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- General account of her life.

Shagonaby: My mother was a Wasson girl. Her name was Wasson. She was born and raised in what they call Wasson Glade (hollow). I think you know where that is. Her mother I think applied for the homestead, 80 acres at one time and 80 acres another time. I think she must have been a very brilliant person.

Warner: What was her name?

Shagonaby: Her name was Madeleine, that's all I know, Madeleine Wasson. She was an Ottawa. The white man added the "n", but it was Wasso. I don't exactly know how to explain the Wasso except that Indians used to go fishing a long time ago; they put something over their heads, a light so they could spear the fish.

DeLaVergne: The Chippewas did that at the Sault and the Ottawas did it at St. Ignace in the old days.

Warner: Do you actually remember people doing that yourself?

Shagonaby: I have never seen them, but I have heard of it. And she (Madeleine) and Mitchell Wasson, her husband, were my
mother's parents. He was a great-great-grandson of Chief Poksigun. And Chief Poksigun was a Ottawa warrior chief here at one time. And there was a previous chief here named Chief Soaquat. Have you ever heard of him?

Warner: No. Can you spell that name, Earl?

DeLaVergne: No, I'm not sure about that name, but there is a similar name for the chief that got mad at Cass.

Shagonaby: Now after the death of Chief Soaquat, then this Chief Poksigun became a chief. That's after he quit warring with the western Indians.

DeLaVergne: The Sioux.

Shagonaby: Yes, the Sioux. That's where Kishwobanasse come from. They brought two children.

Warner: They were brought back as captives?

Shagonaby: Yes, they were captives, they might have been small children. Kishwobanasse, that's Chief Blackbird's ancestor.

Shagonaby: He was not an Ottawa.

Warner: He was brought in as a captive.

DeLaVergne: That was normal procedure.

Shagonaby: Two children were brought. That was the last trip he (Chief Poksigun) made over there warring with those Indians.

Warner: What tribe do they come from?

Shagonaby: We think they were considered as Underground Indians, now what are those? What I think? They are Mandans. Now, Jonas said he didn't think they were Mandans. He thought they were people who lived in caves. Now what would they be?

DeLaVergne: I don't know. The Mandans had circular houses, but they covered them with mud, I think. The Mandans were the ones who had the boats made out of leather, that were round like the Celts had.

Warner: So that's how Blackbird got here? He was taken as a child and then adopted into the tribe.

Shagonaby: Not here, he was taken to Manitoulin Island. That's where he grew up. This other boy they brought was white, with blue eyes. White skin and white hair and blue eyes. He was called Wabanek. Now these are the stories my mother used to tell me.

So when this Andrew Blackbird's father grew to be a young man,
he married into the tribe, to a chief's daughter in Manitoulin. They had three children, three or four children there. Something happened, I don't quite know this -- whether he killed somebody or whether she killed somebody.

Warner: He was driven off the island? With his wife and three children.

Shagonaby: They had to leave. That's where all these others like Mrs. Freelander -- you have heard of her? -- and Mrs. Greenbee Petosky, and there was another, Lydia, Lydia something anyway. And there was one young man, there must have been three daughters and one son that he left in Manitoulin. Eventually the son came this way and the other children. So after he was driven off Manitoulin, he worked down this way, that must have been in the latter part of 1700; it has to be.

Warner: This is how he came here, after he was exiled from Manitoulin and came to this area?

Shagonaby: Yes. Now I have never seen his real name in any book, even Andrew Kishwobanasse, he hasn't got it in there (his book). All he says is "my father." He never mentions the name. Does he have a Christian name? He must have a Christian name of some kind.

Warner: So he came here then with his wife and part of his children?

Shagonaby: No, he didn't bring his wife.

Warner: Just himself?

Shagonaby: Just himself.

Warner: And his wife and children stayed back?

Shagonaby: Yes, eventually his children, as they grew up, they worked toward coming this way.

Shagonaby: And one of the sons married into a Chippewa family up north somewhere.

DeLaVergne: The Upper Peninsula?

Shagonaby: Yes. And that's where Louise Owens, you know Louise Blackbird or Owens, that's her father. Now Mrs. Louise Owens, she's dead now. Right after Thanksgiving I went to her funeral. She died in Newberry. She used to live there. Eventually all those worked down and Mrs. Freelander, of course, was descended from that first brood of them. And after this Blackbird got here, Chief Poksigun recognized him. He was already able to talk English. So what we think is (we thought about this afterwards), he must have went to school in Manitoulin and learned English from English missionaries.
Warner: But that gave him a special advantage which was recognized by the chief here, that Blackbird could speak English.

Shagonaby: Yes. And the Indians around here, the Ottawas around here, had not inter-mixed with the white people yet. So they used Chief Blackbird, I mean Chief Blackbird's father, as an interpreter. They took him to Washington, D.C. when one of these big treaties was signed. That must have been 1821 Treaty. They used him as an interpreter in Washington. That's where he met his English wife. He married her there and brought her here.

Warner: When you say here, do you mean Harbor Springs? Or out where you were born?

Shagonaby: I think it's out towards Good Heart. That's where they lived.

Warner: I see. So he brought her back here.

DeLaVergne: Those treaties show two clans of Ottawas and you'll find that the chiefs of the two clans signed the treaties, and they mentioned it that way. And that is why you had Middle Village and Good Heart, two small but distinct communities, which grew up distinct. That goes back to the two clans of the Ottawas.

Shagonaby: At that time I think this clan business was over with, they had not used that clan.

