



Because our friend Jack Schwartz was in town, we spent Easter weekend with the Celilo. Jack, an attorney, spent most of the 1980's successfully defending the River Tribes against evictions by the federal government from lands that belong to them--evictions that coincided with the Salmonscam trials in which Indian fishermen were sent to federal prison for selling fish that belonged to them.

Now a defense lawyer in Los Angeles, and an internationally recognized authority on native sovereignty and treaty rights, Indian Jack was in Portland--a city he delights in describing as the whitest in the country--for the outcome of hearings to determine if the United States Government should bear the legal costs of defending Indians from illegal acts it perpetrated against them.

We went Celilo Village, five of us in a van, for two reasons. First, because Jack wanted to see his family. In 1988, in a celebration last performed half a century ago, Jack Schwartz was adopted into the tribe. His Indian parents are Howard Jim, Chief of the Celilo, and his wife, Maggie Jim. "I'm the only Jewish Indian from Brooklyn I know," Jack points out from time to time. His Indian mother died not long ago and Jack visited her grave on a windy hilltop overlooking the river her people call Che-Wana.

We went also for the spring salmon feast. The religious celebration, as old as the River People, honors the return of the salmon. There aren't many salmon left now, of course, and the gathering was smaller than I remembered it. It was held, as it has been for thousands of springtimes, at the site of the great falls of Celilo. The last time I was here, Maggie Jim told how when she was a small girl, thousands of River People came from all over the Columbia Basin to feast, renew old kinships, and pray. The drums and singing were so loud, she said, echoing from the walls of the gorge, that they drowned out the roar of the mile-long cataract which was, aside from one of the continent's natural wonders, the center of their universe. The falls are gone now, submerged by the waters behind the Dalles Dam. Drowned also were scores of villages and fishing sites which, contrary to treaty law and formal agreements between the River Tribes and the U S Army Corps of Engineers, were never replaced. So it goes.

When Lewis and Clark 'discovered' the Columbia Basin, it was densely settled. For 300 miles, from the headwaters of the Snake to the Astoria bar, a civilization described by those who first saw it as one of the largest and richest in North America lined the banks of the river from the mountains to the sea. The last bit of land left to the River People is Celilo Village--a barren, windswept 34 acres cut off from the river by two Amtrak rail beds and six lanes of freeway. On the bank itself is a roadside rest area. There are trees, emerald lawns and small lagoon for the launching of sailboards and skidoos. Funny how things work out.

Anyway, for two days the River People fed us--roast salmon, venison, elk meat, fry bread, roots, and huckleberries. No money exchanged hands. All day and all night the People danced the dances and sang the songs that link them to the Earth in ways the make western culture shrink to a lifestyle. On Sunday morning, at the close of four hours of prayer and a ceremonial feast served on reed mats, Chief Jim spoke to the white people who had come to be with them to celebrate the return of the salmon. It was so quiet in the longhouse at Celilo, you could hear stones rolling away.

## Cowboy Consciousness

by Alison Pride



Growing up, I wanted to be a cowboy. Didn't everyone, at some point in their lives? It may be one of the genuinely unique American fantasies. Cowboy consciousness lurks quietly or clamorously inside most of us.

Unlike a lot of people, though, I was able to realize at least part of the dream. When I was eleven my battle-weary parents gave in to my shameless, relentless begging and bought me a horse. We stabled him a mile from our house and, from the day we trailed him home, I tried to take up permanent residence in the barn. Except for inconvenient interruptions like school, sleep and my mother's insistence that I join the family for the evening meal, I would have. I spent every available, blissful moment brushing, riding, feeding, fussing over and watching my horse. I pretty much worshipped the way he rolled, pawed the ground, ate grass, crunched oats, whinnied, snorted, walked, trotted and ran. Unless you were once an eleven-year-old girl in love with a horse, I could argue that you are regrettably ignorant of the meaning of true happiness.

