

**Oral History Interview of
Luis Tijerina**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
July 11, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Luis Tijerina. Tijerina, who is a Native American chief from Odessa, Texas. Tijerina discusses his spiritual journey and vision quest. Tijerina also speaks more broadly about Native American culture and its place in today's world.

Length of Interview: 01:52:59

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez, today's date is July 11, 2014. We're in Lubbock, Texas, and today our guest is Luis Tijerina. Luis, thank you for being here.

Luis Tijerina (LT):

Thank you for having me, I appreciate your time.

DS:

And could you please tell us your complete legal name.

LT:

My name is Luis Ray Tijerina, my Indian name is Watching Wolf. I live in Odessa, Texas, and lived for all fifty-five years of my life.

DS:

And when and where were you born? Were you just—

LT:

I was born in Odessa and lived there.

DS:

What was your birthday?

LT:

October 31, 1958.

DS:

Ah, okay. And how about your parents? Give us their information.

LT:

My father is Alberto Tijerina Sr. who passed away about twenty-five years ago, and my mother is Lourdes Marta Tijerina, she is still alive, and she is eighty-four years old, and she's just kicking and doing good still.

DS:

And where are they from?

LT:

My father was from Mertzon and Ozona area, but tracing the lineage back in that side of the family, we go back to the Tarahumaras, and so my mother was from the Pecos area, my

grandmother was from—what they call El Polvo—Redford, Texas. And so in that lineage, we are Comanche.

DS:

Okay, and you know, it's interesting, you have Comanche and the Tarahumara because we, we work with both of those groups. In fact, I was telling you about that Tarahumara stuff earlier without knowing that connection.

LT:

Absolutely—I run across Tarahumaras all the time.

DS:

Oh, really?

LT;

I really, really do.

DS:

About how many do you think are in this area?

LT:

I don't know, probably about a dozen.

DS:

Really?

LT:

Yeah, yeah.

DS:

Yeah, because, you know, we had a student—sorry to go off here—but years ago we were doing a translation project, and as part of that, they had gone to Mexico and done an interview, and it was Spanish to English, but he had a few Tarahumara words he was using, the gentleman, and though the students understand that were working—they were from Mexico—they were working on a project, this girl from Plainview, Texas said, “Well that means this” and “This means that,” and they all looked at her like “What” and she goes, she goes, “My mom's Tarahumara” [laughs]. So, it was like, you know, you have these international students, and yet it's someone from your own backyard that knows language.

LT:

Right, right, it happens that way, it does.

DS:

It happens. So anyways, so, you know, that's a unique background. How was that background expressed in the culture growing up?

LT:

It wasn't. I've always told the people that I've talk to, when I do presentations, that it skipped a generation because when my grandmother was alive and well, she didn't like talking about being Indian because that was not a good thing in her time. So, my mother never picked up on it, and my father, of course, never really got into that either, probably for the same reasons. And so it skipped a generation, and my mother and father were devout Catholics, and that's the way we were brought up, but during the twenty-ninth year of my life, I was in dire straits and not doing very well, being who I should be, and I had to start digging in the family and find out who we were so that I could know where I want to go with it. And so doing the research and talking to different relatives and that kind of thing, of course we found the Tarahumaras and then the Comanches on my mother's side, and so I did some more research on what it was our people did and I came to find out that they do a ceremony that is called a vision quest where they take you out into the wilderness for four days without food and water. And they drop you off out there in the sacred space, the sacred space may be ten-foot-by-ten-foot, and you stay in that space for the four days, you don't leave it. And that's your sacred space, and that's where you sit and talk with Creator, and you ask him to let you know through a vision what your life is and what you're supposed to be and what you're supposed to do in your life. And for me, it was a matter of survival that I had to go do that. And so maybe fifteen years later, but better late than never, because at that point in time is when my life turned around and started going towards the good. I stopped drugs and alcohol and started being a productive citizen, of course, had family, had one child in diapers, one on the way, and my wife and I both were walking because we didn't have cars. My car had got repossessed because I wasn't making the payments and her car, the engine had blown on it, so we were kind of like in really dire straits and going out into the wilderness for those four days really gave me a perspective in life that carries me through today and allows me to know that I'm doing what I came to this world to do.

DS:

Okay, well, you know, before—I want to get on to that, but before I get there, I want to go back to, you know, you talked about your upbringing there in Odessa, outside of your own native identity. What was it like, you know, growing up there? Did you have siblings?

LT:

I have four brothers and one sister.

DS:

Are they older or younger?

LT:

They're all older, I'm the, I'm the baby of the family. It was kind of hard for me to know what was going on because they were always in charge.

DS:

Ah, what school system did y'all go to?

LT:

The Ector County Independent School District, I went to two different schools in my life. I went to Travis Elementary in Odessa for six years, and I went to Ector Junior/Senior High, back in those days Ector was a Junior/Senior High, and I went there six years, and then graduated in 1977. But growing up Catholic and doing what Mom and Dad asked wasn't always by choice. I didn't have a choice, I had to go. They told me if we didn't go to church on Sundays, you're going to commit a mortal sin and you're going to go to Hell and that's, that's it, you're going to go to church, I didn't have a choice. But as I got older, I didn't quite understand what it was all about. I started asking questions, and I started not going, pretending that I was going. I'd go to the church, pick up a bulletin, and head out and go cruising around until the hour was up and then go home. And so once I got to the point where I could ask the questions and try to find my own way, I was twenty-nine years old because I had already been in the world. I got lost in the alcohol in drugs, and it was almost a little bit too late for me, but I said, at twenty-nine years of age, I hit rock bottom, and I was able to say, you know, "The Catholic church has good things to offer people," and it has some good things about it, as far as knowing that we have a relationship with a spiritual god, but it didn't quite answer all the questions that I had. And then once I started doing the research and finding the native roots, a lot of the questions that I had were being answered through that, and so I began practicing and participating in ceremonies and spiritual events that the native people conduct.

DS:

Okay, now you also mentioned a wife. At what point did y'all meet?

LT:

Back in the day when I was like twenty-five years old, I was a musician, I played trombone in a band and toured around the state of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arizona; we played—I played for about six and a half years, and I met her at one of the dances that we were playing at and she liked to party and do everything that I did as far as the drinking and the party life was concerned. And so, we got to see each other when I was in town playing and that kind of thing, and then we would see each other outside of those playing events and got together, and

eventually after about six years of dating we decided to get married. But it was not a marriage that lasted very long. We did finally end up getting divorced because she didn't want to stop partying, and it was time for me to let it all go, and when she didn't, we went our separate ways.

DS:

Okay, and you mentioned letting that go, and I think during lunch you mentioned that happened when you went on your vision quest. Can you talk about that experience, what it was like? One, finding out that's what you needed to do, two, actually going about and getting it done, and then going out there and then the—as much detail as you care to share about your day to day activities while you were out there.

LT:

Okay, the first thing I can tell you about the vision quest was that I found out that it was a rite of passage for the young men of the tribe, and the young women did it as well, it was a rite of passage for them, to be able to go out and to find out what they were made of, for one. To be out there for four days without food and water is not an easy task. When you're out there for that length of time without the food and water, the body begins to dehydrate and it begins to start walking towards the death. And that's where the vision comes from. But for me, it was a way of understanding that I have to have this rite of passage growing up the way that I did; I didn't have a rite of passage at the age of fifteen. You know, in the Hispanic culture there's a quinceañera for the young lady to let the public know she's no longer a child, she's a young woman. And so they have a quinceañera and celebrate her fifteenth birthday, and now after that she's considered a young woman. And the young men in our culture, in the Hispanic culture, didn't have that. And so I needed to have my rite of passage, and there was no way I was not going to do that because I was in dire straits. And once I understood what that was all about, going out there to have a heart to heart with Creator, as we say in our native circle, Tunkashila is the word, the Lakota language which means grandfather. And so, I went out there and I sat out there in the wilderness and I talked to Grandfather, and I said, "Help me and once you give me what I am asking, then I will become your servant, and I'll do your bidding here in this world," and the third day I had that vision, it's kind of hard to explain, but when you're sitting down and you're almost in a daze because you really don't get to sleep when you're out there; you're in the wilderness and you don't know what's going on around you, you hear a lot of noises in the dark, and you don't really sleep, you may fade off a little bit, but you don't really get a really good, sound sleep. And so on the third day I was sitting towards—facing the west, and this was down there by Presidio, by the Alamito Creek. And so I was sitting by the creek and listening to the little bit of water rustling by and watching the sun set, and earlier in that time, I had seen a couple of snakes in a mating ritual and it kind of stayed with me, I said, they're bringing in new life. And so a lot of things in a vision quest that one sees and one notices are signs or symbols of what may be coming your way. And excuse me, so I was sitting at the—on the side of the Alamito Creek and I was watching the sun set, and all of a sudden I see a snake crawling beside me, and it was a