Warner: After he married he started a second family?

Shagonaby: Yes, that's where Andrew Blackbird came from.

Warner: He was the son of that marriage?

Shagonaby: Yes, they had nine or ten children. And she got killed through an accident. This hot sap was dumped on her and she died right there. She got burned pretty near all over.

DeLaVergne: I've got records of that happening back in the time of the American Revolution. One of the British officers that came down to L'Arbe Croche tells about them making sap.

Shagonaby: This happened way up there in the hills.

Warner: Now is your mother related to him in any way?

Shagonaby: No. But where she's related to this is through Chief Poksigun.

Warner: How is she related to him?

Shagonaby: Well, she is a three times great-granddaughter. I am the fourth generation of Chief Poksigun.
Warner: I see. Well we might explore her family a little bit, as much as you can. Okay, your mother was a generation three away from the chief, is that right?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: And she was born out in area, Wasson Hollow, and lived there all her life?

Shagonaby: Yes, lived there all her life.

Warner: Did she tell you any stories about how life was when she was a girl, and what she did as a girl, how she might have dressed, or what kind of games she might have played or anything like that?

Shagonaby: There was an incident she told us one time though. Her father was a fisherman and they had made these dugout canoes. I suppose they were big. They set out to fish down about Seven Mile Point down below those hills, in the beach in there. And there was two girls, older girls, that is my aunt Victoria and my mother. They were the ones who helped their father. So one day I guess they were up there helping their father get their nets in before the storm really blew and they seen something floating out there. They used to be barges, we called them barges, they had no auxiliary motor on them. They depended on the wind for travel. Sometimes they brought in the lumber, sometimes flour. I take it that they came all the way from Minnesota with the flour. So I guess this time it was the flour. That barge went to pieces among a reef there at Seven Mile Point. So they seen something floating. I guess my mother went out there and tried to help, to get the barrels. She said there was dampness but inside the barrel it was all dry. So they took those barrels up. These were flour barrels. And then they seen something else floating out there. So they went and got it. It was the captain of that barge that went to pieces. He was just practically dead, I guess. They brought him in and her mother nursed him back to health. And this one only had a peg leg. So after he got better, he showed the Indians how to make bread. At that time in those days this country was full of everything. They had all kinds of wild game and all kinds of stuff to use. And he recognized what makes yeast. What do you call it? It grows wild, I've seen it. It has little white blossoms about this big. He recognized those. He had the kids go out and gather those, a lot of those little blossoms, and he steeped them and steeped them and he showed different Indians how to make raised bread. Before that they had hardly any leavening agent.

And as this man got better, he had the Indians build him a rowhouse, about where the last of those hills, those steep banks at Nine Mile Point my mother used to show me. Now that's where our school used to be. So we went to school and this man taught us. But I never knew his name. He taught the Indian
boys and girls how to talk, and how to count, and taught them ABC's.

Warner: Was that the first education that they'd had?

Shagonaby: Yes, the first education that the Ottawas had around this part.

Warner: The church hadn't started schools yet?

Shagonaby: No, not yet. So this must have been before 1874, because that's when this school (Harbor Springs) was organized.

Warner: That's when the priests came in to start the school.

Shagonaby: Yes. The first Catholic Church and school was built at Seven Mile Point.

Warner: The very first mission station was at Seven Mile Point?

Shagonaby: Yes. So my mother used to tell us that this old man used to sleep in the afternoon, shortly after he got through eating, he'd go to sleep. And all these Indian boys and girls would just run up and down raising Cain!

Warner: So he just stayed and settled with them.

Shagonaby: Yes, yes he did. But whatever happened to him, I don't know. I wish now I had asked, lot of things I wish now I had asked.

Warner: Was your mother a convert to Christianity?

Shagonaby: Yes, after the building of that church.

Warner: Did you remember anything about the native religion. Any practices?

Shagonaby: I have never heard her mention it.

Warner: Yes, now that would not be surprising.

Shagonaby: But I did hear at one time, though, when Chief Poksigun's only daughter went to her father and asked him to bring the Black Group. She had heard about the Black Group from somewhere, probably Indians travelling. Because in those days there were a lot of scouts travelling back and forth. Even Chief Poksigun sent 100 scouts from Nbising. That must be on the Canadian side, that's even before they came to live here. And he sent 100 scouts to investigate where they could live without the corn freezing or the squashes freezing. It was too cold up that way.

DeLaVergne: Yes, that was the Upper Peninsula. They said they raised corn but they picked it green because the autumn fogs came in and it would never ripen.
Shagonaby: Yes, that's a 90 day corn.

Warner: I see. So her education was largely done by the old (barge captain) school teacher.

Shagonaby: I never heard her mention ever going to a school down here. I don't believe she did. Because all she remembered is to learn to at least sign her name. That's all she remembered.

Warner: Did she marry very early?

Shagonaby: No, I don't think so. I don't think she got married until she was 24.

Warner: And she married another Ottawa?

Shagonaby: Yes, she did. She married into the Kishwobanasse family. That's related to this Chief Blackbird, probably some distant relation.

Warner: And what did he do, her husband or your father?

Shagonaby: I think he was a carpenter. He was not my father, I am from the second brood. He was probably a carpenter. And the first Indian town that I have heard of was at Sand Hill, on West Traverse. The one woman who owned that homestead, that land, that 80 acres, was named Madeleine Edwigish. And she homesteaded it. And so when they heard that they were going to move Indian town into present Indian town now, this Indian bought the land so she had the whole place plotted out. I was born and raised there.

