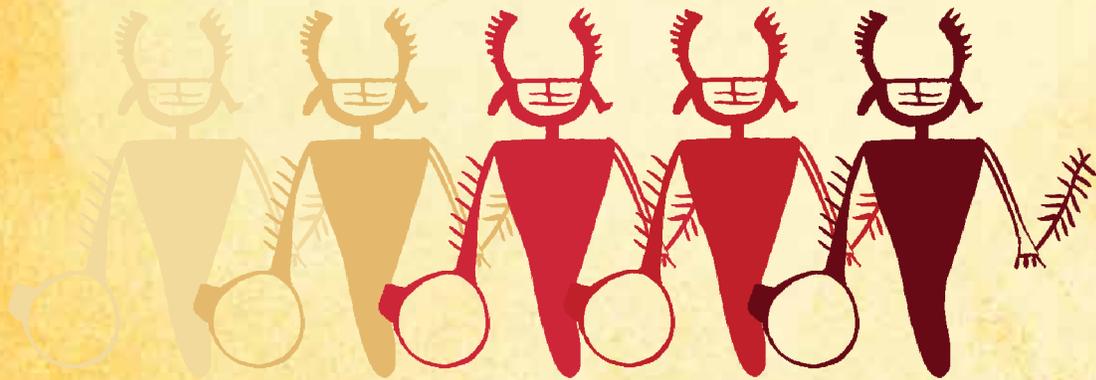


“You know how some men are quick and strong and know the things to do, how people like to do things for them, and how they have a gift for getting everyone cheerful? Well, those men were leaders.”

—Patrick Miguel (Quechan)

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER



CALIFORNIA INDIAN CHIEFTAINSHIP IN THE MODERN WORLD

A Special Supplement to News from Native California





LEADERSHIP TRADITIONS IN NATIVE CALIFORNIA AN IMPERFECT ART FOR AN IMPERFECT WORLD

Malcolm Margolin

IN 1930, William Raganal Benson, a Pomo basketweaver, storyteller, and tribal scholar from Clear Lake, told linguist Jaime de Angulo how the first “chief” came into being. The story is embedded in Benson’s wonderful account of creation:

He lived in the north, the Old Man, his name was Marumbda.

He lived in a cloud-house, a house that looked like snow, like ice.

And he thought of making the world.

“I will ask my older brother who lives in the south,” thus he said, the Old Man Marumbda.

“Wah! What shall I do?” thus he said.

“Eh!” thus he said:

NO WONDER MARUMBDA was puzzled. The world had never existed before, and it was hard work figuring out how to make it happen. Marumbda and his elder brother, Kuksu, had to create and then destroy four different worlds before they got it right. Humans were especially troublesome. Marumbda fashioned them as best he could, setting them up to lead good lives, but they quickly descended into wickedness and incest. Marumbda kept trying, giving them the knowledge of how to do things right, but they always forgot, they always threw the knowledge away. We can picture him saying, “Wah! What shall I do?” Then the solution burst upon him. He approached a village where the people were gathered at the entrance to the dance house. He singled out one man from among the crowd

“Stand here,” he said to him.

**The world had never
existed before, and it was
hard work figuring out
how to make it happen.**

Sophia Thompson was leader of the village of Pikliku, near modern-day Groveland, having inherited the position from her father. Photo taken in 1923 by E.W. Gifford, courtesy of the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley.

**And so the chief's
duties were set in
primordial time, their
roots long and deep.**

Tom Williams, who delivered the oration about how the young chief will do the same as his father. When he spoke at ceremonial gatherings, he knelt on the floor near the middle of the ceremonial roundhouse. As he spoke, he bowed his head so low that his beard often touched the ground, and all the while he would rock back and forth rhythmically, swinging his fist horizontally in front of him to emphasize his speech. Photo taken in 1913 by E.W. Gifford, courtesy of the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley.

“Let me teach you!
“You will be the head-chief of these people.
“You will teach them.
“You will make plans for them.
“You will harangue them.
“You will take care of them.
“This is your village.
“And they in turn will take care of you.”
Thus he spoke.

And so the chief's duties were set in primordial time, their roots long and deep. Encoded in Benson's account are chiefly obligations that would have been familiar not only to traditional Pomo leaders, but to chiefs all across native California: taking care of a tribe's food distribution, event planning, feast hosting, and speech making. Of course, specific leadership functions varied across the rich array and incredible diversity of societies in California. But as the story of Marumbda demonstrates, the chiefly duties and powers were all rooted in an ancient past.

It is hardly unusual for rulers to derive legitimacy and power from divinities. Throughout the world and throughout history, kings, pharaohs, and emperors have claimed divine authority, sometimes even divine lineage. The kinship of rulers and gods is so pervasive that often “God” or “Creator” is described as a sort of mega-chief, “King of the Universe,” as it were. But perhaps it would be helpful to reflect a bit on the nature of California worldsmakers. In the Judeo-Christian tradition and many other traditions as well, the world was made by an omniscient, omnipotent God who commanded a world into being and with consummate authority endowed it with its powers and traditions. The creation of the world according to Native California accounts was entirely different.





Chief Hunchup with his wife and family at Kutba, along Highway 49 south of El Dorado, 1904. Photograph by C. Hart Merriam, courtesy of Bancroft Library.

Whether the world was made by Coyote, Silver Fox, twins born of an egg, beings in cloud houses, or entities known as “Earth Initiates” there seems built into the very fabric of the world a tentativeness, a mystery, a confusion. The divine creators of the California Indian world were not decisive chief executives who said, “Let there be light,” and with a snap of the divine finger light appeared. Rather, like Marumbda, they seemed a bit at a loss. Faced with the momentous task laid before him, Marumbda said it best: “Wah! What shall I do?” To the extent that the chief of a tribe reflects this root of his authority, it might be helpful to realize that perfect knowledge and unlimited power are not part of the package.

With perfection off the table, what then was expected of a traditional leader? As with everything else in native California, there was astonishing diversity. Smaller villages and communities were often simply extended families, and leadership was invested in the family patriarch, or in many cases the family matriarch. Clusters of smaller villages might look to a larger village, which served as a ceremonial and trading center, and the leader of the larger village might be seen as the “big chief” of the region. Other groups had a more complex and formalized political structure. For example, the Pomo village of Pdahau, perched along the foam-carved coastline of Northern California at the mouth of the Garcia River, had three chiefs and two sub-chiefs.

In general, but not always, it seems that leadership ran in certain families. The Coast Miwok chief, or *hoipu*, was advised by four elderly women, and was himself “bossed,” in the words of elder and dreamer Tom Smith, by a female chief called the *maien*. She was technically head of the women’s ceremonial dance house, but her advice, orders, and guidance, were looked to above everyone else’s. An early visitor to California, Stephen Powers, claimed that the authority of a Karuk or Yurok chief was quite limited. He could “state the law or the custom and the facts, and he could give his opinion, but he could hardly pronounce judgment. The office was not hereditary: the headman or captain was generally one of the oldest, and always one of the astutest, men of the village.”

With perfection off the table, what then was expected of a traditional leader? As with everything else in native California, there was astonishing diversity.

As with everything else in traditional native California, the closer one looks, the more varied and complex things get, the more difficult to make any generalizations. Yet this brief introduction is being put together in a year of an American presidential election, and even the most cursory survey of leadership in native California points to some interesting and thought-provoking comparisons.

CHANGE AND STABILITY

In modern societies, those vying to be leaders generally promise change, something new. Someone running for president or governor must present himself or herself as dynamic and forward-looking. But this was hardly the case in traditional California communities. An early phonograph recording from the 1920s or 1930s captures a speech given by a man named Molestu (Tom Williams) at the Mewuk community of Chakamichino; in translation, the speech reads:

The young chief is going to do the same as his father used to do.

Now all of you men get ready.

Put those poles up for him.

All of you men get ready.

Have the ceremonial house ready just the same as for his father.

The young chief is going to do just the same as his father did.

He is going the same way as his father did.

It is just the same, just the same.

CHARACTER AND SECRECY

Another interesting point of comparison is the matter of “character” In modern society, we generally choose leaders whom we do not know personally, especially for national or statewide offices, but often for local offices as well. These leaders are presented to us through the media, their images often manufactured by political consultants. This leads to a deep suspicion that the candidate who is being presented as a paragon of good sense and virtue is really a monster with secrets, and a good part of a modern campaign is to dig up dirt on your opponent and expose his or her history for what it “really is.”

In the small tribal communities of traditional times, though, everyone was well known. There was no hiding; the chief did not live in a palace or a gated community, his or her past hidden, his or her image manufactured and presented carefully to the public. The chief lived with others, his dwelling not much different from those around him, his character and behavior well known to all.

POWER AND PERSUASION

In modern western societies, politicians make laws and have at their disposal courts, a police force, and if necessary an army that can be used to enforce the laws they pass. In traditional California societies, there were no sheriffs, no prisons, no institutionalized means by which the leader could enforce his pronouncements. There did not seem to be any dictators or autocrats among California Indians. The power of a chief was largely the power of persuasion, which made oratory such an essential art.

