



Photo by Travis Mercier

Photo by Toby McClary

History In The Making — At left, Yakama Tribal member Trinity Sohappy watches as a procession of more than 60 canoes pull into Sand Point on Lake Washington near Seattle. Many Tribal vehicles in attendance came painted with words that represented their experience.

Northwest Natives Come Together For A Journey That Unites Them

■ Traditional gathering of canoe families marked by tragedy.

By Toby McClary

"It's OK to shed a tear, this will be the proudest moment you have had this year," said Chinook Tribal member Marvin Dorsey as the Grand Ronde and Chinook canoes approached the final destination point of the 2006 Inter-Tribal Canoe Journey.

The journey wrapped up on Monday, July 31 at Sand Point on Lake Washington with thousands of people waiting on shore to greet their loved ones that had paddled more than 20 miles that day.

The moment that Dorsey explained was proud and the tears that he spoke of were shed.

I began my morning on Monday, July 31 excited to board Grand Ronde's support boat, skippered by Social Services Manager Dave Fullerton, to try and capture the moments of being on the water with Grand Ronde's Canoe Family. Little did I know that not only would I attempt to capture their moment, I would become part of it.

As the canoes approached the Locks in Ballard district near Seattle, my brother, Tribal member Travis Mercier, became ill and needed some relief from paddling. With me being the only other person on the support boat, I was the easy choice.

As I stepped from the boat to the canoe, Dorsey, who skippered the five-man Chinook-made canoe, asked me if I had ever been on a canoe before to which I answered "no."

the other pullers began giving me advice and coaching me through a moment that was a bit scary but most of all it was a teaching of a long-time tradition that could not be



Photo by Toby McClary

"We Are One" — Pictured here is Yakama Tribal member Richard "Bubba" Sohappy, Chinook Tribal members Tahoma Aleck and Tony Johnson and Tribal member Bobby Mercier as they sing for their supper on Sunday, July 30.

"Oh, this is just great," said Dorsey with a slight lack of confidence in his voice.

After our weight was balanced,

taught through words. This was an experience that needs to be learned through actions.

After pulling for about 10 minutes,

I questioned whether or not I had what it took to go on. I questioned whether or not I would hinder more than I would help.

Then we got a break from pulling when the canoes reached the locks. The Ballard Locks are used to maintain the water level of Lake Washington and Lake Union at 20.6 feet above the Puget Sound's low tide. This prevents the mixing of seawater from the Puget Sound with the fresh water of the lakes, and moves boats from the water level of the lakes, to the water level of the Puget Sound and vice versa. In this case, the canoes waited to be raised from the water levels of the Puget Sound to the level of Lake Union.

With the media standing above, the many Northwest Tribes began chanting and had several water fights while waiting for the water level to rise and the locks to open.

There were 67 canoes that passed through the Ballard Locks that morning.

We eventually made it to Sand Point that afternoon. From the locks to the final destination was about 13 miles but the total trip for the day was around 20 miles. Despite being sore and sunburned, the feeling of accomplishment is unexplainable. The feeling of pride is overwhelm-



Photo by Toby McClary

A Chinook Tribal canoe, skippered by Cultural Resources Interim Manager and Chinook Tribal member Tony Johnson, prepares for the final leg of the 2006 Inter-Tribal Canoe Journey.