Whale’s Cave and the UNOCAL Oil Spill: August 1992

The UNOCAL oil spill at Whale’s Cave near Avila Beach, California in August 1992 was a major disaster. It is an example of the kinds of struggles that Indigenous people have to wage to even try to protect their land.\(^1\) When we discovered the oil spill we knew we had to stay there and monitor the burials and other life forms. We organized and worked for several months there to prevent even worse things from happening. In the end, UNOCAL’s corroded pipe spilled over 6300 gallons of oil into the ground and into the ocean.\(^2\)

It was quite remarkable how we found out about the oil spill. The day before the oil spill happened, a good number of Chumash People had come together in the park in front of the San Luis Obispo Mission to honor the Peace and Dignity Runners. The next morning we decided to go out to Whale’s Cave and do a prayer ceremony there, both for that place and for the Peace and Dignity Runners. Whale’s Cave is a place of intrinsic power. The overall character of the entire rock is a presentation of power that can be physically and spiritually experienced. The Old Ones did ceremony there a long time ago. Modern Chumash have continued to do ceremony there, both individually and in groups. We did go there in the morning, but when we arrived, we encountered barricades at the foot of the road.

There is a road that goes to Avila and there is another road that goes up to this hilly place where Whale’s Cave is found. The barricades were at the beginning of the road that went off from the road to Avila and there were guards posted there. There were cars parked all around. We pulled up and asked, "What’s going on? What happened?" We went over and talked to the person who was guarding the barricade and he said he couldn’t tell us and we would not be allowed to go up there. We said, “But we have to. We made a commitment to go and say prayers.” Once you make a commitment like that you have to follow through. We talked some more and he said, “Maybe I’ll call up there to the people who are in charge. They might come down and talk to you and maybe you will be able to go up.”

We were sitting on the side of the road and there were other cars going through the barricade, and going up. We thought, “What is going on? What is happening here?” Then one little sports car pulled up, with a young man driving it. On his car there was a sign that said “Press.” So I said, “I am going to go over and see.” I went over and knocked on his window. He rolled the window down and I asked, “Are you going up to Whale’s Cave?” He answered, “Yes.” Then I told him that we had this prayer commitment and I said, “Will you tell the people in charge up there that we are down here. We are Chumash People and we need to go up there and fulfill a prayer commitment that we have.” He said he would see what he could do. So he went up. He was the press and the press carries some weight. Before long we see some UNOCAL dignitaries coming down in cars. They come down, they call us over, and they say, “Well of

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\(^{2}\) UNOCAL (Union Oil Company of California) was established in 1890 and merged into the Chevron Texaco Corporation in 2005.
course, of course. We didn’t realize you were down here; we want you to come up.” They put us in the car and drove us up. We went up there and we fulfilled our prayer commitment.

We also found out that there had been a massive oil pipe leak. It was a leak that happened on land, went over the bluffs, and into the ocean. That’s a little bit different than most oil spills. They usually happen from a ship or something else out in the ocean. This one originated on land and then went into the ocean. That is how our involvement with the clean-up operation out there began. We ended up working there for several months. There was major leakage and we realized that we needed to be there. The work at Whale’s Cave differed from other sites because it was an oil spill that affected not only burials, a sacred site, cultural resources associated with the ancestors, but it also involved our living cultural resources such as ocean mammals, grasses, birds, fish, shrubs, and the ocean herself. It also involved the sea caves, bluffs, rock formations, land birds, plants and the Earth herself. The scope was broad and comprehensive.

They had established an operation up there with big heavy trucks, a helicopter pad, and a helicopter coming in and out. They had set up their operation with this heavy equipment and they were attempting to get the spill cleaned up. We knew that this whole area is a sacred site and that this kind of activity needed to stop. That heavy equipment was going to crush the remains of the ancestors found there beneath the soil. When we call something a sacred site it is because it has a very strong sacred power to it. The Whales Cave is one of those sacred sites. The rest of that area is also sacred.

We knew there was a UNOCAL facility up there with storage tanks. It has been there for a really long time. There had apparently been a leak for quite a while on this pipeline that ran above the ocean on the bluffs. Inside one of their buildings there they have a gauge that shows the oil pipeline pressure. The leak had been going on for quite a while but it was not big enough to really show on the pressure gauge. Anyway, all of the sudden the pipeline had burst and the oil was just gushing out. Of course that showed on the pressure gauge and then they knew there was a problem. I don't know all of the details because UNOCAL administered everything that had to do with the pipeline. In any event, the spill was really extensive. UNOCAL needed to stop the oil from leaking, and they needed to get it cleaned up.