The ability to make a good speech was valued highly from one end of the state to another. Typically, in much of California, a leader would get up before dawn, climb to the roof of the communal roundhouse, and deliver a morning

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sermon, urging people to be industrious and fair, to avoid fights, and so on. A Modoc leader, in the words of anthropologist Verne Ray, “spoke in a loud voice so he might be widely heard, and expressed himself in carefully chosen phrases. Listeners were admonished not to gossip or quarrel, to work assiduously at the food quest so that none might starve in the spring, and to arise early to such purpose.” As Patrick Miguel (Quechan) phrased it, “it was by [a chief’s] speeches that people knew he had great power and was *kwoxot*.” In a world without a police force or prisons, in small communities where one saw the same people day in and day out, persuasive speech was a powerful and in fact irreplaceable tool.

STATUS AND RESPONSIBILITY

As is true of leaders everywhere, the chief in traditional California enjoyed elevated status. He had special privileges and honors. Kinsmen would often bring enough food to relieve him of the need to hunt, he and his family would often have exceptionally valuable and beautifully made dance regalia, and he might have a prominent place to sit in the roundhouse or a prominent role to play in the ceremonies. Many chiefs were polygamous, keeping several wives while other men generally only had one, in part to make the chiefly lineage robust, but also to secure diplomatic relationships with a range of families across a tribal region. For the Chumash, a chief’s wives moved from their birth-villages to live with their husband in his, upending the traditional pattern of men relocating to live in the villages of their wives in order to accommodate the chief’s polygamous lifestyle.

But it often seemed that the benefits of leadership were balanced by the responsibilities. This amassing of wealth in the form of foods and also precious items such as feathers and shell money was not seen as greedy or self-serving, because it was expected that the chief would host visitors, sponsor festivals, and provide food and resources for the ceremonies that he scheduled and presided over. In a sense, the chief functioned as a community banker and the wealth he accumulated was not really his own but in some respects was a public trust. Anyone who went hungry or homeless in a village would cause the chief utter shame and disgrace, so all those in need were tended to with donated stores of food and wealth. Sometime, it was hard to persuade the next in line to take on the role of chief, because, as Edwin Loeb writes of the Eastern Pomo, the chief, though wealthier than everyone else, had to cover war debts, had to put up the most money when a new ceremonial house needed to be built in short, was responsible. And this responsibility was not to an abstract constituency. In these small societies, the responsibility was to the people you knew and saw every day, the people you ate with and sang with, the people you were linked to by a thousand emotional, familial, and economic ties.

It wasn’t always a desirable job. Perhaps the saving grace was that no one expected you to be perfect; you were too well known for that. ▼

Malcolm Margolin is publisher of News from Native California. This article was written with the assistance and collaboration of Sylvia Linsteadt, who worked with Malcolm for several glorious months in early 2012.



Captain Tom Lewis, chief of the Nisenan village K'otomyan near present-day Auburn. He is wearing a blanket made from gray squirrel pelts, a large gorget of abalone, a flicker-quill headband, and other wealth objects signifying high rank. This photo was taken in 1872 by A. W. Chase, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.



DREAMING US HOME AGAIN: GREG SARRIS

Malcolm Margolin

GREG SARRIS, MUSCULAR and intense, seems to be leading several lives in the space ordinarily allotted for one. He's chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo), with about thirteen hundred enrolled members. He's a professor at Sonoma State University, has a Ph.D. in modern thought and literature from Stanford, and he's written several books and co-produced the HBO movie *Grand Avenue* with Robert Redford. A short story, "Bluebelly," was anthologized in Heyday's *New California Writing 2012*, and Greg agreed to read at a reception for the book at the California Historical Society in San Francisco on May 16. We both showed up an hour early and had a rollicking, funny, and lively conversation, from which the following has been drawn.

MM: You've done a lot, Greg. What are you most proud of?

GS: If I've accomplished anything in my life—the books, the movies, the Ph.D. from Stanford—I think that my greatest accomplishment is that for twenty years I've kept thirteen hundred people—we're a large tribe for California—from factionalizing. We even amended our tribal constitution so that no current members or their offspring can ever be disenrolled. We just got approval of this from the BIA. And to make sure that this policy stays in place, I put in a monetary incentive not to disenroll in the gaming compact just negotiated with the State of California. If, [when we open the casino],

we revise the constitution and disenroll people, more money goes to the state.

MM: That's radical and far-reaching, and it suggests a thoughtful process. What's the tribal government structure like? What powers do you have, how do you interact with the tribal council?

GS: I'm chairman, and we have a constitution that we're always amending, changing, trying to make better. A fluid constitution. We have elections every year and terms are for two years. There are seven people on the tribal council and we have staggered elections, so that one year four seats are up, the next year three seats are up. I've served as chairman for twenty years, ever since Kathleen [Smith] and Bev [Ortiz] sent me an article when I was down at UCLA saying that another tribe wanted to open a casino in our territory. But I'm up for reelection every two years.

MM: A constitution that is always being changed and elections every two years...I couldn't think of a better recipe for chaos.

GS: I'm happy to say that we have had a consistent council ever since we got restored in December of 2000. The same council. Everybody's up every two years and the same people get put in. So that shows you, I would say, an incredible satisfaction among the tribal members with what we are doing. Joanne Campbell, Gene Buvelot...I have sat there and looked at the same people for twenty years.

MM: Is there ever opposition?

GS: No one's ever run against me. I've never been challenged in twenty years.

MM: Why?

GS: Maybe because I'm a weirdo. I speak two languages. I speak the language of the Indian world and that of the government and of the controlling class. I can speak both languages. And I love my tribe and fight madly for them and have given a lot.

MM: So what does the council do? What do you do?

GS: There's the vice chair, Lorelle [Ross], the secretary, Jeannette Anglin, and our treasurer, Gene Buvelot. Then our members at large, and they all have their duties as described in the constitution. For me, I oversee the daily operations of the entire tribe. That means our TANF program—Tribal Aid to Needy Families program—our housing programs, all reports come to me. I've also been the sole person on the development board. I negotiated a contract with Station Casinos that is unprecedented, giving the tribe 100% percent control of the development board. It's been very strange working with the casino business. As you know, Malcolm, I'm a nerd. I have a Ph.D. in modern thought and literature. What in hell ever prepared me to do this?

The other thing I do as leader is not just the administrative stuff, overseeing the development and that kind of thing, but I fancy myself a kind of preacher or a leader because I do a monthly column and in that column I talk about everything in tribal terms, especially about internalized oppression. Why is it that we tear one another down? I try to make people conscious of the homelessness that seeps in the pores of my people. Why do we turn against one another? Why do we destroy one another? That's what we know from colonization. You just see it again and again and again. So what I'm trying to do is make everyone conscious of those disruptive patterns, all the while preparing us for the casino.

MM: A preacher, eh? That's what the traditional people used to say: the prerequisite for a good leader was skill at speaking.

GS: And that's true. Look at my great example, Essie Parrish.

MM: Would you say that Essie was your role model?

GS: Her and Mabel [McKay], too. When you saw Essie—even seeing her in a film like *Sucking Doctor*, where she's standing there and she's speaking Pomo—the richness of her language and metaphors and how she talked to her people and how she knew her people, that's a great model.

So I write every month, and I preach. Every two months, six times a year, we have a general membership meeting where we'll have two or three hundred people all come together. Also, every two weeks we have the council



Greg Sarris at Ceremonial Dedication of Our Land, October 8, 2011. All images courtesy of Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

meetings; they're open to all members and we serve dinner. So we encourage them to come and listen to what's going on and we feed them a wonderful meal. We always have twenty or thirty guests or tribal members there. They can bring their kids. I keep the books open, so nothing's hidden. But at those big meetings, and even at those council meetings, I will start on a riff—I don't necessarily call it "critical thinking" but I talk about what makes something you've heard true or not true.

MM: Could you say more about what you learned from Mabel and Essie?

GS: You know, I was a bad kid, really a kind of angry kid. And knowing Mabel and then knowing Essie, I realized there was something bigger than me, something that I couldn't explain. And they were also kind. Mabel always made you aware. "You're an Indian doctor," someone would say. "What do you do for poison oak?" "Calamine lotion," she'd answer.

"Do you talk to plants?" someone asked.

"Well, yeah, I sing when I have to use them."

"Do plants talk to one another?"

"Well, I suppose they do."

"What do they say?"

"I don't know. Why would I be listening?"

MM: Great story. That generation was so real, not at all puffed out.

GS: That's what made them saints. They surrendered the ego to something bigger. There was no ego there. I remember the Pope wanted to meet Mabel and she just couldn't be bothered. She said, bring him by and we'll take

him to Happy Steak. Needless to say, it never happened.

MM: Do you have people you are mentoring for roles of future leadership?

GS: Lorelle is there, and there are others, but I'm hoping education will create new leaders. You know, Malcolm, the other thing I do—and it's a bit brutal—all our housing programs and our TANF programs, we call it a "hand up," not a "hand out." So if you are getting any of the benefits that the tribe offers its members, housing for example, you have to take a biweekly class that we offer at night on how to manage your money and rent. If you're getting assistance through our tribal TANF program, you have to take a family practice and parenting class. All that kind of stuff.

MM: How do you handle disruptors and malcontents?

GS: We've had them, and one of the things we do is make sure there's no swearing in our meetings. You can't use the F-word; that's forbidden. The minute somebody uses it, you get one warning. If somebody is hostile to somebody else, you get one warning and then you are asked to leave. We don't tolerate any of that kind of stuff. The membership is in general agreement. And also when people use certain tones...some people are very hostile. And often they're not even conscious of their hostility, their anger. And I say, "Listen to how you said that. You're asking me a question that's

Tribal youth playing at Ceremonial Dedication of Our Land.