rattlesnake, and it was looking at me kind of just wondering what was going on, who was this, what's he doing in my land, kind of deal. And as I saw him, I just let him go by, he crawled away. And as the tail became visible, he was about to crawl out of sight, I grabbed it by the tail, and I lifted it up and I brought it to, and I swallowed the snake. And I could feel that snake moving around inside of me, and eventually I started to grow scales on my skin, I started to—my arms became stuck within the sides of my body, and I became the snake, and I crawled off in to the sunset. And that's all I remember until the next morning when I woke up. And I didn't know exactly what that meant, but when I came back and I went through the sweat ceremony to bring me back in, the Apache elder that I talk about, her name is Vina Gaya [?] [00:12:48] which is—means Goes Across Woman. She interpreted that vision for me, and what that vision meant. The snake being one that can give life and can take life because the poison of the snake can be used for anti-venom, which can save a life, and so the snake has the power to give life and to take it away. It also can transcend many things, it can go on land, under the ground, it can go on trees, it can go in water. So there's not much that can hold a snake back. And the fact that a snake sheds its skin annually, or maybe not just annually, but when the growth comes, and it puts the snake in a very vulnerable position because at that point in time the snake becomes blind. And so all of these things were interpreted for me and said, "This is now your medicine." In our native culture, when we have something that comes to us and gives us knowledge and wisdom, we call it a good medicine, and so the rattlesnake came in to my life and gave me this good medicine and know that I could transcend all things: good, bad, or anything that was coming my way in life, and that it was always going to be a part of me, and it was something that I had been given by the Creator, and so if you look at my regalia, I honor the snake, the rattlesnake, by wearing the snake skin as part of my regalia and let the people know that's his medicine. And on my medicine staff, I have the head of a rattlesnake. It's a way of letting people know this is his medicine, this is what he is, this is how he does things, this is certain things that the way these reptiles live and breathe. And so that medicine become mine, and I use it for my good and the benefit for all those around me. So when this happened, and I came back, and once I got in to the sweat lodge, and the Apache lady had noticed other qualities about me, that I was a family man, that I was married, that I was a teacher, that I taught people different things, that I learned very easily and was able to pass that along, and so those were characteristics of the wolf, and because there's a story that she told me about her father, who was the Apache man that raised her on the Apache Reservation. His name was Sees Far. And, at the time, he didn't have any sons, and he taught her what he would normally teach his son and say, "You take this and you give it to the man you will meet later in life, his name will be Watching Wolf," and so she met me and all of these characteristics come to mind to her and she gave me the name of Watching Wolf and asked if I would be willing to take on the responsibility of that particular name of Watching Wolf. And so over the years, I have become the teacher, I have become the mentor, I have become the life-guide, a counselor, many people call me a medicine man. Medicine men in the native culture are a little bit different than what I am. The medicine man—once he is first, as a child, born into the world—they recognize there is something special about this child and so they would take,

maybe, and raise him as a medicine man. And from that moment, when he's born, they start teaching him how to be a medicine man. For me particularly, I use the roots and the plants and the herbs, but I'm not particularly a medicine man. In the Spanish culture, they would say *curandero, uno que usar las hierbas*, "Medicine Man, one who uses herbs". And that's what I do, I use the plants and the herbs and roots, and I also use a mineral that's called Colloidal Silver, which is a natural antibiotic, so I know how to make it, I tell people how to make it, so that they can afford it, because otherwise it's like twenty-five dollars an ounce in a health food store. We can make it for two or three cents an ounce. It's very easy, very cheap, but it still does the work that an antibiotic would do. And the body does not build up any tolerance to it. So, you know, those kind of things I learned and I've used over the years, but I'm not particularly a medicine man, people have called me a Holy Man, and I don't use that term to describe myself either. I'm a man and I know my path, I know my journey, I do have a prayer life, I have a spiritual journey, I do ceremonies, I do sweat lodges in my backyard in Odessa once a month, at the beginning of the month, for the group to come to be able to have some healing, to have some camaraderie, some fellowship and that kind of thing. And so, in that sense, I'm the spiritual leader of the group as well besides being the chief and the chief, and the chief has many tasks and many jobs. People come at all times of the day, all hours of the night, they're in need, sometimes they need money, sometimes they need medical attention. And so as the chief, I direct them where they need to go to get what they need.

DS:

Let me ask you, when you first found out, and you were asked if you would take on this role, did you have any self-doubt or anything that, you know, you were kind of going like, I don't know, or did you just go for it?

LT:

Well, you know, that's a good question because I did ask that, and when I was on my vision quest, I asked, I asked God outright, I said, you know, "I'm just a regular man, I don't know what you want me to go and say to these people. I don't know what you want me to do," and he said, "Just go, and once you get there, I'll tell you and I'll let you know what you need to do," and it always happens that way. Whenever I go anywhere to do a presentation or to visit with someone who is sick or needing some type of spiritual advice, I would have a dream, maybe the day before, two days before, and the dream would, in somehow, direct me to what I needed to do for that individual. Many times when would go to do a presentation, I would always think that our subconscious minds are always talking to one another. Whether we communicate verbally or not, our subconscious mind is there, is doing work before we even know that it is. And so from that, I would gain the knowledge through the conscious mind to be able to say the things that needed to be said to the group of people that was there. And many of the times it's spot on. People will come up after the presentation and say, "You know what, you read me like a book." And I said, "No, I didn't." [laughs] I didn't. It's all coming from above. And that's one of the

things that I have come to know is that I'm just a man. I have been put in to a position of rank by the people because that's what they see, but for me, I'm just a humble man living one day to the next like everybody else, but I do know some things.

DS:

So did the association come first, or were you already doing this before that started?

LT:

No, I was already doing many of the things that a chief would do before the association came around. That was a reason for the association, because the people started gathering, and they started coming and they started wanting to have a venue of ways to worship, of ways to have the healing, to be able to do what they felt their heart was dictating them to do. And so the association came after that, and then, of course, after the association arrived and it became more mainstream and people started knowing about it and knowing that we existed in an association level, the title of chief came in 2005 as a means of putting the period at the end of the sentence, so to speak, that, "You've been doing this already, so now wear the bonnet and wear it so people will know who you are."

DS:

Now you talked about your own upbringing, where you were in a—you were brought up more Hispanic than Native American than what your background really was, was that unusual or are there a lot of people like you in that area, that have come to find themselves later in life?

LT:

I have found that there's a lot people like me out there. That, for one reason or another, as I stated, Grandma didn't want to talk about being Indian because it was not good. Back in those days, the only Indian that was known was an Indian that was dead. And so that was not a good thing, so they didn't talk about it. And it's become a stigma for the Hispanics. They don't want to talk about being Indian, and if they do know that there is, they don't participate in any kind of ceremony. They don't want to do the work that it takes to know about their heritage and culture. And that's one of the things that I have come to understand about this particular walk, it's not an easy walk, it has its job. I mean it's a tough, tough job. And if you don't work it like you're supposed to, you'll fall away from it, and you won't continue. But knowing that's where my family was from, you know, gives me the pride to continue it on, let alone know that my family and my grandchildren will know that "Hey, grandpa was a chief and this is what he taught, and this is what I remember" because my grandson loves to go in the sweat lodge. He wants to go, and he wants to play in it, and I say, "It's not to play in. This is to pray," and he wants to go and he wants to move the rocks, he's only five years old, and he wants to move the rocks around, and, you know, the sweat rocks we use are lava, and he wants to go in and sit down, it's nice and dark in the sweat lodge, and he just loves to be in there, but it's not a thing to play with. And so

teaching him—and when he grows up, then he'll have the opportunity to, you know, "Hey, Grandpa used to do this, I'm going to go do this too," and he'll continue it on, and that's just the way this works.

DS:

You know, and you were talking about, although you're Comanche, it really wasn't the Comanche influence that got—helped you on to your path, was it?