The clean-up operation was organized around a daily morning strategy session. All of the agencies had representatives at the daily morning strategy meeting. The Coast Guard was the lead agency of the whole operation. There were a number of other agencies involved: Fish & Game, UNOCAL, the California Conservation Corps (CCC), whose young people worked really hard and did a great job helping out there. The Chumash People were also represented there. We agreed to have Michael Khús-Zarate go to those strategy meetings. We felt that because of his background he was better able to communicate with these people.

What came out of that was that the Coast Guard captain, named J.M. MacDonald said, "Nothing moves out here in this clean up operation unless the Chumash People say its OK." He and all of the Coast Guard people that were there really supported us. I never experienced any rudeness from any of the Coast Guard people. I did from the UNOCAL people, most certainly, but not from the Coast Guard people. The California Conservation Corps young people were so strong, so motivated. They were extraordinarily careful not to do anything destructive to the
ancestors and the Chumash People. They were really great. Fish and Game was really good too. I met different wardens and people who were out there. There were people from a big bird rescue agency from the southern part of California. Many birds were covered with oil. Those birds needed to be cleaned, whenever possible, and rescued. I worked with them. As the ocean situation got more stabilized, they brought out botanists and ornithologists. They brought those people out to study what was happening with the land and with the birds on the land. I had an opportunity to work with all those people.

Not everybody who had gone out there to pray stayed. In order to stay there you had to be a certain age and in good physical condition. You had to still be somewhat young and have a lot of physical strength, stamina, as well as emotional strength because it was really hard work. It is also very hard to watch your ancestors being torn up and torn out of the ground. That’s not an easy task. We were there; Lei Lynn Odom and different members of her family were there; Bob Gibson was also there working as the archaeologist. He’s not Chumash, but he’s worked with us a lot. I think it was mainly Michael and I, and Lei Lynn. Different family members kind of came and went but she and I and Michael were probably the ones who were the most consistent, throughout the whole time.

Lei Lynn and Michael worked primarily where any excavation was happening, in order to protect the ancestors; if anything came up they could stop the machinery. I worked as a spiritual person with the agencies that were working with the different life forms: the ocean mammals, the ocean birds, and the sea grasses. I went out with the botanists and the ornithologists and worked with them as they were assessing the impacts of the oil spill on the animals. We were assessing, for example, the different birds that were there, their population, their habitat, how it was impacted by the thousands of gallons of oil that UNOCAL spilled. My work was spiritual because all of life carries the Sacred. I was there to assess the spiritual health of what was going on.

The whole operation lasted a number of months, a very long time. I was living down at Refugio, north of Santa Barbara. A friend loaned me her car. Every morning I’d use my friend’s car to drive up to Avila; I’d be there at the start of the workday, be there throughout the day, and then drive back. My memory is that we just worked straight through without time off until the situation got stabilized. We were fortunate that it didn’t do more damage than it did, but it did take the lives of different ocean birds and also mammals. It took the lives of some sea otters and sea lions.

I remember one situation in particular. There was this dead sea lion that was covered with oil. There are little beach areas with caves in that area and she was down there. The scientists had different requirements about how these things would be handled. She was a young sea lion, and they lifted her up from one of the beach areas. To lift her they used this bucket device attached to a crane. They brought her up and I was standing next to a UNOCAL worker. He was just a regular hard working guy. When the bucket came around by us we could see the sea lion in the bucket. This UNOCAL worker next to me just started to curse and curse. I got really mad at him because I thought he was cursing the slowdown of work. I turned to him and told him that he shouldn’t be cursing, that this was a sacred life, and we have to take care of it. He said, “I’m
cursing because she is dead. Look at her, do you see that tear?” The sea lion had a tear coming out of her eye. He saw that tear and was so impacted by what the oil spill was doing to the life out there. This very tough and rough looking working man was touched in that way by what was going on. She was covered with oil, so it looked to me like that was what had killed her.

The scientists and the agency people decided that they would do a necropsy. They called up somebody from Scripps Institute to do that. This beautiful young sea lion was dead because of UNOCAL’s immense and reckless disregard for life. The UNOCAL Company had let loose the forces that killed her. She should have been able to live many more years. Anyway, the scientists didn’t think it was the oil that killed her. They had this hideous procedure done on her and could not make a conclusive decision about what killed her. I wanted to have her and give her a ceremony and burial because I felt so bad that she had been taken out of her life so young. What they handed me was a box with all this bloody guts and stuff in it. That was what she was reduced to by the procedure they did. We did the best for her that we could, and that was a memorable situation. Some of the people thought it was unlikely that the oil had killed her because sea lions and seals have so much blubber that they are protected and can overcome the effects of the oil pollution in the water. Sea otters, by contrast, do get hit pretty hard with any oil spill because they don’t have that kind of blubber to protect them. Oil spills kill sea otters much faster, and much easier.

