

Interview with Eleanor Tom, Cedar Band  
Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah  
Interview date: March 7, 2008

Forrest Cuch

Eleanor please tell us the Paiute creation story.

Eleanor Tom

Well the creation stories aren't really supposed to be told. They are only told on a certain time of the year. They are told like maybe when you are sitting around or during the winter. And you're, you've got a bunch of children in front of you or down, and their grandmothers are telling stories. Or grandfathers you know either one. And sometime they are told like if you are on the pine nut mountain. You know they are picking pine nuts and they are telling stories they are like pine nut stories that they tell at the time when you are picking pine nuts and you're sitting there eating pine nuts around the campfire there. And they tell stories you know what the old people did a long time ago and what Shinto (Shinob) did. And that's the creator to us is the Shinto (Shinob) and Tovwots (Tabats) was his brother, that's the wolf. And this is a story that they tell about these two, what they did and why we do the things that they did. They are the ones that did a lot of the things that's happening in this world today. And you um, but that's what the creation story is. Its very important you know to me because I was raised on creation stories. I listen to my grandmothers when they told me all these stories. When we had to stay awake. Sometimes stories would last for 2 days. So she would have to tell part of it that night. So the next day, next tomorrow, that's how she used to say it, "next tomorrow we are going to finish the story". So we would, after suppertime and everything all cleared up then we would all gather around again and we would listen cause she has to finish the story. And so it's very important to some of the Paiute people that was raised traditional. But now I think its getting lost because there isn't too many of us that tell the creation stories. They don't pay no mind to it anymore.

Forrest Cuch

Eleanor, tell us a winter creation story.

Eleanor Tom

Okay. Um, I'm going to tell you this one. It's my favorite one. I'm going to tell you about the geese. Let me tell you about the geese. No, I'm going to tell you a different one.

That's a spring story. I'm going to tell you this one is, almost like anyway, I'm going to tell it anyway. Let me kind of; let me say it in Indian first okay? Because I'm, lets start like this, when I was a little girl I had never had a brand new dress. I never had no new clothes. I never had nothing like this. So one day, Tommy had bought me this real pretty dress. I was living with Tommy and ? At that time. And he bought this real pretty dress. Oh, I was so pretty I never had such a beautiful dress. I was over there just turning and just oh I was just showing off and everything. Oh, I was just so pretty. So I was just turning and everything. So my grandmother was sitting over there and she said, "hey – Paiute... She said. And I kept you know, just doing everything. And she said, Paiute...And I kept doing, the more she kept talking the more I kept, you know, turning. Anyway, she said Paiute... That water; you see your own reflection in it. So he's thinking...Paiute...That's what you get for showing off he told him. Cause he fell in the water. Now I'll tell you in English. Sonamo (I don't know how to spell this correctly and can't find it written anywhere), That's our creator, his wife, one of his wives, made him this beautiful buckskin outfit. And moccasins, a shirt. Oh it was just beautiful. But he wanted to see himself, but you can't cause we don't have no mirror. So he said well I'm going to well I'm going to walk down there to that creek, in that pure water, so he could see himself. He walked down that path he was just whistling and singing, saying, "Oh I got a beautiful wrap. My wife made me a really nice outfit". Then he got down by the little creek there and there was a big lake. Just pure. You could see yourself. So he went down there and he was looking at himself. Around the circle, getting up see if he could see himself in the water. HE kept getting closer to the water. He just kept admiring himself. So there was a little duck, sitting in the brush. So, he was watching him he said what is that crazy man doing now he said. But he kept watching, every time he would go by, the duck would hide, sit back in the bush and then he would look at him again. So he kept going around just really admiring himself and he got really close to the edge of this lake. And the little duck got up and he told him, he said, "Duck! He said in Indian. He

said and he said, "duck!" and that man got scared and he fell in the lake and he got all his pretty clothes all wet. He was so mad at that little duck he said "what did you go and do that for?" and the little duck said, "well that's what you get for showing off". That's how the story goes. You know, when Sonamo did this, and that's why we do this we do the exact same thing what he did. We are over there in the mirror, you know when we buy a new dress we have to look at ourselves to see if it looks good. How does it look? Doing everything just like he did. That's what he did. So when the duck scared him, and he got scared, you know when somebody said boo! to you, you get scared. That's why you do that. You get scared from this day. When something happens you get scared. Somebody scares you. That's what that means. The stories that are creation stories are stories that are happening today in this new modern world. But back in those days you know somoma brought this. And so that's why we do exactly what he is doing. That's one of the creation stories.

