

Elder's Feature

Happiness Is Having The One You Love

NORMA continued
from front page

over my check and my dad (Tribal Elder Paul Lafferty, who passed on in 1949) went to town and bought me some stationery. He was proud of me because I was not stingy. I was so happy."

Even today, that generosity continues in the quilts and other crafts that she makes almost every day to give away — maybe at an Elders Honor celebration, or maybe to friends and relations.

"All the stuff that I'm making, I'm doing it on my own," she said. "I have almost \$400 tied up in it. I want to make sure they get something nice."

She learned to quilt by watching her grandmother Tilmer Leno, her mom Elizabeth "Liz or Lizzie" Leno Lafferty, and her aunt Agnes Mercier. They used to sit together and quilt.

"Now, I've made a lot of quilts in my life. I gave one to Margaret with the blocks painted with horses."

For most of her adult life, Lee and Dale traveled up and down the Pacific coastline "picking brush," she said. They found plant life they could sell. "And it was a pretty good living."

They sold salal, pine cones from Ponderosa pines ("we got four cents each for them; we picked up so many that the pick-up was piled high over the top with them"), horse tails ("they remind me of snakes"), ferns, and huck brush.

"I love to go through the woods and look at stuff," she said. "I used to peel bark with my dad. I worked hard with my dad. And my brother couldn't beat me."

All kinds of things interrupted Norma and Dale's work and sent them packing from one place on the coast to another. Florence, Bandon, Coos Bay, and Reedsport, she said.

One time, the state stopped the picking of salal trees because those who did not know how to pick them took too much and killed the trees.

"We just took the tips," said Lee. "If you do it right, they'll come back."

When the state stopped the practice, the Lees moved up to Washington state. While they were there, the explosion of Mt. St. Helens sent them on the road again.

"Mt. St. Helens blew and run us out of there and back to Bandon picking brush. They liked the way Dale and I worked (in Bandon). They loved our stuff."

Listen to this travel style. It set up the kind of adventures they shared.

"What we used to do on the highway," she said, "Dale would just say, 'Which way?' and we'd end up all over Oregon. That's how I went to Pendleton for the first time. Then the car turned toward California and that's the way we'd go."

"We'd make money and instead of

running to the bars, we'd travel. It was just the two of us." They never had children.

But for all the traveling Lee enjoyed over her lifetime, it was only three years ago, to the Gathering of the Nations in Albuquerque, that she flew in an airplane for the first time.

"Guess what I got," she said after a recent lunch at the Community Center, "a certificate. They all clapped on the airplane. Everybody just clapped. It's hanging on my wall by the kitchen."

Her own childhood memories include one when she was very little and crawling around the barn at Tilmer Leno's place. "A cow kicked me in the head. You get behind them and they'll do that," she said. "He kicked me clear out of the barn."

Her childhood memories also include work and crafts. "I took care of seven kids when I was in my teens," for a neighbor who lived in Otis, she said. "The father was an alcoholic; my dad was scared to leave me down there. He checked on me a lot."

Lee's twin sister, Geraldine, was 16 when she died of tuberculosis at Cushman. "I was 18 when they let me go to Cushman to work. I wanted to do something," said Lee. She worked there until a car wreck



Norma (right) with O'Dell Bushnell, who owned the company that bought brush from Norma and Dale for many years.

shattered her leg.

"When it's cold and rainy, it still gives me fits," she said.

Through it all, she remembers in her dad, a man who could do anything. "He was crafty," she said. He used to take deer heads and carve and mount them. He used to take the feet and make hat racks out of them.