Warner: Well, let's bring it up to date there. Your mother remarried then later on?

Shagonaby: After her husband died.

Warner: Did she have children by him?

Shagonaby: Four children, but they all died in infancy.

Warner: Was that common? They probably didn't have very good health care.

Shagonaby: Yes, that's about it. When the school began just anybody went there, and somebody had TB and it spread over the whole school, and two of her children died of TB.

Warner: That was the Indian school in Harbor Springs. That was one of the sad things, you bring a case or two of TB in there and it just spread through all the children.

Shagonaby: Yes, two of her children died in there.
Warner: So her children died of tuberculosis contracted in the Indian school. Do you remember any stories about the Indian school from your own knowledge?

Shagonaby: I went to school there myself.

Warner: Well, let's talk about your experience. So she married again, and you might tell us a little about your father.

Shagonaby: Oh, my father lived in Cross Village. He too was an Ottawa, and he was also the great-great-grandson of Chief Middleplains, they call him in English. And he was one of the co-signers of the Treaty in 1836. They went to Washington again. And Poksigun went along and I think Kishwobanasse went along that time.

Warner: So your father came from Cross Village and did he come down here to settle after he married your mother?

Shagonaby: Yes, but they lived around different areas. Well, he worked in the lumbering mills where they needed men.

Warner: It was a big time for lumbering.

Shagonaby: Oh yes, those were lumbering time days. I remember one time, we must have been living in Pellston. All I can remember is seeing cars going by loaded with lumber and wood. We must have lived not too far from that railroad. And I can remember my mother looked at me and says, "You was only past two years old and you can remember that much?"

Warner: Well, how long did your mother live, did she live to be a great age?

Shagonaby: 82.

Warner: That's remarkable. You moved around various towns like Pellston while your father was working in the lumber camps and so forth?

Shagonaby: I think we settled down here. We had three or four big mills here in Harbor Springs at one time and my father got a job working for Carry Thompson, one of the big mills in there. That's where he met Dr. Garpee's father, and he was a head sawyer.

Warner: I'll bet the wages weren't very good then?

Shagonaby: Well, it's not what it is now. You could buy a lot for a dollar. If you made a dollar an hour or a dollar a day, you could still buy an awful lot for that money.

DeLaVergne: And you had competition, too. You had two or three grocery stores, it wasn't like you had to go into one place and
buy it whether you like it or not.

Shagonaby: There used to be two dry goods stores, two bakeries, there was about four grocery stores, two shoe stores, and one big saloon as well!

Warner: Well, if you had lumbering camps, you had to have saloons!

Shagonaby: Oh yes.

Warner: What was your earliest memory then of your early life? Some of your schooling and your friends, and anything of that nature, things you can actually remember yourself. Where did you start school?

Shagonaby: Down here at Holy Childhood, they didn't have no kindergarten.

Warner: Could you tell about the school?

Shagonaby: They used to have charts, you know, different charts, and they swing those over and you get your numbers, and your ABC's and all that, you know.

DeLaVergne: You might mention that the Sisters were a lot different in those days than they are now.

Warner: Sure, let's talk about that. You said when we were talking earlier about the discipline and that it was kind of grim.

Shagonaby: Well, I'll tell you, I didn't get along too good with them.

Warner: Tell us about that.

Shagonaby: I had Sister Cleomina.

Warner: Now the Sister wasn't an Indian, was she?

Shagonaby: No.

Warner: Was she from this area or was she sent in from the Church?

Shagonaby: They were all sent in by the Church.

DeLaVergne: A lot of them were from Wisconsin.

Warner: Were they sympathetic to the Indians?

Shagonaby: No, they were not. They were pretty well always on the uppity.

Warner: So that made some problems.
Shagonaby: It did, it made a lot of problems.

Warner: Did they try to understand the Indian culture and traditions and have you talk about it and take pride in it or anything of that nature?

Shagonaby: I don't think so. You see, what used to happen is when all of us Indian children got together we all talked Indian.

Warner: You still talked your Indian language?

Shagonaby: We still talked it then. And the Sisters they didn't want nobody to talk Indian. They used to get lickin' for that. They were all out to kill everything there is to do with the Indian life.

DeLaVergne: Another thing, did they show partiality to the children that were staying, to the boarders?

Shagonaby: They sure did.

Warner: Tell me about that. I don't know enough about the school. You had two groups of students, those who were day students and those who were staying there?

Shagonaby: You see this is parochial school, you might as well say. Then the Indian children boarded there. The Indian children who had broken homes, not many though. In the Indian families, they loved their children.

Warner: That's always been traditional in the Indian, they were very good to their children, very good.

Shagonaby: Yes, it was not what it is now. Nowadays people who have kids, to heck with them, adopt them out even before they are born! That's life nowadays.

DeLaVergne: But the Sisters in those days, their custom was different, their whole attitude was different.

Warner: Are there other things that particularly strike you about the school or how you were treated in the school or the people there? Did you ever come into contact with the priest, was religion pushed hard?

Shagonaby: Ho! Ho! That priest, I'd like to hang him myself. Father Erkins.

Warner: Why?