LT:

No, it wasn't, meaning that there was no one in the area to teach me the Comanche way of life. I got introduced to some people that were in the Lakota native circle, specifically speaking the Sun dance ceremony. I've been a sun dancer for going on eighteen years, and I've done the Sun dance, and I've learned from being a grunt, doing all the dirty work and then going up to being a fire tender, which is a step up from grunt, and then going in to being a helper in the sun dance circle, and then being a sub-chief in the sun dance. And so I've seen it from the bottom up, and I've learned everything in between to be able to do the job that needs to be done, but it was one of those things that, you know, it's not an easy thing to do. You get in there, you learn it, and you put it into practice. The part of the Lakotas, they were the ones that did the ceremony, not all tribes did the ceremony. And so when I had that in the vision, and I talked to the elder that was introduced to me by Vina Gaya [?] [00:24:44]. She brought an actual Lakota pipe carrier to my house to talk to me about this. And when I relayed this vision to him, he said, "There's no doubt about it, you've got to go," I said, "I've got to go where?" he said, "You got to go do the Sun dance," and from there, I started learning what the Sun dance was all about because, in my mind, I had already done it, I just needed to let the body catch up because in that vision, I saw myself pierced, hanging off a rope, at the sun dance tree, and it was something that need to be done. That sun dance ceremony is grueling. It's four days of dance from sun up to sun down, no food, no water. You pierce your skin with bone pegs and you tie it on to a rope to the tree. The tree is the central point of the dance circle. It stands for balance and harmony. The tree is the masculine, the earth is the feminine. And so when you put both together, that point where they are is sacred ground, because it's complete balance and harmony. And so we tie that rope to the tree and we pierce ourselves and tie ourselves to the rope and we have to pull back until the pegs bust loose, and then those two pieces of flesh that are hanging are cut off and put in to a piece of cloth and put on the tree as a sacrifice for the prayer that we are saying to our families, for our friends, for the world, for this whole universe, so that it may continue on to live and to breathe. And that sacrifice, it's not an easy thing to do, but when you step in that circle, it makes you know who you are and what you're made of.

DS:

And how hard is it to maintain those traditions and rituals as the world—I mean because you're an IT guy, so you know how the world has advanced so far and so fast?

LT:

Right, the IT world is totally different from what you're talking about in the sun dance ceremony and these other ceremonies, specifically speaking at the reservation where we go to do the sun dance—no running water, no electricity, you go to an outhouse to take care of business. That's completely, totally opposite of the world that we live in today. We're out there for two weeks and you grow accustomed to going to that outhouse, you grow accustomed to not having a radio or television going, no telephones because there's no cell towers out there. So, all the conveniences that we have in our world today are gone for two weeks out of our life so that we can re-center and re-balance ourselves out there. And when we come back, then we're renewed, at that point in time, we say that's a new year to us because we have started the countdown, 364 days now until the next sun dance. And so that's the way we look at it, that's our new year.

DS:

And, as you know you mentioned, you go out there and you talk to people, you give advice, you know, when you're called to go speak and stuff. While you're out there, are you looking for people that might be people that need more guidance, that need to be a part of what you're doing? Have you identified somebody that can go like, you know, This is your calling, but you don't know it yet, that type of thing?

LT:

There is all the time. But I have, in my own knowledge and wisdom, come to understand that it's not something that's done. I don't go and, per se, cast your pearls before the swine. There's many times where even though they may be wanting to hear more about it, they don't believe it. And it's kind of like, they'll trample on it. They'll want to take it and use it for their own benefit, to make money with, per se, that one man in Arizona who had a sweat lodge was charging people \$6,000 to go in, and some of them died in it. Well the first thing I would tell those people that are seeking that is that if anyone charges you for this, turn around and walk away because it's not charged for. Spirituality cannot be bought and sold. And that's what this is; it's the spirituality of the people, and it can't be bought, it can't be sold. So if someone is trying to sell it to you, turn around and walk away. My instances with many people that I run across, they're hungry. A lot of the religions have failed their people because they're not giving them everything that they need to have, and that was my instance in the Catholic Church, it didn't answer all my questions. And so I had to go searching elsewhere, and there's hundreds and hundreds of people out there searching for their right thing. And they may hear me talk, and they may say, "This is what I need," and then on closer inspection they say, "No, I can't do that." And so I have learned not to go actively seeking someone to put into this. They will normally, naturally come, and then when they do come and they start asking the questions, then I'll start giving the information out. But I don't normally go out and say, "Hey, I got something for you," no. You know, maybe if—I know I made the comment earlier about the Wame [?] [00:30:30] and smelling someone's feet that needed to be healed of their Athlete's foot kind of deal. I can tell them about it, but if they

don't believe it, I'll leave it alone. Because I can't make them drink the water. I can lead them to it, but I can't make them drink. And that's one thing I've learned, is that you've got to give people that privilege of having the right of choice.

DS:

Right, you know, and you know we're talking about, you know, religion and spirituality; can you talk about how you define the difference between the two?

LT:

A religion—

DS:

And spirituality.

LT:

A religion is a dogma of someone's writings that they put down how certain things should be done in that particular religion. Spirituality has no written—what you feel inside of you, with your connection to Creator. That's your spirituality. It's a—maybe not a theology, but it's a way of thinking of your relationship to God and your spirituality may not be the same as mine, it may not be at the same level as mine, it may be two notches above, but your spirituality and my spirituality are the same because we're connected to the same Creator, God. And that's the difference. I could have a spirituality, go out in to the yard, sit down on the grass, look up at the clouds, talk to God, and get an answer to a question that I may have, and that's my spirituality. But in a church, in a religion, you don't have that privilege, what they teach is what they teach, and that's all. You don't waiver from it. And so that puts people in a hard position, it put me in a very hard position because it wasn't teaching me what I needed to know.

DS:

How has your spirituality evolved since you've become more and more familiar with yourself and with your Creator and familiar with your role in this universe?

LT:

My spirituality has come from when I was at that age of twenty-nine in the infancy of trying to find out who I was, not knowing of the rules and regulations that go with the spirituality, because there's natural laws that go along with it. And in those natural laws, there's things you can do and thing you shouldn't do. For one, like I said, selling the spirituality. That's going against the natural law, and usually bad things happen when you go against the natural law. And now with my spirituality, the way I am, I have grown to the point that my understanding of God is he's all powerful, he knows everything, he does everything. And if I believe that, then there's nothing that I can't overcome, and that's my faith, that whatever comes my way, and I'll give you an

example. My son passes away in an automobile accident a few years ago, it was the hardest thing that I should never have had—ever had to experience. Parents shouldn't have to see their son die, or their children die. Yeah, my son was out in the world living and doing things that he did, that I did when I was young. He thought he had a lifetime to get over it and to leave it, but he didn't, he died when he was twenty-one. And so at that point in time, my faith was really just jostled. Why am I losing my son? I've done all these things. Well, it wasn't about me, my spiritual faith told me, "Your life is your life, you have your allotted time, your son's life was his life, and he had his allotted time here, and he's done. Now he's back with Creator." That was my faith, that's where I am today, I couldn't have lived with that at the age of twenty-nine, I would have lost my mind. I would have committed suicide and gone to the grave with him. That's how much my spiritual faith has grown. That God does not send me anything that I cannot handle with him at my side.

DS:

How do you take these teachings and then go into those schools—you were talking about where that just like, that role came to you, like you said, and it was a role you didn't question because the words came to you while you were there?

LT:

That's correct, it's a funny thing but in my vision quest, when I asked him, "How do I do this? What am I going to say?" and he told me, "Go and I will tell you once you get there," and I had to believe that. And when people call me and tell me, "Hey, I want you to do this", I agree to it, and I go, and when I get there, God tells me what I need to do, or he will make it known to me before hand, through my dreams. That one instance that I talked about, the counselor from the school had someone scheduled to talk about drug and alcohol abuse, and I was scheduled for a later time, but that person didn't show up, so he called me early and said, "Can you come and fill this spot and is it possible that you could possibly talk about drug and alcohol abuse," and I said, "I'll give it my best shot." I talked about myself, I talked about the things that I had done when I was on drugs and alcohol, and many time the students would say, "Well aren't you ashamed of talking about that?" and I said, "No, I should have been ashamed when I was doing it. Now, I'm on the backside of that, I've let it go, I've grown from that experience, and I'm able to say to you, here in front of God and everybody, that I've been clean and sober for years now." And I know that that's what it was all about, my vision quest about getting in to talking to the young people, of letting them know that what they're doing and where they are is not the right place to be. Many of them are on drugs and alcohol. And like I said, I lost my son to drugs and alcohol, but it wasn't about me, it was about him. That was the choice he made, and I had to live with it, and I had to have my faith, and what God said I needed in life. Now I can talk to somebody who has lost their child and tell them how I felt and what I clung to because there for a while, it was real jumpy. I didn't know whether I was going to be alive the next day or not. A lot of times I'd get up in the morning and want to see my son and suicide would run through my mind, and I had

to stay close to Grandfather and say, "Okay, I know you're all powerful and you're all knowing and you sent this my way for a reason, and when I talk to people who are in that dire strait of having lost a child, they come to me and ask me, 'Well, what do I do?' I say, Live your life, live it today just like you would if they were here because that's what Grandfather wants you to do, that's what God wants from you. Live your life the way you know you have to live it."

