

back into the nets." He remembers helping a pal drag in a 60-pound salmon.

Dean Mercier recalls Wyams Chief Tommy Thompson showing him a picture of a 115-pound Chinook. "Today, people get a 30-pounder and think they got a big fish."

But Dean also remembers that dip-netting wasn't all that easy.

"The pole holds like a basket," he said, "and (when the fish is in there) it closes like an umbrella. It's more like lassoing."

He recalls first trying it. "I was always six feet behind the fish. You have to throw the net 5-6 feet ahead of them, and you've got to let the net go the length of the fish. You can feel the fish going through it and it's just like setting your hook in sport fishing."

Dean also remembers netting two salmon at once from one of the Celilo platforms when fishing with Tribal member Oren Pichette, now passed on. The current was too swift, though, and Dean's tennis shoes slipped.

"They said, 'Let it go.'"

"I said, 'No.'"

"It took four or five of them fishermen to pull me up."

"I told Oren that's the last time I'm going to let those goddam fish pull me in the water. I went home and got my cork shoes (spiked shoes for standing on logs)."

And then there was Tribal member Hattie Hudson, Dean's grandmother, now passed on. "She loved to fish," he said. "She'd fish at The Ripples (on the South Yamhill River across the road from her home in Grand Ronde) and she'd catch some big trout. She had a bench, and she had her pole and nobody touched her pole."

In later years at the Nestucca River falls, Hubert Mercier recalls putting "a good sized hook on a pole to hook chinook and silver salmon

The fish turned red, Hubert said, because they were in the fresh water too long. "It didn't hurt the meat but you had to scrape the slime off them."

One time, Hubert recalled, "two guys come in raincoats and then we had to go to jail. Dean's dad was the first one to head to jail. I was the next one. They fined us five dollars apiece but we had no money. My uncle, (Tribal member) Jasper Boydson, who has since passed on, had money, and he said he'd pay. "Dean's dad jumped up and said, 'Can we all go home?' and the judge said, 'Yeah, go home.'"

Hubert remembered all kinds of times when they took him and others off to jail for illegal hunting and fishing, sometimes losing a truckload full

when we needed it, maybe that deer would have another generation. The other thing is, we're trying to get so many, we might have three, four deer in our freezer, and sometimes deer go bad. If we would only get that when we need it, none of it would go bad."

LaVerne Hosford remembers hanging deer in a shed "until we got a refrigerator in the 1940s."

"It held for a week or better," she said.

And for a time, Tribal member Irving Tom (Chips Tom's uncle), now passed on, lived with the Bean family. "He'd go fish-



Photo by Toby McClary

"I told Oren that's the last time I'm going to let those goddam fish pull me in the water. I went home and got my cork shoes (spiked shoes for standing on logs)."

~ Tribal Elder Dean Mercier

of fish in the deal, but he said that people were hungry all the time so they hunted and fished all the time, whatever the Oregon laws said.

Tribal member Bobby Mercier is one of the younger generation of hunters and fishers who can't understand why Indians should be expected to limit themselves to seasons and places, as specified in Oregon law and agreed to in the Consent Decree signed by the Tribe around the time of Restoration.

"The original treaties said that we could live off the abundance of the land to take care of our families. We should be able to take care of our families the way our old people did."

Elder Dean Mercier, for one, doesn't believe the Tribe ever had the right to sign away those rights. "Those

ing in Cospers Creek (coming out of the Yamhill River behind the junction). He'd bring home 70-80 trout (you couldn't get that much now), and there'd be enough people in the extended family to eat for two, three days," said Hosford.

Changing Times

While salmon has remained a mainstay in the community, somewhere in the 1950's, 60's and 70's, "venison turned to chicken" at the potlucks, said Elder Dean Mercier.

But change comes slowly to many Tribal families. Even Tribal member Bryan Langley, not yet 40 and one of the younger generation of Tribal hunters, said that he still was raised on venison, and hunts to keep that part

his thumb and first finger less than an inch apart. "I'm about this far from becoming a vegetarian."

He doesn't even care that much about eating salmon anymore. He spent a lot of years "alongside Dean" commercial fishing in the ocean. "Dad and I gill-netted on the Columbia, too," he said. "I guess when you're knee-deep in it all day... I don't know."

Today LaVerne Hosford, who once upon a time hunted with her husband, Fremont Bean, today says that there's a deer and her does living behind the Tribal Housing Authority building. "I hope no one kills them," she said. "They're a beautiful animal."

But many in the younger generation are knee-deep in it now. When Bobby Mercier hunts, he tries to get enough to provide not only for his family, but also for cultural events to keep traditions of the Tribe alive. When the Maoris of New Zealand (see related story, page 4-5) visited Oregon with their weaving arts recently, Bobby and his family provided 210 packs of stew meat for the celebration. Members of the Siletz Tribe provided hand-picked huckleberries.

As Bobby Mercier and Bryan Langley started learning to hunt almost as soon as they could walk, they are now passing the traditions on to their children.

Bobby's boys, Kyoni, 7, and Nakoa, 3, already go out with him to hunt. "They are just thrilled about hunting. They just sit and watch out the windows and watch for deer. I take them around small hills where they can walk. When we get a deer, they're right there, helping me put it in the truck. They help me when I'm skinning it and everything. They just love it. Everything about it. They ask me to cook it. We fry it up, same as my dad and grandfather did."

