everybody else, and it's a way of living. And it's, you, you can feel it, I think it always makes you feel good to go back. You always feel as if you could breath that something in and stretch and say, "Oh, I'm back." (laughs)

But no, I think it's a, it's a wonderful feeling, and it's a wonderful way of life -- to still have that culture at the back, and your heritage, and not forget it. Which, now, it's too bad that the children now have forgotten all these nice things that we were taught. You know, so many things that we've done, so many things that we used to do, and making things. And the children, they've all forgotten that, even

their own mother's time. They want to get away from all that. They went to, amongst the white people and worked for them, even if it was just housework. They didn't want to come back and be as one. Some of them even wanted to change their names and maybe pass as French or something like that, you know. It's just, it's too bad when you think of that. Because, well, I do, I think... It's a good thing I have a husband that understands my part, because I can go back there and, and be, you know, enjoy their ceremonies and be as one. And because to me, it means something to me, and he's with me. And he says, "Well, if that's what you want, and that's what you like, well, okay," you know.

But it's just, there again, I never thought anything about marrying an outsider, never thought about it. But of course, I guess, now means a lot to a lot of other girls that have married an outsider, because they have lost all their rights. To me I, I didn't have any, you know, because I was away for so long. I never realized, at that time, that there were certain rights there, you know, that I could have. Although, I realized after I was married that the land that I did own there I had to sell, and give away, you know. "Well, why did I have to do that? It was mine, it was given to me. Why do I have to do all this?" But I can, but I realize, you know, because if everybody did that there's no room for an outsider to go back there and take... If anything happened to me, well, maybe he could say, "Well, part of that land is mine too," you know. So that's why I had to get rid of my land and give up everything.

Ranald: What do you feel about the fact that white women, or non-native women can get status by marrying a native man?

Ella:       The which?

Ranald:     A non-native women can get status and go live on the reserve by marrying a native man.

Ella:       That's a hard question. (laughs) It is because... and yet it shouldn't be, because we were brought up to think that, I think. Because my grandmother always said, "If you marry, if you go and marry an outsider, other than your own people, from your own reserve you have to leave us -- you have to go with them." And you expect, I mean it was drilled into you and you knew. So when that happened I, you know, I never thought anything more about it, because that's what my grandmother always said, she said, "Well, if you don't, don't like our people's... somebody else, you like somebody better, well, then you just have to leave, that's all. Anything you have, you just leave everything and go." That's your sacrifice, that's your, you have to just take. And I just accepted and never thought anything more.

And I shouldn't think anything more about the women that marry, like my brother. And most of my brothers just have married outsiders and taken them back, you know. As long as they're... become a good wife and become a good Indian (laughs), live like that, and not criticize anyone else. If they, if that's the way they want to live, well, if that's the way they want to be brought up, well, that's their, that's their road to take. And I think it's fine as long as they do their part and bring their children up that way, and, and not tell them otherwise; because they're brought up -- they have an Indian father, so why not bring them up as Indians, you know. So that's, that's all I can say. I have, I have really nothing against it myself. Some may, but of course you get that anyway, but still, I don't think so. Why we should think otherwise, I don't know. This is my husband, Len Rush.

Len:        Hi, how are you? Pleased to meet you.

Ranald:     Hi, I'm Ranald Thurgood. Ranald.

Len:        Ranald.

Ranald:     Mr. Rush was taking a break from his farm work. We stopped the interview for ten or fifteen minutes and all sat around, and made conversation.

Ranald:     Could you tell me what kind of work women did at Six Nations when you were young?

Ella:       Well, they more or less all had their, had their chores at home, which was looking after the children, and cleaning corn, and making corn bread, and doing all that, like, making corn, corn bread, and soups and things. And curing corn, curing beans, and also curing our own meats, which we have done while we were there. And they made a lot of things,

like now I make dill pickles and we eat an awful lot of dill pickles, even down there. Even sauerkraut, because I guess we're used to having so much cabbage around, and vegetables that we just, just automatically make a big barrel of sauerkraut and leave it outside, let it freeze. And in the wintertime we just go and get an axe or something and cut a piece of it out and bring it in and thaw it out, and have it that way, warm it up. After you cook your bacon, and take your bacon out and leave the bacon fat in the pan, then warm your sauerkraut in there. It's a, that's what they did.