“I have a big dream that it can somehow bring us all—

Indian and non-Indian—home again.”



really an accusation; you're asking the question as if you presume an answer, aren't you? You're asking the question as if you're assuming that I did this wrong, aren't you?" And I say, "That's offensive to me. That hurts me. What you should do is let me show you how to ask that question so that I'm not offended and other people aren't offended."

So, you know, Malcolm, I keep talking to folks and reminding them of the incredible opportunity we now have. One of the things I'm saying is, People! You have to realize, for the first time since European contact, we are not only going to have control of our lives but control of the community in which we live. We're going to make more money. We're going to have the biggest operation around. Think of that!

MM: What do you think brings dysfunction to other communities?

GS: It's internalized oppression. We have to constantly make people aware of it and how ubiquitous it is in our lives. And I always give a simple example, a girl who had an abusive father. She says, "I'm never going to marry a guy like that. Never!" She goes to a party, and there are a hundred guys, and the one she picks is just like her father. And I say, why? Why? Because at a deep level, below language and intelligence, is emotion. And down there is home. She sees in him what is familiar, what is home,

Tribal Council at Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria's Ceremonial Dedication of Our Land. From left to right: Gene Buvelot, Joanne Campbell, Lawrence Stafford, Jeannette Anglin, Robert Baguio, Greg Sarris, and Lorelle Ross.

and we seek—even if it's pathological—what is home. So we have to get to a place in ourselves where we stop that, because that home is not beautiful.

The other thing is that we're victims, victims in this culture of homelessness. You get trapped into an us/them dichotomy. How do we get a "we" instead of an us/them? Indian people always had a "we" But as soon as you get dislocated—and we *are* dislocated, we're strangers in our homeland—how do we come home again, all of us? That's one of the big things that maybe this casino and the other things we're doing can [help us] come to terms with. I have a big dream that it can somehow bring us all—Indian and non-Indian—home again. And the big question for today is, how do you stop this us/them dichotomy that is a cancer that will kill us?

MM: You know, Greg, maybe your awareness of the harm that the us/them dichotomy brings is because you yourself are mixed race.

GS: I'm glad you raised that. That's the hardest thing for me, because I don't fit in anywhere.

I'm constantly reminded of this everywhere I go. It's been really hard, and it's been really lonely, and it's been thrown in my face. I try to get back to what Mabel told me when I was nineteen years old. She said I had a lot of anger in me. She said, "You're going to let holes grow in your heart, hatred and poison will go there, and you're going to poison yourself and you're going to poison other people." She said, you don't have to do that. She said, you have another choice. All the things that have happened to you, she said, could become medicine. She said, this is an opportunity to doctor.

MM: Do you figure that leading a tribe is different from being a leader in the dominant culture? Do you think you could do Jerry Brown's job and govern California? Although come to think of it, I wonder if Jerry can do Jerry Brown's job.

GS: Or could Jerry do my job. I like Jerry very, very much. The problem is that politicians are so compromised. Whatever ideals they have, they're so compromised by money and all that. The joy I have, so far—knock on wood—my ideals of creating huge organic farms, which we're in the process of doing, of getting people to school, of getting the old people housing—all of those things are not compromised. I'm making them happen. I have nobody in the

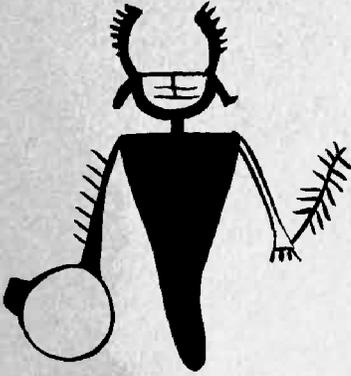
tribe telling me no. I'm not having to rob Peter to pay Paul. So far, I haven't had to do that. If I were to do Jerry's job, I'd have to do a lot of it. But you know, the big test will come when the casino opens and the money comes. But I'm preparing.

MM: Thanks, Greg. Anything you want to say to sum this up?

GS: I think it's especially important for a modern Indian leader to be able to work well in both the Indian world and the non-Indian world, so that he or she can translate both sides. In my case, having this ability to translate enables me to be visionary, to see a future for my people as empowered and engaged individuals who can work together as a tribe to recreate for all members of our community, Indian and non-Indian alike, those ancient ethics and aesthetics of place that make for all a safe, sustainable, and cherished home. This kind of vision and leadership is particularly necessary where tribes have economic power and can influence and shape a sustainable future with that power. Power should not rest in one individual or a few, but in a community that is happy and safe and sustained by a healthy, equitable relationship between all peoples and their larger natural world. ▼



Tribal Chairman Greg Sarris speaking at Ceremonial Dedication of Our Land.



WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP: SUSIE LONG AND MARIA TRIPP

Paula Tripp-Allen

ANYONE WHO HAS spent time in Native California knows that there is no shortage of leaders—people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get the job done, who drive all night to make sure they get to the Big Time, Brush Dance, or Indian meeting. These people are amazing examples of Indian men and women who are dedicated, passionate, and committed. As I thought about how to approach this interview, I begin to think about the many types of leaders—elected tribal leaders, community leaders, traditional leaders, spiritual leaders, and family leaders—and how each of them brings a particular set of values, expectations, goals, and visions in their leadership.

The presence of women is especially worth noting. If you look at our community organizations and tribes, there is a long history of women's leadership. My own involvement included sitting on the board of directors for our local Indian Health Board when I was in my early twenties. Many of the same women who had come together in the late 1960s to start the organization still sat on that board. I was a college student then and a new mom, and I often think back to those meetings and realize how lucky I was to sit in a room with these ladies—women who taught me

the importance of giving back to your community, leading with your heart, laughing, and pulling together to make a difference. These mostly elderly woman provided me, and so many others, with the foundation our community continues to grow from today. Without them we wouldn't have our health, education, and tribes. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview two of the women who are part of that history.

Susie Long and Maria Tripp were elected tribal chair and vice chair, respectively, in 1994, under the newly adopted Yurok Tribal Constitution. Both had worked for their communities in various capacities for many years, and both had recently served on the Yurok Tribal Interim Council, which was responsible for writing the Yurok Tribal Constitution.

Prior to being elected the first Yurok tribal chair, Susie Long had worked with California Indian Legal Services for many years, first as a secretary and later as a paralegal. She was also actively involved with United Indian Health Services, Inc. (UIHS), and the Indian Teacher Education and Personnel Program (ITEPP) at Humboldt State University. After serving as tribal chair until 1996, Susie went on to work for the Trinidad

Rancheria before retiring to spend half her time in Arizona with family and the other half in Trinidad, picking blackberries, attending ceremonies and, most recently, helping to support the recently renewed Jump Dance ceremony at Cha-Pekw.

Prior to being elected as the first Yurok tribal vice chair and later serving as chair from 2007 to 2009, Maria Tripp spent many years volunteering, advocating, and working in the areas of culture, education, and health. For thirty-five years, she served on the board of directors for UIHS, including twenty years as the board's chairperson. She was also a board member for the California Rural Indian Health Board (CRIHB) and served for a time as their chairperson. In this capacity, she was the California representative to the National Indian Health Board. In recognition of her dedication and long-term commitment, she was selected as a board member for the California Endowment, where she served a nine-year term. She currently resides with her husband, Amos Tripp, in Blue Lake, California, where she continues to be actively involved in sharing cultural traditions with her four granddaughters and the community.

PTA: Do either of you have a role model, someone you look up to or someone who inspired you to do this work as a tribal leader?

MT: For me it was my gram, Lena Reed McCovey, who was full-blooded Yurok, and was amazingly traditional and did everything a Yurok woman would do. She raised her family, and then in her late sixties got into politics. It was awesome for me to see her move from one world to another, but she didn't really change either. I always wanted to be a leader but be traditional, too. I didn't want to trade one for the other. If you can be true to yourself and be true to your people, while still being political, I think you're a long ways ahead. Although I'm not a basketweaver—I tried that—but I have been a gatherer and I do some things pretty well traditionally, I try to carry those on. My gram once said if you always eat the foods that you did traditionally, it's hard work, so you will retain a lot of who you really are, and I think that's part of it. And it's hard to make time to get acorns, it's hard to make time to can fish, to strip fish [fillet in preparation for smoking], to pick berries, to gather roots...to do all the things that Indian women have to do in order to maintain the traditional values for their families. My gram was really my role model, and

my mom carried those things on too. My gram was a real strength, though, she raised nine kids, pretty much on her own...she was pretty inspiring.

SL: Well mine was Vi Tripp. But when I got started, it wasn't politics, it was to meet our needs. Vi's the one that got me working to make our community better. It was about meeting the needs that people had, I learned that in my early years at CILS. Back then was when we were starting UIHS and ITEPP and Tri-County (which is now known as the Northern California Indian Development Council, NCIDC). At that time, most of our tribes were terminated and we didn't have a say, so we had to get together and work together. We traveled a lot, did what we had to do to get things done.

I mean, I always had role models. My mom, my gram. I was twelve years old before I realized bread could come from a store. Mom only bought what she couldn't raise and she cooked for us on her wood cookstove. She provided us with everything. We ate what she raised, what she gathered. That's what you did. But then when Dad got hurt, well then Mom had to go to work. In those days the men had to work in the woods or go off to war...you know, the women did what they had to do to survive and provide for their families. And I think that's what developed our really strong woman genes, and you pass that down to your daughters.