During the clean up I held a dead baby sea otter in my arms and I offered sage and I sang to it. I gave that otter—as well as other sea mammals, sea plants, and sea birds—ceremony, and put it back into the Mother Earth. There was a huge disregard for animal life; that is a great wrong. That sea otter baby was dead from the pollution, from the oil that UNOCAL Oil Company had recklessly and negligently dumped into the ocean where it killed not just this baby, but many other forms of sea life. As I held that baby there was no separation between that baby and myself. We were one. When that baby died, when those plants that live in the ocean died, when the sea birds died, part of me died with them. I know it. I experienced that death. The truth is that you also die.

It was an extraordinary experience and finally the oil spill was contained. The weather cooperated with us; we didn’t have any heavy storms or heavy seas. So we were able to do a fairly good job on the clean up. After the clean up there was a long going negotiation between UNOCAL and different stakeholders who were impacted by the spill: such as residents and business people from Avila and from the beach. We the Chumash People were designated stakeholders, but when the lawyers with all these different agencies showed up we got shuffled right out. The lawyers did not want to deal with us, so that was hard. The struggle to protect the cultural resources of that site moved into secret meeting rooms and courtrooms, making it virtually impossible for us to come together and participate in the same way we had done at Point Conception.

The laws that protect Native peoples are weak and the laws that protect private property, as well as the rights of government are incredibly strong and sometimes impossible to overcome. What we witnessed was, in our estimation, how irresponsible UNOCAL was in their operations and how unethical towards us and toward the environment in general. At the same time, the San
Luis Obispo County officials did not enforce their own laws and regulations, in deference to UNOCAL. For example, the County and UNOCAL moved heavy equipment into a restricted and highly sensitive area of great antiquity. They refused to put up a protective fence and even invited the general public to walk there on the remains of our ancestors (see UNOCAL protest photo).

At the time of the UNOCAL oil spill at Whale’s Cave, a sacred site and ancient Chumash village, UNOCAL faced four other clean-up orders in the same region. There were oil spills under the towns of Pismo Beach and Avila Beach, a spill under the Nipomo Dunes in Guadalupe, and there were excessive fumes being emitted from their refinery in Nipomo. When we realized that UNOCAL and the County were acting in bad faith and in destructive ways at Whale’s Cave we organized a public awareness campaign, including letter writing and petitions. We also held a three-day healing ceremony at Whale’s Cave, which was open to the public. Many people brought Earth from their homes to cover the wounds of Mother Earth and the ancestors. Thus we raised awareness regarding the need for protection measures.

For those thousands of years when our Chumash People lived at Whale’s Cave prior to colonization everything was regarded as sacred. We neither brutalized nor destroyed the land, the planet, and everything that Mother Earth provides. We were not destroying our environment; we were living with it. We lived with the sacred oak tree. We lived with the rattlesnake. We lived with great white shark. We lived with everything. We were not the caretakers; we were not the good shepherds; we were not stewards of the land. When you see yourself as the caretaker you elevate yourself above everything else. We are of it and in it. We have always known that everything is sacred. And so our people respected everything. We took what we needed. We took what we needed to use, for our lives to continue, just like everything else does. But we did not exploit it. We did not destroy entire food sources. We did not destroy the environment when we gathered what we needed, such as feathers for ceremony. We understood that everything was part of the circle of life. So you respect it. If there is a necessity to take something—for either nutritional purposes or ceremonial purposes—you take care of that in particular ways that show your respect for what you are taking. Nowadays there is an unconsciousness and an unawareness of that. There’s this prevalent myth of the individual who is independent of creation. That allows for a lot of unthinking destruction.

**San Simeon Point and the Hearst Corporation**

If you look at a map of the California central coast you’ll notice that there are many points that go out to the ocean. These points have certain significance to the spiritual world of the Chumash People. One of the points that protrudes out into the ocean out in my ancestral area—the northern

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3 See the very informative and comprehensive report “UNOCAL. A Legacy of Destruction and Deception” detailing “UNOCAL’s worldwide toxic impact on native peoples and their environment. Issued by Rainforest Action Network, November 1994.
part of the Chumash nation—is a place now called San Simeon Point. Some of you may be familiar with the struggle that continues to go on around San Simeon Point. The very wealthy and powerful Hearst family and their Hearst Corporation controls that Point, as well as thousands and thousands of acres around there. The Hearst entity has wanted to develop on that sacred site.