And a lot of baskets, they did a lot of basket weaving, and husk mats. The husks you get from corn after the fall, well, they have the, they save all that up, put it in bundles. Or they make dolls with it and sell it. And I remember my grandmother taking all these big mats. She'd make them about, oh, say around about maybe two and three feet in diameter, and put it outside your door and that made a good mat for your

shoes, you know, for a mat outside. And she used to get about, oh, I know she'd take about maybe eight to ten, maybe more than that in a bundle, and put a big rope through it and away she'd go to Brantford. And she'd come home so happy because she'd pay some one to drive her there and back, and then we'd have all the extra little things like oranges, and bananas, and, which we don't usually have too much of.

And you're never out of tomatoes, or jams; and tomatoes was one of my favorite food when I was small. In fact I was always looking to see if anybody else was going to take more than their share at the table. (laughs) Because I was so fond of tomatoes that it wasn't very nice, I guess, at times. I was just a little stingy of it, and that was my favorite food. And how I used to love to come home from school and smell that soup on the stove cooking when it was so cold outside. I'd come running in. Off would come your things and she'd take them up and dry them and you're into the soup, have a soup bowl on the table, and have that. And by later on, then you'd have your meat and potatoes, and vegetables, and your scone. Usually scone -- baker's bread was always a treat to us, because we didn't get that too often. And, anyway, we had our... made our own bread, because she had her own yeast, which she could get. And we used to make our own bread.

And I think that's what they, that's what they did mostly. Of course, a lot of the women had to haul their own water, too, from the wells. And that came, of course, very handy in the summertime, because what we used to do with our butter is have it on a long rope and have the, a pail or something, have the butter in there, and have anything, or cold meat and put it down into the well where it was cool. We kept it cool that way, and bring it up when we needed it. And then we used to have an old pail out there. We used to have a stone on one side of the pail so it would go lopsided when it hit the water. So when it went down there then you could get the water out and bring it up, empty it into your own pail, and take it home,

and it was always so cold -- I used to love that in the summertime. Getting your own well water, and those little things you often... you just remember, you know, so many of those little things.

And of course my grandma used to make a lot of quilts, did a lot of quilting; and they had little quilting bees among themselves. And, of course, in the fall they also went out husking bees into the fields where they'd husk the corn off the cob, and also braid it, like. Have long strings of dry corn, and they'd put that into these here little, like cribs, they used to call it corn cribs, where it was cool and dry. And same with the beans, they'd have that out there. And I think that's what they more or less did.

And they were always making baskets when they can get the splints. Of course I think the nicest sound, too, in the morning, when you woke up in the morning, of course, look and go outside, you could hear some of these here pounding splints. You'd hear that 'ping, ping, ping' of a splint log somewhere. You knew somebody was pounding the splint log for their basketwork. And they had their own dyes.

And the men used make axe handles, and hoes, and a lot of, like, axe handles, and the small hammer handles. They used to do an awful lot of that. And, of course, the men made the great big bushel baskets, which they don't do any more, but they did make very large baskets to carry things. But, of course, that's gone now with the modernization of having cardboard. So that's gone, I mean there's a lot of...

And there was the old ways of preserving your vegetables where they dug a hole in the ground and put straw around it, and buried your turnips and potatoes in there, and maybe apples. Put a little straw hole up at the top and buried it again. And around about November, or December you went out and made a hole in it, brought in your fresh vegetables. Then you had carrots

again and fresh vegetables for a while. I think those things you always remember, those little things that they used to do.

And of course then they had their own customs, costumes, not costumes but customs where, if there's anybody passed away they always made sure that they buried something that they liked with them, like their pot, or a little iron pot, and then all their little treasures with them. That was something that we always did.

And then at the Longhouse wake you always made sure that the person was brought back into the house at least two days before they were buried. And they have their Indian costume on and they just lie there and stay in one corner. And at midnight, when everybody has their feast, and you also give them a plate too, you always leave a dish there for them. And because their soul and -- it's supposed to be with you until such time as they leave in the morning to the burial ground. And the next day at the burial ground, if their clothes are not all given

away, and if all their treasures are all, whatever they have, is not all given away then, then some one has to stay at the graveyard and keep a little fire going there for ten days. And at the end of ten days you have your regular ceremony again, and then everything is given away, even to the clothes. There is nothing left that belongs to the deceased. And the property always, of course, was always left to the youngest boy. And I think that sort of covers (laughs) quite a, a lot of what we used to do.