Shagonaby: I don't know. Now he was a good priest, what I'm saying is he was a good priest as far as religion was concerned. He taught us to respect religion. And there are times that he was too much over. Now my brother quit there and
my father was called in to go over there to talk to the priest, Father Erkins. And I quit after a while, 1920 I believe I quit there. Then I went to public school. Well, I got myself messed up with the Sisters. I had Sister Cleomina. She was an old teacher, an old German general. And what they done to me was, I'd sit here in my class, and there's older classes on this side and there's middle classes on that side. that's like fifth grade, sixth grade and seventh grade and all that you know. There were about four grades to one room that was supposed to be taught by Sister Cleomina. Well I sat there, and all the children they had this room there to go by, they used to pick pins at me when they went by. And if I made a fuss, I was made to stand in a corner of the room. Well one day she sent me out because what I did, this one girl, she was a white girl, she stuck a pin, jabbed me right across here, so I got ahold of my ink well and I just slammed it at her and I hit her, I ran it on her head and dumped the ink the whole length of her. And I got sent out to stand in the hallway for an hour. But I kept right on going to the cloak room, put on my clothes and my boots and I went home.

Warner: You never went back?

Shagonaby: I never went back. And then the Sisters used to come over and try to get me. My father told them, "You ever come close here, I'm going to use this club on you. I don't care who you are and what you are."

DeLaVergne: Did the priest ever visit the Indian homes, to help?

Shagonaby: No. They never visited any Indian homes that I know of.

Warner: But did they visit the white homes?

Shagonaby: That I don't know.

Warner: But they didn't visit the Indian homes?

Shagonaby: They never went to any. You went to the Indian school to him. Well, they called my father in after I quit. And this father Erkins told my father (I went along, see, to be the interpreter), "Well," Father Erkins says, "when you die, you're going to go to hell!" Oh boy! So my father, he can just barely speak English, you know, he had a very limited education in Cross Village. And my father told him, "That's all right, if I go to hell, you'll go to hell, too. You're no better than I am." And that's the way it was.

Warner: Were the white children in the school too?

Shagonaby: Yes, it was all mixed up.

Warner: Did most of the Indians that went to school at that
time, did they go to Holy Childhood, or was it about half and half?

Shagonaby: Well, all of my kids went to Holy Childhood. Because I told my children when I got to meet my Maker he can never accuse me of not trying. They got Christian training, Christian education.

DeLaVergne: All except one finished at the Holy Childhod School. There were some families, though, that had problems with the priest and they wouldn't. Like the Shabanasses, they never went to parochial school, did they?

Shagonaby: No.

Warner: But all your children did go to school there?

Shagonaby: Yes. But one thing I will tell you, when you graduate from the Holy Childhood in the eighth grade, when you go to public school you are just as good as a tenth grader. They got good training. I think they still do.

Warner: Well, you went to the public school then.

Shagonaby: I went to the public school after I quit there.

Warner: And how was that different, was it better or worse or...?

Shagonaby: I have never known any discrimination all the years I went to public school.

Warner: That's remarkable.

Shagonaby: I have never known any discrimination, never had any trouble at all.

DeLaVergne: We all grew up, and worked together. I used to play with Indians. Like I say, I grew up with the Shawbanasses, and the Adibogisics and the Coopers.

Shagonaby: We used to have a ball team down there. Ha! We all played together, and we might as well say we didn't have no enemies.

DeLaVergne: We never knew what discrimination was. We wouldn't know what it meant. Everyone was friendly and accepted each other as people.

Shagonaby: There's one thing though I didn't do, I never went to any white families, never.

Warner: You mean, say, go home for lunch or something?

Shagonaby: Yeah.
Warner: Did many of the Indians go on to high school or did they usually finish up about eighth grade.

Shagonaby: Quite a few went, but not too many though. There's three Indians here, three of us Indians that graduated from Harbor High. The first one that made it was William Kishigo.

Warner: That's the first Indian to ever graduate from Harbor High?

DeLaVergne: Well, way back before our time Leander Bernette graduated. Hedrick tells about Leander graduating. And he went to college and he was an engineer and he was a great athlete. Now it was before your and my time. We didn't know about it. But Michigan State wrote up here and Mrs. Shirtleff knew about it. I knew his first name but I didn't know his last name. Well, he wasn't all Indian, he was part Indian, his father was a Bernette. I don't know who his mother was. He was renowned because he was such a fine athlete. But I've been trying to get that story.

Warner: But you were telling about this first Indian graduate in your day, what was his name?

Shagonaby: William Kishigo. And the second Indian that graduated was Madeleine Kishigo.

Warner: They were brother and sister?

Shagonaby: Yes, they were brother and sister. Then I graduated in 1927.

Warner: You were the third and you graduated from Harbor High in 1927?

Shagonaby: Yes. Then everybody said at that time, "Well, if she can make it, what's the matter with us, that we can't make it?"

Warner: Why didn't many more go on? Did the parents not encourage it? Were there too many obstacles?

Shagonaby: No, there was too many obstacles on their own. None of the Fisters ever made it.

Warner: Did they have to go out and work and earn a living?

Shagonaby: No, no it wasn't that, I don't know why.

DeLaVergne: It was easier to get a job than it was to study.

Shagonaby: Their brain wasn't that brilliant, I guess.

Warner: Well, was there a language problem too, or did most of them know English by that time?
Shagonaby: By that time, they all know English and everyone was forgetting Indian.

DeLaVergne: They were bilingual when I was growing up, because they could talk English like we would, but they could talk to each other in Indian.


Shagonaby: It is vanishing. They talk like the way we're talking now!

Warner: I see, and people don't converse in Ottawa any more.

Shagonaby: No.

Warner: Let's go to some of the questions our friend in Sweden would like to have answered. Where are the Ottawa living now, mostly?