Forrest Cuch

Good one. How was growing up as a Paiute child?

Eleanor Tom

Oh growing up as a Paiute child, I was raised by grandmothers, didn't have much, I didn't really grow up rich. We were poor. I mean really dirt poor. And so were a lot of the other Indians. They were really poor. We were all poor people. But we as Paiute people we were strong people. And grandmothers were never ashamed of being poor. And I grew up having no food in the house. So I was like, "maybe I can barely remember being five years old and one day my grandmother said, I think it was before Christmas or after Christmas I cant remember. She told me she said, "Well, put your little coat on" I had a crazy looking little coat that was my coat. I put it on and I remember shoes that like had rips in them and everything. Anyway we walked across a creek right there, where uh, this happened here in cedar. We lived right across just where the church house is now just over just a little way you come over the turn there is a great big huge house the church had given my family. My grandmothers. We lived in there. That house had six or seven big huge rooms in each room were different families that lived in there. Anyway she said

we are going to go across the creek there. So her and I we went across the street we went to the first house that was on the corner there, and she had a little flour sack, a little so I carried and she'd knock on the door and she'd hold out that little sack and people would come and give us some potatoes or maybe bread or whatever they had, whatever they could spare. And some places they didn't answer the door or but there were some people that would open and they would give us stuff. So we would get just enough that we are going to eat. That's going to be our supper or maybe breakfast for the next day and she would say, " I think we got enough. We come back down over the bridge, back down to the house. And then I was ix years old I remember going to the city dump. And a lot of the Indian children did. We all went to the city dump. Cause the dump was up by where the golf course is now just up behind there. And we'd all walk up there and pick stuff and we would get our food. There was this one man that did a we call it the Mormon dump because he had good stuff in there that the Mormons had given so we called that the Mormon dump. So this Mormon man would come and he knew we were there so he would leave out you know, cause he came from the grocery stores that he would gather form the grocery store. So all this stuff he would leave out for us to take. So when he took off we would all run down there start and gather what we were going to take. And we would all kind of divide it among each other. And as soon as we got that we'd all run back home just to go take this food back, down to my grandmother. And I would tell her you know "I brought you your turnip" is what she liked. "I got you your, that stuff that you like" so she would cook it right away. And then um, when that was over with then we would come home during the night and we would find stuff. And I didn't have a good shoe so one day I found me some shoes and they were like, really small. But I made my foot go in you know and it had like, my little foot was just like this. And that's how I wore that shoes. My little toes were just curled up in there. And I wore these little shoes and then they had that a little rip in the back. And that' how I kind of went in. Cause I had the rip in the back there. And um anyway that's where I got my first shoe. But we all had it hard you know we weren't rich, we didn't have, you know, I don't know if my grandmothers got any kind of money from anywhere. I don't think so. Because we were very poor.

Forrest Cuch

But on the traditional side you were telling us earlier about your grandmother or great grandmother who found the porcupine? Would you tell us that story?

Eleanor Tom

Oh yeah, the old Indian ladies you know, they were strong ladies. Um, they were strong ladies. You know if we didn't have food in our house they are going to go out and look for it. So I went to picking willows one day with my grandmother and she told me we are going to go kill a porcupine she said. Paiute...she said we are going to go and look for the porcupine this morning. Paiute...she told me early that night. We are leaving early tomorrow. Paiute...So we went down early in the morning and we walked down by the creek. She had a big long stick. And we walked and I don't know for some reason she knew exactly what the move was on this, she knew so she would tell me to be quiet. So here is that porcupine. Paiute...hit him in the head. And the little he just fell. The little porcupine just went like that. And she picked up this sack and put him in there. Then we went home and she's clipping all that stuff off from that porcupine. And then she starts this fire. This fire was ready; she had rocks in it already. So we just got back she just did the fire and she just put him in there in a gunnysack. Wrapped him up and there he was. So the next day she got up and she watched it pretty closely during the night so the dogs don't go dig it up.

Forrest Cuch

She covered it over?