MT: And you know I didn't take speech in college, I couldn't do public speaking. But I found my voice when I had to speak up for my children. When you are passionate about things, about our families and our communities, that's where the leadership comes from.

PTA: Thinking back to your time on tribal council, specifically as a female tribal leader, how did being a woman impact the way you worked with other tribal leaders and how you were treated or received in this role?

MT: Actually I always think we were treated with a lot of respect. Among Yuroks, I can say that there is definitely a friendship among the leaders because we have all experienced the same treatment whether you're a man or a woman. Working with law enforcement on the river was kind of traumatic because law enforcement has their own language, but even then they were very respectful. I can remember one



time in particular, though, that someone was talking very rudely to Susie, and she held her own, but she didn't want to be rude back; but then there was this tribal elder who stepped in on her behalf and said there was no need to talk to anyone like that, let alone your tribal leaders. It took a man to tell this other man that wasn't the way to act, but in the end there was respect. I think most of the time—well, sometimes the fisherman don't exactly think you know what you're talking about because you're a woman, and I'm the first to admit I don't fish. But for the most part, there is a lot of mutual respect. I remember one time we were back in Washington, D.C., I think, and there was this Pueblo board of governors, and there were these elderly men and when we walked into the room they all jumped up and they gave us their seats, very gentle and polite people. But I can remember when we said Susie

Maria Tripp with her oldest daughter, Pimm, and four granddaughters, taken at the *Ihuk* (Flower Dance) ceremony for her granddaughter Ty'ithreeha. Photo courtesy of the Tripp family.

was our chairperson, our governor, you could tell they were surprised, because there were no women with them, but even then they were very respectful of the difference in nations and they were very nice to us. I can't say I can really recall anytime when there really wasn't that respect.

SL: I think here locally, it was due to the changes in the late sixties and early seventies. Things were really starting to change. When I went to high school, that was my dad's dream—that all of his kids would graduate from high school. It was a big achievement. Then the next wave, they started going to college and they learned to speak out and they weren't afraid to



approach issues with the powers that be. And it became a joint effort between all of us, men and women. We had many women going to college, and it wasn't just a man thing. Outside of this area, there were a couple of times when I felt there were some differences. Like when I would be at a meeting and there would be a real atmosphere that the men were the speakers. I can remember one time when we were meeting with the farmers in Klamath Falls, when we were first starting these discussions about water issues and whatnot, and for some reason none of the other tribes were going to send anyone, but I went to this meeting with the Bureau of Reclamation and the farmers. So I walked into this big meeting and they had appointed someone to run the meeting and he looked around and seeing no men, said, "Well, I don't see any of the tribes here." I was way in the back, and I raised my hand and said, "Yuroks are here." It was amazing, the whole atmosphere of the meeting changed because the tribes were present, even though I wasn't what they expected when they were looking for tribes. Sometimes you just have to stand your ground. And I think that if I was a man, you know they might try to schmooze you, but

Maria Tripp sharing words with her granddaughter Ty'ithreeha at her *Ihuk* ceremony. Photo courtesy of the Tripp family.

with women we don't really try to schmooze each other.

MT: That's the truth, the way we did business was sometimes different from the way some of the men did business. Women leaders really tend to do everything, all their business, out and open at the table...not that the other way is better or worse, but women lead differently.

SL: Yeah, I can remember way back, before the tribe was even thinking about organizing, when I was attending meetings for one of the state-wide Indian organizations, and there was definitely this group of men who would meet and make decisions about how they wanted things to go, and they would come to the meeting and just move motions through with no discussion. But as time passed, people got wise to them and things slowly changed.

PTA: Did anyone ever give you a good piece of advice that you still remember to this day and that you would like to share with others?

MT: Yeah, boy did I ever get some good advice. When you are young and headstrong, you sort of think you know things and I remember I was

on this board and there was this one person who taught me so, so much. You know I always say to be a leader you have to have vision, you have to listen. You have to be respectful of what every person has to say because every person has something of value. Politicians do know how to listen, but to learn to really listen and get the value out of what they are sharing with you, that was really good advice. People want their opinion to be valued. I would say it took many, many years to learn to be that kind of a leader. I have been at it a long time but that's one piece of advice, and you have to practice it.

The second piece of advice is that if you expect your [tribal] staff to do their work, you have to do your part and be prepared for a meeting because that is what you are elected to do. I can remember being frustrated when people would grill staff, but you could tell they hadn't even read the reports that the staff went to all the trouble of putting together. I can remember Susie saying, when she was elected, and it was good advice, that she wouldn't ask her staff to do anything that she didn't know how to do or that she wouldn't do herself. It

was good advice and I know that I tried to practice that when I was chair.

And I think sharing knowledge is also very important, not holding on to it for yourself. I also learned from many others, others older than me, to be humble. I mean, you're not a leader unless you have some kind of ego. I'm sorry, but that's the truth. Maybe it's because you have a vision. In reality you are at the table because you have something to say, but you still have remember to be humble in that leadership.

One last thing that I learned in my travels, from all the other tribal leaders, and I loved this part of it, is that they all welcome you to their home, we always start meetings with a prayer, and those things really help to remind you to be respectful. It would really set the tone for meetings and it helps you realize, particularly in the health field, that people everywhere want their people to be healthy. That transcends all the other things when you are doing something for their children, for your children...when you have that as one thought, it can be very powerful.

SL: Good advice came from lots of people, I can't say just one person said this or one person said that. But one of the main things is the listening. It's important to people that you listen, and you

Maria Tripp and her three sisters wearing traditional basket hats at Ty'ithreeha's Ihuk ceremony. Photo courtesy of the Tripp family.



can learn from anyone. You don't know what they're going to say, and it could be the wisest thing you have ever heard.

The other thing is, either be the first person to speak at an event or the last person to speak, because those speakers are the ones that people remember the most. When you talk it doesn't hurt to go last...and by doing that, you learn what the holes are in the story. I learned that one time—I don't know how I got on the federal jury but there I was—and I remember that the two attorneys painted this whole story, but there were things they couldn't present for some reason, so there were all these holes in the story and the person wasn't convicted. So when you sit there and listen to everyone else talk, you can hear where there are holes, and then when you speak you can help to fill in those gaps.

PTA: What is the most rewarding thing about being a female tribal leader?

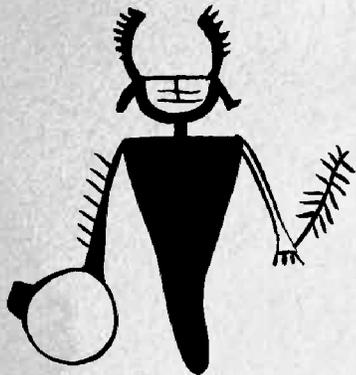
SL: I guess I never viewed myself as female or male, I just viewed myself as someone who had to roll up my sleeves and work in order to get the job done. I would set certain goals that I thought could get accomplished and then work towards them. If our people have food, if they have a place to live, if they have their health, then they could survive...and everything else is gravy. One thing I do regret is that we didn't buy the whole town site [in Klamath]—the power that you get when you own your own land. And I wish the tribe would buy south of the mouth. When I think back to when we were drafting the constitution, I know in my mind, I always hoped someday we would own all our aboriginal territory. But we just have to keep chipping away at it, [for] the freedom and—I guess it's the feeling, that this is ours. It was taken away from us and to have it all be ours again....

MT: As a tribal leader, you get very few thanks, but what has to be the most rewarding is when you see that the tribal staff has done a good job and you see the impact in your community. I will use education as an example. You know there's hundreds of kids a year graduating from college, not just high school but college, and they are given opportunities to come back to the tribe. Some go other places, but many come back to the tribe because someone

helped them and they want to help others. I think that's one of the biggest things you can do, educate your own people and others about who you are. Like Susie said earlier, things changed so quickly and whether those changes be when people went to war or whatever it might be, people get lost in the dynamics of those changes. Today we get to write our own history with our people. To see our college kids start to understand why they have struggled, why they have those feelings, they start to understand themselves better. Many tribes, that's where they put the little money they do have, towards things that will help our people to overcome those things. I know that I was very excited when the tribe put dollars towards reintroducing the condor in the region for ceremonies. In the process, our people learned about themselves. Yuroks learned about themselves. It began a whole new program...and that vision got larger and larger, and more and more people got involved. One Yurok student who was at Harvard interrupted her studies because she couldn't give up the dream of working with the condor program. She believed in what she was doing in that program and found what she wanted to do for her people. And also having vocational opportunities for people who don't want to go but one mile from their home and work in our streams—that is also very rewarding. Not everyone wants to go out into the world and put a fire under it, some just want to stay near home and take care of their grandma or grandpa and I am proud of all those things.

Every chair, every council, has worked towards those things because you can't do it by yourself, it takes everyone. I do remember one day when someone did say thank you. One of our weavers came to us, me and Susie when we got elected, and she had made us each a basket medallion necklace. She gave them to us and told us every chair and vice chair needs a basket medallion and so we put them on. That was her way of saying thank you and it gave us strength, different things give you strength. ▼

Paula Tripp-Allen (Karuk/Yurok) is a cultural resources professional and has worked in education, healthcare, community advocacy, and the arts. She is also a singer, dancer, and mentor for the Karuk Women's Dance Camp at ceremonies on the Klamath River.



FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS:

LOUISE MIRANDA RAMIREZ

Malcolm Margolin

I INTERVIEWED LOUISE Miranda Ramirez in early June during a break in the Breath of Life conference at UC Berkeley. Louise is tribal chair of the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation. As early as the 1920s, anthropologists and other outside “experts” declared Ohlone/Costanoan and Esselen culture to be dead. They obviously hadn’t met Louise.

MM: Just to clarify, the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation is not federally recognized, right?

LM: We are not. We’re forgotten. We’re just forgotten.

MM: What’s the tribal structure? Are you a corporation? Are you a 501(c)3 nonprofit?

LM: We have a 501(c)3.

MM: The tribe has a tribal council? What determines enrollment in the tribe?

LM: We have about seven hundred tribal members. We have an enrollment committee. There are thirteen core families, and we only accept membership from those families.

MM: And what are your duties as tribal chair?

Cook, bottle washer, you pick up after people...

LM: Yes, after tribal gatherings, that’s exactly what you do. You try to be nice, you try to get out there, you try to meet everyone. You’re

out there representing the tribe, going to people, introducing yourself, telling them we’re still here. It’s just getting out there, meeting as many people as you can, complaining, yelling. Like yesterday [at the language conference], they had a presentation about the cleaning of the wax cylinders for the ancestors, the songs. And right there they had Maria Soto. I didn’t want to yell and scream while they were still doing the presentation. But afterwards I made sure they understood that that was our ancestor, that she was one of our thirteen core families. I contacted the person who was in charge and said, “That was our ancestor.” When I wanted the CD of the songs to take to my people to play at the tribal gatherings, I had to sign a document saying I was the tribal chair and that music would be used only for the tribe. Then I said, “I didn’t authorize you to use it. How come *you* used it? The proper protocol would’ve been for you to contact any tribe before you use their music.” The young girl who was speaking during the presentation said these songs are not ceremony so therefore they could use them. And I said, “You have no idea what is a ceremony because you’re not our tribe. All of those songs are ceremony to us, because they’re our ancestors.” I said, “*We* listen to them. *We* decide this is when they can be sung.”

I mean, I understand what they're doing. They're trying to clean them so they'll be available, and it sounded really good. A lot of the static was gone. But they didn't ask us if it was okay, and they should have.

MM: So, you see protecting rights and safeguarding traditions as part of your duties as tribal chair.

LM: Right. It's a way of saying we're still here. For example, we want the responsibility of taking care of our ancestors. We accept that as our responsibility. Don't try to take it from us, because we're going to fight you for it. Too many things have been taken and we're not letting anything go anymore. And that's one of the things, the responsibility to care for our ancestors when their graves are disturbed, or

the responsibility to protect their songs. When I listened to those songs over the years, they come alive to me, these people, and it's at the end of one of the songs and the two women are singing, then they're just *ha ha ha*—they're laughing and it's like you want to laugh with them, you know? You feel that joy they were having because they're singing to a recording, knowing that their voices were going to be kept for as long as it takes.

MM: Oh, that's so beautiful. You know, one of the things that I want to do is compare what it is to be an Indian leader to somebody like a mayor of a city, and I've never heard of a mayor of a city trying to protect songs.

LM: No, I don't think so. I don't think they even understand.

MM: So your domain...it's cultural, it's not just political.

LM: Correct, it's cultural as well. And we've tried to have cultural committees to teach crafts and we had another one with cultural resources, but it seems that once you give someone a title, they think that they can do whatever they want. I think that's one of the things that's been wrong with our tribe for so long. Everybody did what they wanted, and nobody put it together. That's one of the things I'm trying to correct. We've had previous chairs who have done reburials, but we don't know where those ancestors were reburied. Our children will never know where. I've created a form for the monitors to take out to the site. It makes it easy, but I don't get the form back. As a leader, I try to get as many people involved who want to go to the reburial so they know where it's at, so they teach their children. I may protect the remains for as long as it takes to be reburied. But when the actual reburial comes, I will do the ceremony, but I ask for the youngest adult to place the remains in the grave. And they ask me why, and it's because I want them to know what to do. I want them to know and to understand that they need to protect us when we're gone, and to put us in in a respectful way.

We make sure we do the ceremonies. My hair is short now. I cut it and cut it to put in with the ancestors because it was our custom. It's okay to love that person, because that could've been one of our family members.



Louise Miranda Ramirez. Photo provided courtesy of StoryCorps, a national nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. www.storycorps.org

More than likely it was one of ours. So acknowledge them.

I can say I have that feeling because my daughter died when she was fourteen. She died of leukemia, and I would kill anyone who hurt her. Even to this day, it's been twenty years, and I still go and protect her grave. I make sure there's flowers, make sure nobody's stolen her toys. The rocks that the kids have given her—when we go have a tribal gathering, one of our customs was to leave messages on rocks. So the kids, they know about her and some of them will make me a rock and paint it or leave their message and I go and put it there. The cemetery says, “Oh, you can't have rocks there.” And you know what I said? “Excuse me,” I said. “You tell me I can't have rocks? You go take all the rocks out of that Jewish section over there. I know they have them, so I can have them. It's just a rock that means something. It means something to Jewish people; it means something to me. That's all. Don't throw my rocks away, because they're for her. That's their message to her and that's all I want.” And I would fight, and I've been kicked off sites. You know, I've been threatened, I've met people who I thought were going to be good to us who weren't, who I thought cared. I had to be arrested.

There were some mortars that I protected. I asked the archaeologist, “What do I do?” He says wrap them in cellophane. Buy some wrap to protect the context of the center in the mortars so that in case we ever have money, they can be examined to see about the food that was in those mortars. So I did all that, then I protected them. I took them for the tribe because that's what the agreement said. Then the archaeologist said, “Oh, I was wrong. They don't belong to you. They belong to the owner.” And the owner called the cops on me and threatened to arrest me, and I did not hide—to tell you the truth, the firemen were checking out the site. And they even helped me put them in the car. The owner called the cops on me. He threatened me, told me I didn't have any rights. I said fine, I'll take them back. Then he was threatening that if I even came on the land there he was going to have me arrested, so I said you know what? I don't even want to face this. I called the Native [American] Heritage Commission up and said this is what's happening; you handle it. And I drove from San

Jose to the Native [American] Heritage Commission [in Sacramento] and said, here's everything. Not the remains, they were ours no matter what. But all the artifacts. I said here they are. You handle it with him.

MM: Does the tribe have housing or any other programs?

LM: You know, as of right now, no. We don't have any money. We depend on donations. If I go speak somewhere, maybe an honorarium. I just ask the tribe for gas and donate the rest. I use the money to buy paper and ink to write the letters that I need to write. It's one of my jobs, one of my responsibilities, to write letters complaining about the digging up of our sites.

MM: Did you ever have a job outside of being tribal chair?

LM: Yes, I worked twenty-one years at San Jose State as a payroll technician. Retired.

MM: You're retired so you can fight archaeologists full time.

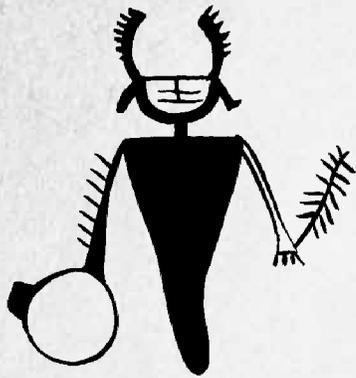
LM: And you know, I kid. I probably could. I remember when I was in the ninth grade. You know how in the ninth grade, you do this study of what you want to be? I wanted to be an archaeologist.

MM: You wanted to be an archaeologist?

LM: And not only here, but in Egypt and India and everything, you know? It was just that fascination with it. I don't know, it just... I don't know what happened. Forget it. That didn't happen. You get older and forget it.

MM: What pleasures and satisfactions do you get out of being tribal chair?

LM: The tribal gathering. The tribal gathering, when I sit there and teach the kids or everybody about the language. I have them sit there and learn the language. Last year I made a coloring book. I got a grant from the Monterey Arts Council for five hundred dollars and I made one hundred coloring books. I went there and I put the letter, the word, the pronunciation, and a picture. I took them off clip art and whatever I could find, but I did it for them. And I got crayons and sat there and when the kids show the respect and call you Auntie, you know, it's okay. They're learning. They're learning. ▼



