

A February tradition

Eagle Watch soars with cultural opportunity

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Nine years ago when Rudy Clements started speaking at Eagle Watch, where people gather every February to learn about and watch the birds, there were very few people in attendance. As the years have gone by the crowd has grown considerably.

"That encourages me," he says, "not only non-Indian people, but our own young Indian people go there with our group to share the experience."

He goes on, "It gives us elders an opportunity to pass on what we've learned from our elders...I see it as a wonderful way of educating and sharing cross-culturally."

Breaking down cultural boundaries to share information about Mother Earth is important to Rudy Clements.

"I'm not trying to pass on spiritual values to make other people practice them," he says, "I share them so people will understand our Indian ways and, hopefully, be able to utilize some of [the principles] to enhance their way of contributing and sacrificing on behalf of Mother Earth and The Creator."

He acknowledges there are plenty of native and non-native people who value the land and have dedicated their lives to protecting and enhancing the earth.

"If we all try to do that in isolation from each other...we're not going to get much done," he says, "I think Eagle Watch provides an opportunity for people to come together and join their knowledge, wisdom and hands together, join their resources and



Rudy Clements of Tribal Relations is host at Eagle Watch.

Bing Bingham/Spilyay

He continues, "The primary message in our longhouse religion is that we as human people have been placed here to take care of Mother Earth...to protect it, to enhance it...to use the things The Creator put the Mother Earth here for, but we use it in accordance with sacred laws The Creator made...I think the eagle represents that."

When the organizers approached Rudy Clements to speak at the first Eagle Watch, he saw the opportunity to build bridges between cultures and

know how long ago, a great drought overtook the earth. It was during the time when the bird people and all the other animals were the ones The Creator had assigned to take care of the land. For many thousands of years, they took good care of The Creator's land, the earth. And The Creator was very happy with them.

The bird people and all the other animals became lazy and forgetful. They quit carrying out the sacred ceremonies. Soon they forgot them altogether. The

He was a boastful little guy and a braggart. He pranced about and made bold statements about how he could go to the Sun and make him end the drought and save the people. He said, "Let me go to the sun and make him end the drought so that we may live!"

The animal people agreed. Magpie, with his chest stuck out and a smirk on his face, took off like a rocket going to the moon. He wasn't gone very long. When he returned he was no longer flying like a rocket going to the moon. In fact, he was no longer flying in a straight line. When he landed, he wobbled about and seemed weak and out of breathe.

Magpie said, "I couldn't make it very far. The heat is too strong."

Magpie was no longer all white. Some of his feathers got scorched. Today when you see magpie, he has some black feathers and some are still white. Raven spoke up, "I am the One-Who-Makes-Things-Right." But the people knew he was not a humble person. They knew he would use his strength and cunning and not always be truthful to get what he wanted. The people considered him a bully, but they also knew he was very strong and would do anything to stay alive and maintain his power among the people. The people had no choice but to agree with him.

Raven started his journey to the sun. He flew and flew. It was very hot but Raven continued on. The heat was becoming greater and greater. Sun watched Raven getting closer and thought, "Raven is a very strong person." Raven continued flying until his body was very black and his thick claws were thin.

When Raven returned to the people, he exclaimed, "The Sun is too strong, we are doomed." From that day on, Raven became a good person and a strong symbol for the people. Many clans name themselves after him because he tried.

Way in the background was Bald Eagle; he was a magnificent looking bird. He was large and streamlined for speed. He was strong and brave; Eagle was the humblest of all the bird people.

The people said, "Eagle is the only one of us who is strong enough to go to the sun and ask him to stop the drought." They begged and begged him to go. Eagle said, "Sun is too strong. We have forgotten the proper ways of our Creator. He is angry with us. We are being punished."

"What are we to do, Brother Eagle?" the people asked. Eagle answered, "We must remember the old and proper ways of our people. We must remember the songs, the feasts and the laws of life."