In school, she said, "they wanted to jump me two grades but my Dad said, 'Don't jump her. Give her a little of both (levels). I want her to

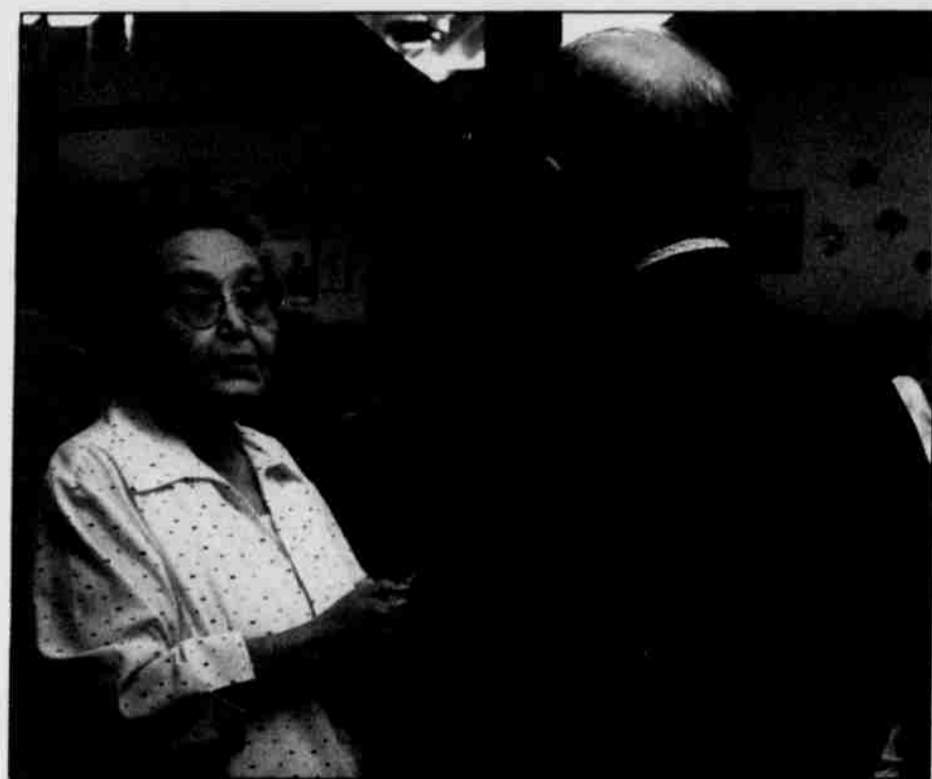


Photo by Ron Kartten

Norma Lee talks with Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski at the Tribal Community Center during his visit to the Tribal campus on May 11.

get all that comes in between.'

"My father was smart. He was a genius.

"Dad used to go hunting. We were poor and he'd stay out there until he got one for us. He was a good dad. He and Mom would go hungry to

ma Tilmer's. She'd hold church in her home. After church, the Elders ate first, and then we came in.

"The crick across the road (Agency Creek), that's where us kids were baptized. (Tilmer Leno lived up on a hill above the creek at Hebo Road).

"We enjoyed it at her place," said Lee. "There was a great big oak swing, and that was the first thing we'd run for (to get there) before the other families.

"We played in the hayloft."

Cousin and fellow Tribal Elder Val Grout remembers about growing up with Lee, "We used to play at the mill (Murphy's Mill) all the time or on the pond. I learned to skate on the pond across from Grandma Leno's. There was a watchman who used to get us if we got too crazy.

"There was also a cook shack by the mill and we'd get goodies there. We'd do chores (for the cook) and she'd give us something."

When we were young," said Tribal Elder Bob Leno, "she used to give Ken (Norma's brother Kenneth Lafferty) and me hell all the time."

The Lees have had dogs for many years. They got their first dog, Pug, when they were living in a small apartment in Coos Bay around 1965. Pug lived to be 18, and for the last three years of its life, it demanded (you heard that right) a Baby Ruth candy bar every day.

The family dog today, Rowdy, has followed in Pug's footsteps, expecting chocolate milk every day. "I keep cutting it down (the amount of chocolate milk) every day," said Lee, "but Dale doesn't know."

"We give them stuff we shouldn't, but Dale says they like it."

And Rowdy starts running back and forth to the bedroom in the early evenings trying to encourage Dale to go to bed early.

Earlier, for many years, they had a cocker spaniel called Buttons. A

Photo courtesy of Norma Lee