In Eastern Washington, where I grew up, horse country enveloped me. The nuclear power plant was an ominous anomaly in the otherwise primitive landscape. The desert was abundant with sweeping, barren vistas and endless trails that led on and on to nowhere in particular. It was possible to ride no more than a half hour from civilization and forget for the next two hours that civilization existed. On these rides I often became a variety of people with a variety of missions, all of critical importance, and all dependent upon my wit and resources. The desert was large, empty and inviting enough to absorb all of my frontier longings. Often I rode until I was sore and stiff-legged and could barely slide down out of the saddle without an automatic flinch of pain. It was sheer heaven.

As I got older, I stopped envisioning myself as a cowgirl, but I never lost the feeling those fantasies elicited. I made friends with long, uninterrupted silences and the easy solace of the limitless spaces surrounding me. Sure, I had to contend with the occasional barbed-wire fence, but it was possible to imagine that the desert went on forever and I was just a tiny, insignificant dot traveling like a beetle across its rolling vastness.

Out there, I got to pretend that annoyances like other people and their needs and demands didn't exist. Out there, the world was sparsely populated except for the shy, furtive creatures that crawled and slithered around, usually after dark. Out there, it was possible to be impossibly self-centered, operating in an impartial sphere of absolute freedom, subject only to limitations imposed by the desert climate itself. This was part of the fantasy. I still wish, sometimes, that it could be true.

But our frontier and cowboy days are over. Some might convincingly argue that they never truly existed. When the European settlers pushed westward into what was, for them, mostly uncharted territory, they were displacing and often destroying already-established, advanced cultures. The American frontier consciousness possessed a particularly ugly thrust--discover, claim and conquer. Always, the land was viewed as something to subdue and overcome. Men and women paid for it with their lives, the sacrifice so great, the price so high, it could be argued that they earned the right to do with it whatever they damned well pleased.

Now, instead of battling with the indigenous peoples for control of the land, we fight over it in courts or wrangle deals

in real estate offices. But the issue is still the same--who controls the land? Who should? How do you resolve the issue when something as precious to the American identity as personal freedom vies with something as vital to the life of the planet as protecting the land from harm? Harm can be deliberate or unintentional; it can result from outright disregard for the well-being of anyone but the individual or just plain ignorance. For a long time, it was possible to imagine that the resources of this continent were inexhaustible. They appeared that way. Who needed imposed limits? It seemed ridiculous to make a fuss about planning for the future.

But we know better now, and we can no longer plead ignorance. Destruction of the land, of crucial habitats and landscapes, occur with our full, informed participation. We are reaping the rewards of our greed and disregard for other life forms. We are uncomfortably aware that we are an ever-increasing population existing on ever-dwindling resources, an uneasy position to be in. But how do we talk about our common dilemma? Like any relationship, ours with the earth is subject to permanent erosion if we make a habit of inattentiveness.

So who protects the land? Is it too late, the damage done, the process now one of irreversible degeneration? I don't think we have any real way of knowing for sure. The impulse toward life is strong, persistent and yes, it often moves in mysterious ways. What is apparent is that we have done great damage with our insecurity, greed and callousness. But isn't it still possible for us to shape a world more out of cooperation and less out of competition? Can we take the romance out of conquest? In conquest, there is always the victor and the vanquished. The irony is, of course, that we have a history of perceiving ourselves to be one when, in fact, we may turn out to be the other. Because, if we continue on our present course, we will dominate ourselves right out of existence.

Perhaps the answer is education; I like to believe so, anyway. It is not good enough to demand that people change their attitudes without teaching them why it is necessary. We need to educate ourselves and the world toward a more inclusive, life-sustaining ethic, one that depends upon our viewing all life and life-forms as interconnected and interdependent. This education needs to start early, but it is never too late. And when we hear people talk (for example, at the Timber Summit) we need to ask ourselves if they speak from fear and a desire to keep us bogged down in past attitudes, or if they genuinely offer a new, fresh and hopeful vision for how we might move forward. We are still a nation of breathtaking, dizzying panoramas. It is still possible to be optimistic about the future, but it is time to let our frontier mentality die and to replace it with a vision that recognizes and willingly accepts our dependence upon one another and upon the land.



Timing has a lot to do with the outcome of a rain dance.



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