DS:

Now, earlier on you talked about, you know, at twenty-nine, you had to go back and do where you're supposed to be at fifteen, and basically be reborn into your new path, and in the years that's transpired, how has that rebirth helped not only yourself but we mentioned a little bit about the community, has it helped just Native Americans or other cultures and other groups?

LT:

I think it's helped anyone and everyone that I've come into contact with. Those specifically who ask, you know, they don't know, for instance, if I meet someone on the street, they don't know that I'm chief, I don't talk about it. I don't think that I'm anything special; I'm doing a job that I was asked to do, and that's it. And I don't go around bragging about, Oh I'm chief, I'm this, I'm that, I'm that, no, I don't do that, and those people out there, when I do get to talk to them, whether they're native or they're Hispanic, whether they're Caucasian, it doesn't matter. Truth is truth, and what I speak is the truth, and if it rings true to their heart, they'll cling to it, and it makes a difference in their life. And they have the opportunity to go back and to recollect all those years gone by and to make amends. When I went on my vision quest, and I saw the devastation I had left behind, I had to go back and make amends to those people, my family and to other people I had hurt along the way. And I had to go back and apologize and say, "Look, I'm not the same person that I was when I was your friend back then, this is who I am today, and I want to apologize for being the way I was, I don't do that anymore, I don't do drugs, I don't do alcohol, I understand myself in a different light." And when I have presented that to different people, they understand it as a truth for themselves, and they can go back and do that. And there are several people in our group who are non-native that find the truth in the words, and that's what it's all about, is finding your own truth. And if it rings true to your heart, then follow that.

DS:

Another aspect that we live in is the political world, have you had a chance to talk to anyone that does legislation that might impact Native Americans or that type of culture? Have you— Like at the city, state, or local level, have you spoken to many groups like that?

LT:

Well, last year, a couple of years ago, we had a Senator Mike Conway come to our annual meeting, and he and I have known each other long before he was Senator, and he knows who I am and when he sees me out on the street he greets me and we talk and that kind of thing. And

he understands the kind of work that I do, and when he came and talked to us at our annual meeting that's my phone—

DS:

If you want to answer that or—out this on pause—

LT:

Thank God for everything, huh? No, I don't want to answer; I just want to turn it off.

DS:

Okay, let me start this again—well we're only forty-one minutes into it.

LT:

Okay, good.

DS:

And you were talking about—

LT:

Senator Conaway, like I said, he and I have known each other for a long time, and when he came to talk to us, he talk to us a little bit about some of the legislation going on. I try not to get into the political arena as far as mixing one with the other. I know that if I do my job and talk to people on this level, then it will affect the other levels that they deal with in their life. And so he respects me for who I am and what I do and knows the job that I do. And so, in that regard, knowing what he knows about me, it may affect his decisions down the line when he has to make a decision that's concerning something that has to do with Native Americans or something like that. He'll remember, Hey, Luis in Odessa, this may be able to help this group out.

DS:

Yeah.

LT:

So he may be able to make a difference. Years ago, there was a sub-committee, Senate subcommittee that was put together in the state of Texas to talk about reinstating the Texas Indian Commission. And I got involved with that because I do believe that there is a need for the Texas Indian Commission. Money that is designated for Texas does not get to Texas for Native Americans because we don't have a commission to distribute the money, the funds. And there's only four tribes in the State of Texas that are recognized federally, and so there was no need for the Indian Commission in Texas, so that was abolished. And there was talk about wanting to reinstate it because, of course, now more people are saying, "Hey, I'm Native American, and we

need to have service, we need to have health, we need to education for our kids, and you know, our family, the Comanches, had a treaty, there's supposed to be moneys there. So now all these things are coming up as people are becoming more aware of what their roots are. And so I became involved with it, and I testified in front of that senate subcommittee, and the Senator Armbrister, at the time, was a card carrying Cherokee. You look at him, he's a white man, but through his bloodline, Cherokee. And so when I got up there and I talked about the things that needed to be talked about, as far as why we need to reinstate the Texas Indian Commission, he came up to me after the session, and he said, "Luis, you put everything back on track, because everybody was talking about, My daddy's land got stolen, We want this, We want that, and nobody was really giving us reasons to take back to the Senate of why we need to reinstate this Indian Commission." And my point in getting involved with that was, someone has to step up and say the right thing. Again, I'll say, tell the truth. And the truth is, we need that money. Our people need that money. And without that Indian Commission, they're not going to get it. So, knowing that there's a need and my involvement is showing we're doing things on our own that shouldn't have to be done that way. I shouldn't have to dig into my own wallet to give to a family to have food for tonight because they don't have it and their Native American, okay, that was my thing. Of course, that's the chief's job. But how much more could I do if that money was there for the people? There was talk about me becoming the commissioner for the Texas Indian Commission and being the one who would be in relation with the tribes to be able to disseminate the money. And once it go to the point where they saw these tribes, these people are not ready to have this kind of money—we're talking about billions of dollars—that are stockpiled in the Federal Government that aren't getting here. I said, they're not ready for it, they're already trying to fight for land and water rights and, you know, Granddaddy's land got stolen, we want it back, and all this. Money's just going to make things more complicated, so that senate subcommittee voted against it, and the Senate voted it down. So maybe later on we learn a little bit from our mistakes and grow into the political arena with a little bit more sense of knowing that we have to come together as one, one tribe, not many individual tribes, but together as one tribe, speak with one voice, one mind, one heart and to be able to say the things that they need to hear, so that they can say, Okay, we'll reinstate this, so you can get your money, and then you can talk about getting Grandad's land back.

DS:

Yeah, years ago, about, I want to say about a decade ago, I had the honor of escorting Chief Lyons from the Seven Tribes over in the Syracuse area who had spoken in front of the UN on Indigenous rights for several issues similar to that. And so, you know, it's been an ongoing battle to, you know, and maybe someday, it will come to fruition.

LT:

I think it will eventually, but we have to work on ourselves first, and that's the biggest issue right there. Work on you and the rest of it will iron itself out. And that was one thing I had to learn in

my life, is that if I'm taking care of my business and taking care of God's business, then all the rest will fall in line, and that's what I had to have, the faith. He knows what he's doing, he's in charge of this show, you know, we're not the producer, we're not the writer, we're not the director, all we are is the actors, and he is the one that's directing us.

DS:

You know that, you mentioned earlier how you were trying to affect at least one person when you met at a grouping and stuff like that, have you seen enough of those people that have been affected that it's made a change, even just there in Odessa?

LT:

Yeah, there's been several over the years that I have had that kind of a confirmation that the work that I am doing is paying off. One particular story was I was at the Albertson's grocery store, and a lady came up to me and hugged me around my neck, and said, "Thank you, thank you" and she was almost in tears and I said, "Well what do I owe this honor to?" She said, "You were at my daughter's school today and it was an in-school suspension class, and she came home and hugged me and gave me a kiss and said she loved me and hadn't done that in months" because she had been going towards the wrong side of the street, hanging out with the wrong crowd and that kind of thing, but in that class I had challenged them, I said, just like Nike says, Do It, Just Do It. Go home and whoever your caregiver is, give them a hug and a kiss and tell them you love them because tomorrow they may not be there and you may not have a chance to do that, and it's very important that you do. And that girl took it to heart, she went home and cried with her mother and told her she was sorry for the things that she had been doing and she was going to change and turn that leaf, so to speak and gave her a hug and a kiss and said she loved her and she was thanking me. So I know that one person was affected that day, and on other occasions, I may be at another store or something and a young man may come up to me and say, "You remember me?" and I say, "Well, not really." He says, "You were in my in-school suspension class, and I heard your talk, and look at me, I've got a job, I'm off drugs, off alcohol, I've got a family, I'm married, and my life is good." So, I get those kind of confirmations, yeah, pretty regularly.

DS:

Yeah, and you know, another thing we kind of touched on but we really didn't get in depth about it was the, let me get this right, the Trans-Pecos Native American Association, is that the name? Can you talk about how that started, how that grew, and then how you became the chief?

