

Reflections On Tribal Restoration

By Angie Sears, Tribal Mentee

The story of the Grand Ronde people is a difficult story to tell. The Grand Ronde people have a long history of triumphs and defeats; they have a rich Native culture, and a strong will. There are several large families that have remained in the Grand Ronde community, and many elders with stories to tell and knowledge to share. I don't believe that the Grand Ronde story can be told in just one article. There are far too many people to speak with and too many stories to be told.

As I began writing the stories I found difficult to separate myself from the story as a both a writer, and a Tribal member. I am approaching this story with much caution to ensure that I don't offend anyone along the way. But I am also embracing it as an opportunity to learn more about my heritage, and my family — the Grand Ronde people.

My name is Angela Sears and I am Rogue River, Clackamas, and Rosebud — Sioux. My father is Dennis Sears, who is not Native American, and my mother was Patricia Petite-Sears. She was an enrolled Tribal member at termination. My grandfather was James Petite, who was Rogue River and Clackamas, and my grandmother was Rebecca Reynolds, who was Rosebud — Sioux.

I grew up in the small coastal town of Florence, Oregon. When I was a young girl my mother used to bring us kids to Grand Ronde to visit my grandmother. She used to take us to pow-wow's, and keep us involved with the Indian education program in Florence. She did these things to ensure that we knew who our ancestors were, and where we came from.



The people of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde have demonstrated a great sense of heart, strength, endurance, and determination as they fought for many years to restore their pride, their heritage, and their identity as a Native people.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde were formed in the 1850's when the U.S. Calvary began gathering 28 Tribes from Western Oregon, Northern California, and Northern Nevada, and driving them by foot to the Grand Ronde Reservation where they were forced to live.

Among these journeys to the reservation was the journey known as the "Trail of Tears." This was a devastating journey for the Grand Ronde people. On February 23, 1856, several bands of Indian Tribes were driven from the Rogue River Valley at Table Rock to Grand Ronde where they would join other Tribes. This was a 263 mile journey in the end of the winter months. It was cold and wet, and the Indians, both young and elderly were forced to make the trip by foot. The trip would take 33 days to complete and many Indian people would lose their lives along the way.

In February of 1887, the General Allotment, or the Dawes Act was passed and 33,000 acres of Grand Ronde Reservation land was allotted to 270 families as farm land. The idea was to make farmers out of the Indians. The Act allowed Indians to live on their land tax free while it was held in trust for 25 years. At the end of 25 years the land would be transferred from trust status to fee status and would become taxable, in an attempt to allow the families to eventually own the land. In 1901 when many of the families couldn't make the payments, the government declared more than 25,000 acres of reservation land as surplus, and sold it to settlers for \$1.16 per acre.

In 1936, the Tribe was able to purchase residential land under the Indian Reorganization Act, in an attempt to provide homes on the reservation for Tribal members. This plan would soon be set aside, as the federal government had a new plan for the Grand Ronde people.

In 1954, Congress passed a Ter-

mination Act which void all treaties and severed the relationship between Grand Ronde Tribes and the federal government. This meant that the Grand Ronde people would no longer be recognized as Native Americans in the eyes of the government, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and,



Grand Ronde loggers, circa 1950's. From left: James Petite, Melvin Petite, John Petite and Gus Leno.

unfortunately, the eyes of other Indian Tribes. They would lose all rights to their reservation lands, as well as health, education, and housing benefits. This act would prove to be detrimental to the well being of the Tribe both individually and as a whole.

Cheryle Kennedy, Rogue River & Umpqua

I was born in the 40's so I was a child at termination. This was during the days that were called the "CC Days."

During the world war, there was an effort to utilize the skills of the people in support of the war. At that time there was a camp called the "CC Camp." A number of the people from here were sent there for training, and then sent to provide support for the war efforts. We were sent to Portland because my family became welders on the ships for the war. So that took place in the 40's until the end of that era.

My father was an engineer by trade; my father was a Sioux Indian. My parents met at the ship yard, so that was probably around 1942 and my mom married him during that same era.

