

## INTERVIEW LARRY CESSPOOCH, UTE STORYTELLER

**FORREST CUCH:** Larry, tell us what life was like for our people before the coming of the white man?

**LARRY CESSPOOCH:** Our people, I think for most native people, we've been taught that when the creator decides to create life he takes earth and water and combines these and everything here is here for a reason and he blesses us with part of its spirit and so native people say all our relations because we're just like this sweet sage here and all the animals and all us human beings, we've all been made to that same process. So we say all of our relations, we call this Mother Earth because it provides us with everything we need, just like a mother. And our people were in harmony, we call that *nanama* so that way we didn't take anymore than we needed and everything was in harmony just like this wheat that's here, it flows back and forth. And it's all good.

**FORREST CUCH:** And our people also sacrifice through ceremonies we have, like sun dance and sweat lodge ceremonies, it's a form of sacrifice.

**LARRY CESSPOOCH:** Right. We come into this life with only this body. Material things, money, don't mean anything to the creator so all we have is this body to sacrifice and in our ceremonies we sacrifice this body, either through our, our comfort in the sweat lodge or our food and water in the sun dances and so it's all on that premise: sacrifice. Material things and money don't mean anything to the creator. And so in the sweat lodge we sacrifice our comfort in the heat to receive what we're asking for and the same way in the sun dance lodge. *Taguwuni*, we stand thirsty, we fast for whatever amount of days that we're in there for what we're asking for. A lot times we do that for our Mother Earth, sometimes we have relatives we go in there for and then ourselves. So it all is sacrifice, just like when we take the plants and the animals; it's all connected, it's all one circle.

**FORREST CUCH:** Larry, tell us about how the horse transformed the lives of our people?

**LARRY CESSPOOCH:** Before the Spaniards brought the horse, we'd call it *kava* for the horse we were on foot and we could only go so far as our feet would carry us. But when we had that horse, it was like having a car nowadays. We could go great distances and accomplish great things. Our people were known as horse people, very powerful people. We were a feared people, nation. We learned like the Spaniards, from the Spaniards to use that horse to conquer other people and, and so that made us very powerful. We were able to go out to the plains and travel great distances and bring things back here and that was one of the main things that changed our people. Nowadays you could count them on one hand how many families have horses. That's real ironic, sad as well.

## Larry Cesspooch

**FORREST CUCH:** And the Mormon settlers, when they came, how did they treat us?

**LARRY CESSPOOCH:** Well, when the settlers came they were different than the other people that came through Ute country. They stayed. For our people, we'd stay for a little while and move about so we didn't take anymore than we needed. But for the Mormons when they came here, they stayed in one place and they had their livestock and everything ate up from there and they killed all of our game and everything that they needed for themselves, for native people we stayed in one place. And to see it, you wouldn't think anything was, was out of the ordinary because it was all in harmony. But for them, they just ate from the center out. And more and more came and ate up more and more. And our people were just in the way. We kept getting pushed and pushed and pushed to where we couldn't be pushed anymore so they, they petitioned Abraham Lincoln to create a reservation. Brigham Young sent out all his surveyors to check out the lands in Utah. And the ones for the Uinta basin returned back home and said "This land, that land, was only good for coyotes and holding the earth together." So when they created the reservation, they put us out here in Uinta basin. And [sighs] because Abraham Lincoln did that by executive order, Congress never ratified that. So Ute people have never seen any compensation for all that was taken here in Utah.

**FORREST CUCH:** Larry, tell us your version of what caused the Meeker incident.

**LARRY CESSPOOCH:** Well my understanding is that the *Nuchu*, the Ute people, had many horses. And Meeker the Indian agent -- who also made himself agent, rather than somebody asking him to, made himself agent—wanted our people to kill their horses so that they could use grazing lands for farm land. He wanted to make us farmers. And we weren't that way; we weren't farmers. We were hunters and gatherers and, and we just listened to him until he started having his workers plow up our racetrack. And then the Indian people, *Nuchu*, they got mad! And that was it. Weren't going to take it anymore. And so they confronted Meeker and as things happened he was killed and the way that they drove their point home with him was they put a stake in his mouth and said "We're going to silence this man forever." It's the way Ute people were, they were hard people. When they said something, there was a reason for it and that's what they did to Meeker. And all of that was the Meeker incident. And the army was called in and some captives were taken; Meeker's wife and, and daughter. And the army was sent in and the Ute people had to decide—we going to live this way rest of our life or are we going to fight? And we've been pushed so much. We were told this was yours and they took more and more and more. So we decided to fight and the result of that fight, we defeated the army but the result of the fight meant the removal of our people over from Colorado to this reservation here today.