LT:

The Trans-Pecos American Indian Association is doing business as name for the Trans-Pecos Renewal Center. There was five of us, there was four ladies and myself that we did pretty much stay together to have ceremony and to have fellowship because we were of like mind and

consciousness. One of them was the lady I spoke about who was Apache, Vina Gaya [00:50:47] who was my mentor, and we decided that there was no way for other people to know where to go to have prayer life—to be able to have ceremony, to be able to have a venue, an outlet for that. And so we got together and put a powwow together. And the first powwow we made us some flyers with, You want to become a member, sign up and pay a membership to help us pay for what we need to pay, and join us. And so it started growing and growing and over a period of time—I've got a roster that's got a couple of hundred people's name on it still. And so it was not something that happened over night, but the powwow was one thing that wasn't happening in this area, and we knew that there was one that was needed for people to be able to come to have that family atmosphere, to be able to dance, to sing the songs, and to just have the culture experience. And not only that, we knew that it would be a way educating the other public that were non-natives and to let them know that the culture is rich and beautiful and that if they come and participate in it and share in it, they will be blessed by it. And over a period of time, the organization grew, I had board members, and we became a 501(c)(3) organization, and so it's talking a life of its own and that kind of thing. So it was a good thing, at the time, it was needed.

DS:

Okay, well talk about that first powwow, where was it done, when was it done, what was the response like?

LT:

The first powwow, I can't even remember what the year was, but if you go back about fifteen years, that's when it was, the first one, and we always had our powwows at Odessa College. Odessa College became one of our main sponsors for the event. Every year they would give us a break on the rental of the facility. You know Dr. Williams at the Odessa College, the president? He is a card carrying Cherokee, and so when we went to talk to him about getting a powwow going, he was gung-ho. He said, "Yes, let's do it," and so, you know, from the very first year, it just kept growing and growing and we have had to turn people away because it's just not big enough, but we know that if we try to make it too big then it's going to suffer. And so we kept it at a reduced size so that everyone that does get to come and be a part of it enjoys it a lot more than having one at the coliseum where it's just too many people. You know the gathering of nations in New Mexico every year, thousands and thousands of dancers come and vendors and people. It's become too commercialized now, it's not really a good time. People struggle to actually be there because it's too many people. So we've taken that into consideration, and we've said, Keep it simple. Keep it on this level and everyone will enjoy it that gets to come and enjoy it.

DS:

You know, you kind of read my question I was going to ask, you know, how do you draw the line between the cultural aspect and the commercial and you just kind of almost did there.

LT:

Yeah, there is a certain point that it becomes commercialized because there people that want to buy it. You know, if you look at what I'm wearing today, the bonnet—Pharrell Williams, caught a lot of heck here a few weeks ago because he wore one and was pictured with one and then there was one of the Kardashians had another bonnet and she caught heck over it. You know, people don't realize what this bonnet means. If you look at this bonnet, it has seventy-six eagle feathers. For one, you can't own an eagle feather if you're not Native American and if you don't have papers for it. So what were they thinking? Is it a fad? Is it something that they want to possess, do they want to buy what we have? It's not sellable, we can't sell it. I earned every single one of these eagle feathers by what I did over the years. Nobody can pay for that. I couldn't pay for it with cash. There's not enough money in the world to buy this bonnet. Nobody can authorize a bonnet just because they pay for it, doesn't make sense, doesn't mean anything. So the work that I did and the meaning of an eagle feather in the Native culture is that if you get an Eagle feather given to you, it's because you did something, you did something for the people, not for yourself. And these feathers came from a Comanche chief, and we talked about him at lunch today, Chief Runkles, who gave the box of feathers to that man that we talked about, Ken, and he's the one that made this bonnet. But he saw what it was that I was doing. He said he studied me for years before he decided to make this bonnet and give it to me. And we went to the Chief in South Dakota, and he asked him, he said, "If I present this bonnet and make this bonnet would you put Luis in as Chief so he could wear it legally and be able to help the people in the way he's been doing with that much more emphasis." That's what it does, it makes more emphasis. And so the Chief in South Dakota said, "Let me think about it," and he talked to the people, the Council in South Dakota and they made me a sub-Chief of a sun dance. And then once I was a sub-chief of a sun dance, he came here to Odessa at the powwow and introduced me to the people as the Chief in this area. So it was one of those things that, this is not something you can buy. I don't know what those people were thinking about, Pharrell and what Kardashian girl was thinking, they don't—evidently don't understand the significance of what the war bonnet means. You know, back in the day when our people would go to war with one tribe against the other, the chiefs really weren't ever in the battles until it came down to the last man standing because he was the one to reckon with, and you could tell he was the one to reckon with because he had the bonnet, he had all the feathers, and that's the one you have to watch out for because he's the one that was the bad man. Of the whole tribe, he knew more, he was strongest willed and the more spiritual person of the whole tribe. And so when you saw him out there on the battlefield, said, "That's the one I got to deal with." These other ones, the warriors, you may have to deal with them, but the man up there on that hill, watching the battle is the one you've got to deal with.

DS:

And you talk about some of those people that have helped you and guided you on your way, could you tell us a little bit about them, what they were like, what they meant to you in your life?

LT:

Sure, hold on a second, time out [sneeze]. Excuse me, edit that out [laugh].

DS:

We'll try, let me tell you, for historical purposes we just don't edit out [laugh]. People see—

LT:

That will go down in history then, I'm sorry.

DS:

That's all right.

LT:

Your question being that the people that help me to be who I am today? Two specific people in my home area Vina, we call her Vina short for Vina Gaya, Apache, born and raised on a reservation, didn't know other world existed other than the reservation, that's where she grew up. Her father taught her everything that she knew, told her to share what she knew with me because in essence I would become this. I would sit at her house in the morning sometimes on a Saturday morning, drinking tea and talking about life in general. What she taught me was that the faith that we have in God doesn't come overnight, we have to work at it day by day, those experiences that we have in life enrich that faith. Like I said with my son—hardest thing I ever had to live through, but I have to have the faith that it was mine to bear. I couldn't talk to somebody about it; I can't pretend to talk to someone about something I don't know. If I hadn't had the experience then I can't talk about it. And if someone comes to me, as chief, hurting inside because of their loss and I can't give them one word to make that pain go away, or to, at least, subside long enough for them to think about it, then I'm not doing my job. That's what she taught me, she taught me to be gentle, taught me to respect others and their opinions, all of their feelings of their spirituality. I said, "Your spirituality is not mine and mine isn't yours, but yet we could find a common thread, to meet somewhere in the middle." She taught me those things. She taught me about ceremony and the significance of ceremony, the sacredness of ceremony. Those things that we do in a ceremony, people may just look at it and say, Well they're just going through the motions, it's nothing, it doesn't mean anything to them. But until you step on this side of the fence, instead of the outside looking in, and you're on the inside looking out, then you don't know what it is that ceremony means. The sacredness of items that we possess, this particular fan, the eagle fan, it's old, and it's had its time with me over the years at sun dance, but it bears a significance that a man who helped me on the first years of sun dancing. He had been

through the sun dance years in his life, and he saw that I didn't have an eagle wing to carry like the other dancers normally do, and he was dancing next to me that one day, and when I danced, I danced hard, with a lot of energy, and he was talking to his wife one day at a break, and he told her, "I feel a lot of energy dancing next to Luis," and she said, "Well, why don't you do something for him," and he had an eagle that he had been given and he was Native American and he was on the registry for eagles, and this eagle wing came from him. And he took me off to the side and he gave it to me and I was—my jaw dropped and hit the floor because of the significance of what an eagle feather means. And he told me, "It's because you don't have one and you should because you're a dancer, but most of all it's because of the energy you give me when I see you dance." Well when I went to my first sun dance, another dancer told me, "Dance hard because when you're dancing that's your prayer, and Mother Earth will give you energy like you've never had before to allow you to finish your prayer strong." And so I took that and I danced hard every day for four days, sun up to sun down, danced hard. The other guys, sometimes, were almost falling out because of the heat and lack of water. But I danced hard, and this man gave me these feathers. And it meant so much, and it still means so much. The other man that came into my life, that meant a lot, his name was Red Dog. He was a white man, but he took up the native ways and became a Lakota pipe carrier. And he's the one that taught me how to carry a pipe, how to load it, to sing the song of our ancestors, to be able to load it in a way that meant something. When we sing that song, we're asking God to lay witness to what we're doing, so that when we smoke it and we say our prayer, the smoke coming out of the bowl is the symbol of our prayer that goes up to Grandfather. And when he gets that prayer, he's going to give us what we need. And that man, he's dead now, he's gone. But his memory lives on in me, what he did for me, he supported me. He took me in and he taught me those things that I needed to know. And I pierced for that man, he became ill one year, and piercing is kind of—you don't really get the concept if you don't know what I'm talking about. You take a bone peg or a wooden peg that looks much like a pencil sharpened on one end to a point and it's about maybe four inches long, and they take the skin on the chest and they pinch it together and cut with a scalpel all the way through where they've pinched it together and they put that bone peg in. Well when Red Dog became ill—for selfish reasons, I asked Grandfather to allow him to live longer to teach me the road that I needed to learn, and that if he allowed him to live, that I would pierce for him for six years. And I said, "I will pull the buffalo skulls." Well, the buffalo skulls—each skull weighs about thirty five-forty pounds, and they tie seven of the together in a row on a rope in succession, and the bottom jaw of the skull has been removed so the teeth, when they're on the ground, will grab the dirt and grass and make it harder to pull. Well, they pierce you on the back, put the bone peg in your harness to the rope where the skulls are and you drag them around until you bust loose. It's not an easy thing, it's hard—it's heavy for one. And you're doing it with two pieces of skin that are about [indicates with fingers] that wide on the back. And for selfish reasons, I made that deal with God, and Red Dog lived long enough to see me pull those skulls for six years to give me more knowledge and wisdom, to help me on my road. He was a very important man in my life, may God rest his soul, because he's gone now. But he lived to walk with me on those six