Shagonaby: We are all intermixed and scattered all over. Each to everyone his own.

Warner: So there is really no one centre that you can say: this is the centre for Ottawa life and culture. You can't say that; there is no one place.

Shagonaby: No, there is no one place.

Warner: Have they migrated from Harbor Springs or have they intermarried and stayed? What would you say to that?

Shagonaby: I would say more or less intermarried.

Warner: They have more or less intermarried?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: And they marry, of course, into other tribes of Indians, and married whites and so forth...

Shagonaby: I myself married into a Potawatomi family.

Warner: Okay, let's talk about you. You're a good example of that. Tell me about your husband; where did he come from?

Shagonaby: My husband was born and raised in Allegan County.

Warner: I see, and he was a Potawatomi?

Shagonaby: His mother was Potawatomi and his father was Ottawa. But neither chieftainship there.
Warner: You mentioned, you said his mother was a Potawatomi, and in the Indian culture, it flows through the mother's line, is that right? You said he was a Potawatomi even though his father was an Ottawa?

Shagonaby: I think his father was part Potawatomi too, and more or less he was recognized as Potawatomi because the line is below a Hartline or Muskegon line. And you might find few Ottawas in Muskegon. You see, years and years ago, when the Indians first came to live here, they used to migrate every fall...

Warner: Yes, to the hunting grounds.

Shagonaby: No, it was too cold here, and they'd migrate to Silver Creek, it's on the Kalamazoo River. There was one big place there, there would be five or six thousand Indians wintering.

Warner: Migrating for the winter down there?

Shagonaby: Yes, and they'd live on the wild game, deer, muskrats, birds... and in the spring again, after they had made the sugar, they'd migrate back here again to do their planting and raise their corn and beans and all that staff. So the Indians through the Ottawas automatically had become involved with the Potawatomi nation.

Warner: I see. Well, how did you meet your husband then?

Shagonaby: I worked in Muskegon.

Warner: You worked in Muskegon, so you met him down there?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: Well, how did you get to Muskegon, after you graduated from school in 1927?

Shagonaby: Well, I tell you, in 1927 after I finished high school I wanted to go to college. But there was no money. I wanted my mother to help me borrow money, but she was already grown too old to borrow.

Warner: She would have liked you to go, but she didn't have the resources to do it.

Shagonaby: Yes. So I wrote in to Haskell Institute; this was before I finished high school to see if there was any possibility I could enter that school in the fall. So they sent me blanks to fill out. He says I must attend at least one year federal-funded Indian school and this is not federal-funded; this is parochial. I mentioned Holy Childhood, that I had attended there, but...

Warner: They didn't count that because it was not a federal
school?

Shagonaby: Well, what can I do? I should have gone to Mt. Pleasant but I didn't.

Warner: Because that was a federally-funded school, the one in Mt. Pleasant?

Shagonaby: Yes, it was. So, how to dig up $250 as an entrance fee.

Warner: That was an awful lot of money.

Shagonaby: But if I was to dig up $250 I would have went to Michigan State. I wanted to go to Michigan State. So in the long run I made up my mind that, well, she raised me this far, she helped me out all this time, what's the matter with me if I didn't get out and earn my own living? So that way I helped her out. Whenever I made extra money, I would sent it to her.

Warner: So you left here and went down to Muskegon?

Shagonaby: No, I went to Grand Rapids.

Warner: Worked in a store, did you?

Shagonaby: No, I learned to cook here. I worked for quite a few jobs while I was going to school.

Warner: I see, to help earn your way through school you worked in various places around Harbor Springs.

Shagonaby: I mostly did housework. So I got myself a good job in Grand Rapids.

Warner: Well, what did you do down there?

Shagonaby: Well, I worked for these people, helped them look after the house, and cooked.

Warner: Were they a good family?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: What was their name?

Shagonaby: George Daiken. But I was still interested in furthering my education, so when I had time I would take courses at the YWCA, and I took courses from some gas company that offered courses, and I'd go over there and stay, just to kill time, and I had time, all the time in the world after my work was done. On Thursdays I'd go over there; that was my day off. I'd go to the YWCA, in fact I joined it, too, in Grand Rapids. I learned a lot from there; I got acquainted with a lot of people.

Warner: Was it hard living, was that the largest city you
had lived in up to the time?

Shagonaby: No, I went to work in Chicago.

Warner: When did you do that?

Shagonaby: Oh, it must have been '29. But I didn't like it though so I came back and got another job, well, which I kind of liked.

Warner: Did you come back to Grand Rapids?

Shagonaby: Yes. But why I worked in Muskegon is that the family I worked for went to Europe on a vacation trip. They were gone three months so I had to find myself a job so that's where I went. I had a cousin living in Muskegon, that's how I ended up there. So when I got myself situated and found a place to stay, then I hunted for jobs then. But I worked in a factory.

Warner: Down in Muskegon.

Shagonaby: Yes, that's where I met my husband.

Warner: He worked in the same factory?

Shagonaby: No, in another factory.

Warner: By that time tribe differences didn't really make any difference?

Shagonaby: No. Because his father and I, we talked the same language. The Ottawa, the Chippewas and the Potawatomis, their languages are identical. We're all Algonquins. And the Menominees, they're Algonquins too. Because when I was in Minnesota -- that's when I run into these people. And the Chippewas.

DeLaVergne: Did you ever run into Iroquois?

Shagonaby: Yes, I have. They speak completely totally different.

DeLaVergne: That's your big difference!

Warner: Had your husband gone to an Indian school?