Eleanor Tom

She covered it. Yeah buried it. And the steam you know is the one that was that cooked the meat. So the next morning she went outside and she dig it up and then she took it out. She took the porcupine out and the meat just went like that. And I don't know how it tastes cause I can't remember. But I know it was, it must have been good cause I ate it. And she made karate bread and then we, that was our breakfast. That was our breakfast and our supper. And there was an elderly man and another elderly woman that lived there

with my grandmother. So I was kind of raised you know, by these little old people. And I did what they said; pick wood, go get wood, get water. Get their washbasin so they could wash their hand or their face. Or go get wood, and you know stuff like that. That was my job to do for the elderly people. And to make sure that they went to the bathroom. Cause we had an outside toilet. And I would take them out.

Forrest Cuch

It sounds like the traditional ways were a source of pride and strength for you. What more could you add in terms of Paiute women? Eleanor most of the Utah tribes not all but most of the tribes are matriarchal in there culture. Meaning the women seem to have a little more decision making power, a little more authority in some things. You relate earlier about your grandmother. How she prepared that porcupine. What are some other things that you can remember about the matriarchal part of the culture? What makes you proud as a Paiute woman?

Eleanor Tom

Well, um I'm going to say that um I am proud being a Paiute woman because I was taught the traditional ways. And every, in every household there was a boss lady. I call them a boss lady today. My grandmother Mabel, my uncles called her boss, and very few of them called her mom. Only one uncle called her mom. I'm glad, I'm proud to say I learned a lot from my grandmothers. And the strength that they have given me to be a strong lady and to be strong when I was growing up. Cause I was very poor. I would just say that I'm proud to be a Paiute lady.

Forrest Cuch

That's great. Eleanor there has been lots said about the um, mountain meadows massacre that occurred in 1857 and (someone) always said that the Paiute were involved in the killings. What are your, what is your understanding of the mountain meadows massacre that took place, in your perspective?

Eleanor Tom

Okay. This is what was told to me when I was...well not exactly to me but I just happened to be there when they were discussing about this thing that had happened. I wasn't there but my grandmothers were talking about this what they heard a long time ago. Anyway she said that there were four men I think it was. And I can't remember if it was her, was it her brother? That went out to go, they were going hunting is what they were going to do. And they started heading out toward Pinto. Pinto you know, at that time was Indian Territory. My great grandmothers, great, great, great, grandmother came from Pinto. That was where she was born in Pinto. And there was at that time you know that had villages over there. Or maybe they lived in caves or maybe they lived in little wikiups, I don't know. My grandmother used to say that that was her homeland. That's where she grew up as a young girl. But anyway, at that time you know they were hunting, these men. I don't know if they lived close by there or what. They must have lived close in that area to head over toward that meadow massacre area. But they heard these popguns you know it was popping. The four men went up to go see what was going on. You know with the hollering and screaming and stuff. And the four men looked and saw what was happening and so the two men, one man told these other two, "Go back and go tell the people what we have seen here, what's going to happen. We are going to get blamed for all of this". And so two men, no three men went back I think is how it went. Cause one man followed. Cause he wanted to see what was happening, why was all this whooping and hollering cause, you know at that time I don't think we did that. Whooping and hollering and all that stuff. And they wanted to know what kind of Indians they were that was making all this noise. So he said, "I'm going to follow them". Paiute... "I want to see what they are doing"...Paiute..."where are they going to go I need to see what's going on"...Paiute. We don't do that we don't go Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh, like that..Paiute... they didn't know what kind of Indians they were that were doing this. And so they followed them...Paiute...They washed up all their face and their clothes. And they were white man that was doing this. And he knew from that time that the Paiute were going to get blamed for all this. So he had to go on. He went down into the St George it was at the time, you know some Indians were living in along side of there. Somewhere down along the line there was Indian camps you know. He went back and told them what was happening, what he had seen. But these white people started toward, they didn't go down south, I

think they started over toward where is that? Over that way somewhere. In that direction. But he didn't follow. He just knew that they were heading that way, and then he went, I guess after he did that then the word got out. You know, he was telling all the other Indians what's happening. What's going to happen. And we are going to get blamed for all of this. Sure enough, that's what happened. They got blamed for all this.

Forrest Cuch

So the people who did the killing were dressed as Indians?

Eleanor Tom

They were dressed as Indians. Oh yeah, they were white people.

Forrest Cuch

And there were no Paiute?

