

Raising Children With Stars and Apples

■ "For too long we've been told our ways are bad. Those days are over;" Indian Child Welfare training reaches out to Indian parents.

By Ron Karten

When Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy and her family wake up in the morning, the first thing they do is have a drink of water. The practice was taught to her by her grandmother, who got it from her father, who used plants and herbs for medicines.

"He said," said Kennedy, "when you open up your body in the morning, it's like a new life. It's a form of cleansing for the new day, and a reminder that it is also a time to give thanks in prayer."

"From the time my babies were born," said Tribal member Elaine LaBonte, "they were in baby baskets. These are traditional from southern Oregon and California Tribes. They're not a baby board or a cradleboard. They're shaped kind of like the womb and the baby is tied in there in a sitting position. It mimics the womb, so when they come out, they're still feeling secure. The way the rim is made, anytime somebody wants to hold the baby, they hold the basket, protecting the baby from any negative forces."

LaBonte's children also were named traditionally "by their great, great auntie who was 82 years old. She was driven six hours to be there at the birth to name them and she named them in the traditional language. So that name gives them strength. It named them for the time they were born and they will be named again."

"The other thing that I do," said LaBonte, "since the time they were in the womb, they have been going to ceremonies. Built into that way of life is a respect for Elders, for themselves, for Mother Earth, and to have values such as honesty. That's what they get from ceremony and being around ceremony."

For raising children, the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) recommends traditional ways updated for today's challenges. In Portland last week, NICWA trainer Jillene Joseph taught techniques of "Positive Indian Parenting" to Indian social workers from across the country as well as from Canada and Alaska.

In three days, the program was



Family Values — Colville Tribal member Delsie Greene attended the Positive Indian Parenting training put on by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) in Portland on January 24-26. Greene brought her daughter, Umatilla Tribal member Atosha Greene, who was celebrating her 4th birthday.

still an abbreviated introduction to eight basic techniques first published by NICWA Executive Director Terry Cross in 1987.

"The information doesn't change much," he said, "because it is based in tradition. People want to be grounded in our traditions. It is so important to who they are. (The program also is important) because so much damage was done by boarding schools, and even states and counties (governments)."

In one of the first training sections back in the 1980s, said Cross, an Elder in a four-day training sat quietly for two days. On the third day, "she stood up and cleared her throat," said Cross. She was the kind of person who commanded authority, and when she cleared her throat, everybody turned quiet and listened.

"For too long," she said, "we've been told our ways are bad. Those days are over."

"She sat down," said Cross, "and that was it. That was the last we heard from her during the session."

The curriculum has trained thou-

sands of trainers over the years. *Smoke Signals* is pleased to provide an overview of the ideas contained in the training.

One: Traditional Parenting

To get started, the program opens up the idea that parents can choose the kind of parents they want to be, and the kind of parents they want their children to become.

In traditional Indian communities, children were taught the right way to do things, how to get along with others, and self-control.

Two: Lessons of the Storytellers

"American Indians have been using legends as a way of teaching since time began," according to the program. It describes the differences between storytelling and the electronic entertainment from which many kids today learn their lessons.

Three: Lessons of the Cradleboard

The benefits of using a cradleboard for infants is traditional for many Tribal peoples and is now receiving attention from mainstream society.

Among these benefits:

- Babies are kept close to their mothers
- They allow mothers to do their daily work and still keep their children right with them.
- A tightly wrapped baby feels safe and secure.
- The baby on a board can sleep or observe activities.
- Because the hands are wrapped up, babies use their eyes and ears more. Later in life, babies raised on a cradleboard seem to wait and look over situations before fully reacting.

Four: Harmony in Child Rearing

Many Tribal people believed in balance and harmony among all things. All things large and small have a purpose, and these beliefs are reflected in the way people of a community treat each other.

Sharing is highly valued. Cooperation rather than competition is stressed. Non-interference with others is considered a way to maintain the harmony and balance among people. Anger, mental illness and violence are seen by some Tribes as showing that a person is out of harmony.

Five: Traditional Behavior Management

Children raised with the self-control that cradleboards teach, many need little or certainly less additional training as they grow. The ability to look at and evaluate situations before acting provides many lessons itself.

This behavior management model requires, however, that everybody in the group agrees about the right way to do things. That keeps expectations consistent.

A child who is respected as coming from the spirit world gains a self-confidence and respect that also allows other lessons to be learned.

Teasing and shunning were often used as corrective techniques, with the provision that mistakes were quickly forgotten when the child recognizes and acknowledges the mistakes.

Respect for Elders is also part of traditional behavior management. Discipline is not separate from teaching the right way. It is part of the teaching.

Traditionally, Tribal peoples invoked supernatural forces, believing, for example, that spirits watch over the children.

Six: Lessons of Mother Nature

Nature was always considered a good teacher among Native Americans. Children were taught to observe their natural surroundings and learn from what they saw. All nature was considered a teacher and an ally.

As an example, an Elder teaching a child patience might point to a flower and say that the flower often has to wait for water.

A Sioux, Charles Eastman, used to be sent out in the dark for wood or water, said Jillene Joseph. The night taught him to be still and feel the power of the world around him.

Storyteller Ed Edmo (Shoshone-Bannock Yakama, Nez Perce) was once told as a youth to observe an ant hill. It taught him about teamwork and persistence.

Many turn to nature for solitude and peace, and they come back to their worlds renewed.

Seven: Praise of Traditional Parenting

Traditionally, praise came to children both verbally and non-verbally. And it often came in response to customs or rituals that children learned.

Early on, children would give their first baskets or first fish caught to Elders, who would praise the work, and in the case of fish, they would bone it, cook it and eat it, no matter how small or raggedy the specimen was.

One story tells of a child taught by a grandmother to catch butter-



Open Arms — NICWA Trainer Jillene Joseph instructed a class of about 50 people that are involved in Indian social services programs across the country. Case workers from as far away as Canada and Alaska made the long trip to Portland to attend.

Photos by Toby McClary