years of pulling those skulls. And when I would call him in to the circle, the first time I called him in, as he was not dancing in those days, I would call him in, and I asked him to walk beside me, and he said, "Why am I walking beside you?" and I said, "Because I am pulling the skulls for your health." And he shed tears and said, "I hope I'm worthy." And for six years I pulled the skulls because that's how important he was to me.

DS:

So I don't want to interrupt the train of thought but I have to ask, what were some of the things he taught you in those six years that helped you grow?

LT:

To become a man, to honor the words that come out of my mouth. That when I say I'm going to do something, that at all cost, I will make it happen. He taught me how to load the sacred pipe. This is my pipe right here in my bag. When I smoke this pipe, I do it the way that he taught me, which is the way he was taught by the Lakotas. You take a conch shell and put some sage in it and light it and the smoke that's coming off of the sage helps protect and cleanse energies. And you take the tobacco that you're putting in your pipe, it's not just tobacco, it's called Kinnikinnick, and it's a mixture of different elements: tobacco, red willow park, bearberry, maybe some osha root, some mint. All these mixtures are together with the tobacco and that's what's used to smoke out of the pipe. And you take a pinch and you wave it around where that smoke is coming up, to purify it, and you're singing the song and you put it in the bowl, and you take another pinch and you offer it to the directions. You know, we have seven directions that we honor in our native circle: the North, the South, the East, and the West, Above and Below, and then the direction within. And we honor those seven directions, and each time one of those directions is recognized with the tobacco. And you're singing the song when you put it in, you recognize all the directions. By the time you get all of the directions recognized, you're through loading the pipe and you're ready to smoke it. That's the traditional way of loading the pipe and that's how he taught me to do it. And when we sing that song, we know that what we've been told about this pipe, that the healing power that it has, because you're saying a prayer to God and he's going to listen, and he's going to send you what you're asking, not because you're having to do anything specific, but because you're his child. And that you will be given what you need in life to live today, and for always, spiritually speaking. So that's what other things Red Dog taught me—how to be a man, keep your word, you say you're going to do it, do it—become an impeccable warrior.

DS:

I don't think I've ever heard that before.

LT:

It's a very important thing in our culture. Impeccable warriors don't exist today, so when you take up this pipe, and you take up this way of walking, what we call the Red Road, and carry this pipe as a traditional Lakota pipe carrier, you become that impeccable warrior, where your words are iron, and when you say you're going to do something, you're going to come through and people will know that that's a man of his word. Those kinds of things are far and few between these days. There's no honor; there's no respect. Life has lost the respect that it needs. There's no honor in it. So these are the things that Red Dog taught me. That Vina Gaya taught me. The man up in South Dakota, the chief of the tribe of the Lakota on the Rosebud Reservation, Chief Keith Horse Looking, has taught me their way. And I asked him one time, "Why is it you're teaching me this?" I was there to learn, he knew that, but his answer surprised me, he said, "Because I've looked in to your heart, and you're here for the right reasons." And we need people like you to carry on because when we get old and die, there's not going to be anyone left to carry it on. So that's why I'm teaching you what I'm teaching you."

DS:

You know, and even today, what we're doing, Native American, it's the oral tradition, your traditions, your ways, your knowledge is passed down, and hopefully this will be here for future generations to hear directly from you.

LT:

I hope so, and I hope they can find the courage to be that impeccable warrior that I speak of.

DS:

How hard is it to be that impeccable warrior, given what we have in the world today?

LT:

It's not an easy task. Many things in the world get in the way. The most important thing that I can tell someone that's aiming to be an impeccable warrior is to lose yourself. Don't put any high importance on yourself. Everyone else is more important than you. Become a humble person, humility, and that will make you an impeccable person.

DS:

And how hard is it to balance your spiritual world, your Native American world, with working where you work in IT and, you know, doing what we all have to do during the work day.

LT:

First of all, I had to get my priorities straight on that. In the morning, the first thing in the morning, thank God for today, for my next breath of life. Thank the family for who they are, tell them you love them, as we separate and go our separate ways in the day, and then take care of

the job. Keep those priorities; God, family, job. Everything else falls in place. If you don't take care of those three, it ain't going to work. God first, family, and then everything else, the job, the world. But there's a lot of things in the world that get in the way. Many times when we prepare for sun dance, or we prepare for ceremony, things pop up that I can't afford it. Well, that's one of those things that has popped up to try to keep you from keeping your word. You know, when we go to sun dance and we commit, we commit to dance for four years, and then after the fourth year, you make a decision whether you're going to commit for another four. And so those things pop up to keep us from keeping our word, but once we decide, there's nothing that's going to keep me from going. Then your problems go away, I could have chucked it all out the window when my son died and said, "All of this that I've done and I get paid back this way?" That wasn't the case. I had to deal with it in and know that my strength, my faith in God above was utmost and foremost.

DS:

Now earlier, we started talking about what you're wearing and—could you go through there and just, you know, top to bottom or bottom to top, tell us the significance of what you're wearing and what it means about you and your background?

LT:

Okay. The war bonnet, as it's called, is a symbol of rank. When I am in the circle and I'm wearing the bonnet, everyone knows that I'm the one who's in charge of what's going on, made of eagle feathers, this one particularly has seventy-six [coughs], excuse me. They're about a hundred years old, these feathers. The headband is a design that was made by a friend of mine, she's also deceased now, who made the design as she thought it would be a nice pattern to put on a headband, and so it was put on this war bonnet. These are called rosettes; this is called the Comanche morning star. These are ermine sables; it's a traditional animal that has been used for the _____ [1:18:28] that you see. They're really nice and soft, it's almost like mink. And so it's an honor to have something that's considered a high valuable item on you. And if you notice all these little barrels that are up here, each of them have more feathers in the bead work. And the more feathers that one possesses, the more visible it is to the native circle that his person has done a lot for the people, and that's what it's about. It's not about to give me a big head to say, Hey, you know, I'm this, I'm that. No, it's a recognition of what has been done over the years. This is ribbon shirt that was given to me by my wife, that I wear and it's got the wolf on it, so it's a traditional kind of garment that the Native American wears sometimes at powwows or other ceremonies, and because my wife gave it to me, I use it in this to honor her. The loin cloth, of course, is—this is in the Comanche traditional; the loin cloth itself. The leggings, this is deer skin, my brother and I, who understands my journey, but doesn't participate, he was a Roman Catholic priest for seventeen years, and so he understands my journey, he helped me put this together. He's pretty handy with a needle and thread and that kind of thing, and he wanted to give me something that he could—he said, "I wanted to give you something that you will always