POLITICS OF THE SPIRIT: DAVID BELARDES

Stephen O'Neil

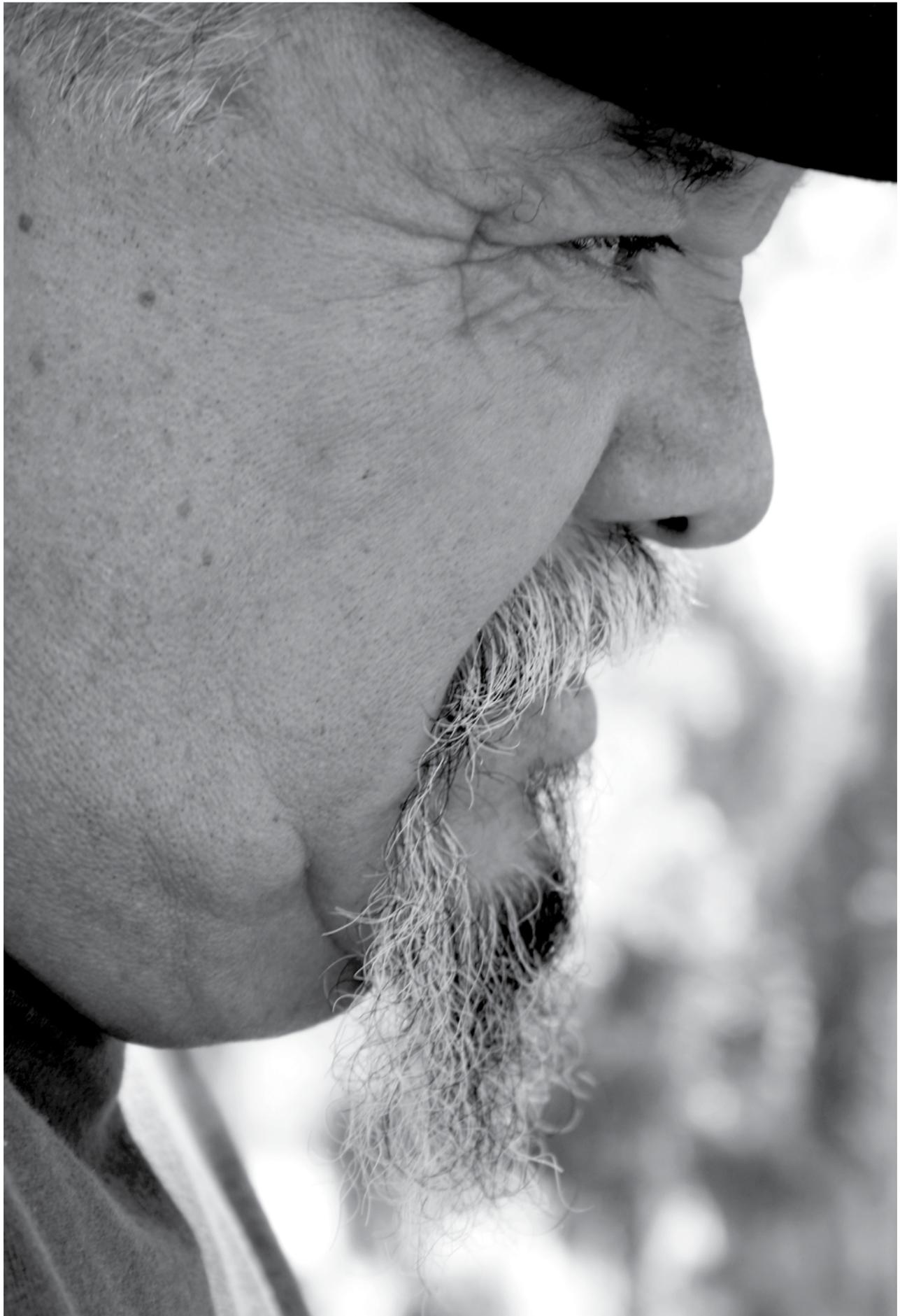
THE ACJACHEMEN, historically known as the Juaneño, have lived for millennia along the coast of southern California, and now live in modern suburbia, supporting their families while honoring their traditional culture and the ancestors who carried on through hard times. Like many tribes in California, the Acjachemen suffered greatly with the Euro-American invasion of their lands, through horrific cycles of disease and foreign institutions designed to eradicate their way of life. Entire family lines died out, and others left their tribal lands after the secularization of the missions to survive on the ranchos and developing towns to the north. Fortunately, a core community remained in the San Juan Creek region of southern Orange County.

San Juan Capistrano was an isolated, almost forgotten town for many decades, except for tourists attracted to the mission ruins. The Acjachemen, Hispanic, and minority Anglo populations lived the natural cycles of farming and ranching, with the Native people remaining spiritually and culturally connected to the landscape. Post-World War II development, however, eventually reached even the remaining ranchos, and in the late 1950s, the newly built Interstate 5 opened up the San Juan Capistrano region to “progress.” This

brought a new type of forced change, a new way of looking at the land as a commodity that had its own effect on local society, and eventually new challenges to preserving their Native heritage.

The Acjachemen people never had a formal relationship with the federal government, and no reservation trust lands set aside for them as a protected community. With no hereditary lines of leadership remaining after the massive loss of life at the mission, in turn followed by a smallpox epidemic in 1862 that killed up to half of the remaining population, leaders arose within the community as they were needed. Someone with the right background, either in the ways of the dominating society or the traditional one, such as Marquitos Forster or José de Gracia Cruz, would negotiate and interpret between the Acjachemen community and the outside world. Sometimes the influence of a particular family, such as the Lobos and the Charleses, would be felt for several generations. These leaders would find the ability within themselves to unite the community and take up its cause. But these people always derived their strength and abilities from an understanding and

David Belardes. Photo by Olivia Batchelder.



connection that came from having been raised within their Native community.

I met David Belardes in 1980, near the beginning of my studies in the Acjachemen community. I was still a college student, and David was a tribal council member of the newly formed Juaneño Band of Mission Indians. His cousin Raymond Belardes was chairman, but it was David who had grown up in the town and held the knowledge of the interwoven relationships binding the community. At the time of the band's inception, the



David Belardes. Photo by Olivia Batchelder.

recent loss of elders who had been the last people conversant with the old language gave the people an urgency to research and retain cultural patrimony. Federal recognition was and is a main goal of the band. New towns and housing in the south county rapidly expanded, with no concern for cultural preservation. Ways had to be found to implement the California Environmental Quality Act and start educating the government, developers, and public at large to the fact that the local Indians were indeed still here, had never left, and would no longer tolerate the bulldozing of their ancestors' remains.

David Belardes is now the Juaneño Band's chairman, a political role, and the chief, with spiritual responsibilities to the tribe. The growth of David's abilities to navigate through and negotiate with the powers that be, and his growth as a leader within his own community, are at the heart of the conversations he and I had this spring.

There are now four organizations of the larger Acjachemen community called the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians—Acjachemen Nation. This has come about over the years as various leaders stepped forward to represent different geographical communities of the tribe as well as different philosophies of how to achieve federal recognition and to lead the people into the future. Through all of the turmoil, David Belardes has retained the respect and confidence of a core group of traditional families within San Juan Capistrano, and continued his role as leader.

The conversations that David Belardes and I had took place in two different settings within San Juan Capistrano. Both places have roots in the town's history, and each represents an era of change. One evening was spent in David's current home on Los Amigos Street, part of the first housing tract built in San Juan. This was constructed immediately following the building of the freeway through the edge of town. This house is where his parents moved after selling their ranch along the Trabuco Creek, to be turned into another housing tract, and was the last of the family's land holdings. Another conversation was held at the Blas Aguilar Adobe in the middle of the old town. The core of the Aguilar adobe is

one of the original family quarter buildings built for mission neophytes in the 1790s. Expanded decades later, it was occupied by Mexican colonists following the secularization of the mission and named the Casa de Esperanza. It now belongs to the City of San Juan Capistrano and is operated as an interpretive center of Acjachemen culture by the Blas Aguilar Foundation, led by David Belardes. Blas Aguilar was an *alcalde* (city councilman) of the newly organized pueblo, and is the great-great-grandfather of David's late wife, Aurora Paramo. The history of San Juan Capistrano is Chairman Belardes's history, and the traditions of both the Native American culture and the later Hispanic heritage run deep within him.

FORMING THE BAND AND...

SO: How is it that Raymond Belardes, your cousin, decided to start looking into his Belardes family history and deciding that he wanted to try to organize the Juaneño community as a modern political band?

DB: I think Raymond called me, probably, back in 1977 or '78. Raymond was living down on the San Pasqual Reservation already with his wife's people, the Kumeyaay. He wanted to reorganize the tribe, but first he wanted to know where all my dad's paperwork was, where all the genealogies and all the BIA information was. I dug it out of my dad's old trunks. He started by getting the word out, and we took turns going to meetings and belonging to the Capistrano Indian Council. This had been started by Jasper Hostler from Hoopa in northern California and several local Juaneños.¹ I think Raymond and I took turns being the president of the Indian Council. I think he had become aware of the new federal laws, that there was the possibility to pursue federal recognition. Raymond just basically wanted to better his life and everybody's life, and help people out.

It took us a couple years to get going and get the word out. Finally, with the Capistrano Indian Council, we got all the people together, and worked with California Indian Legal Services to draw up a constitution, have our first meeting, ratify the constitution, and have a tribal council. I was on the original tribal council. Back in 1980 was our official beginning. And in '82 our letter went out to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to apply for federal recognition.

It was like a big ol' family reunion there for a while. It was just unbelievable, seeing how the people came out and how we were all connected. We started doing genealogies and all that. I had started earlier with my dad, because my dad was telling me who everybody was and how they're related, who all the cousins were, so I did a lot of helping people find their genealogical lines from way back when. What's that—almost thirty-five years ago now.

SO: Like Ray, you didn't come from a background of being a leader.

DB: No, no, no.

SO: So how did that on-the-job-training work?

DB: I don't know. I just did it. In my youth, growing up, I wasn't very forceful at all—if anything I was shy. So to get up in front of people and talk, to get into city council meetings and negotiate with people, was big for me, a big step forward.

SO: You hadn't been the high school class president.

DB: No, no. I wasn't the valedictorian. In fact I didn't even graduate from high school. I was out in the work force early on—at fourteen I was out working. I was still in school at that time. But I was out working.