Ranald: Okay. Do you still keep some of those crafts skills that you learned?

Ella: Oh yes! Oh, myself, I still do a lot of crafts myself. In fact you can see on the table just now all the different things that I've made myself that I'm going to exhibit. Oh, we have a little competition that we have next

week in London. We have, we call the Homemaker's Club, which is on different reserves. And we have an annual meeting, like, different reserves have it. And it's London's turn this, this year to entertain all the rest that come in, like southern Ontario. And we have this here, like, a regular competition. That's one of our lists here with our prize list, and there's knitting, crochet work, embroidery work.

Ranald: And you do all that, do you?

Ella: Oh yeah, I've done all that. I can do different things.

Ranald: Do you, can you still make mats and dolls, and corn dolls and stuff?

Ella: Oh yes, yeah I can still do that.

Ranald: And do you make them?

Ella: I have made them, yeah. I have one small one there I just made that I've dressed. Yes, that's one thing I can still do, especially out of husks, because there just a certain way you can make it. And you don't -- our little Indian dolls -- usually there's no features in there, because you're supposed to use your own imagination -- features in the doll, you know. You have to use your own imagination whether they're crying or whether they're laughing. (laughs) It's how you feel yourself.

Ranald: What other kinds of toys did you have when you were a child?

Ella: Pardon.

Ranald: What other kind of toys did you have?

Ella: Well, we had our own dolls. And of course we did

skating, of course. And they did their own, what do you call, lacrosse And they used to have another little game, we used to call it riggity-jig. And it was just like a, a what do you call, two balls and there was a rope in between. And there was one long stick and just, just sort of a little point at one end. And you just threw that to one another too, and that was another game.

And then we had another game called the peach, peach nut game. And you had that, like a big butter bowl, and the peach nuts that you have is all, the nuts itself was all shined up and one side was a little darker than the other side. Like, you'd burn one side, so one side of the peach nut would be dark and the other side would be light. But it was just like a marble, as smooth as a marble, but not that round -- it was just a little flattened, but not... And you'd pick up the dish and you'd just sort of let it down suddenly. Not too high, just maybe three or four inches from the mat on the floor. And the peach would roll around and maybe sometimes if they all came up the same color then of course you'd win so many points. And it all depends how many, how many colors you turned up. And there was a game that went on like that and the other side would get a turn, of course that went on too. And that was played also at wakes.

And the other game at wakes was to hide the silver, silver, a ball. And that was more or less a little marble, silver, like a silver marble. And you'd get a... line up mitts on the floor. And one side has the one long stick and the other side of the bench -- of course they were all kneeling down to this too. And they stick their hand under each mitt, and it's up to the one, it's up to you to guess where they've left this silver ball; and if it's your turn, then you could guess. If you guess right then you get so many points for your side. But if you guess wrong then you lose so many points to them. And they usually use little sticks. So that's what they do to fill their evening after midnight at a wake.

Ranald: Was there any significance to those games, or were they just for fun?

Ella : No, they were just for fun. They're just something to keep you awake and going, you know.

Ranald: Did people stay in the house all night?

Ella: Instead of... Oh yes, they did. But what do you call, relations, of course, never played this game -- they all went to bed. But it was the neighbors that came in and took over. They did all the cooking -- you didn't do a thing. They did all the cleaning up, did all the cleaning before and washed the place and cleaned it up, and tidied up, and that was all looked after. No, there wasn't a thing that you had to do yourself. Because all the cooking was brought in and in fact everybody donated as per usual. And their great favorite I think -- I used to remember going to them -- if my grandmother would take me to a wake for a while, stay at the feast, would

be rice pudding. (laughs) I don't know why -- they always had rice pudding, rice pudding and raisins.

Ranald: That would be the white rice, would it?

Ella: But, pardon.

Ranald: The white rice?

Ella: Oh yes. No, all depends. We never had the wild rice. In fact I didn't know anything about it until just recently. Because all depends, of course, your location, you know. You just made use of what was in your own locality. And, of course, not being used to fish, because we were not

used to that, not being close to any bodies of water, too. So we didn't have too much of fish, but we had more of less a lot of beef and pork, just like that, and we made use of that. Always preserve them. No, it's, I think it all depends where you're brought up and how you're brought up to use things. Like if you were brought up around a body of water naturally you're going to like your fish and do everything with it, you know. Which I can't say we don't like it -- we do. I've got to like fish lately. Len loves fish. But, no, I've grown to like fish. Same as I've grown to like olives, (laughs) but... And Len never liked dill pickles and I love dill pickles. Sauerkraut -- that's one of our favorites. I think that's about... Oh, we, had more or less, I think, a very balanced diet. And in the spring -- in fact we've had greens from around before our spinach... We had like lamb's quarters and we used to eat that. And we've had also the greens from the milk weeds, just the tips of them.

