

TRIBAL PROGRAM NEWS



Windows in Time – Four Siletz women (above) gather together for a photo. Below, Daniel Brown cooks salmon at the 2006 Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow.

Restoration, con't from page 1

A sign posted in Siletz said, "Important! Meeting of former members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Sunday, Sept. 30, 1973 1pm VFW Hall – Siletz Visit Old Friends, Discuss Reorganization."

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing," said Tom of his and others' efforts to help the Tribe achieve Restoration. "We were trying to preserve our ways for future generations."

Tom said the whole effort seemed larger than life. Repeated trips to Washington, D.C., by Siletz Tribal Council members reminded them of the fact they were from a remote area on the central Oregon coast and they were in the nation's capital.

"There is a few things in life you can only do once," he said. "This was it. It had a sense of so much importance to it. Not many people in the world have gone through something like that. We were trying to accomplish something that was a great thing to us, but seemed like just one of many things there in Washington."

Tom, a student at the University of Oregon at the time, said serving on the Siletz Tribal Council before Restoration and making those long trips back to Washington, D.C., was one of the high points in his life.

"It was the best American Government class I ever took."

Tribal Council Chairman Dee Pigsley said she refused to be overwhelmed by the process of putting the Tribe back together again even if it meant doing things she never thought she would do.

"The big picture was enormous," said Pigsley. "I traveled to Washington, D.C., and I had never talked to a congressman in my whole life."

Pigsley rose to the occasion and found a sense of confidence along the way.

"I was there to convince Sen. Dale Bumpers of Arkansas why it was important to restore a Tribe," she remem-

bered. "The arguments we gave were natural arguments. For some reason, it was an easy thing to do."

The facts were that many Tribes and Bands of Indians were relocated against their will and forced to integrate into Tribes that had been living on the land from time immemorial. The relocation came about after treaties were signed that said, among other promises that were never kept, a permanent reservation would be established.

No permanent reservation was ever established. In fact, the land was taken piece by piece.

In 1865, the first slice came from the 1.1 million-acre reservation, dedicated to the Tribes in 1855, when 200,000 acres surrounding Yaquina Bay were opened up to white settlers. Another 700,000 acres were claimed by an act of Congress in 1875.

The fatal blow was dealt to the people of the Tribe in 1892 when the allotment act reduced Tribal land holdings to 80 acres for each of the 551 Siletz Indians. Many allotments were lost to tax bills. Many of the members did not understand what taxes were.

These facts contributed to a story that would eventually lead the Tribe to Restoration in November 1977.

In response to the demands of the federal government, the Siletz Tribe elected an interim Tribal Council of nine people. They set out to accomplish four things.

First they needed to update the Tribal rolls by removing the names of the deceased. Next they began to enroll members under the requirement imposed on the Tribe of one-quarter blood quantum. A Constitution was established and a reservation plan developed once a management team and a fiscal system had been put into place.

Once the reservation plan was submitted to the legislature to become a bill, a modern-day Tribe was given life.

For the first time in Oregon's century-long history, a Native American Tribe was returned to federally recognized status.

The descendants of the state's original inhabitants could now call their ancestral lands home. Their children now would be able to call these lands their home. And their children ...

If you talk to elders of the Tribe, they will tell you over and over again about the respect they have for the land and all its creatures. They will tell you stories about a way of life that kept a certain harmony in place for all.

"The Indians that lived on this here

precious place we call Mother Earth that was slowly taken away, taken away thought they were part of the land just like the animals," said Tribal Council member Frank Simmons in the Tribe's historical documentary *Skookum Tillicum – The Strong People of the Siletz*. "They felt they were part of the water, the air, the rain and everything else. They were just part of it."

Simmons said Native people have a connection to the land that goes deep in their history.

"Trees, fish, water are all important to the

Tribe," said Simmons. "The Tribe is really trying to get the fishing back and I know we take care of our share of it because we touch the water, we touch the ground. We touch everything that is important to get the fish back. We believe in the circle of life."

All you have to do is hear a young Tribal member speaking their ancient language to see that the efforts to bring back the Tribe was worth it.

"It is part of their culture," said Tribal Council member Lillie Butler. "It is important that our children learn the language. They will need to learn it in groups so they can speak it to each other and that way they can all learn it."

Butler said discussion in Siletz about bringing back the language started when a Culture Committee was formed in 1982.

All you have to do is see a Tribal elder walk his ancestral lands to know it was worth it. All the trips to D.C. to lay the foundation for a people proved to be worth it in the end.

"Being a Tribe is important to all of us," said Tom. "I feel great in that we are developing our people. I go to the dance house in Siletz and I see them dancing the old dances. I see them revitalizing the language. I love the history of who we are and I think all Tribal members should get to feel like that."

Simmons often tells a story that gives perspective to the Tribe's history of loss and gain.

"A wise man said years ago, 'If you lose something go back and you will find it.' We lost an awful lot. There is an awful lot out there that our Tribe has lost over the last 150 years. It is still there. It is waiting to be picked."