Finally a young child began

to sing a song he had heard his grandfather sing. He couldn't remember the whole song. The child said, "We must gather and try to remember what was passed on to us by our grandmothers and grandfathers. We are neglecting Mother Earth and grandfather is taking it from us. That is our punishment. Maybe, if we remember, he will forgive us." Eagle finally agreed to fly to the Sun. He flew and flew. It was getting very hot. He could see the sun getting closer and closer. He was about ready to turn back when he thought, "If I put my wings over my head, maybe I can get close enough to the Sun to speak with him." That is what the Eagle did and today the Eagle has a white head and white tipped tail feathers. Eagle reached the Sun and said, "Sun, my brother, the people of earth are dying because of this great drought. I have been sent to beg you to stop it. It is causing great famine and disease."

Sun said, "The people have forgotten the old ways and The Creator is angry at them. They no longer respect him and the sacred laws. The longhouses are empty and the drum cannot be heard. The people have become evil and wicked. The first food feasts are no longer carried out. That is why this great drought was brought."

The Sun continued, "Because you are his people, he is going to forgive you and let you live, but there will be great change. No longer will Sun sit in the sky all day. Half of each day will be darkness. From now on you will have to work to survive. Some of you will not be able to do that and shall perish. You will no longer be in charge. You will be cared for by a new people, the human people. If they take good care of you, they will live. Moon and stars will assist you during the nighttime. Nighttime will be your rest time. If the human people become as you did, then Earth and the world shall perish forever. You must teach them. When the human people arrive, it shall be your job to offer up yourselves so they may live. That is the message Eagle brought back from the Sun and that is the way it has been since that time.

"Because you are his people, he is going to forgive you and let you live, but there will be great change."

encourage one another to work together rather than try to be more powerful than one another...My way is the best way...and control everybody else."

The big problem for the land, as Rudy Clements sees it, is governmental gridlock. There are so many governmental agencies that are involved in trying to protect their turf - forest, water, land - they forget what they're trying to accomplish.

"As a result, the earth is the one that gets the damage done to it," he says.

Political favoritism is a chief gripe of his where certain individuals or corporations use the land to the exclusion of every-one else.

"I think if the natural sacred laws were followed in governmental decision making," he says, "we'd have a healthier earth."

Even though spiritual guidance and responsibility are key issues in Rudy Clements involvement with Eagle Watch, he hasn't always seen himself as a spiritual man. As a young man he never found the time to become involved in traditional tribal ways. He spent his time getting an education. It wasn't until after graduation from college he became involved in the Washut religion at the Simnasho Longhouse.

"There I began to understand the spiritual responsibilities we have and how all of nature relates to that," he says, "the eagle is the most sacred symbolization of the creator."

pass along some longhouse wisdom.

"As I listen to our elders and become more experienced in reading and sharing with others," he says, "I try to build in positive ways to speak on behalf of the Mother Earth and The Creator in taking care of the Mother Earth."

Rudy Clements admits he gets discouraged sometimes when he sees the way the earth is treated, but he views himself as an optimist. He'd like to see Eagle Watch continue to grow. If he were to return to the event 50 years from now he'd like to see even more eagles flying the skies of Central Oregon. That's not all he'd like to see:

"I would like to see an education observatory where we become nationally or worldwide involved and help, not only Eagle Watch locally, but Eagle Watch all over the world. We would be a good example through cooperation, integration of resources and all people working together...that'd be my hope."

But most of all he'd like to see if the children of today have listened to his words:

"You need to learn to love and respect the eagle. The eagle is very, very important to us as Indian people. It's going to guide your life. If you follow the life of the eagle all the way...you will not only have a strong community, you will be strong people."

THE DAY EAGLE SAVES THE WORLD
A long time ago, we don't

Creator was very angry with them.

He became so angry, he caused a great drought to come over the earth. The Bird people and all of the other animal people began to suffer. The lack of food, water and disease spreading about caused sickness and death. Soon only a few animal people were left.

They paused and gathered together. "What are we to do?" they exclaimed, "How can we stop this? Why is this happening to us?"

Owl spoke up, "We have forgotten the old ways. We have forgotten the songs. We no longer have the feasts. We no longer gather in the longhouse to worship. We fight and cheat one another. We no longer take good care of the land. That is why The Creator is punishing us!" The Owl went on, "Someone must go to the Sun and beg him to stop this terrible drought. Who amongst us is brave enough to do this?"

In those days the Magpie was white just like all the other birds.

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