Some years back they came forward with a plan to build a world-class golf course and high-end resort for wealthy people. There was a huge outcry against this resort golf course that the Hearst people wanted to put there. That outcry came not only from Indigenous people or from central coast people. People from throughout California, from throughout the United States, and even from other countries were outraged. The Hearst people pulled back, they regrouped, and then they brought in other players. One of the family members, Steve Hearst, became involved, and they also hired a local attorney instead of a shark type from Los Angeles. They brought in these folks thinking that local people would feel more comfortable.

The Hearst Corporation has been negotiating with the Nature Conservancy agency for quite a few years, concerning the placement of a Hearst project there. They want to develop there. All of a sudden several things happened very quickly just before the end of last year. One of them is that the Hearst Corporation dropped the Nature Conservancy; the lead Nature Conservancy person then jumped over to a new environmental agency called the American Land Conservancy. A whole new plan was then put forward. The Hearst family and this new “Land Conservancy” came to one of the organizations in the San Luis Obispo area who had been struggling against the development of San Simeon Point. It was just one of the many organizations in San Luis Obispo who were opposed to the development. The Hearst Corporation told them, “We have this new plan. It’s a great plan and you need to give us complete support for it immediately because we need to get paperwork to the State in order to be eligible for State money to buy an easement from the Hearst Corporation to protect this land.” There were no more than a couple of weeks to think about it.

I was just really shaken because I wondered: What happened to the Nature Conservancy? Why did the lead negotiator against development jump from the Nature Conservancy to the other new environmental agency favoring the development? What does this new development plan mean? It looked good because the area targeted for development was phenomenally reduced in size. They would not develop on the Point itself, which was a big issue. There were a lot of things that made the new plan look good. But it did not feel right to me. It doesn’t feel right to me when a lot of quick changes all happen at the same time, and there is no time to think about it, and they are pressuring you to say it’s OK. I have been publicly in this struggle since the 1960s and I’ve seen this method happen many many times. What it usually means is that the Indigenous People are going to get the short end of the stick. That’s exactly what this situation was developing into.

They were intending to turn the jurisdiction of San Simeon Point over to State Parks. State Parks has a very bad reputation with environmentalists and with other people in general. They have a particularly bad reputation with Indigenous people because they will not work with us. They won’t talk to us unless they are absolutely forced to. Regardless, the plan to turn the jurisdiction of San Simeon Point over to State Parks has been pulled back. The Hearst family is
now going to maintain the title to San Simeon Point and they are saying that they are not going to develop there. There are still many issues there that need to be discussed. What the Hearst Corporation wants to do is build a hundred-room hotel and some other business structures at the foot of San Simeon Point.

I was at a recent meeting with the founder of the American Land Conservancy and other people from the community, but nobody from the Hearst family. At this meeting I said, “You know, if you have a big hotel and other businesses there, you are going to get a lot of people coming there. Do you intend to use San Simeon Point in your advertising to draw people to your businesses there? That would definitely bring people there who will want to go out on the Point. You’ll have thousands of people trucking out there over the year, every year. Multiply that and you know you are going to impact that land in a very negative way, even if nothing else is built out there on the Point. Even if you don’t use it as an advertising tool, people will know about San Simeon Point. It’s been in the news. People will want to go out and look at it.” I have talked many times about the innate spiritual quality of these places. That innate spiritual quality draws people like a magnet. Besides, even if people don’t know anything about the significance of San Simeon Point, if they are staying there at that hotel, walking around, and enjoying themselves, they are going to see it and say, “Let’s walk out there.” So you will still have a large impact on San Simeon Point.

The entire San Simeon Point area is what we call extraordinarily rich culturally and archaeologically. I spoke with some of the archaeologists who work in that area. They don’t want that development there either, because they know as well as I do that what we have to deal with is grave robbers. Grave robbers will go out there and wipe that area clean. They’ll take everything; and what they will be taking is our history; that’s our Spirit, that’s our life. Not just of the people that are walking around on the planet now, but of the people who have been here for all of these many thousands of years, and of the people yet to come; those generations that are just beginning to push their faces up out from Earth. We have a right to preserve San Simeon Point and that right is established in the legal codes of the United States of America, even though they invariably ignore them. But they are still there, and we do have a right. So it’s important that our rights be taken into consideration.