SO: So, no college, no leadership training like they have for young up-and-coming Native Americans, interning at the Smithsonian and all that?

DB: No, no, no, no. It was more like a street fight. "Say what?" "What did he say? Come here." It's the old cliché—from the school of hard knocks. I got my lumps, and I dished them out, too. Over time the people in the community would say, "What the hell happened to Dave Belardes? What got into him?" They'd never heard a peep out of me, and now here I was running for chairman.

...THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN

DB: I should say early that when Raymond was bringing the tribe together, we did a lot of consulting with Matt Calac, Henry Rodriguez—you know, people on the reservation that Raymond knew down south—and Vince Ibanez. Thurmond McCormick was one of our advisors.² I did our first reburial down at Panhe on Camp Pendleton with Thurmond, with the

Christianitos Road project that got us that five acres for the ancestors.

We hadn't done any reburial ceremonies before this. A lot of the ancestors were going onto shelves and going into repositories, and Raymond and I said, "We want that back in the ground," "We want you to set aside a piece of land for those remains to go back in the ground." And that was pretty much a movement, it was kind of unheard of back in the 1970s. Simultaneously, the whole state and the whole country were doing that. How many years it then took them to enact laws to repatriate—it took another twenty years probably.

In those early years, we were also getting into cultural resources protection. I remember one of my first projects was the water project at Laguna Niguel, the AWMA project in Aliso Creek. The Caspers Park work. Quite a few things going on. Raymond and I and Joe Ocampo were on the first tribal council—Gloria Felix was in there. Raymond was in power until 1989. That's when I got voted in as chairman. A couple of years before that, he was elected chief at one of our meetings out in Aliso Canyon.

SO: When did the cultural resources work start for you, for the Juaneño?

DB: Oh, we started right away, in '79 or '80. And then when we had burials on sites, we would negotiate for reburial areas on the property, or an open space at the site, something like that. We were one of the groups that were saying, "No, don't put them in storage, don't take them over here—let us have them, let us put them back in the ground, back in their resting place." And I'm still doing that today, still negotiating for reburial areas, and access to the land to do ceremony.

FAMILY TRADITIONS AND BROUGHT UP IN SERVICE

SO: You have said that your roots to the Juaneño community and your ability to be a leader come from your parents.

DB: I kinda-like grew up with the old knowledge, which a lot of our people didn't do. I was being raised by my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all rolled up in one, because my dad was sixty-two when I was born. I was fortunate in that aspect. I never knew my grandfather, great-grandfather because my dad was so

old when he fathered us. He was the guy who I ran the hills with, went hunting with, and all that. When he wasn't hunting, he was gathering herbs, making teas and poultices and doing this and that. So yeah, it's a process I guess—as that's how life is.

My family's homestead is up in the mountains, north of Camp Pendleton, up in the Indian Potrero and the Belardes Potrero. Teodosio Belardes was my grandfather on my dad's side, and José Bernardo's my great-grandfather. My dad and my grandfather ran all that, they knew all that territory. That's where I get my stories on the rocks of fire, the *piedras de lumbre* in those different canyons. Of course my dad was my initial introduction to our traditions and culture with all his knowledge, because he was born in 1885, and his dad was born in 1850. So they both cowboied on the Rancho Mission Viejo along with my half-brother Charlie Belardes. He knew all of Orange County and San Diego County and "the Belardes," which is in a little corner of Riverside County. Then they lived in San Juan town west of Los Rios, across the Trabuco Creek—both my grandfathers owned property, that whole western half of the valley, from about the 1860s on.

SO: When I started to get to know you, and we would drive around to places, you were doing things in the community that your father had taught you to do—these were what a man does. Like one time you had an errand to do first, you had your pick-up truck, and you were delivering firewood to some of the older people in town.

DB: I did that. I did commodities, distributing government food to the tribe and the community. Remember the big cheese commodity thing?

SO: I would think sharing the firewood was more traditional.

I was asking before about the way you were brought up. A lot of people in this community, when there's going to be an event, they would help. What are some of these events? Meetings, weddings, baptisms—

DB: Yes, all of that. It's just what we did. When somebody died, or somebody was baptized, or married, people show up, they bring gifts, and they help out. You didn't just show up and leave like people do today. I mean, that's the way I am, because that's the way my dad taught me,

and that's the way his dad taught him. It's just what you do, you know. And my boys know. The grandkids are learning. Yeah, they're learning—they show up, they're gonna work.

SO: You have the chiefly role now, organizing and conducting ceremonies. That's not something that was preserved and passed down in the community. So how did you learn?

DB: From a variety of sources. From Raymond, my cousin, and his brother Blackie. Remembering some of the things that my dad did, that him and Viejo Majel did. Even though many of the things they did weren't done in ceremony, it was done just them remembering things, and Viejo talking the language and them singing and dancing around the fire. Just their little phrases and stuff—you know, "*bailendo*, you're dancing like the *viejas de antes*," the old people, you know. And we learned it on the reservations—like when my son Domingo used to go down and learn *peon* from Leroy Miranda.³ Raymond, Blackie, my dad for sure, and Matt Calac, and Henry Rodriguez, Thurmond McCormick.

I remember as a kid, my uncle Joe, my dad's brother, died, and my half-sister died at like age fifty-one. I'm four or five years old, so it was the early 1950s. I can't remember if it was right in conjunction with the burial, or it was a year later, but the family did the burning of the clothes. It wasn't the whole image ceremony, but it was an aspect of it that was being done.

SO: Do you recall, or did you hear later on, who did the burning ceremony for your half-sister?

DB: Basically, it was the family. It was my dad, and it was my uncle and my *nino*, my godfather, Ray Arce, and my mom's mother's sister Lola Arce, Lola Castillo. I remember them being there. I remember them coming out.

The same thing as in the old days—the family dug the grave and buried the individual. Then later you went up and put in a handful of dirt to signify that. Now we're getting back and in certain places, not everywhere, to where you dig the grave

yourself and bury the individual. And now we've added the tobacco and the sage. So, in the '50s, that was done, you know, and, and it's being done again. It's being done more now. We burn the effects of the person, whether it's clothes or whatever. In between and after the burials, we did certain things. In the old days, you know, people would cut their hair, traditionally knocked their teeth out. Well, nobody's going to knock their teeth out anymore, because no one's gonna go around with that,



Stephen O'Neil interviewing David Belardes. Photo by Olivia Batchelder.

but there is the cutting of the hair. So those traditions, they're not coming back—they're back. People do that, you know, people are doing that.

BECOMING A CHIEF

I asked David about the role of “chief” in the Acjachemen community nowadays—what are the responsibilities of this position in the modern era, how is the person chosen, and how are they invested with the authority to carry out their duties? Within the traditional society, each clan had a *nu*, the ceremonial leader, which was a hereditary position. With the hereditary lines broken and no initiated practitioners the past hundred years, new traditions and new ceremonies had to be constituted to fill the growing need for spiritual links within the community.

DB: I consider myself a traditionalist and a practitioner of our traditions and culture. Maybe not as they were way back when, but what we have remembrance of. We're practicing them as best we can. With thirty years of elders guiding us, guiding me.

David Belardes (standing, left) with sons Domingo and Matias Belardes (right) at a gathering of the Juaneño Band. Photo courtesy of Joyce Perry and the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians.

I was elected as chairman for the band in '89, and I think it was about '94 that I assumed the responsibilities of chief. That was done with consulting the elders, in particular Frank Lobo, and people who were involved at that time. Alfred Lopez, Pete Mares, there was a number of elders I got advice from. I asked all the elders, all the people, who were active in the tribe, “What do you think?” And everybody agreed to it. I mean if they had said no, I wouldn't have been chief.

When you have people like Frank Lobo and Pete Mares, at that time, in support of my taking on the role, that was important. I think Raymond had earned the position before me, as Clarence Lobo had before him.⁴

SO: The ceremony investing you as chief was a private event just for the tribe. But I have wondered what this ceremony entailed, and how it came about.

DB: It was based on a lot of things—tradition, federal recognition, do we need an acknowledged leader in a traditional way? That was always my feeling. We were adhering to this federal tribal packet ruling where you needed to have a tribal council, X amount of members, and so forth—following the government's rules of what a tribe should be. Traditionally we didn't have that sort of structure, politically or socially.



Traditionally we had the *puuplem*, the ceremonial specialists, and those were the ones who took care of everybody's needs—the chiefs prepared youths for initiation, and all that. So I said, do we want to do it traditionally?

Around '91, Domingo and I both acquired almost-full eagle pelts. There were feathers enough to make eagle-feathered skirts. So I said, let's do it traditionally. Everybody pretty much got behind it. I mean there was like five hundred people there.

At the ceremony everybody put their eagle feather on the staff I had been presented with, each family or clan member put an eagle feather on that, a dozen of the old-time families.

SO: These were the representatives, or the elders, of each of these families present and involved?

DB: Yes, they put their eagle feather on that staff. But the main traditional part with assuming the responsibility of chief was when Frank Lobo took that eagle-feathered skirt—prayed over it and blessed it, saged it—and then presented it to me. That completed it—you're now our chief. Like I say, there were five hundred people there. We sang, we danced, we ate: you know, we had a big to-do. That was it.

SO: How do you see the difference in roles between chairman and chief?

