

Tribal Elder Feature:

Tribal Elder A Leader And A Legendary Rebel

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I'd seen or talked to," said Dean. "I said, 'Which kids made him cry?'"

"I had three or four of them before they could stop me. The superintendent was going to expel me from school until I told him the story."

As Dean remembers, though he said he wasn't privy to the institution's discussions, they stopped tours of the facility after that.

Beverly Ann died at the age of 26.

He told the story of a school shopping trip in Salem. "Hubert gave us \$100 for school." At the store, the owner "called the cops on us and said that we stole the \$100. They thought we were from the Chemawa Indian School.

"The first good fight I had was with some of those Siletz people," said Dean. He referred to one, Thomas Charlie, who "kept running his mouth. He thought he was a badass. Well, I knocked him on his ass."

Dean Mercier has always been a fighter. He even had a Golden Gloves fight, though that career was short-lived. Too many rules, he said.

Still, his patchwork of occupations led him into the white world often enough. "I never felt intimidated by white people," he said. "I was called a half-breed and an onion head."

When Dean was 15, a log truck smacked into the car he was driving and his arm was caught in the misunderstanding. It "near tore it off," he said.

The hospital wanted to amputate, but uncle Hubert was on hand to tell them to save the arm, and Dean emerged from the hospital with his arm, but in a body cast.

"Hubert is why Dean has an arm today," said Christina.

The arm got gangrene, said Dean, and they used maggots to treat him. He was supposed to stay at home, but he wasn't having any of it. Marion Mercier, a Tribal member now deceased, sawed slits in the bottom of the cast so Dean could climb out the window. Which they both did.

It was summer. Marion and Dean took what was left of his cast to the Phil Sheridan Days celebration where a local physician's nurse took a look at his arm and gave him the go-ahead to run around, so Marion drove Dean off in the family's '41 Ford heading for the Yamhill River and a little fun.

"They did the same thing they complain about the kids doing today," said Christina. "Drinking and driving."

Somehow, the bumper of the car caught on the railroad tracks at the bend in the road on the way to Willamina, and the car "upended, ass over front," and landed in the river.

"I heard the splash," said Dean. "I (accidentally) hit Marion with the

cast and knocked him out. I had a hell of a time waking him up. He tried to help me out of the car but he wound up back inside." And there went the rest of the cast as the two made their ways first out of the '41 and then out of the river.

three times as much as the principal himself was making at the time. He nevertheless ultimately earned his G.E.D. "without looking at a book."

Dean told stories about work at a plywood factory, a cannery, buying

found nails in the desks used by kids, he held them after class to repair what they had damaged. They did and the program grew from 68 students when Dean started to 800 when he left two-and-a-half years later.



Photos courtesy of Dean Mercier

Dean's 1931 Chevrolet—Here's the infamous '31 Chevy that Dean Mercier was driving when an accident with a log truck caused him to almost lose his arm.

Dean went through his junior year in high school before taking on the working life full time. The principal came out to see him to encourage him to go back to school.

"All through grade school, I heard about you," Dean quoted Dan

and selling everything from potatoes to junk, cutting and selling firewood, picking hops and fishing.

Dean also worked as a counselor for Indian kids through Oregon State University (OSU) for a time. It was an energy and nutrition

Dean worked for many of the logging concerns here as well as some up in Washington and down in the southern part of the state. He said he put in "all the roads" when he worked for the local Zimbrick logging company.

"I was born in the environment in which everybody works," said Dean. "I did everything. You had to survive."

"One time, we didn't have grocery money, so I went into the junk business."

Back in the late 1960s and 70s, when some 300 commercial dories trolled the shores of the middle Oregon coast for fishermen in need of a boat, Dean had a charter fishing boat, *Running Bear*, a dory, for a time. (He wanted to call it, *Running Bare*, with a bear chasing a naked woman as a logo, but Jerry, his wife at the time, quashed that idea. Tribal Elder Allen George did the final drawing of only the bear.)

Dean told a story of a Hell's Angel or a member of some motorcycle group, who rested a foot on *Running Bear*. "I told him to get his damn sandy foot off my boat," and later his daughter, Jackie Whisler, came riding up on the back of the guy's motorcycle. The guy had brought some beer as a peace offering.

"Clean off them shoes and come on up here for a beer," said Dean.

For many years, he also participated in the Pacific City Dory Days races.

"I took care of that son of a bitch," said Dean, referring to his dory. "I waxed it every week."

He became "overall champion," at



Tribal Leaders Out For Bear—Tribal members Fremond Bean (left) and Dean Mercier shown here with the skin of a bear they killed. Dean and Fremond spent most of their young lives together working and playing in Grand Ronde.

Hyatt, his principal, as saying. "When you left, everybody followed you. You're a natural leader. I wanted you to show others the right thing."

"I didn't pay any attention to that," said Dean, who was making

project that he got through the recommendation of his old high school principal, Dan Hyatt. And this was not the only time that his personality — difficult as he could be — opened doors for him.

On the OSU project, when Dean

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