My father's job as an engineer took

It has been said that Congress presented the idea of termination to the Grand Ronde people as a "good thing." Termination would be a way to alleviate any discrimination or stigmas against them as Indians. They would be mainstreamed into society; allowing them to become upper class citizens, and in a sense, to become "free" people again.

After evaluating the great benefits of termination, the Grand Ronde people held a "vote" to determine if they would go along with the idea of termination. According to the federal government it was a unanimous decision, and the Tribe was terminated. In the early 1980's members of the Grand Ronde Tribe went to Sand Point, where all of the Tribe's archives were stored, and found the original ballot box for the so called "vote." The box had a total of seven votes, but at the time of termination there were a total of 862 enrolled Tribal members. This is the "unanimous" decision the federal government claimed the Grand Ronde people had made.

Cheryle Kennedy, Tribal Council member, Rogue River and Umpqua Tribal member, was among those who found the ballot box. "In my opinion it was all a farce," said Kennedy. "There wasn't an election to terminate ourselves, or an overwhelming agreement for that matter."

During the termination era, many Tribes received large payments in exchange for their land and their rights

as a Native people, but the Grand Ronde people were not among those Tribes. The Grand Ronde members each received a one time payment of \$35; a payment that was supposed to be a replacement for their identity.

Mike Larsen, 58, Chinook and

Umpqua Tribal member, was just six years-old at termination. "I don't think I was old enough to recognize a difference in the area at termination," said Larsen. "I know we got a check, but I don't remember how much it was for. My little brother wasn't old enough to get a check...I think everyone got a new bed."

After termination, the Grand Ronde Reservation was reduced to nothing more than a seven-acre cemetery lot that was maintained by the families during the termination era.

By this time, Grand Ronde was predominately a logging town, and the majority of the families survived on logging incomes.

Russ Leno, 79, Umpqua Tribal member, who started logging at the age of 17, said he didn't really notice a difference in the Grand Ronde community between pre-termination and termination. "Some of the families moved away, but we survived," Leno said. "I was a logger before termination, and during termination; I've been a logger all my life. It's pretty much the main means of support for Grand Ronde citizens."

Leno took a short break from logging in 1945 to enter the service, where he would remain for the next three years. He was shipped to Japan, and served as a personnel/office clerk. Upon completion of his term, he returned to Grand Ronde and began logging again.

The effects of termination took its toll on individual Tribal members and families in different ways. Kennedy, whose educational background is in psychology, spoke of the ill effects that termination had on the Grand Ronde Tribal members. Among the many problems brought on by termination, identity issues were prominent, especially for those who identified themselves only as being Indian.

"Without your identity you're always going to have problems. You'll never fit in, and you will always doubt yourself," Kennedy said. "In my opinion it was a huge obstacle we had to overcome to be at peace with ourselves. In order to be a peaceful person you have to have it from within, and then around your environment. So we weren't at peace." ■

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did take place.

After the 50's, I began to notice an impact because again, my father was an engineer and a lot of the work he did was for different Indian Tribes. So we would go to their reservations while he worked. These Tribes received medical assistance through Indian Health Services, but if we had a need for medical assistance we were denied. Physically I looked Indian, but I wasn't Indian anymore and I couldn't be served there. I didn't understand. I wondered why; what is this?

So there was always for me, and I think for many of the people who identified themselves only as Indian, a big cloud over you that says that's not who you are. Your identity really becomes damaged because you can associate within yourself who you know you really are, but there's this law that says you aren't.

him many places. We traveled through Idaho, Washington and Oregon. We went to various places because he headed up projects, but we always came back here. We never broke those ties. That was the 50's just before termination. We were enrolled here at the time of our birth. It was very important; not only to my mother and my grandparents, but my father. He was Sioux Indian, and he understood the importance of maintaining a connection with your Tribe.

All I remember as a child when termination was looming at us was that there was something terrible going to happen to us as Indian people. I remember my uncle tearfully meeting with the families at our home in Salem. It was awful. He was really heart broken about it, and was starting to feel really futile about whether this was actually going to take place or not. As a child you don't understand all of that. You just know something bad is going to happen to us. So of course termination