Ranald: Did you cook those, or eat them raw?

Ella: Oh yes, you cook them up.

Ranald: And the lamb's quarters too?

Ella: Oh yeah. Yeah, they were always all cooked up.

Ranald: Boiled?

Ella: Boiled, yeah. And same as the easterners had fiddle heads and I never, I've just been introduced to fiddle heads (laughs) not too long ago and I like them. But, no, I think it all depends what you're brought up to eat, and what's near and you just make use of what you have, that's all. Because we eat an awful lot of corn. Of course corn, I think, is our main

diet. And the best, I think the first thing when a young person leaves home and goes to work, and come back for the weekend -- that's the first thing they'll come and ask. "Did you make some corn soup? Have you got some corn soup? Or have you got an corn bread made?" And they'll go if they don't have

any at home well they'll go and see somebody else until they find a dish of it somewhere. (laughs)

No, that's one of the things you must have. And that again we make ours with white corn, flint. And the easterners, or east of Toronto here, or north of Toronto, they have the yellow corn, apparently. They like that. And it all depends, I think, just what you get and what you have. And of course beans, we have all kinds of beans. And in fact sometimes we have so many different kinds of beans in the, what do you call it, in the bag, that we call it the Six Nations beans; because there's about four or five, six varieties there together instead of picking them all apart, you know, and putting them, and getting one variety, we have them all mixed up. So and we have, of course, different ways of cooking it, too, like the Mexican stew, I guess. Sometimes we grind it up, sometimes we make it into a powder, sometimes it's like a sauce. So I think that's about it. Of course, we like mushrooms that we gather out in the woods, in the fields, and I think that's it.

Ranald: Were your parents both Cayuga?

Ella: Yes. Both of them are.

Ranald: And how was it that you got a Tuscarora name then?

Ella: From my grandmother. In fact she wasn't a, what you'd call a blood grandmother. She was more like, I'd call her now a great aunt. But I used to call her... she was always Mom to me, she was never anything else but that.

Ranald: What was her name?

Ella: Her name was Kate Silver. So...

Ranald: So did you speak Tuscarora then?

Ella: A bit, yeah.

Ranald: Do you still speak it?

Ella: A bit of Tuscarora, a little bit. And a bit of Cayuga I can still understand. Mostly Mohawk and Oneida. And I don't know any Seneca or Onondaga -- that's one thing that I can't master yet. Well, I've never been with them, or living with them, you know, to know; although, that's one of our Six Nation tribes.

Ranald: Which of those languages do you speak best?

Ella: Mohawk.

Ranald: How did you come to learn that?

Ella: I don't know. (laughs) And I've never forgotten -- it's just what you learn at home, I think. Although my grandmother used to try and teach me more Tuscarora than

anything. Because... and they said it was one of the most difficult languages there was down there; hardly anyone can speak Tuscarora. But Cayuga is a very common language down there, and Mohawk. But other than that I think there's... They can't... I can say the odd word and I could still understand even though I've been away all these years. But there's no one that I'm with to be able to converse, you know, to talk and bring these things back up again.

But I have one brother down there and every time I see him, of course, he speaks in Indian to me, and just for fun you know. And I try to talk back in Indian, just the odd word, but then I get lost. (laughs) He speaks so fast that I'm lost. So anyway, it's nice to be able, I think, to talk your own language. I don't see why it's ever lost, but there again, as I said before, it's because our own mothers at that time went away from their language. Too much school, I think, and wanted to get away from it. But I think it was necessary, too, because you can't... You can have your own dialect and that... Even now I think it's nice to have your own dialect at home, but have it at home with your own family. But I don't think it should be forced on you at school. Same as French, I don't see why that... I like it, I think everybody should know, but I don't think a language should be forced on you. They say, "Well, you have to do this and you have to do that." I think if you have it and it's there for you to use, well, use it, you know. But I don't think you should be forced into something that you don't want, or not being used to, or if it's not going to do you any good later on. Why spend your time with that if it's not going to do you any good?

