

RESTORATION



Photos courtesy of Jackie Whisler

GRAND RONDE
RESTORATION DAY
NOVEMBER 22, 1983



Meeting with a Congressman — Tribal members Jackie Whisler (right), Frank Harrison (foreground) and Marvin Kimsey met with Congressman Les AuCoin while in Washington, D.C. AuCoin was one of a handful of politicians in Oregon to take up the cause of the Tribe and really help the people work towards Restoration. Everything Tribal members have today is a direct result of the efforts of a handful of Tribal members and their efforts.

nal territory or on the former reservation.

4. They have maintained their customs and language.

5. The Tribal group is poorer than the surrounding adjacent non-Indian population.

"So there you had it," he told me. "The five or six steps toward Restoration. It seemed so simple, but it wasn't."

And AuCoin was the first person to tell them that.

"When we first dealt with him, he told us about all the work," said Kimsey. "And he told us 'You've got to do the work, I'm not going to do it for you.'"

They had to hold meetings, to prove governmental functions. They had to hold Pow-wows and other rituals to demonstrate the upkeep of culture. They had to certify the blood quantum of members, document those who still spoke jargon, research families and collect numbers on income. They had to pursue grants for funding. Fry bread stands and peddling homemade (by Tribal Elders) jam were some of the notable fundraising activities. At one point, Mercier said, the Tribe had an unsigned deal with United Airlines and Southwest Airlines to provide them with huckleberry jam. That is, until they realized the quantity demanded was way beyond their means.

Community support also had to be garnered. They contacted churches, clubs and scores of organizations, and just about anyone who would give support. They went through all manner of tedious bureaucratic work just to fulfill those obligations. Before steady funding arrived, Kimsey had to quit his job just to devote more time to the effort.

"It was like chasing a rainbow," he told me. "It seemed closer but it wasn't."

But the group got plenty of help from Tribal Elders; either through bake sales or money. Their support was monumental, said Kimsey.

"Ila (Dowd) and Velma (Mercier) helped us," he said. "And Wilson Bobb and Esther LaBonte, they donated money.

"It made you feel pretty good that someone believed in you," he added.

"Sometimes I think the Elders just wanted an excuse to get together," said Whisler. "To them Restoration hopefully meant getting their medication paid for."

But even with all the backing, the goal still seemed unreachable, just always out of grasp. More than once they felt like quitting.

"The hours were long and tedious," Kimsey said. "And there were times I wondered if it was worth it."

"I can remember once I wanted to quit because we didn't get this ANA (Association for Native Administration) grant," Whisler told me. "We thought we had it. But Marvin told me we didn't get it and I cried. It just seemed like this would never happen."

They got over it, and pressed on, taking solace in the slightest sliver of hope. As Whisler told me, the encouragement came sporadically, and when it did, it worked.

"We would be so down sometimes," she said. "But all it took was one phone call from somebody in Salem or (Washington) D.C., telling us we had to do this or that and it would have us all fired up and working for another week."

The occasional workshop would happen, or a conference out of state, and they would have to decide who would go. Funds were that limited.

"We didn't have enough money, so we just sent one person and they would take notes for all of us," remembered Whisler.

Ultimately, another ANA grant came their way for \$60,000 enough to fund the whole operation for a year, and enough for the core members to quit and go full time into Restoration.

"At that time it was enough for all of us," said Kimsey, smiling.

More help materialized, as Elizabeth Furse, Don Wharton and Oregon Legal Services jumped on board and really got the effort going. In a clear reversal of fortune, at one point Kimsey and the others were actually turning down grants. And slowly but surely, with their newfound aid and finances they were building up toward a date in D.C. with Congress.

But other obstacles loomed, among them opposition from Oregon Steelheaders and commercial fisheries, who feared that the special fishing rights likely given to a newly restored Tribe might encroach upon their business. Timber organizations worried federal lands loaded with troves of lumber might go to Indians for reservation land. Even the Bureau of Indian Affairs proved difficult.

"Geez, you'd think the BIA would be your friend," said Whisler. "But they demanded so much from us."

Through political maneuvering, they were able to neutralize opposition or turn it into support. With AuCoin gathering support in the House and Hatfield in the Senate, plus the aid of then Oregon Governor Vic Atiyeh and assorted Polk and Yamhill County Commissioners, CTGR was only a hearing away from reality.

In 1983, Kimsey, Whisler, Kathryn and her son Frank Harrison and her daughter Karen

Askins, along with Elizabeth Furse made the legendary trip to Capitol Hill in Washington. Neither Kimsey nor Whisler have forgotten that. As funds were still nowhere near the abundance they are now, the intrepid group stayed at one Davis House, not exactly a mission, and pretty far from being a hotel.

"My room, as near as I can tell, was a converted closet," said Whisler. "And I had one towel for the entire week. I had to ask for another."

Down the hall lurked a large and noisy Japanese delegation with a fondness for showering together (per Japanese custom, no doubt). Kimsey remembered the presence of Finnish missionaries.

The big day was truly, well...big. Whisler wasn't really prepared for what lay ahead. The plan was originally to have Marvin and Frank speak before Congress and aides, with her looking on not uttering a peep. But Furse had other plans, telling Whisler it was imperative she spoke.

"I freaked out," she said. "I told her there's no way I can speak in front of all those people. I told her I wasn't going to do it."

"She just looked at me and said 'Jackie!'" Whisler told me, imitating Furse with a voice similar to the way a parent might speak to a petulant child.

Later on, while walking down the halls of Congress, Whisler peeked into a side room. Mike Wallace (*60 Minutes*) was conducting an interview with some political bigwig.

"I said to Frank 'Do you know who that is?'" Whisler told me. "I said we should go ask him for support. Frank said 'Are you crazy?'"

They also met with a Senator from Minnesota. She remembered vividly how he explained that some Tribes in Minnesota considered termination one of the best things that ever happened to them.

"We didn't know what to say," she said. "I just said, 'We can't speak for other Tribes.'"

They all spoke on behalf of their Tribe, and what was said you'd just have to ask for yourself. But needless to say, Ronald Reagan signed Bill HR 3885, and it was passed with 57 letters of support and none opposing. And on November 22, 1983 the inception of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde began, 2,200 members in all.

Sadly, nearly everyone who really fought for Restoration has retreated into anonymity. Holmes, Provost, and Mercier have retired. Kimsey passes his days volunteering at the Food Bank or the Grand Ronde Rodeo Commission. Whisler resides in Cultural Resources as a Chinuk teacher for pre-schoolers.

"The truth is, I've no interest in being back there and part of those politics that go on today," said Kimsey. "But I'm glad I was part of Restoration, and like I said, I don't know what would drive a person to do it. But if it had to be done again, I suppose I could muster up the strength."

Whisler reflects rather fondly on it as well. "As good as we're doing now, when I think back to all the struggles then, it was so much fun," she said. "It was so...innocent."

If Kimsey himself has any hard feelings, they are well concealed. He just hopes that some day the recognition due to this crew will come, particularly Whisler, who he thought had been largely omitted in appreciation.

"Not enough is said about Jackie," he said. "I can't even begin to tell you how important she was. Whatever we needed, she always got it done." ■