remember that I understand who you are,” and at that point I said, “Well, you know, let’s make some leggings,” and he said, “Well, I’ll do some research, so that I can help you make some good leggings.” So, okay, fine, so we went and got the material and made the leggings and it came out really nice, I thought it was real nice. And this snake came to me in a particular way. A friend from work, works out in the oilfield, called me one day on a Friday afternoon and said, “Luis, I got a surprise for you,” I said, “What’s that”, he said, “Well, I got a rattlesnake out in the field today, do you want it?” and I said, “Sure,” and he said, “Well there’s only one thing, it’s still alive.” I said, “Well, okay, yeah I’ll take it.” I had never in my life messed with a rattlesnake, butchered a rattlesnake, or knew how to cure the skin or whatever. And so I met him down the road and picked up the snake, and it was in an army ammunition box, and I took it to the house and I set it in the backyard, and that night I had a dream, and in that dream, I saw myself butchering the snake. And every step that I had to take in order to get that snake done, from getting it out of the box, killing it, peeling it, curing the skin, and ending up on these leggings in a dream. So the next morning, I went out and opened up the lid on the ammunition box, and the snake rose his head up a little bit, he said, What’s going on here? Right? So in the dream I had taken a PVC pipe and put cable—a wire capable through it to make the noose to hold the snake, and I did that. And I went and I had taken some tobacco to offer as an offering. I talked to the snake, and a lot of people would think that, you know, that’s kind of crazy, that it wasn’t going to understand, but I felt that it was going to understand. And I told it that I was going to take it’s life, but that I was going to honor it’s death by wearing it and using it in ceremonies by putting it on my leggings. I had already seen it in a dream what they were going to do, what it was going to be. And so I took some sage, and I put some smoke in that box from that sage, and I started singing the Lakota thank you song. And I touched that noose to the rattlesnakes head, and it raised its head up, and I put the noose on it, and I lifted it out of the box, and in my dream I saw a five gallon jug of water, I put the snake in it and I stood there singing that song for thirty minutes before the snake drowned. Once it drowned, I laid it out on the table, laid it out on its back and took a knife and slid it down, cut the head off, and stripped it, and put it in that five gallons of water with salt and cured the skin and here they are. And so this is what we know as my medicine. This is what I wear, this fan is medicine; the things that I use for ceremony that represent who I am. You know, I guarantee you that there’s probably not many people in our circle that if they see this fan and say, “That’s Luis’ fan.” They’ll ask you, “What are you doing with Luis’ fan?” Because it’s my medicine and they know it. If they see my leggings, “Oh that’s Luis.” There’s no doubt about it. This represents who I am to them; this is who I have become. But yet in psychological terms, it’s an archetype. An archetype is a role that we step in and out of. And when I’m in this role, as the archetype of Chief Luis, Watching Wolf, I’m that impeccable warrior, and nothing can get in the way of accomplishing what my goal is. Out in the world, when I’m doing what I’m doing, working, I have problems, I have to deal with problems, family problems, all kinds of problems. I’m not perfect; I’m not a perfect man. But this archetype, that’s an impeccable warrior. And a lot of people sometimes get the two mixed up, and they can’t distinguish between the two, and it goes to their head so to speak, and they

think they're a lot more than what they are. Well, for me and the way that I have grown up and I have another story that I can tell that allows you to see how I got to this point. Years back in the sweat lodge—and when I go in to the sweat lodge and sweat alone—I'm usually nude, it's in the backyard, it's a closed off area, nobody can see in. And so out there alone on a Sunday morning, I was about to sweat, and I was really just disgusted, I mean I was just at the breaking point, and I had a long conversation with God in the sweat lodge, and I told him I didn't want to do this anymore, I said, "I'm tired, I'm tired, people don't care and don't respect nothing that I do, they don't." I was just totally disgusted with it. And I had already but the red hot lava rocks inside, and just as you and I are talking here; I swear I felt I was talking to God and that God was sitting there with me. And I, for some reason just decided I was going to turn my back on him. And I turned, physically turned away from him, like he was there, I turned my face away from God. And in a big thundering voice, I heard, "Don't you turn away from me," and I was turned back around, literally, just physically turned back around and sat on a hot rock, and pulled up skin on my hand when I touched back there after burning myself, and I said, "Okay God, you win, I know what this means, I can't give this up. I made a deal with you long ago that if you got me out of the mess that I had made of my life that I would serve you. I'm back, I'm serving you." I'll never be able to get rid of this; this is something that I asked for, he's given to me, and I have to carry it. It's my burden to carry, and I have to step out there and talk to the young people, talk to those people who would listen. That's the distinct point of the books that I wrote, was to have it written, so that when I die, it's still there. It won't be forgotten.

DS:

Now you talk about those books, and we mentioned them briefly, can you describe, you know, how you came in to one, wanting to do those books and then also deciding what areas you wanted to cover?

LT:

Well, it's a funny kind of thing, but I didn't write them [laugh]. It's kind of like I sat down at the typewriter, and I think, in the instance where I say, "God told me to go and he'll tell me what to say," that's the same thing that kind of happened. I had been thinking about doing these books for years and years, and I never did sit down and start them. And then, when I sat down, it just flew off my fingertips. I worked on it day and night, day and night, day and night, every chance that I'd get, staying up late after midnight working. You know, sometimes my wife would say, "You going to come to bed or what?" You know, I'd say, "Okay, I'll wrap it up and I'll come to bed," but it was because I couldn't stop, it just flowed, but I'm talking about things that are important to me, those things that change me. And if you look at who you are, you're human, you bleed when you get cut, you hurt when somebody offends you, you cry, you have emotion, you have physiology, psychology, we're the same. So if my truth did this for me, and if that truth can do the same for you, it's because we're same. I'm not saying it's for everybody, because some people aren't ready for it. But those people that are ready to step up to this will see that

their life will definitely take a change for the better. It's that important to know, because one truth can be for me, it can be a truth for you, it can be a truth for someone else, if they're ready. Not everyone's ready. Not saying that it's going to be a universal type deal, but in these books, I hope that someone can pick it up and read them, and in reading that step in to my shoes and put themselves in the position where I was, and maybe they've already been through a similar experience. You know, I'm talking about psychology. Carl Gustav Jung was a Swedish psychologist who hung out with Sigmund Freud. And Sigmund Freud thought everything was physical, sexual kind of deal. And Carl Jung said, No I believe it's spiritual physical, that the body and the spirit work together, and there's a union between the two that will make the person function, and there's what Carl Jung called the process of individuation, when one person recognizes it's not about them, their universe doesn't revolve around them, but they are a part of the universe, and they have to do for that universe. So when I went through my process of individuation is when I started realizing it's not about me, it's about them, it's about you, it's about all the people that come to seek the truth in themselves, and if I can lead them to the water, they take a drink, their thirst will be quenched. And that's my philosophy is that if they're seeking, honestly, and want to know the truth, and I can give them this, and they can apply it to themselves and say "Yeah, it fits," they can take it and run with it. And if they're not ready for it, they say, "No, it's not my time, I can't do that," and they'll go no and look for something else. That's where I am today, I came to that realization, it's not about me, it's about everybody else. As long as I can keep that perspective, I'll be doing good because once it becomes about me, I missed the boat. I can't heal you, I don't have that power, God does, I can take you to God and you talk to him, and he'll tell you what you need to do.

DS:

Now you're talking about that, then there's also, you know, we mentioned earlier, about the culture and the importance of keeping that alive and showing the significance of it and during lunch we talked about, you know, plans that have been made for—and, like, you know, the Quanah Parker markers that are going up showing the Comanche trails and stuff like that. What kind of things are going on in the Odessa/Trans-Pecos area to help show the culture, to let people know this is who they are, this is who we are, and this where we're going?

LT:

Well, a lot of what I have participated in in the area, of course the powwow, for sure, that's a gathering where people come to and they get a lot of education out of it and learn what a powwow is and what things are acceptable and what things weren't. But in Fort Stockton, they have an annual Fort Day at the old fort in Fort Stockton. I don't know if you've ever been there. It's got the old jail, the barracks where the soldiers used to live, and it's got a big field where they used to do the parades with horses and that kind of thing. And every year they bring reenactors out there and we had become a part of it, we take a teepee and set it up, and we all dress in our regalia, there are usually maybe a handful of us, six/seven of us that dress out and

look the part, and the blue coats are down there and that kind of thing. So we're showing how the tribe used to live and the things they used to have, we take all kinds of different things that people can look at, ask questions about. The biggest thing is if we put something out, somebody is going to ask a question about it, so we have a chance to teach, for them to learn. A lot of photo opportunities, which to me is like, there's not a chief in town every day, okay, and that's one of the things that—not me being important, the title is what's important. If you look at it in the way that we do, in a reservation, the chief is the president of the United States to them people because he's in charge. And so when I step up and put this on, I consider myself at that level because that's the way it is, and people need to know that, that when a chief is in town, you don't get to see that every day. There's not many chief left, and so when there is one, then learn what you need to do to honor and respect the position, not the man. The man is nothing, you know, Barack Obama is Barack Obama, but the president of the United States is something else. So the chief is that something else, so respect the position. The person, yeah you can respect them too, if they earned the respect. The position itself, all alone, doesn't have to be earned. It is a position in itself. The person has to grow up and reach that and obtain that. So over the years, I have obtained this title, I earned it, nobody gave it to me. My daddy was not a chief and handed it down to me. And that's the way it usually happens in a tribe, the chief hands it down to his son. That wasn't the case in this family. I wasn't handed down from my father, he wasn't a chief. And when I die, then it goes with me to the grave because I don't have a son. If, by chance somewhere along the line, my grandson decides that he wants to get really into it and carry, I more than happily give it to him and be proud to give it to him. But that is yet to be seen, he's only five.

