

Southern Utah Oral History Project

The Southern Utah Oral History Project was started in July of 1998. It began with an interest in preserving the cultural history of small towns in southern Utah that border the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The project was managed by Kent Powell, from the Utah Division of State History, who oversaw the collection of oral histories conducted in Boulder, Escalante, Bryce Valley, Long Valley, Kanab, the Kaibab Paiute Reservation, and Big Water, by Jay Haymond, Suzi Montgomery, Marsha Holland and other volunteers. Also in cooperation with the state was the Bureau of Land Management and the people of Garfield and Kane counties, with support from the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The goals of the project were first to interview long-time local residents and collect information about the people and the land during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, the interviews were to be transcribed and copies of the transcripts were to be made available to the public at the Utah State Historical Society and at local repositories. Lastly, to build a relationship with state agencies and the local communities and provide a medium for the local communities to express their interest in preserving their own history and culture in the areas that are now included in the GSENM.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to care and share their memories and stories.

March 7, 2008

This interview was part of a larger project conducted by Logan Hebner. Mr. Hebner donated the interview to the Southern Utah Oral History Project (SUOHP) because of the crossover of land use with the Paiute and the project area of the SUOHP. For more information on Mr. Hebner's project contact Logan Hebner at 435-772-3873 or at hebner@infowest.com.

Many thanks to Mr. Hebner.

Marsha Holland
Southern Utah Oral History Project
Tropic, Utah
Holland@color-country.net

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Clifford Jake Indian Peaks Band 1919

I was born in Indian Peaks, way out in the sticks on the fall time, camped out picking pine nuts there. My parents didn't move for maybe two weeks, let me settle in. They met at a big Cry ceremony out in New Castle. They liked each other so they left together, took off on one horse and came back over this way.

I started with the Native American Church in 1940. My uncle, Jo Diro, he used that great medicine to bring me home safe from WWII. I use it to bring my son home from Vietnam. Jo worked as a CAT operator in Apache country and learned it from the Comanche, Alfred Wilson. He also took a part of it in Goshutes. Back from the war I went up to Ft. Duchesne; Jo told me I could be a member, bless me. Another uncle, Albert Tom, and others, Tommy Wash, Calbert Piunumpt, Ivy Bear, been with it a long time. I learned how to do the spiritual things that they do, the medicines. I learned how to talk to the Creator and Mother Earth, Water, Air, Food, all these things combined what the Creator did. Give. When you give, you take care of this mother, make a home on this Mother Earth. That's the way it goes.

I heal with the medicine. I was a spiritual man, a good man, and it come to me itself. They give me the authority. I put up the teepee, put everything up for people that need me, ask for me. I don't go around looking for it. They have to come to me. To heal them, they have to express themselves to me. Tell me what's wrong. They got to be honest. You can't leave those honest things to do what you want. I've seen mistakes; people play with it. It gets bad. The Great Spirit says; "The peyote is not yours, its mine. You better straighten it up."

My uncle Jake Wiggits, Tuunip was his Indian name, had the healing power given to him from the Great Spirit. Lots of people from Shoshone travel toward him to do the blessings. I used to attend that, sit up until midnight watching him. It's a power of the Great Spirit and the Mother Earth. When he's blessing a person he visualize what sickness was taking place, and he had a song for it, something to replace that sickness and put in the fire. Charlie Chemehuevi had the same power as Jake. Johnny Poog (Kanosh) too. Others from Koosharem, from Kaibab. One lady from Caliente pulled a red feather from my sister's body, threw it in the fire and she got better.

I died once, went into spiritual world. Real pretty blue curtain. I was standing right here and the curtain was right there. I wondered what that was, went through, down a slope. Lots of water, real green, lots of people. "Dad, have you come to stay?" I had two daughters gone from my first wife. Another one come, real beautiful girl; "You don't know me, I'm your grandmother. I've been taking care of your daughters." Talked to her for a while. My time up, I have to go back. "Dad, stay with us, we got everything we need, everything here." It was real peaceful.

