

Reflections On Tribal Restoration, Part III

Note: If you missed Part I & II, see the December 1, 2006 and January 1, 2007 Smoke Signals issues.

Talking with many Tribal members about their experiences with termination and restoration has been a great learning experience for me. It has given me the opportunity to meet new community members, as well become reacquainted with people I haven't known since I was a young girl.

In talking with some of the people who were involved in the efforts to restore the Grand Ronde Tribe, I have learned that this struggle was greater than most of us, who were not around at that time, could have possibly imagined.

These people are responsible for restoring our identities as Native people. They have laid the ground work for all the Tribal leaders who have followed, and paved the way for a life of self-sufficiency for many generations to come.

I realize that there were many people involved in the effort of restoration; in fact, there were just too many to mention them all.

I would like to say to everyone who played a role, no matter the size, that your efforts are greatly appreciated and will not be forgotten.

~ Angie Sears

By Angie Sears, Tribal Mentee

After nearly 20 years of termination, a small group of Grand Ronde Tribal members got together and began what would become one of the greatest achievements of the Grand Ronde people.

This group began a fight that would become a decade-long struggle. They fought for recognition. They fought to restore pride, and they fought to restore identity; the identity of their ancestors who once fought a similar fight long, long ago.

This group of people took on the United States government in a fight to restore the federal recognition of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

But what started as a small group soon became a community effort, as many Tribal members came together to represent the Grand Ronde people as a whole and fight for what they knew was right.

Many Tribal members recalled the events of the fight for restoration. As they told their stories, they felt that there were three people who deserved special recognition as the people who were instrumental in the beginning efforts. Those people are Margaret Provost, Marvin Kimsey and Merle Holmes.

The efforts of those three people were immense. They spent many hours rallying the Grand Ronde people who had been spread out across the country. They wrote letters and talked with representatives of Congress to let them know that the Grand Ronde people were still among them. They sent the message that they were still Native Americans and they deserved to be federally recognized as a Native American Tribe.

"My cousins Margaret and Marvin, predominantly Margaret, had an idea about restoring the Tribe. At the time, the Monominees were seeking restoration. They got theirs in the early 1970's. That got Margaret's interest...so she talked with other Tribal leaders and ultimately called a meeting to talk about her thoughts to become a Tribe again," said Cheryl Kennedy, Rogue River and Umpqua Tribal member. "Margaret Provost, Marvin Kimsey, and Merle

Holmes were the first people to serve on the elected council."

Once the meetings began and the Grand Ronde people learned of the idea to be restored, many people came on-board and joined the efforts. Because many families had moved away to find work



Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison was among a group that helped fight for Tribal recognition to restore Grand Ronde's identity and pride.

after termination, there were a lot of people who traveled a long distance to attend the meetings and join in the efforts.

"I was living in Amity when they started having meetings to get the Tribe restored. My Dad called me and told me to get out here and start working for my people. That was about 1973," said Jackie Whistler, Rogue River, Umpqua, Kalapuya, Clackamas, and Chasta Tribal member. "So I started coming to the meetings and was elected Secretary of the Tribal Council at one of the meetings, and from that point I was immersed in it. It was just burning inside of me and I had to see it through."

The group held fundraisers to help pay for the cost of postage,

phone calls, newsletters, and what ever was needed. Eventually the elected Council formed a non-profit organization that would allow them to apply for more grants. It was this effort that allowed them to make many trips to Washington D.C. to testify before Congress, as well as hire five employees to aid in the efforts, and purchase the Depot building for an office space.

Among those hired was Jackie Provost, Rogue River, Umpqua, and Oglala-Sioux Tribal member, who worked as a secretary and organized the efforts to conduct a census of Tribal members.

"We went door-to-door and conducted a census to learn how many Tribal members we actually had living in the community," said Provost. "We set up a trailer to help families register and determine how many people there were."

Provost was also responsible for helping to gain the support of other Tribal leaders. "We went to pow-wow's; that's where I learned to dance," said Provost. "Pauline Ricks from Siletz taught me the protocol. But that's how we gained

was money. Every general meeting was a bake sale or a raffle. People were buying things from each other to raise money. The Elders always gave us their full support. I remember Esther LaBonte; she was on social security and every month she gave us \$20."

So the group continued to grow, and the efforts of the people became greater. They continued their search for Tribal members, and communicated to the Grand Ronde people through the use of a newsletter called "Smoke Signals." The newsletter contained updates of the efforts, announcements for upcoming meetings, and little heartfelt messages to the community.

Members of the group made appearances on local television and radio talk shows to tell their story and talk about the existence of the Grand Ronde Tribe. They shared their culture and talked about why restoration was so important for the Grand Ronde people.

At this time, there were only a few members who were making trips to Washington, D.C. to meet with Congress. It was mostly Kimsey, Holmes, and Harrison. The trio didn't have a lot of money to spend on these trips, so they did whatever they could to economize. They booked "red-eye" flights; stayed in a Bed and Breakfast, where they made their own beds; and avoided taxi's.

Throughout their meetings with Congress, they were given sort of a check list of things they needed to accomplish before getting the Restoration Bill introduced. One of the items on the list was to show support from surrounding communities.

The group organized and went into the communities to begin meeting with residents, business people, and community leaders to ask for their support.

"It was a lot of lobbying for the State and for the locals," said Jackie Provost. "There was a lot of worry about what would happen if we were restored as a Tribe. Local people thought we were going to take their land, or that tax rates would go up...People didn't understand the positive impact that restoration could have on the community."

In an effort to gain their trust and support, the group spent a lot of time educating the community and letting them know that if restored, the Tribe would never take their lands away. It was a long process, but eventually the community began to see the "big picture" and realized that the restoration of the Tribe could help the whole community economically.

Once this fear was lifted, the surrounding community members began to offer their support to the Grand Ronde people. The group received more than 100 letters of support from community members, business owners, state and county representatives, and Elders of the Tribe.

"The biggest problem was that people didn't know what to say in their letters. So we drafted a form

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