DB: The difference is the chairman is basically the political part of what you do. The chief is more ceremonial. As chief you take the leadership of conducting the ceremony, and direct people in their participation and roles within the given ceremony. You give direction.

You gotta remember, we hadn't done any of these traditional religious activities for a long time because we don't have the traditionally knowledgeable people with us anymore. So I had to be everything—the *puuplem*, this, that, and the other thing; be chief, this, that, and the other thing; and the political head at the same time. Traditionally we didn't do that. We had different individuals who filled all those positions, the *puuplem* or village council, they discussed and agreed on how to carry out everything. So I'm doing everything, because there's nobody else out there. If I'm not available, or can't handle it, my son Domingo, who is just as committed to our traditions and culture, he's

the one who assists me with my duties as chief. He does the reburial ceremonies, he'll go to funerals and sing.

I'm doing this because somebody needs to do it, and I guess I'm the one. I remember my dad saying, *yo no voy, ellos me llevan*—"I'm not going, they're taking me." Even if I didn't want to go on this journey, the ancestors, the spirits, are going to take me. For better or worse, I'm out there.

HISTORICAL LEADERSHIP

SO: The Juaneño were particularly "disrupted" and torn apart by the mission experience. Family lines were extinguished before sacred information could be passed on. But are there any families in town who have traditions that they were of chiefly families?

DB: The one family in modern times has been the Lobos—via the Robles line on the mother's side.

SO: I know there was Clarence Lobo, who was chief. And his mother Hope had been very active, particularly with the Mission Indian Federation.

DB: One of his grandfathers, Juan Robles, was in there before Clarence, and before him was José Dorum, and then Marquitos Forster, starting from 1919 with the Indian Federation and all that. Then there were the historical leaders from the 1850s up through 1900. They doubled [as people with a hidden traditional role and a public economic or Catholic church role], like Mesa, who was the *santero* for church services, but he also doing sweat lodges and mourning ceremonies down by San Juan Creek. There were still then spiritual leaders, *curanderos*, taking care of the health of the people.

SO: But I have not seen, historically, the same family starting the next set of organizations that appeared in town. If they had been a new lineage of leaders, wouldn't they have been active this way?

DB: I don't think you can say there was like a father to son, or a father to daughter, thing like that. I think it's all broken up into different people, different families, who stepped up at different times. It just depended on what the need was.

THE FAMILY

SO: I've watched you the past thirty-some years, watched the other people who are involved with keeping the Band going. You were working at the same time. You were with Cha-Cha [his wife Aurora] raising the two boys. Going to their games, coaching their games. And you were doing the cultural resources monitoring and negotiating. How did Cha-Cha feel about all that?

DB: Well, she was always there. If we had meetings or functions or anything she was always in the kitchen with the ladies. They were always in the kitchen cleaning up or preparing the meals or whatever. Everybody was supportive of each other. I mean, I guess she knew what she was getting into.

SO: Well, not when she met that boy in high school.

DB: Actually we met in kindergarten at mission school. So we go back a long ways, and our families go back a long ways. I mean her mother, dad, and grandparents knew my mom, dad, grandparents. Everybody worked together, battled with each other, whatever. There's a couple of stories in the family, where they tangled.

SO: I was thinking that there had to be times you had to make a decision, or choose between one event and another. Something with the family that had to be put off—some conflict once in a while. You had to go with the tribe, or divide your responsibilities.

DB: I'm sure there were conflicts. I can't remember any right now—not conflicts, but there were times I had to be certain places.

You had to make sacrifices. Both of us made sacrifices. The kids made sacrifices. We all made sacrifices because we had to be here, there, or everywhere. But we worked through it, we survived it. You know, a lot of times I look back and I say, I wonder how was I able to do it all? Even with my being retired now and having all this time, I still don't have time. And I don't know—how do you throw a job in there and still do this? I don't even know how I did it, but I did it. But of course I was younger, I was a lot healthier. I was always on the run back

then. You had the energy and you made the time. And everybody was involved. All the families were involved. I don't remember Cha-Cha or anybody ever complaining. It's just like, you gotta go, this is what I gotta do.

TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE COMING UP

I asked David about the coming generation of leaders. Within the band there is a positive mix of elders and the young. Most of the young bring their children and babies to council meetings, to the receptions following wakes and baptisms, to the educational events held at the Blas Aguilar Adobe to learn traditional skills and listen to the language tapes. The youth are taking an active role in the band and a generation has now grown up with the reality of a tribal band in the midst of their community. Several have served on the tribal council.

But when I ask for specific advice on how the next generation should prepare themselves to be the next chairman, Chief Belardes's answer is characteristically to the point: "Stick it out. Learn from the elders. Be tough. It won't ever get easier, so be prepared to work long and hard to the end." One of those elders they should spend time with is David Belardes. ▼

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Endnotes

- 1 The Capistrano Indian Council was founded in 1975 by local and other Native Americans of San Juan Capistrano as a platform for discussion of Title V Indian education issues and as a cultural resource center for all Indian people.
- 2 These are all Luisefio hereditary leaders and ceremonialists.
- 3 Leroy Miranda is vice chairman of the Pala Band of Mission Indians.
- 4 Clarence Lobo was chief of the Juaneño community starting in the 1950s. His was not in a religious role, but he was named chief in honor of his hard work as a political leader representing the community and the Mission Indian Federation at the federal level. He retired in the early 1970s, moved to northern California, and retained the title of chief for life.

CONCLUSION

Malcolm Margolin

AS PAULA TRIPP-ALLEN points out in the introduction to her interview with Susie Long and Maria Tripp, there is no shortage of leaders in Native California. So many tribes, recognized and unrecognized, so many groups dedicated to culture, health, employment, education, and social justice. We all know people who serve on several different boards. We all know organizations that are in constant turmoil and others that are quietly productive and effective.

Much is made of the divisiveness of Indian politics, the infighting, the battles over enrollment, the painful conflicts that split up families and sometimes lead to violence. Yet anyone who has watched politics on the state level, the national level, or the city council level, knows that infighting is not the exclusive domain of Indians. Whenever anyone talks about the divisiveness of certain Indian groups, I point to the turmoil within the anthropology department of a certain university up the street from our offices: talk about dysfunction! Yet there is still something about the feuding within Indian communities that is especially soul-sickening and disheartening.

Undoubtedly, it was once a lot better. Certainly much of the damaging infighting is the result of internalized oppression, as Greg Sarris pointed out in his interview. But even in the best of circumstances leadership is a tricky business. In traditional California Indian societies, there were of course no written constitutions, no elections, no terms of office, little of the formal legality that clarifies the role and defines the powers of a leader in modern institutions. In 1929, a Quechan man

named Patrick Miguel explained how chiefs were chosen: “When a man knew he had the power to be a good leader, he told his dreams. If his dreams were good, his plans would be followed, but if they were poor and stupid others would tell him so and he could do nothing. Sometimes men struggled with each other to lead war parties and arrange daily affairs. Then each would try to get more of the people on his side, giving feasts to his friends and encouraging them to speak of his wisdom. But it was not long before we knew who was the better man and he became leader and gave positions to others. If a leader acted stupidly, it meant that his power had deserted him and it was time to have another to decide things. A man did not become *kwoxot* (chief) because his father had been *kwoxot*, although some families were more powerful than others and had a lot of good men.”

A leader chosen on the quality of his dreaming? How utterly revelatory. Obama, Romney—tell me what you are dreaming so I can probe your soul and know who you *really* are. I for one would much rather know a candidate’s dreams than see his tax returns. But we live in a world of legal and corporate constructs. Our institutions have rules to follow, procedures, and job descriptions. Lawyers draw up tribal constitutions, the BIA approves them, and we have democratic process, elections, balance of power between the leader and the tribal council, with courts adjudicating if things fall apart. We’ve been brought up to believe in the democratic process, fair elections, clarity about power and duty. I’m sure these things are

necessary in a diverse and complex society; lack of law and lack of process can lead to some really scary things.

I keep feeling that the key to understanding the potentials and distinguishing features of California Indian leadership is intimacy. The mayor of Berkeley, Tom Bates, is a good friend and a fine person. He is mayor of a modest sized city of one hundred thousand. He knows personally only a fraction of his constituents, and perhaps more to the point most of his constituents know him only as a public figure. In a world in which people don't know each other, there needs to be agreed upon rules, defined boundaries between government powers and individual rights, clearly articulated duties and expectations. Yet for California Indian leaders, even today, the world is one of families, friends, people with whom there is a deep understanding and emotional connection. Maneuvering in that world is probably more challenging than maneuvering in a world of strangers, less bound by rules and more by basic human emotions.

What advice can we give to a young person we are grooming for leadership? What qualities can we suggest they have? What policies might they pursue? The preceding interviews offer some good advice. Greg Sarris suggests that the ability to work well both in the Indian and the non-Indian world is essential. Maria Tripp and Susie Long emphasize that a leader must learn how to listen. Louise Miranda's life suggests that a leader needs to fight fiercely for tribal rights. David Belardes shows us that leadership is not just confined to the political arena but manifests itself in ceremony and social service.

What advice would you give to a leader? Do you have any personal experience, anything you have done as a leader that strikes you as worth passing on? Anything that you have seen leaders do, either right or wrong? What practical or social skills do you think are necessary in this age? Let us know. Send your thoughts to us at lindsie@heydaybooks.com, and we'll see about following up this supplement or perhaps starting a blog. ▼

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