Shagonaby: Mt. Pleasant. He'd gone to Mt. Pleasant. He graduated there in the eighth grade, or ninth grade.

Warner: I see, and then gone to work.

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: Well, both of you worked there, and so forth, and then how did both of you get back to Harbor Springs?
Shagonaby: Well, I came home. My mother was sick, so I came home to work to help her out. So he wasn't my husband yet -- we hadn't got married yet -- so he came up here and stayed, and eventually we got married that fall, the hardest part of the year in '32! Depression years.

Warner: Those were terrible times. How did the Depression affect the Indian community? Can you think of things, how life changed with the Depression?

Shagonaby: No, I don't think so. I think we lived accordingly with the white people. Whatever the white people were getting we got too.

Warner: Was there any interest at all among the Indians, did they pay any attention to politics, when Roosevelt was coming in did they get interested?

Shagonaby: No, I don't think so.

Warner: It just wasn't a matter of their interest.

Shagonaby: Yes. But I have never been a Republican, and I have never been a Democrat. My interest in politics has always been to vote for the best man. That's been my interest. But my father was a Democrat.

Warner: Was he a big Roosevelt man?

Shagonaby: Yes. And my mother was a Republican, so every voting year, boy, them things were hot! So we had quite a time to turn my mother to vote for Roosevelt. I believe Roosevelt was a Democrat. And we had quite a time to convince her; she was definitely a Republican.

Warner: You're really famous for your quill work. Did you learn that as a girl? Who taught you?

Shagonaby: My mother. I didn't learn it as a girl, I helped her work with it, I'd seen her work with it. But I wanted no part of it. I wanted to be able to live in a better world!

Warner: Isn't this the same thing true today, that young people aren't interested in quill work?

Shagonaby: Yes, that's right.

DeLaVergne: They act today the same way you acted?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: So you had watched her and helped her but you didn't want any part of it. So when did you take it up again?
Shagonaby: In 1934. When times were awfully hard. My husband could not even get a job on the WPA. No, he didn't belong there, that's why.

Warner: So the local people wouldn't give him a WPA job?

Shagonaby: Yes, they wouldn't give him any kind of a job at all. We weren't starving. We had a lot of deer meat, and we were planting my mother's farm. She had a big farm up there. We were raising a lot of our crops like potatoes and vegetables and all that, and I done a lot of canning myself, and we always had a lot of deer, and we were raising chickens. We weren't starving, as far as that goes. So one day we needed some money though; you have to have some money to buy salt and sugar and things like that.

DeLaVergne: You need a cash crop as they say.

Shagonaby: Yes, so I told him, I said, "Look I'm going up there to see my mother, see if she's got any spare bark, and maybe she's got some tools she can let me have." So I went up there. We had all kinds of porcupine; we used to have porcupine hanging in our back porch. By that time, we had two little boys. So I told him (husband), "Stay with the kids here while I'm gone. I'll go up there and see my mother, see if we can get things to work with." Well, our first quill box didn't look (like) very much, ha, ha, poor job. So I said, "Well, you make one and I'll make one." So he made one. And by golly, you know, we sold our boxes and pretty soon, you know, we're making quill boxes. The more we work at them the better they are.

Warner: Who bought them? Visitors coming to Harbor Springs?

Shagonaby: No, George Adams, here. Yes, he was buying them, then whenever we had any amount of them we game them to Tysons, but we didn't do too much business with the Tysons because that was too far away.

Warner: Up at Mackinaw. What did they give you for them, do you know?

Shagonaby: Ha! That little that you can see, a quarter, and that squirrel one dollar, next to nothing. But it would buy us what we needed.

Warner: Sure, and you both made them?

Shagonaby: Yes, we both made them, and gradually the Indian came out. Gradually we learned how to do this, learned how you made these own solutions. Well, I'll tell you, necessity is the mother of invention, that's true; you live up there in the middle of the woods...
Warner: Whereabouts was your home?

Shagonaby: What we call Middle Road, way up there; it's completely different now. My mother owned 80 acres up there.

Warner: So you lived on her place?

Shagonaby: Yes. The snow was about that deep (three or four feet high). You have to pass the Jablinski farm. Way up there. My mother used to own it (the farm). So I sold it after she passed on because I had to bury her.

Warner: You used the money to bury her.

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: While we're talking about quill work, what kind of tools do you use?

Shagonaby: Well, we got an awl; then we have a thing you pull the quills on the underside. You make the hole first on the bark. You put your quill in there and the quill has to be damp, so it will be flexible; then you make another hole and put your quill in there, over and over and over.

Warner: You say you have to pull them and then clean them?

Shagonaby: Oh, yes.

Warner: You have to clean them. And then do you soak them or just wet them to get them pliable?

Shagonaby: I use just water.

Warner: Then how do you decide on the design? Is it just something you think about ahead of time? Nobody has told you a design. How do you come to it?

Shagonaby: Well, there is something about this quill work, it's something about the art, you know, like a painter's. It has to be created in your mind. You make up your mind what you going to have. And the more you work at it the more you think about things you can do; the harder the problems are, the better. Now my husband was a good basket maker. Yes, he was an expert at making baskets. Now I was never too much of an expert.

DeLaVergne: What did he use, ash?

Shagonaby: Yes, ash, black ash. Used to go out and get that.

Warner: Well, what about the Ottawas today now, what has happened to their traditions? Now you have kept some of them -- remember some of them -- but are you the exception?
Shagonaby: No, there are other people who are interested yet. But I have always gone and pushed them and pushed them.

