

INDIAN COUNTRY

The spring salmon feast at Celilo was smaller this year. The rodeo and pow wow on the Warm Springs Reservation split Indian Country down the middle that weekend. No matter. Magic has little to do with numbers.

For the Columbia Basin tribes, the River People, Celilo is a holy place, the center of their world. For centuries, the people have come here in the spring to feast, renew old kinships, and pray. The salmon is a gift from the Creator and the first fish of the season is caught ritually by young men of the tribe whose character has brought them honor. The salmon is then ritually consumed, with roots, berries and water, by the people. The feast is a sacrament that joins the River people to each other and to their place in the scheme of things.

The people came to Celilo because of the great falls. Here the Columbia, second largest river on the continent, narrowed to a boiling cataract 200 feet wide and a mile long whose booming roar could be heard for miles. Maggi Jim, whose husband Howard Jim is chief of the Celilo-Wyam, once talked of the feast of her youth when thousands of the people came, so many that the sound of the drums and the songs echoing from the bluffs drowned the sound of the falls.

Celilo Falls is gone now, submerged in the waters behind the Dalles Dam, along with an elaborate network of fishing scaffolds generations in the building. Maggi Jim is gone too. The old woman cleaning bitterroot in the east wind died last year on the 34 acres of Celilo Village--the last scrap of land left to one of the richest native cultures on the continent, a settled people whose villages once lined the river they call Che Wana from the mouth of the Snake to the Astoria bar. The spring salmon feast was smaller this year.

The night before the Washat ceremony--revealed in a vision to Snowhalla, the last Native American prophet whose village at Priest's Rapids on the upper reaches of the Columbia is now part of the Hanford Plutonium Facility--the people danced in the long house, welcoming many times the whites who had come to be with them.

Midway through the dancing, an old woman, an elder of the tribe, introduced a young man who had come to honor the people. He had danced all day at Warm Springs and had come here, at the old woman's request, to dance the chicken dance for her daughter who was visiting and who, like many of the people, had never seen the chicken dance. She thanked the young man, who looked to have stepped from the pages of National Geographic, for honoring her daughter, and then counseled the children to watch, to see how it was in the old days, to see who they are.

As the young man danced the old dance, some of the people walked softly into the circle and, eyes cast down, placed dollar bills on the packed earth floor--gifts to honor the dancer who never once looked at them. The dollar bills were then blessed with a wand of eagle feathers by a male elder. Then several young girls in beaded doeskin and single white feathers, watched over by an older girl on the verge of womanhood, picked up the gifts, walked to the edge of the circle, and placed them in the hands of the oldest women, those without husbands, the poorest of the people. The old women accepted the gifts, sometimes nodding, remembering other feasts, when their eyes were younger and the people were many, and the sound of the drums and the songs stilled the roar of the river.

The spring salmon feast at Celilo was smaller this year. Unless you count the heart of the people.

6 UPPER LEFT EDGE OCTOBER 1993



Wordcraft Circle

OF NATIVE AMERICAN MENTOR & APPRENTICE WRITERS

NATIONAL OFFICE
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National Director

The Oregon Coast Council for the Arts will be welcoming a diverse group of Native writers to the Newport Performing Arts Center for an Intensive Writing Workshop scheduled for October 21-23, 1993. This NW Regional Gathering of Native Writers is being sponsored by Wordcraft Circle of Native Mentor/Apprentice Writers, the OCCA, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz.

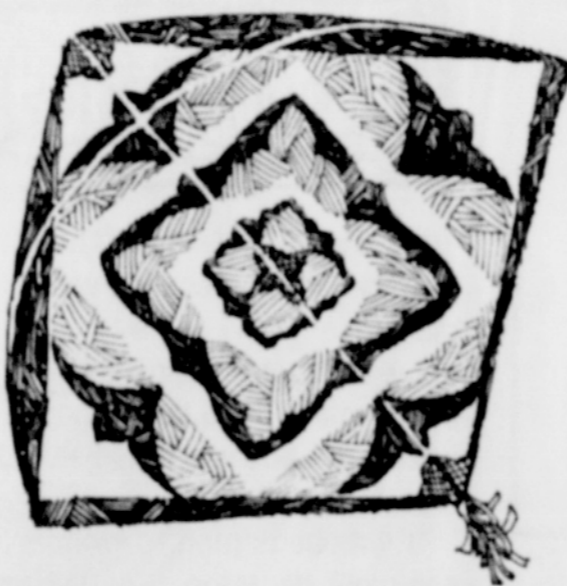
Wordcraft Circle was established at the Returning the Gift Festival of Native Writers held in Norman, Oklahoma in 1992. This historic gathering brought over 400 Native writers together to share ideas and experiences.

The purpose of the Wordcraft Circle is to create, develop, and maintain an ongoing formal national and international network of Native writers. Participants in the visionary effort are beginning and emerging Native writers (Apprentices) who work with established Native writers (Mentors) for at least one year. The emphasis during the year is to facilitate the development of self motivated, self-directed writers. At the conclusion of each year, an anthology will be published to present the best work of the Apprentice writers. All services are free to Native writers because Mentors volunteer their time and skills. The National Director and all Regional Coordinators also donate their services.

The workshop is open to all Native writers, and membership in the Wordcraft Circle is not required to attend. Admission is free. Beginning and emerging writers are encouraged to bring samples of their work for one-to-one mentoring sessions and critique.

There will be public performances Thursday and Friday evenings. Thursday evening's featured performers will be poet Elizabeth Woody and Ed Edmo, performing an excerpt of his play, "Through Coyote's Eyes." A special benefit performance by renowned Santee Sioux poet and activist, John Trudell, is scheduled for Friday. He will be accompanied by the percussion and traditional songs of Warm Springs singer/songwriter, Quiltman. Admission is \$10.50. Proceeds will benefit publication of Wordcraft's First Anthology.

Call 503-265-ARTS for tickets or E.K. (Kim) Caldwell at 503-765-2107 for more information.



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