Eleanor Tom

There were no Paiute and, or maybe there, well I think there was one he was there, the scout. And he was from a different tribe. And I can't remember what tribe he was but I think the Indians didn't like that tribe after what happened and what was seen and what he did and all that stuff. I think he was a scout or something I don't know. But he's the one that did all that. And so, but that was all I heard about that massacre. And my people would never do that. I mean they just wouldn't. They didn't have guns; they didn't have any kind of weapon. They had weapons but it was like maybe arrows and knives and stuff, but they didn't have guns. And besides the Indians are scared of dead people. I don't think they went over there and took everything like the white people said they took. Indians don't do that. Indians don't kill kids and Indians don't they are scared of you know the, a dead person. They can't go over there and pick their stuff cause if you do that; the Indians always believe that their spirit will be there. You know they are going to haunt you. And Indians are superstitious people. At least the Paiute people were. I mean they believed in ghosts and they believed in evil things they believed in a witch doctors they believed in everything. They were like real Indians you know.

Forrest Cuch

What would you like people to remember about the Paiute people?

Eleanor Tom

Well I think id want the people to remember us as peaceful Indians. Peaceful Paiute people. And for the other Indians around us you know. And that's what I would want the people to think about the Paiute people. Any Indian.

Forrest Cuch

Any more you'd like to share about your people?

Eleanor Tom

Um, I grew up around the Paiute people. The elders and um, I went up to um to the museum here at Will Palmer's collection. I went up there one day. Because somebody told me that Will Palmers got all these pictures of all these Indians there and I wanted to go see. I was curious; I wanted to see what kind of things that he had that would interest me. Cause one of the elder ladies said, " I went up and I had this uh, photograph of my grandfather and I recognized him she said. And I've seen your grandmother in there too she said. So that's what got me kind of curious. So I went up there cause I know William Palmer. As a little girl you know I think I must have been about six years old, six or seven years old, when we lived with, we lived here in Cedar, and will palmer I can't remember if he was an agency man or if he was some kind of leader I don't know what he was. But he was always among the Indians and the Indians shared a lot of histories with him. And a lot of the traditions and a lot of the creation stories. They shared that with him. And when he did this he'd write it in a paper. Everything that the Indians told him. They told him in Indian. So the Indians you know, they confided in him they invited him to funerals, they invited him to there ceremonies, what they did. Their card game areas. He was there all the time. So he was allowed to take pictures. So he took a lot of these pictures of funerals and of old elderly people and just all kinds of pictures he took and I was just "Oh" you know like that cause I didn't that he did all this but he did. He

took all these pictures and I got some of my great grandmothers pictures. I told the lady, I had to order for it. And I think I paid maybe three dollars for a little one and I think maybe I got four or five of them you know of my grandfather and grandmother. And my great grandmothers and the baskets that the Paiute ladies made and I asked the lady one day I say is this all the collections that Will Palmer has? She says "oh no, we have some in that room back there and they are all like baskets and they are all like Indians stuff" you know all kinds of stuff in there. So I asked her if I can see some of the stuff. So I went back in there and I remember my aunt my mother's sister, Virginia, Virginia George was her name. And she would make book, I think they are like, you know what you put your books in, what do they call that? Book whatever. She made two of them every time; it was like you put a book in there. She made like, quite a few for him and she made a um, she would bead this book that he wanted her to write like every, I think it was like maybe every three months, she would, when she would finish up a little buckskin like this and she would take it up to him and he would pay her. And he would mark down on this little hide what color he wanted each thing to be. The beads to be colored you know the green red, you know whatever and she would do all that, and then she would, she made a book, he made a book. I don't know what kind of book but she said that Will Palmer was doing a book and so anyway I went back there and looked at some of his stuff. I couldn't see the book in there. All I seen was the book thing. And a lot of baskets that some of the elderly made. My grandmother Nina was making a basket for him one day and I went up there with her. And she said when I go up she said, "sit right here don't go in the house. You are going to sit right here on the porch". So I sat out there and waited for her and finally the little old lady her name was Will Palmers wife she came out she had some milk and some bread with a little bit of jam on it. Boy that was a treat. You know. I never had a treat like that. So when I'd go up to her house I'd always look for that that little piece of bread. That homemade bread and some jam on there. Oh! And milk! My gosh I never had that kind of treat. So that was a treat to me. And I always remember that. And grandmother would always tell us that he was a nice man. And I guess he was I just saw him you know and he would you know say hello to me and all that. But I did know him though. Just by seeing him. And the Indians call him...Paiute... because his little eyes like this. So the old Indians called him which means "your eyes is shut, you're