I used to drink a lot around 1956. I didn't have nothing. Just my shoes and my hat and my clothes, that's all. I'd meet up with people drinking and just go, Reno, Salt Lake, Las Vegas, just go. I told my wife Yetta; "We don't have nothing." She said she know; "what we going to do about it?" "I think we better quit." We stop drinking. Everything that I need I open my heart to it, my mind. Now I have this house, my horses, this car. I don't understand that alcohol.

When I did the Blessing for that Mountain Meadows Reunion in St. George, Yetta told me; "I seen something, seen it real good. Saw three of you, you in the middle, the

White guy and an Indian with buckskin and a feather on.” I told her there was only two of us on stage. She said; “Some spirits were guiding you, protecting you.” These people who traveled from elsewhere, tears came out from those people during the Blessing. Something really takes all the sadness out of you. Then they asked me out to the site twice. I said no. Some of the feelings weren’t right from the Mormon people, not sad feelings. Seems to me they were just doing it. I don’t want to be involved in those feelings.

.... so Coyote knew he done bad; he tells everyone he’ll burn himself. He made a fire. Fire was going pretty good, real powerful way. He chicken out. He jumped in, rolled out, snuck off. When he come back, he said; “I’m his brother.” Them old people used to tell those Legend Stories in winter. You can’t sit down, you have to lay down; you can visualize them better. Also, I’ll tell you, it’s because you’ll get a wrinkled ass. You don’t want to be that way.

I was about eleven, had a little sorrel from my father Carl. He had a lot of horses, used to trade with the cowboys. Dad was a real good hunter, used to get big bucks. I killed one when I was twelve. I left it there for an older person. That’s our tradition; give your first kill away. Father told me, you have to drink the blood, warm, so I did that.

Zion still has a lot of good spirits in it. Grand Canyon too. Song in the water, song in that rock wall; got some voice down there. Yetta could hear that voice. Afraid of Zion? Rumors your talkin about now. You’d be afraid too if a gun was pointed at you.

Night before mother Minnie died, I went to visit her. She was all right; “Before you go home sing me a pretty song.” I had this song from Yucca Mountain. Went there in evening time, waaay up on the highest mountain, with Stoffle, Lucille and Vivienne

Jake. A place where Indian people used to roast the pine nuts, metates. I went off by myself, really fine wind, nice breeze, just right. There was a song on that breeze and I hum it for a while, learned that song. Really special song there. That's the song I sang to my mother. Next morning she was gone.

(Senator) Watkins was concerning about how Termination make you free to do everything, promised everything; gonna be free Indians, build a hotel, restaurant, anything you want. Four band leaders there; Cedar Band didn't come. Three of us, Tony Tillahash, Wes Levi and me together listening. Tony talked, said; "How come you talking on this treaty? We not gonna have anything then." I told him; "Mr. Senator did you ever visit Indian homes? You talkin' there, did you ever visit the Paiute Nation? Do you know how they live? I tell you. We go through your trash and junk and make a shack. Maybe a board, maybe a tub for an open fireplace, cook things out there. He look at me real funny. He tells me; "Hey, sit down and shut up." He did, right there. After that, Bruce Perry, Mary Sloan and another guy, our lawyers, ask me to speak in Washington, D.C. They tell me; "You're the only one who really understands what this Termination means."

There's powerful medicine still in these hills, powerful, waiting for an answer. What the Indians used in the long and early days. Paiutes now got to decide if they want to be Paiute or White people. Soon maybe they won't be Paiute. Just be people. They are researching all these plants now. They might know about it but they don't know how to talk to it, pray to it. They just pick it up and it doesn't work out like it supposed to. Like these songs, that's what they're looking for now. I was just there two months ago, where the old people used to go for spiritual help.

My thinking is this way. A lot of things changing all right. Everything's going haywire, messing up, people against one another. The Medicine knows it already. It comes from the Earth. Air. Everything's a part of it. It's there yet. Indian Medicine still waiting for an answer.