But sure, if you're going out working with some people like that, like if I went up north, I'd want to speak in their language, you know so I can converse with them, know what they're saying, which would be more beneficial for me. And we could understand one another. But it's just too bad that we've been losing all this all this time. Now they're trying to bring it back; I think it's very nice. But then, oh, it's going to take a long time. I don't know whether they're going to really bring back the proper... They say some words right and yet other words, supposed to mean the same thing, they are not said right at all, (laughs) just the way you pronounce it, I think.

Ranald: You were telling me about the different places that you lived. Were there other places, are there other places that you've lived, or places you've travelled to?

Ella: Well, we have travelled extensively ourselves, like. Through the States, you know, different parts of the States. And, but in our own business, through gardening and vegetables, you know, associations and all that. And then of course we went on a farmers' tour to New Zealand, you know, and Australia. Same as Europe; went on flower tours there, and garden tours, and with the garden again. And last year, of course, was to England and that was on again; the summer tour was again a farmers' tour. Someplace that takes you into the

fields, into the outside that you're used to. And of course there's everything else with it, too.

Ranald: You said you were to the Maritimes, too?

Ella: Oh yes. Yeah, I've been there a couple time myself, because Len and I were there, right to the east coast. But we haven't been to, haven't been to Newfoundland yet. And then I went with three other Indian girls a year ago. So we made up our mind that we were going to visit the different reserves this time, which we did and which was very enlightening. And we stayed at some places; we went to Deseronto, and went to Cornwall, stayed there, Caughnawaga. And they again know something like Mohawks down here -- we call them our cousins. I think because they're partly Mohawks, too. So, but they, they had just sort of a little different dialect, sort of a French tang in there, you know. I think it's cute. So, and the Oneida as well, because down here in London they... We can understand one another in Mohawk, but there again they're just a little different. But no, it's kind of nice. And of course we stayed at, what do you call it, Eskasoni?

Ranald: Eskasoni?

Ella: Eskasoni, yeah.

Ranald: In Cape Breton.

Ella: That was nice. And, of course, we went to Prince Edward Island, seen some Indians there. And we never saw anything different that anybody... Of course, we never stayed right with them, right there. In some places we did, you know, stayed right with them, but we didn't stay too long. And Cabot Trail, and then we went to Boston -- one of the girls had a niece there -- and back again. So we've, and of course I've travelled out west. I've been there about three times now, myself. Len and I -- went with Len and his sister and brother -- we went by car, and we went as far as Victoria because they had a brother there at the time, to see. But I've been there, but on, again, on the Indian tour. It was through the Indian, not the Indian Department, but the, what do you call, the Friendship Centre -- connected with them. One of the girls was lecturing at B.C. so we stayed there for a week and I enjoyed that very much. It was nice to see so many students coming in and out there. And a lot of them were Indian boys and girls that were attending the university there, different courses. And I had thought it was wonderful, and it's so big. I thought, "Of all the opportunities they have nowadays, if I was only about fifty years younger. (laughs) And had that opportunity." I, I don't know, I think I would be here and there, too, and everywhere. It's so interesting, and I think I would be doing more or less social work.

Ranald: What kind of groups and clubs, and things like that have you belonged to?

Ella: Well, mostly Toronto groups. All my activities have

been involved in Toronto, because I've had the centre and I've been on a board there. And we have our W.A. -- Women's Auxiliary. I was five years president there. And of course that's not so good when you're living outside of Toronto, because you need somebody right there so they could be there, and in and out. Otherwise it's too much, I think. Just now I'm with the Homemaker's, too, and we go to different reserves every year -- all depends where the annual meeting is. And I'm on a Board of Directors with the, what do you call it, Ontario Women's Organization, just now, and our head office is at Thunder Bay. So, and then there's so much involvement there, there's all the different branches that they handle. So we're involved in quite a bit; all the different branches like Children's Aid Societies, and they have the Prison Societies, and then they have the game -- trying to group, doing group work, community work. And sending out girls that are interested in trying to make homemakers, you know, better homemakers. So, all that and all those reports have to be brought back to the... There's so many different involvements... (telephone rings)

Ranald: We were interrupted by a brief phone call, but this seemed to be an appropriate place to end the interview.

(END OF SIDE B)  
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