

'We started grade school together'

**FRIENDS continued
from front page**

the fireplace and traded memories and stories of growing up together, making their way in the world without each other and then being reunited again where they can be surrounded by family, friends and caring staff.

Joined by some of their daughters – Penny DeLoe and Sharon Freund for Val and Christine and Kalene Contreras for Beryle – the duo traded stories that proved their commitment to each other was genuine and lifelong. There were moments of laughter and crying.

Both are bound to their wheelchairs and each is afflicted in some way by the toll of working so hard for so many years, but their eyes still sparkle and their minds are sharp and crisp and quick to tell certain memories, especially if it shined a new light on either party. Their daughters relished in the memories, as well as the feigned debate on whether these were the type of stories they ought to be sharing with the world.

"We've known each other since the time we were little," Val said. "We started grade school together. We were good friends and we grew up together."

Beryle remembered an incident that took place outside of a dance in Rose Lodge when the ladies were young. It involved another girl making eyes at Val's eventual husband of 43 years, Pete.

"We don't want to tell him that story," Val said, but laughed as Beryle continued the story anyway.

Val remembered the two girls picked beans and berries and eventually hops together with their families.

"That is how we earned our school clothes," Val said. "I probably ate more berries than I picked."

Beryle said she remembered camping in the hop fields to work.

Eventually, the young ladies began having their own families and each moved away from Grand Ronde following the relocation years. Each began their own path of raising children, caring for their husbands, working their careers and changing the world.

Grout spent 14 years on the Grand Ronde Tribal Council off and on from 1987 through 2004 and is well-known throughout North-



Contributed photo

Tribal Elders Val Grout, left, and Beryle Contreras in sixth or seventh grade. The two went to school together in Grand Ronde.



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Elders Beryle Contreras, left, and Val Grout pose for a photo with Santa, aka Tribal Elder Steve Bobb Sr., during the Elders Christmas Party held at the Elders Activity Center in December 2015.

west Tribes for her dedication to preparing Tribal-event meals. She was involved in preparing meals for the Tribe's annual powwows, Restoration celebrations, Christmas and holiday meals, and literally hundreds of funerals over the years.

Grout served on Tribal Council before it was a paid position. She used to hold bake sales to raise gas money so she could drive back and forth between Tillamook and Grand Ronde in the early years right after 1983's Restoration. She is also dedicated to helping with fundraisers for children.

Contreras relocated to Portland and then to San Francisco while raising her family. After attending beauty college, she eventually found herself part of the Native American activism movement that has become legendary since it occurred

spent three months living on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay during the famous Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. The occupation of Alcatraz happened when 89 Indians lived on the island from November 1969 until they were forcibly removed by government troops in June 1971.

During her time on Alcatraz, Contreras became involved in Indian activism and got to know John Trudell, Russell Means, Richard Oakes and Wilma Mankiller. Mankiller, who went on to become the most powerful Indian woman in the country as principal chief of the

Cherokee Nation, and Contreras became close friends.

In 2005, Mankiller reunited with Contreras when she visited Grand Ronde. The two women spent the day together and toured the Tribal campus and housing units, sharing many of their stories along the way.

Grout said she is continually in awe of everything the Tribe has accomplished over the years since Restoration.

"I'm amazed at how far the Tribe has come and I'm so proud of our Tribal leaders for leading us to where we are," said Grout. "And all of our staff that have backed us up throughout the years. I'm so thankful that we had the foresight to build the Adult Foster Care program because that's my home now."

DeLoe remembers letting Val know she would be coming to live at the foster care lodges in Grand Ronde with deep emotion.

"When I got to tell her she could come home that was the best day because this has been her life since the time we were reinstated," said DeLoe. "This is what she lives for. For me to be able to tell her was amazing."

"I think by creating the Adult Foster Care facility we are bringing years of our culture back to where we are. So it truly does mean a lot to have them here back at the Tribe and be well taken care of."

Christine Contreras said their family was cautious to have Beryle return to live in Grand Ronde and that the whole process of them checking it out took about a year.

"She is well taken care of," said Christine. "We're just so lucky to have a foster care program where she can still be with friends like Val. A lot of the people that work there are like granddaughters and grandnieces and we know they love our parents and our grandparents. That's a big deal to us."

Val repeats that she is very proud of all of her children and that their father – Pete – was also very proud of the children.

"I married the best man in the world," Val said. "And I had him for 43 years."

Beryle gives credit to Val for much of her good fortune.

"I think Val was the reason I made it on this Reservation," says Beryle. "Because she was so good."

Together again. Childhood friends reunited. Both surrounded by family. Both winking at each other at just the memory of it all. ■

Celebration of life potluck to be held for Tribal Elder

A celebration of life potluck for Tribal Elder Richard "Mushy" Ray will be held at 4 p.m. Saturday, March 5, at the Elders Activity Center. For more information, call the Elders Activity Center at 503-879-2233. ■

Adult Members' Trust and Minors' Custodial & Rabbi Trust Funds

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