

# A conversation with: George Aguilar, Sr.



George says he is "retired" these days, but retirement is not evident, as he spends much time working alongside family members.

**Editor's Note:** The following article was written by George Aguilar, Sr. He was reluctant to be interviewed for Spilyay's senior citizen segment and wanted to submit his own recollections of the past, steering attention away from himself.

The setting is the early years of the 1800's, 1805 to be exact. The mother's a member of the Tenino Clan of the Columbia River, relates a story to her daughter named Sta-Na-Que. It was about the arrival of the white man; (Lewis & Clark Expedition). Within this era, arose a prophecy: It concerned the arrival of the hordes of these people. It was to be an introduction to a different culture. Catastrophe was to also follow in the wake of these foreigners. This prophecy was fulfilled in the 1840's upon the arrival of the pioneers of the Oregon Trail.

Sta-Na-Que now a teenage girl witnesses the arrival of these strange people. The never before seen cooking utensils that was revealed in the prophecy had now become one of the trade items for dried salmon and other foods. The pioneers arrived nearly starved from the long trek. It was mentioned by Sta-Na-Que to my grandmother Hattie Symentire Polk, of the children being barefoot and sickly with some near death. They also brought diseases upon our people. The prophesied catastrophe of small pox and measles took their toll and wiped out a great portion of the River area tribes.

The Native people young and old were seriously affected by the never before known illnesses. Many died. The sweatshouses became ineffective.

Many dove into cold waters only to become victims of death that paralleled a near genocide to our racial group.

Sta-Na-Que survived this catastrophe and also witnessed the signing of the 1855 Treaty. She was now a young lady of 35 years of age when this historical event took place. Sta-Na-Que lived out her years in the Tenino Valley, where Jack and Irene Towe now have their irrigation pond. She died in 1934 at the estimated age of 110 to 115 years of age. She is buried in the Tenino Cemetery.

My genealogy is as follows: Kush-Shi-At (Great Grandfather) is a nephew to Sta-Na-Que. Henry Symentire (Great Grandfather), Hattie Symentire Polk (Grandmother), Evelyn Polk Aguilar (Mother), Easton Aguilar (Father), Great Grandfather James Polk Sr. was named after president James Polk. My father Easton, was born in 1891 at Manila, Philippine Islands. Immigrated to the United States and was a veteran of the First World War. Easton's first marriage to Adeline Brunoe had produced a son (Raymond Aguilar-deceased) and daughters Arradonna Aguilar Seyler (deceased), Theda Aguilar Whalawitsa. These are also descendants of the Symentire's and Chief Billy Chinook.

I was told by my grandmother that male members were lined up and given caycaia (whiteman) names. Hence: Symentire, Polk, Seymore, Sidwalter, Howard, Miller or whatever. This was how most of our people lost their Indian given names.

Yearly chronology of events are:

George Aguilar, Sr. born 1930 at The Dalles, OR. In the spring of 1930 made first outing trip to Big Eddy. 1932 Father Easton drowns at Cascade Rapids salmon fishing. 1932 Evelyn (mother) dies. Services held in historical Shaker Church near present Shilo Inn at The Dalles, OR.

From early childhood to 1948, I was raised by my grandmother Hattie Symentire Polk (Swi-Do-Ni Indian name). During the course of time I learned how to scrape hides, tan and smoke hides, turn gloves, dig roots, become familiar with my uncle's fur trapping methods, farming, gardening, fishing on the Columbia, net making, berry picking, bootlegging and whatever else it took to survive in that era.

The year about 1935 we made a trip to pick huckleberries at Zig Zag area, which I now assume is known as the controversial Enola Hill. The trip was made with a pair of horses and buggy. The hack was parked at Zig Zag, horses were taken up a trail where we came onto other tribal members. The trip back to the Rez was first stop off at Swim camp ground (east of Govt. Camp). While there grandmother and Mot-Ni (Sid Miller's grandmother) conversed with a whiteman practicing the use of the Chinook jargon.

1934-1948 stories told by elders are: Raids by the marauding Snake Tribal Clans in the root digging and grass gathering areas. A special grass was gathered and used to separate the drying salmon. This method of processing salmon drying probably went out of existence in the mid 1930's.

I would accompany my grandmother on her visits with other elder relatives. A blind and near deaf old lady was telling grandmother of the place of gathering this grass. She would pause, listen intently to hear the direction of the roar of the Celilo Falls and point in an easterly direction with all her fingers extended. I never did find out how far east it was because at that time, I was sent outside to make a deal with a tourist. The trade for his watermelons and grapes was a bright, fresh caught salmon. We would also search the Salmon Head beach area for oval shaped flat stones. Grandmother would throw these small stones on larger rocks attempting to split it in half so it may be used for a hide tanning rock, which was attached with rawhide to a stick.

