

Fieldwork Report

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Since 1974 I have been working through grants from the Elizabeth and Melville Jacobs Research Fund which is administered through the Whatcom Museum of History and Art.

It occurred to me that some of you might be interested to know about the topics that I have been able to transfer to the written page phonemically in Skagit Lushootseed and translated into English.

The first thing I did was to transcribe one of the many tapes recorded by Leon Metcalf in the early 1950's. This was material related by a Snohomish elder about her lifetime memories, 1855-1958. These include some humorous anecdotes of the Indians' reaction to new items introduced by the new cultural contacts with white people.

One little anecdote particularly brought chuckles to me and my students as I read it to them. The elder describes using the unfamiliar bar soap as she washed her head in the salty waters of the Sound. The description she gave of the appearance of her

hair after this shampoo was most graphic in Lushootseed. She drew a most vivid picture for me which I have found difficult to duplicate in English.

After finishing this transcription, I selected tapes from the collection that would give my finished collection some variety. Sometimes it was difficult to know which to translate next because I had known many of the story tellers and know which of them could tell the most interesting tales.

One of these stories that I did select to transcribe, I'm most anxious to make available to my Skagit people. It is one related by an elder who was very dear to me. She was a relative who could keep an audience enthralled by her story telling technique. It is referred to in English many different ways. Most commonly it is known as Star Child. It is also named Star Husbands and Diaper Child. Some refer to it as the story of creation because it concerns the beginning of our Skagit country. There are two other versions yet to transcribe and translate.

One of these was just told to me in 1975 by an elder who is still alive. She also told me stories that I had never heard before. One was how the sg^wədilič (spirit boards) were first given to our

Skagit people. Another was how we received the blackberry. She also related a short version of the flood story.

Her early years were spent in the upper Skagit area so I read her my transcriptions of place names as told by another historian. She recognized and approved my transcriptions.

It has made me happy to be able to add to the collections gathered many years ago. As I work I realize the need to record answers to many things alluded to in the stories that will remain mysteries after all of our elders are gone unless satisfactorily explained today. Therefore, I am not only transcribing and translating but also, I am doing much fieldwork on a variety of topics. The following list includes those I am currently investigating.

1. How the bone game sləhal is played.
2. How cedar root baskets yiq²us are made.
3. The different varieties of ducks, their habitat, how the elders distinguished them. How they were killed and prepared for eating.
4. The different varieties of berries, where they grow and their salient characteristics from the elders' viewpoint.

How they were prepared.

5. Describing distinctions among pətidge^wəsəb, ǰəč and s(h)əli? which correspond only roughly to the English thought, mind, and soul.
6. The music, songs of our people. This is my latest undertaking. This is proving to be the most involved yet. The subject has received only the most cursory treatment thus far.

It will be an interesting task to undertake while elders still live who can give me good answers.

Among other tales I have finished, my favorite is How Daylight was stolen by Mink and Raven. This was told by an Upper Skagit elder whom my family used to visit frequently when I was a child. He and his wife were friends and relatives of my parents. I was acquainted with his animated style of story telling so it was a pleasure to transcribe his story. Tales frequently told were Bluejay Story and the Beaver Story. These too, I have transcribed.

Another popular subject was the tiuḷbaḷəd, the spirit power that brought wealth in various forms. A tale in this category was often preceded or followed by a personal account of a power quest.

Doing this research has been a very stimulating learning process for me. It is particularly rewarding to see the information I have transcribed put to use as soon as it leaves my typewriter.

Since 1972 I have been involved with teaching a Lushootseed language class at the University of Washington. Dr. Thom Hess has written the textbooks for these classes. He very generously lists me as co-author as I provide material from this research. We are currently involved in compiling stories for a third textbook for the instruction of Lushootseed literature.

In addition to teaching a class on campus this past year, I was asked by the Swinomish Tribe to conduct a course for them. This I did through an evening extension class administered by the University of Washington. Students who so chose, earned three credits for the quarter. This was a mutually exciting experience for us as I introduced my people to their first glimpse of our language set up in textbook form.

Hopefully sufficient interest has been stimulated that some of our younger Skagit will continue the study of their language and culture.

Maybe all of these research pages will some day find their way into the hands and minds of our future generations of Skagits and other interested people so they can all appreciate the treasures contained in the cultural heritage of our people.