When Bobby was a boy, he said, "Us boys would go with them and walk where we could until we were old enough to carry a gun and keep up with them. I've been walking in the woods with them since I was six, seven years old." He's been carrying a gun with them and hunting since he was 13, 14. "After that, I was hunting ever since."

While the need was different back in the day, Bobby said that even today, "We live off it all winter. There's no need to buy meat. We make our own hamburger. With some of the extra, we get pepperoni done for the kids." ■

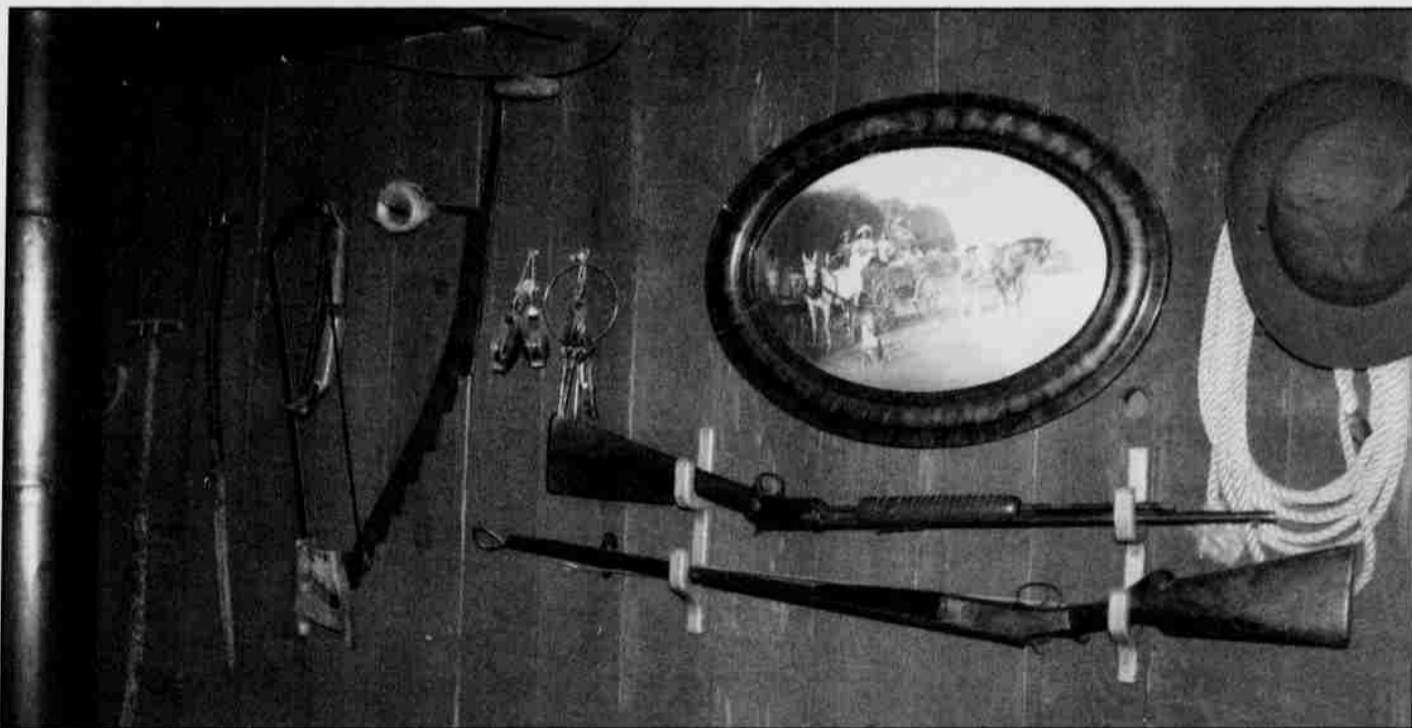


Photo by Ron Karsten

Tools Of The Trade — This wall in the home of Tribal Elder Marvin Kimsey holds memorabilia from the old days, including guns used to hunt, a photo of life for earlier generations, and some of old tools used to dig roots.

are the people's rights and they can't be signed away."

"It was illegal," acknowledged Elder Marvin Kimsey, "but we'd use every scrap of the meat. You should obey the law, but we needed that meat, and (though the state tried to stop Indians from hunting in traditional ways) they weren't that hard to outwit."

Because of the restrictions today, said Bobby Mercier, "we try and get as many deer as we can. The way I see it, we're kind of killing off a whole generation of deer because we can't go back in when we need food. Some get 4-5 deer (when enough tags are available). If we would have only got that

of his family birthright alive.

Time and the casino have brought many changes to Tribal members. The Tribe now provides Elders with food and housing, health care and burial rights. It helps the young attend college, the middle-aged go back to school, and provides employment for many, if many others say not enough yet.

The change has been profound for Elders like Kimsey and the Elder Merciers. Kimsey said that he stopped hunting 30 years ago.

"I didn't need to anymore," he said. "The older you get, I guess, the more you respect life." In fact, he added, holding

when they jumped."

At that time, he said, "There were so many white people there that you could have to wait. The chums would turn red coming in from the ocean and the white folks wouldn't take them. When they left, we went in."