Stories also were told of the abundant salmon runs. Its decline starts with the whiteman's introduction of fish wheels, traps and beach seining with horses. Some Chinook salmon runs exceeded 100 pounds or more per fish. This salmon run was wiped out of existence when the Grand

Coulee Dam and Chief Joseph Dam were constructed near the Canadian border. The last known silver side (Coho) salmon was caught at Tenino where we fished in October of 1948. I never saw this species in this area again.

The year 1937, I entered boarding school. My clothes are a homemade pocketless store bought calico cloth flowered shirt handsewn by my grandmother. Trousers were tied up with a buckskin string used for a belt. Footwear consisted of a brand new Indian made wix'am lapklakii (high top moccasins). Upon the issue of boarding school blue overalls and shoes, the matron in charge threw away my moccasins. I spoke fluent Sahaptin and I spoke and understood just enough English to get by. I was very bewildered by seeing so many children.

The most shocking was the change of diet. Some foods served at the dining hall were completely different to me. Gone were the dried salmon heads and dumplings, roots, dried eels, dried deer meat, luk-a-meen and so forth.

The year 1938, I became 8 years of age and I was in the Kindergarten grade. Tribal enrollment comes into existence. I become No. 0008 on the enrollment records. I attend my very first powwow and stickgame held at the CCC Dining Hall, located in the Park area.

1939 was the last Huckleberry excursion to the Enola Hill area. An avalanche rumbling an entire afternoon rolls away about 20% to 25% of the top portion of Mt. Hood. Huckleberry buyer informs tribal members encamped in this area of the arrival of war. Germany invades Poland. Huckleberries sell for 75 cents to \$1 per gallon.

1941 Japan invades Hawaii. School children listen intently of the news on the radio. 1942-1945, modern dance of the time is the Jitterbug and Fox-trot. The nation experiences rationing of meat, gasoline, tires, and sugar. Formations of Madras-based B-17 bombers flying overhead daily on training missions. Many local young men march and sail off to the war in the Pacific and Europe.

1949, last year of fishing the Columbia River, I join the Army. While in Bootcamp I fought (Boxing) for the Sixth Army Elimination Championship. Made runner-up position by winning 7 out of 8 bouts.

1950, I was stationed in the Ryukyus Command (Okinawa). We were on Training maneuvers when North Korea became an aggressor. Another war, our heavy anti-air craft unit was attached to a B-29 bombardment group which was very busy raining bombs on the Chinese and Koreans. I attained the rank of Ser-

geant First Class (E-G Grade). Honorably discharged late 1952.

1953, fell timber in the Hood River area and once again fished the Columbia River.

Activities mentioned are only of ancient historical value. Through the 1930's and 1940's, there was much activity. It is very painful to make mention of the horror stories of police brutality and the FBI beatings on alcohol use. Some retail stores, restaurants, barber shops had a "No Dogs or Indians Allowed" policy mentality to run their business. Some of these practices lasted into the early 1950's.

1954-1955, was hospitalized with

a service-connected illness. December 1955 I married Ella Kurip, a full blood Ute from White Rock, Utah. We had four sons and one daughter. Pursued building trade that was learned in Alaska and Chemawa Indian School. I was employed with the Confederated Tribes for 13 years, was the tribal construction manager for 5 years. Was a union-affiliated carpenter for 12 years, some reforestation, contracting, general construction contractor. I am now retired and serve as an Ex-officio for the local Shekinah Enterprises (Easton & Tina's) specializing in general contracting, reforestation and development projects and Autobody rebuilding.



George Aguilar was raised by his grandmother Hattie from a very young age. He learned many traditional trades from her.

## Baker named veteran's officer

The Jefferson County Veterans Service Department has hired Keith Baker of Warm Springs as their new Veterans Service Officer. "This position became available with the passing of World War II veteran Cecil Benson," says Baker. Benson held that position for a good number of years. Baker's first day was



November 4. The office will be open on Wednesdays from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The Jefferson County Veterans Service office is located at the Jefferson County Court house building on C street in Madras.

Keith Baker is a Vietnam Veteran, and served with the U.S. Army as an infantry soldier in the first infantry and the twenty third infantry divisions. "The position is only parttime," says Baker. "But I'm going to try to be able to assist any veteran who is fighting for their benefits or whatever reason involving a veteran. A veteran is someone who has completed basic training or has served in the armed forces," says Baker. "If needed says Baker, "I can extend the office hours for the working Veteran, and try to meet their needs. The object of this program is to help the Veteran and that's what I plan to do to the best of my ability. Stop by my office or call me at 475-2449."



An aspiring drummer?



Young Thanksgiving Powwow dancers received \$1 each for their dancing efforts.



Veterans were honored at this year's powwow.

## Spilyay Tymoo

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