Warner: To be sure not to lose their traditions and their history.

Shagonaby: Yes. Now we always have ghost suppers, I have them. There are other people that have them. Well, ghost supper was introduced by missionaries, and the idea is when you have a supper, it could be bring your dish to pass, but me have mine alone. And you cook a big dinner. Now last year I made two meat loaves this long, and I bought nine chickens, and fried them, cooked them all up.

Warner: That's interesting. This would be a traditional Indian meal, things like potatoes, and anything else, traditional food?

Shagonaby: Always corn, and squash.

Warner: Now those were staples, the things that were traditional Indian meals.

Shagonaby: Yes, and beans.

Warner: I see, that'd be a real feast then.

Shagonaby: Yes. And the beans were brought from the last trip out west that Chief Poksigun made. He brought them beans.

DeLaVergne: He brought the seed back and that was planted.

Shagonaby: Yes. And those are the kind of beans that Mr. Carl Wright used to pass around, scattered those beans all over. Some of them are growing in India now.

Warner: So you had this big feast and who would you invite to this?

Shagonaby: In my house nobody is invited. People just come and go. You just come in and sit down. When you get through eating, out you go and let somebody else come in. Just keep right on. I think I have fed over a hundred.

DeLaVergne: What is the feast where you put the money in the cakes?

Shagonaby: That's another feast introduced by the missionaries, called "The Three Kings."

Warner: When do they have that?

Shagonaby: We have that the 6th of February.

DeLaVergne: What are the coins you put in and what do you have to do? When you get the coin, are you obligated to bring
another meal or something?

Shagonaby: There are three coins, 10 cent, nickel and penny. Now these represent the three kings of the East, that when Jesus was born the three wise men they seen the star, these are the three kings. The head king is the dime, the middle king is the nickel and the penny is that colored -- Ethiopian, is it? Well anyway the three kings are the ones who decide where you going to have it and when.

DeLaVergne: In other words for the next year?

Shagonaby: No, we have what you call pay-off supper.

DeLaVergne: Oh, is that where they draw the money?

Shagonaby: Yes. After Ash Wednesday, after 40 days Ash Wednesday. Otherwise we observe Lent. Then we'll have our pay-off supper. You want to attend, you're interested to attend I'll invite you, I got the beans! And the beans, then there's beans in each of those fried biscuits. Some of them have no beans, some have. I think there's two beans in our family. So we are the courtiers. The bean families, the bean-getters are the courtiers.

DeLaVergne: You have to promote the thing, organize it.

Shagonaby: Yes. We are the ones who take what we are going to eat.

DeLaVergne: But then if you get one of the coins it's also the responsibility, you have to furnish food or something.

Shagonaby: They usually have to furnish the paying of the hall that you rent, and if you want musicians, music, then you hire them. Now my youngest son, he was a king one time, and he had to go to school in Chicago. So I told him, I said, "Look, I'm going to have to have it, so I'm going to call all the kings in and then I'm going to rent West Traverse Town Hall." So I did. Then I made an announcement. I said, "I don't believe I can afford to hire music." So all the Indians together pitched in five dollars apiece to hire music -- what's a feast without dance!

Warner: So you got enough money to hire music. What goes on at a feast?

Shagonaby: The people that get the beans are the ones that invite others, so there's always a big mixture of Indians all over. Indians come from all over.

Warner: And this does help to keep the culture and the tradition alive?

Shagonaby: Yes, it does.
Warner: Are there any other things that help that you can think of that are keeping the traditions alive?

DeLaVergne: What about, do they go out New Year's any more?

Shagonaby: No, that's all died down.

Warner: Do the young people come to these too, or are the young people not interested in Indian tradition? Is it hard to keep the young people interested?

Shagonaby: Very few of us is interested left.

Warner: Not the young people.

Shagonaby: No, not many.

Warner: What happens to the young people, do they stay here or go away or what?

DeLaVergne: They are just like the white kids, they quit school or they go on to school; they go to Detroit where there's a settlement; they go to Grand Rapids; they go to Lansing.

Shagonaby: Oh yes. Now at the museum people ask that question what you're asking me, so I always tell them, "Okay, now where are the 'Fisher Bodys' situated?" That's where you'll find the Indians. Because there are no factories here to keep our Indians alive.

DeLaVergne: There's no factories here for anybody. If your folks don't have a business, or you can't marry somebody, if you're a boy and you can't marry a girl whose father has a business... you're marginal.

Shagonaby: Mr. Palethorpe and I used to visit a lot, and there's an awful lot of things he told me that I didn't know.

Warner: Well, he wasn't an Indian, but he read the history and knew it.

Shagonaby: The Palethorpes had done a lot of work with the Indians.

DeLaVergne: They were attorneys for the Indians.

Warner: Oh, I see.

Shagonaby: And he brought me that book, and I read it through. It was about this boy, John Tanner, who was captured when he was only seven years old and he was sold from tribe to tribe until the last that bought him was in Mackinac Island was an Ottawa woman.

Warner: I see, and she raised him. So he was really raised an Ottawa?
Shagonaby: And he had forgotten his own people.

Warner: The Land of Wauganatsi, that's how this area is known as, and everybody identifies that with the Land of the Crooked Tree.