winking" (Forrest laughs). That was what the old Indians called him you know...Paiute...he said. Old Will Palmer is coming. They all knew who he was so yeah, that was a hard life for me when I was a little girl. I never had it rich and I never had nothing. I didn't graduate from school, I my old people didn't believe in school, they thought that gathering wood and water was more important than going to school and so I stayed home and just did all the stuff with the grandmothers. And um, I got married really young because I couldn't, after the grandmothers died I didn't know who to go home too. You know I didn't have a home it just seemed like that I was lost. I was a lost girl. So I would go and stay with this lady named Jesse Bow was her name at that time. She was related to my grandmother. She had a lot of kids. But here I just mingled right among with her children so you know I stayed with her for maybe two or three weeks maybe and then I'd get tired and I'd move on again. And go to my uncles house and stay with them for a while so then I'd stay with another uncle and get tired of being there too you know and I was just wondering around all over. I wasn't, I was never, nobody claimed me you know.

Forrest Cuch

So how old were you when you got married?

Eleanor Tom

When I got married I must have been about, I'd say I was about 15. Or maybe 14. Something like that. And my husband was 18 years old when I married him and he worked on a farm. And my we lived up north. I moved from here up there with him. And you know, he didn't propose to me like a man should propose to a woman. You know like "will you marry me?" I went with him, I met him at a bear dance, they had a bear dance up north. I met him there and his family was there. I danced with him and I asked him to dance and we did the round dance and we did the bear dance. Anyway, so he went back home and he wrote letters to me you know. And finally a guess one day I got proposed to through a letter. You know, and he told me he says if you say yes I'm coming down this weekend and if you say yes you know, okay. And I'm bringing you home. So I was thinking to myself "golly you know what's going on here, I never got proposed like this.

Nobody has proposed to me in the mail" in a letter. So I showed my aunt. And she just giggled and I told her "what should I do"? She says oh marry the poor guy. So I married him. We went, he came down and I went home with him. And um, and I lived up north for many years. Up around the skull valley and the Tooele area. Grantsville area. He lived in Grantsville at that time with his family. From skull valley to Grantsville we just kind of went back and forth. And in town. We lived in town in Grantsville was because of they had two grandkids that had to go to school so they would stay there. And when school was out we'd head back to skull valley. But it was rough.

Forrest Cuch

Okay very good, thank you. Very good.

Eleanor Tom

Well I think they had it really rough because they had to live in this little made out of cedar. It was a rabbit coat they had that was made out of rabbit skin. And they had to kill...Paiute... they had to kill a lot of rabbits to make this skin, to make their blankets and to make there clothing you know to keep warm. Paiute. They put that on when they got cold during the wintertime. What was it they had? Some sort of cloth for their dresses...Paiute...summertime...they had to move in a different area. Because this was their winter camp. Paiute...they had to go to where the supplies were. You know like they had maybe they had potatoes there and they had to make gardens. And they would do this and um so they had to gather for the winter and they had to move to different areas. And when they needed meat they had to go to Zion's. Paiute...I can't remember the name of the Zion's but he has a name in Zion National Park where that big white thing is. It's got a name. And that's where they went to plant their crops. You know melons, and there squash and corn and that's where they had to go. Cause it was by the water. And they couldn't um, cause water was very important to them and water they had to carry water from a long ways when they were out in the down in a flat area during the winter. So they had to rely on these little wikkiups. They had to build it so that it would keep them warm inside and the rabbit fur was their blankets so they had to kill a lot of rabbits. In order to make this, their blankets and stuff. But uh, that's part of the history of some of the old

Indian history stories. That's part of what will palmer has in his book that's part of what he got from the Paiute...Paiute...he talked to them...Paiute...he asked questions...then he was writing it down...he wrote a book about the Paiute people. That's the history of the Paiute people. And so that's a history of the Paiute people that he has. It's important because I'd like to know a lot more about our people. You know and he had it. He had all the stories. So um, and you can't buy his book, you can buy the legend book that's the only thing that's out at the bookstore. You can buy the legend; stories that has written. But he has one about the Paiute people. You know.

Forrest Cuch

Very good. Thank you.