

'An example of love, pure love'

WHISLER continued
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sons Doug and Mike into the world. They divorced a few years later.

Jackie married Rob Whisler on Dec. 8, 1990, in Gresham, and also shared her life with Rob's children, Jimmy Whisler and Angie Whisler Knott, both now married.

She passed away on Dec. 3 in Lincoln City, where she lived for the last 23 years.

"Mom helped raise Rob's kids," Doug said. "She filled some of the void that she missed with us. I feel good that we were able to share what we had with her with the others."

Cousin and Elder Mark Mercier said he remembers the time both their parents were not home and Jackie made popcorn in a frying pan. Without a lid. He talked about her serious side concerning parenting and her adventurous side with hobbies, such as skydiving.

She also enjoyed weekend camping trips to Sand Lake, hunting in eastern Oregon, playing games and video poker, and spending time with her mother, Jerry, before she passed away.

"She was always there for me," said Tribal member Sam George.

When Tribal members organized fundraisers for Jackie during her long battle with cancer, Christine Mercier said, "She said she had no idea that so many people cared."

"Jackie was an example of love, pure love," Tribal Elder Buddy West said.

She was someone who "said yes to life," said Tribal member Marion Mercier. "She had boundless energy."

Tribal Council member June Sell-Sherer said she remembers "what a wonderful person Jackie was," and how she made Chinook Wawa language classes "fun."

"My sister, LeVeta, still has the set of flash cards that Jackie made for her in that first class," Sell-Sherer said.

Flutist Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach played "Butterfly Visit" from his "Seven Rabbits" CD at the celebration of life, and Sell-Sherer reminded the Tribe that Reibach dedicated the CD to Jackie. "It is in all the cancer treatment centers



Photo by Peta Tinda

Jackie Whisler's first year with the pre-school Chinook Wawa language immersion program was in 2002. On her lap are Tribal members Cameo Kester (left) and Shayla Ulestad-Espinoza. To their left is Tribal member Logan Bobb, and to Logan's left are Tribal members Michael Reyes (in back) and Trent Finley, with his back to the camera.

across the United States," she said.

Jackie's supervisor in the language department, Tony Johnson (Chinook), said, "Jackie was my boss. I was not Jackie's boss."

"We don't have to look very far back to remember great people in our history," Johnson said. "She earned the right to be a big person around here, but she was humble."

"You never heard anything bad about her," said Christine Mercier. "She touched everybody's heart."

"One thing she wanted more than anything in the world is for her family to come together and be one."

Christine remembers the family being with Jackie as her life drew to a close at age 56. "Here are these three big men (husband Rob, and sons Doug and Mike) talking to her with such compassion, wiping her forehead and her cheeks, kissing her forehead."

"We'd do anything for her," Doug said.

Jackie's employment with the Tribe, starting in 1986 as a contract health clerk, was among the longest of any Tribal employee, said her father, Dean.

But Jackie was working for the Tribe's Restoration long before that. Along with her father and the others involved in the effort —

Elders Marvin Kimsey, Margaret Provost and Merle Holmes, who passed on in 2004 — she kept persevering, continuing to work at it in countless ways for almost 10 years until success came in late 1983.

"She helped write the first Administration of Native Americans grant for the Tribe," said Bob McElderry, the Tribe's grant writer today.

Jackie served in many positions with the Tribe, from Tribal Council secretary to Tribal Council member to her last position as a Chinook Wawa immersion language teacher for pre-school students. In her honor, the students performed at Jackie's celebration of life.

Of those early years, Jackie herself said how her life changed when she became involved with the Restoration effort.

"I had been a stay-at-home wife," she said in a Restoration video produced by the Cultural Resources Department for the Grand Ronde cultural history exhibit shown between Spirit Mountain Casino and the lodge.

Then her father, Dean, called. "You need to get out here and work for your people," he said.

That was the beginning of a new phase for Jackie. "We had a teepee village behind the Seaway Market," she said. She made huckleberry

jam at home for fry bread bake sales.

"Restoration took away time from our Mom," said Doug. "She was always saying it would pay off in the long run."

There were endless meetings she hosted and attended.

"Mom would make sure things got set up and we were in the gym playing basketball," Doug said. "Sometimes there were so few people there wouldn't be a meeting."

"I don't think we would be where we are as a Tribe without the hard work my Mom did. I don't want to lessen what others

did, but I'm definitely proud of what my Mom did.

"Mom was the type that didn't go out looking for credit or recognition. She didn't need to be always recognized. She did it not for reward but hoping that we would get where we got."

But she knew what she wanted. In the Restoration video, she said, "I wanted our land base back. I wanted my grandparents and my kids to feel some sense that they knew it was owed to them, that they had a right to it, and I wanted them to live it and feel it."

She is survived by her husband, of Lincoln City; four children, Doug and Mike Colton (married to Daphney) of Grand Ronde, and Jimmy Whisler (married to Amy) and Angie Knott (married to Nathan) of Lincoln City; father and stepmother, of Grand Ronde; brother, Harold Dean Mercier of Highland, Calif.; sister, Cheryl Carl (married to Bill) of McMinnville; uncle, Pete Mooney of Grand Ronde; stepfather, Dennis Noyes of Otis; seven grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her mother, Jerry Noyes.

A recital of the rosary was held Dec. 6 at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Grand Ronde. After the celebration of life and graveside ceremony on Dec. 7, a meal followed in the Tribal Community Center. Contributions in her memory can be made to the American Cancer Society. In honor of Whisler's legacy, Tribal offices were closed Dec. 7.

Doug said he remembers family camping trips.

"She was a good camper," he said. "She was the organizer. She got things ready to go. She took charge of things, made sure things got done. She was the ringleader of everything, the whole family."

After the Rosary held for Jackie in St. Michael's Church, Doug recalled a particular moment.

"We're ready to bring in Mom's casket," he said, "and I found myself waiting for her to get things going."

Dallas Mortuary Tribute Center handled arrangements. Online condolences can be left at www.dallatribute.com. ■



Photo by Ron Karten

From left, drummers Lonnie Havanak (Siletz), Bubba Sohappy (Yakama), and Tribal members Nick Atanacio, Bobby Mercier and Travis Mercier honored Jackie Whisler on Dec. 7 at the Tribal cemetery.