



25th Restoration commemorative issue

ATTORNEY continued
from page 16

things, President (Richard) Nixon in 1970 issued the very first Indian self-determination statement. So the tenor and the attitude in the government, that is the Executive Branch and in Congress, was changing in terms of looking at and seeing what a mess they had made of Indian policy and Indian administration. ... Therefore, the consciousness, if you will, about that issue was changing. People were just simply more aware of the concerns of minority people; particularly, for our purposes, of Native people in their own community.

So Congress in 1977 adopted the Restoration Act of the Siletz Tribe. In 1973, the Menominee Tribe was the first Restoration and that seemed to

have broken a hold that Termination or that federal assimilation had on that policy. In 1977, with the Siletz being the second Restoration, it was like, "OK, Menominee was not unique, but

actually the beginning. Now that Siletz has been restored, it is important to keep moving." So, the other Tribes said, "Yes, we want this, just like the Menominee and the Siletz have achieved."

Not everyone jumped on board, but we had a much more open atmosphere toward accepting the idea of Restoration. There was still a lot of work to be done and people were getting organized around doing just that. They were doing good on their own. People were paying for themselves. People like Jackie Colton, who would have never gotten on the radio before, got on and explained what it was that was going on and why it was so important. Others had bake sales, trying to help pay for this.

When we had to go back to Washington, D.C., Merle Holmes paid for his own ticket. This was the kind of stuff that was going on. People were seeing that this was important, and it was certainly important to them personally. But more importantly to the future of the community and to the future of the Tribe.

Q. I have read about the Tribe's Restoration that the late '70s was kind of the treading water situation, and then finally when the Tribe received an ANA grant to help, people actually quit their jobs and worked on this effort full time, and it seemed like a dam was broken through. Was that the

period where they were going around talking to the community to elicit local support?

A. It is exactly as you suggested in that it wasn't that there was no progress; it's that there was a lot of groundwork that needed to be done. One of the things that had to be done was what you have just identified. We had to find funding for the Tribe, we had to have more people putting more time and effort into this, and the ANA (Administration for Native Americans) was the place to get it. Well, one of the places. We went all over the place. We went to the Catholic Church. We asked everywhere for help with funding. The ANA was one of the primary focuses.

If they had given us funding in 1978, it wouldn't have made anything go any faster. People simply weren't prepared yet to go there.

I mean they, the local community in particular, had to keep hearing this over and over again to become used to it, to be able to come to some level of understanding and acceptance in their own sense. What they think is going on and whether they fully understand it or not, they have to come to some understanding for their own purposes.

You know, not everybody agreed; there were certainly people who opposed it. Opposition meant that there was just a lot more work to be done with and around those people. And, just as importantly, while I have given you the core of people that were working on this, there were others that had to work in their own communities to spread the word and to recruit greater participation. There is Kathryn Harrison. She was a part of that, and she brought an enormous amount of credibility and focus to this leadership. She was a very important part of coming along and adding to the Restoration effort a little later down the road. She became an icon for the Tribe and its efforts. She continues to be very important part of the history of the Tribe.

Q. Can you talk about how the work was divided between yourself and Elizabeth Furse as far as working on this effort?

A. Well, we worked very closely together so there really wasn't an awful lot of division. A lot of what was important to moving us forward was Elizabeth had been to law school. She had not graduated, she was not a lawyer, but she understood the law and she was terrific at community organization. She was terrific at talking to people in positions of power in the Legislature,

and in other places, Congress, etc. She just had a real touch for that. She knew she had access to or knowledge of an enormous amount of resources.

For example, when we went back to D.C., we stayed at a Friend's house ... a house where we were able to find a place for all of the Tribes to stay so that it would be less expensive for them. It was our first trip back to D.C. to go and visit the jurisdictional committees in Congress, in the Senate and to talk to the local congressmen and senators about what was going on here. Each Tribe had to talk to their own congressman; they did not really share that many in common. She knew about resources and was very good about getting them together. She was terrific in the community, and she really had a touch for talking to and understanding people.

We had to put together a lot of educational material; this was something I was not particularly good at. She understood media, and she, with a friend of hers, put together a slideshow that talked about Termination. I did a good bit of the writing, but they actually put together the slideshow that would give people a visual to follow and to understand that this was a very difficult story. This is not a story that people intuitively understand. This is a story about what happened to Tribes; we have to be able to overcome people's misconceptions about the way the world was. About how "The West was won." About how the cavalry came in and defeated the Indians, how they began to disappear and how they became the vanishing America, that myth.

We had to start by saying "No, that's not the way that it was." It's not like telling people a story that they're going to hear for the first time. You have to overcome their misconceptions and turn them around. You have to get them to understand what really went on and why this is important. She was very good at putting together that kind of information and helping people to understand what this was all about.

Particularly the people we needed most to understand. The congressmen and their staffs, the people in the state Legislature, the local government, people in positions of relative influence; the churches, folks that you do not usually think of; the Ecumenical Council that had its seat in Portland, Oregon.

Q. Was there a moment or event that felt like, yes, we finally have accomplished this or yes, this is going to happen?

A. Well, we all believed, certainly I always believed, this was going to happen. It was never a question in my mind, or in our minds, that this was going to happen. It was in our view inevitable. It was just a matter of just when and how. I left to go to work for the Navajo Tribe in 1983, so I left before it was done. It was after that that Elizabeth

took over and saw it through to its conclusion.

Q. How did you feel when you heard about it?

A. Well, I was elated, very happy. I knew how much it meant, I knew what it took to get there. I knew how much personal sacrifice and commitment, as well as effort, it took the people of the Tribes, specifically with respect to the Grand Ronde. All of the Tribes individually in their settings, but for Grand Ronde what an enormous effort it took, how much heart it took. I mean endless meetings. I know that you may have talked to the very young people, but the people who were children at the time will tell you that they almost began to hate the Tribe because it took their parents away from them so much, just to do all of this.

That is just a little window into the level of commitment and effort it took in the behalf of the community to get this done. The people who were actually there did that, the names I gave you and others, of course, but certainly the names that I gave you were the ones that were most involved through the entire process, and worked the hardest to get this done. Knowing what a sacrifice they made, this was so richly deserved. It was important to them, and to their future. It was terrific.

Q. Is there something that you think Tribal members should know, say 25 years from now, about this effort?

A. I think that this is a story that needs to be told and remembered, so that people understand their own history of where they came from and the roles people played. Not that there is some reason to canonize these people, but to understand that they came from a place where people were committed to something that they had no reason to believe could be done on a rational basis. But they had so much commitment and belief that it had to be done that they were committed to the thing until it was done. As a result of that, it was done. It was their belief and commitment that made it get done, because at every turn they could have easily turned away.

I mean, the first time they went to see the congressman, he basically said, "No, I'm not going to risk my career on this. You have to do all the work." The kind of work he was telling us to do was something that we were not accustomed to doing. They all had to learn how to do it. They all had to take enormous personal risks in terms of who they were and to get out there and do things that they were very uncomfortable doing. But, they understood that it had to be done.

So that story of personal commitment and personal sacrifice, I think, is an important touchstone for understanding who the Grand Ronde people are and where they came from. ■