
“I had a just a story about language. And you have to realize that our government tried to erase our language and take our language away from us, my grandparents were sent to boarding school. For four generations, our children were taken from us and sent to boarding schools, to adopt Christian religion, to give up our cultural lifeways and to teach us English and take our native tongue away from us. And my grandfather spoke Kaw, spoke our language when he was a young boy. And, and just like many others, and you've heard these stories, he would have his mouth washed out with soap at the boarding school if he spoke to his kinfolk in our tribal language. And so it was a fight. It's been a fight for us to recover our language, our language was almost extinct. And I remember, as a young man working for the Kaw Nation, I applied for an ANA Grant, Administration for Native Americans Grant, with the federal government to jumpstart a language program at the tribe. And we wrote the grant, and they wrote back and said, “We're not going to fund you because your language is dead. It doesn't exist.” And luckily for us, and there were you know, there were some people that spoke a little bit of Kaw our neighbors, the Osage, had some fluent speakers is a very similar language to ours. But there was a professor there at KU, Robert Rankin, who studied the Kaw language as a young man, and had recorded several of our elders at the time back in the early 1970s. And he had these reel to reel tapes of the Kaw language. And he spent a couple of summers there recording the whole syllabary, and had quite a bit of our Kaw language recorded. And I heard about this in the 90s and the mid 90s. And I made arrangements to go meet with him there at KU, and we met. And he showed me he had he had recorded this, but really hadn't done much with it over the years. And it was sitting on his shelf in his office, and I said, “You realize that you have something more valuable than gold or anything else sitting on the shelf, you have our language.” And I said, “We need to recover, we need to reclaim our language.” And he said, “I agree with you.” And he said, “You know, I recorded your great grandfather, he's one of the people that I recorded.” And I said I remember sitting on the porch at my great grandfather's house. And I was kind of afraid of him because he would sit there on the porch, and he would talk to himself, and he would speak to himself in the Kaw language. And he would just be talking to nobody it looked like. My grandfather was there and I asked my grandfather, “Why is great grandpa out there talking to himself?” And he goes, “No, he's not talking to himself. He's talking to God.” He said, “God gave us this language. This is the language of God. And I'm speaking to God because I have no one else to speak to. Nobody else speaks our language.” And so I knew then, that it was important for us to save our language.”