Shagonaby: And the French couldn't say Wauganatsi so they got their own name, L'Arbre Croche. But these three words means one name. And Wauganatsi was up there by, just on the other side of Good Heart. There's a point coming that looks like this. A few years ago, maybe 20, 25 years ago, maybe longer, they had practically a deluge on that road at Talbot Heights. But you can still see that old road. I travelled on that road when I was a kid. And you could see all through the beach, but after we had that terrible storm, one day, it washed out trees and everything underneath. Well, the old Indian belief (explanation of the flood was that), the old devil himself came out of the swamp and the old devil was the sea serpent. And he had moved out. But you've never been down there, have you, been down below?

DeLaVergne: Talbot Heights? No, I never went down there.

Shagonaby: Well, I went down there looking for cedar roots; it's part of my work, I use cedar roots.

Warner: For cedar root, do you use that in your quill work?

Shagonaby: Oh yes.

DeLaVergne: They used to use cedar root to make their canoes with, didn't they?

Shagonaby: Yes.

Warner: What part do you use for the cedar work?

Shagonaby: Right on the outside, on the edges.

DeLaVergne: For binding.

Shagonaby: So we went down there. We used to go in company, my children and Charlie and I, we'd all go either bark hunting or sweetgrass hunting and we'd go cedar root hunting. And that's what we were doing -- cedar root hunting. And we seen that creek that goes under the road and we seen it coming down and pretty soon it disappeared, no more creek, but you could hear the water running, you know. So we went around, went towards the beach and it's all dry land, there's no creek, but when you almost reach that beach, though, I had to go by there. I was walking, you know, and I had my axe, to dig up those roots. And I happened to hit that. My gosh, it sounded like a drum! "Holy smoke," I told the kids, "you get the hell out of here. You get quick on the other side, there's a hole here somewhere, there's got to be." That water was coming out and
you could hear that tomp! tomp! That must have been a cavern.

DeLaVergne: Have you ever been up to Indian Gardens?

Shagonaby: Yes, I have.

DeLaVergne: Well, you know that stream disappears.

Shagonaby: There's quite a few streams disappear. My husband was a hunter and a good hunter, too, and he travelled among these hills all through those hills back there, we call them 99 hills, there may be more than that. And at one time, before the coming of the Ottawas, there was already a tribe living here in this area, called the Muskotons. They were a small people. They lived underground in caves. They dug big holes as big as this room here, that's where they lived. I don't know what they done here -- probably had some kind of roof on it. And so one day my husband was out there hunting and ran into a great big huge well, way up in those hills. And that well was at least 50 feet wide, he says, and he went down and down in this well, this well was spiral. Then he got down there, and that's where the spring is. And there was water in it, but it wasn't a bubbling spring (it might have been at one time), the other side of the Good Heart. The other one is up here around Indian Gardens. So the Indians at one time lived among those hills. They didn't associate around with the Ottawas.

DeLaVergne: They were here before the Ottawas?

Shagonaby: They already lived in this area. And he used to run across those huge caverns. He says, "By golly, they look funny, you know. It's kind of frightening, too." He says, "I went down in one of them. It just seems like there's people looking at you. Even my dog looking around like this, my hunting dog kept looking. And I thought it might be a bear or something like that, something frightening to the animal. I couldn't see anything," he says, "by golly I got out of there!"

Warner: Well, this is something like we were talking (about) earlier. You can sometimes sense or feel you don't know what.

Shagonaby: Yes, and there was another place we run into like this. Now after, I used to work for the Poverty people. And Mr. Kezroski and I, we got $9,000 federal funds to promote Indian crafts. This was a government program to promote Indian crafts and culture. Well, we had to find a place where we could get our bark, and it was getting late. I finally told Leonard Kezroski, "Look, have you found a place yet?" "No, how do you expect me to look when I haven't got time, and besides I don't know your country." I said "Look, there's ony two places where you can look." I said, "You inquire around with the DNR (that's before it became DNR, it was the Conservation Department)." I said, "Look, there is State land in every
county. We have one of them, in Emmet County, and there's one of them in Charlevoix County, there's one in Cheboygan County."

Well, somebody recommended Cheboygan County. See, they were cutting on trees, this big, beautiful birch bark. And he said, "Go over there and ask for Mr. (I can't remember his name)." Okay, so he called me as soon as I got home from work. He says, "You're Susan Shagonaby? You're the head of this poverty program?" "Yes, I am."

Warner: You were the head for Emmet County?

Shagonaby: Yes. I said, "We need bark. I want a place where we can find at least a hundred pieces." He said, "You come over here in Cheboygan, we'll wait for you at Indian River, then we'll take you out there." We went out there. I went along with my daughter. My daughter had a car. We all went out, my son and daughter and I. First I sent them over by themselves. I have to open the museum, so I sent them on ahead. So the next day and we thought we'd go pick for about three days, we picked only two days though. So they went along, and they said there was one big place where they picked bark. Oh, it's a beautiful bark, tall trees, and my son had things that make you climb?

Warner: Climbers.

Shagonaby: Yes, and he'd go up as far as he can.

Warner: This to get the very best bark?

Shagonaby: Yes, the best there is. The next day we went along. I told him, "Hey, how (did you) folks miss that place over there?" He looked at me, he says, "I wouldn't go over there again." And the same with her. "And you know we got out of there lucky," he says, "that place is haunted. We got our first bark and that's all we could touch, we had to get out. It just seemed like there was somebody ready to grab you."

DeLaVergne: The bark wouldn't come off, would it?

Shagonaby: Yes, I guess so.

DeLaVergne: He tried it and the bark wouldn't peel.

Shagonaby: He said it was just like people standing around looking at you. You could just feel it. So we travelled around; we found another place. And somehow...

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