DS:

Long ways off.

LT:

Yeah, yeah, but it's a position, and that man has to own up to it, and I do my best every day when I put this on to own up to this position, that I can be that impeccable warrior, that people will be able to say, You know what, he said he was going to do something for me, and he came through, and I never let them down. And if I tell people, no matter who it is or where I'm at, if I tell them I'm going to do something, I do my best to make it happen. Sometimes life gets in the way, and I have to work a little extra hard at it, but I always come through.

DS:

Now we've been going on probable for about an hour and forty minutes—is there anything that I haven't asked that you feel is important for you to speak to?

LT:

One of the things that I address in the first book is the metaphysical aspect and that—I think

something needs to be said about that. Metaphysical—if you look up the word metaphysical in the dictionary it says, “it’s the cause and effect of things.” And a while ago I alluded to, with Carl Jung, that he thought it was physical/spiritual working together, and I believe that. And I believe that illnesses come when we aren’t walking our spiritual path the way we should. And when someone comes to me and says, “I’ve got such and such, and the doctors can’t fix it, I’ve been to all kinds of doctors, they say there’s nothing wrong, but I have this.” I say okay, now—I don’t immediately jump on, and say okay I can fix this or I can do this or whatever. I always consult the main physician which is God. I say, “Give me three days so that I can think about it, pray about it, and wait for the answer,” and then when I get my answer then I’ll call them up and say, “Come over we’ve got to talk.” One of the first things that I ask those people is, “What kind of a relationship do you have with God?” And some of them go, “Why do I have to answer that?” Well, because if you’re going to work with me, that’s something that I need to know. If you want me to work with you, I need to know an answer. And sometimes they say, “Well, I don’t have one.” And I say, “Okay. That’s part of your problem.” I believe that we all have that connection to God, Creator, Wakan Tanka, The Great Mystery, Tunkashila, Grandfather. If we don’t nurture that relationship, our spirit will begin to die. And then we die two deaths, the physical death and the spiritual death. There are few in your life who can recognize a higher power. You don’t have to call him God if you don’t want to. You can call him whatever you want to, but as long as you recognize that there is something bigger in this world, in this universe, in this life, bigger than you, then you’ve got half the battle won. Then I ask, tell me one of your dreams, and they say, “Well, why do you want to know that?” and I say, “Well, because I believe that dreams is God’s language, and we have forgotten how to speak it, and if you don’t know how to interpret your dream, then you don’t know what he’s telling you, but I do, because I speak God’s language. I interpret dreams for people, all the time.” It wasn’t something that I had in me, I had to learn it, I had to learn how to interpret dreams and what they mean, and not every dream is a literal interpretation. You know, dreams come from our subconscious mind. It doesn’t have vocabulary, it has symbols, pictures. And so the dream, we see all these pictures, and when we wake up, we see the pictures and we put words to it. That’s how we interpret—get our dreams; through the conscious mind. We put the words to it when we wake up. If you’re having bad dreams, you say they’re bad dreams, I say good for you because you’re going to end up where you need to be, because that dream is going to drive you to where you got to go because you hadn’t been paying attention, so the dream has escalated over a period of time and has gotten worse and worse and worse, and eventually you end up like I did, waking up at three thirty in the morning in a cold sweat and your heart pounding because you just got the life scared out of you in your dream because it’s trying telling you you’ve got to move from where you are, you’re in a bad place. And so when—and they say okay, they tell me one of their dreams, then I can help them to get the healing, to understand what the healing is going to be all about. In my studies, I came to find a book by Louise Hay, and it’s *Heal Your Body: The Metaphysical Reasons for Illnesses*, and it goes from A to Z, every illness that we’ve ever known in mankind from A to Z, and it says what the probable cause was and what the probable fix is. Changing

thought patterns, of saying this is what you're doing, that's why you got what you got. Do this and this goes away. An example: if I put a silver dollar in your shoe, and you walk on it all day long and don't take it out, you're going to end up with a blister more than likely. That's the cause and effect. The cause was the silver dollar; the effect was the blister. What do you got to do to make it go away? You got to change something, change, take that silver dollar out of your shoe for one, and then the problem goes away. Many people go to the doctor, get the pills for the symptom, but they're not really addressing the problem. The way I look at it is let's take care of the problem, and the symptom goes away. That's metaphysical healing.

DS:

How hard is it to make people or have people trust you and take that jump? Or leap of faith?

LT:

Well, when you are at the end of your rope, and I am the only one with my extended hand, and there is a bottomless pit where you're fixing to fall off that rope, what are you going to do? You're going to reach for my hand, right? Sad to say, a lot of people have had to come to that before they reach for my hand. I wish that they would reach for it long before they come to the end of the rope. But in those cases when people know it's do or die, they're going to do.

DS:

And I know that you as a man that's also looking at the world, what do you think of the world and the straits that we're in right now?

LT:

Well, again, knowing that we're not the director or the producer or the writer of this show, I think it's a good thing. We, in our lives, are on a path that is taking us to a higher consciousness. Those people that are doing the things that are doing, those murders, those things that are bad things out there in the world, those people are not following their true path of going to a higher consciousness, and eventually those people will be removed—by artificial means, by being locked up, or the world will take care of them and they die and they'll be gone. And eventually what you're going to end up with is a bunch of people who have a same awareness and consciousness at a level that is godly, because that's the evolution of who we are. That's what we came to this world for—to learn, to grow, to die, and go back home. Our spirit is on a journey, it has to have a body to be here but when we let loose of this body, we're going to fly. Our spirit is going to go back to the Creator, and we will have finished what we came to do. We will have taken the step in our spiritual journey; I believe that with all my heart that eventually the world will take care of itself. We have to endure what we have to endure. So like I had to endure my son's death, made me a better person, made me cling on to God and say, "You're all I got." That's where we're heading to, got to hang on to God and say, Hey, when you see these disasters, people come out of the woodwork to help one another, doesn't happen normally does

it? So is a disaster a good thing or a bad thing? If you look at it, yeah, people lost their home, so? You can get another house. They lost their TV, so? You get another T.V. Still have their life, still have their children, and now they have another brother, maybe someone of a different color skin who came to pull a fallen house off of you, who came to help your child get out from under that tree. We forget the color of our skin when we get into these kinds of situations. When our brothers go to war, black, brown, white, yellow, they ain't no color, they're brothers and they're fighting for each other to survive. It's going to happen, we can't escape that, it's inevitable. We have to come to a higher consciousness and awareness.

DS:

Now it's almost as if those points you were talking about, those stressors almost take you back to where you talk about where you go yearly to find the center, to find your balance, to find, you know, your role amongst your fellow humans.

LT:

Right, absolutely. I believe that with all my heart and soul.

DS:

Well, do we have something else to talk about?

LT:

That was it.

DS:

So proud to have you, Chief, thank you.

LT:

Yeah, thank you, thank you. I—that's all I want to do with my life is get this out to people, to let them understand that they don't have to live the way that they live, they don't have to have the pain and suffering. Not that it's sometimes needed, you know, because it sometimes is, but the people, they came to support me when my son died. I didn't know I knew that many people, they didn't fit inside the funeral home. They were lined out in the parking lot because they couldn't get in anymore. It was like, who are these people? People that I had touched and affected one way or another in their life had come to pay respect. I can't say it any other way, we do what we do because we have to do it, but the people that are out there are the ones that are being touched by what we do. What you do is an important thing here, and people get affected by it because you're preserving the history of who our people are, of here in Lubbock, of here at the school. I'm doing it out there with who our people were—their ways, their secrets, their healing powers. We do the same work.

DS:

Thank you, my brother

LT:

Yeah, this I know.

DS:

I'm going to turn off the recording. Thank you.

LT:

Preservation, that's what it's all about. You know I want to do these talk radio shows, but I know that they'll come when it's time, like I told the publicist. I had a conference call with the publishing team and I told them, I want you all to—

[End of Recording]



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