The Hearst Corporation wants to develop other undesignated areas on their ranch. There are so many unanswered questions about that. We have not had an opportunity to speak with anybody from the Hearst Corporation at this point. When we put questions to the American Land Conservancy we get responses like: “We don’t have that information. We can’t give you that information because confidentiality binds us. You’re going to have to trust me.” Those are unacceptable responses if they expect me to say it’s OK, or if they expect any thinking person to say it’s OK. When they came to the meeting they had no maps. They had no data on water issues, on the effects on different life forms out there. They came without any information. These are lawyers I’m talking about. These are not just people who decide that they love Earth and want to take care of it. These are very high-powered career-environmentalists. They come just like that without any information. Not acceptable. When you want support you have to come out with substantial evidence concerning what it is you are asking support for.
The final blow was when we were told over and over again, “Trust me.” I think everybody knows what that means: “Trust me. The check is in the mail.” If you have any sense at all, the red flag should go up. If you have any sense at all it is an unacceptable response, especially from a very experienced attorney in environmental issues. To expect us to give full unqualified support without them giving us substantial documentation is just not right. Unfortunately, I was the only dissenting voice within the group I belong to, when we took a vote as to whether to endorse that project. They then drafted a letter of support and sent it to the media and other significant people in the area. They wrote that endorsement letter with some qualifications attached, which was good. But I was the only dissenting voice and I was very upset because they did not acknowledge that dissenting vote, which they should have done on such an important issue.

There are many people who may not even be interested in saving this place from a spiritual Indigenous point of view, but rather because of the environmental issues. The thing that the Hearst Corporation has going for them in their newest proposal is that they have greatly reduced the size of the project. But when you look at a project that involves Indigenous issues, you don’t just look at the size. You look at the location; you look at what is in its surroundings. You don’t just look at the primary impacts onto your site. You look at the secondary impacts. Maybe we would not have to worry about where they want to develop, what they might dig up in one place directly. But that development would be in a place of proximity to known archaeological and cultural spiritual richness. These big projects—like what the Hearst people are proposing—affect all the life in the area.

They need to talk to us. At another time I proposed to Steve Hearst and his attorney that they needed to talk with more than one person at a time. I told them, “You need to talk to the Indigenous people and not just to one Indigenous person at a time.” This divide and conquer is an old tool that they use. They’ll talk to this one person here; then they’ll go over there and talk with that other person. They don’t want to talk with us as a group, which is the way they need to talk with us because we are tribal people and we operate better collectively.

The response that I got from the Hearst family attorney was that it wouldn’t work out because we fight too much with each other. Have you ever seen a family that doesn’t fight once in a while with each other? We’re family!! All tribal peoples are family. We are huge extended families. Also, I have been around lawyers quite a bit and I always see them fighting with each other. I see people at the university fighting with each other. I see archaeologists fighting with each other. Unfortunately that’s part of what we do. We need to learn how to fight without killing each other. But we do have disagreements. So what I am proposing is that we get together all the Indigenous people who have been interested in San Simeon Point; and also people that Hearst has spoken with before. Let’s get all of those individuals and groups together, all of the organizations. It may be a series of councils that we need to do. It is unlikely that we will resolve everything together. The Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation has done this before, with other developers; I have done it before; the Bear Clan has done it before with other developers. If we are given an opportunity to dialogue, to hold council with one another, sometimes we can come up with resolutions that allow for a project to go forward.
It may be that they need to put their project someplace else. That’s what I think may have to be the case in this instance. But give us an opportunity to sit down and talk about it and see if we can come to a resolution. I don’t know whether that will happen or not. I did get a little nibble from the Land Conservancy spokesperson. Who knows whether we will really be able to do that or not! But the point is that we are still under siege. We, traditional Indigenous people, live in occupied territories. If Hearst Corporation goes forward with the project as they are intending to at this point, they will extend the siege. Out of concern for San Simeon Point itself, I indicated to them that I was glad they had pulled the Point back from the State Parks, and I asked them if we could now establish an advisory council composed of the various Indigenous people who have ancestral and spiritual ties to this area. We should establish an advisory group so that the Hearst people can hold council with us. We need to continue to have our rightful say concerning the future of our spiritual places. San Simeon Point is a spiritual place of very high significance.

It is necessary that these places of high concentrated spirituality continue to be able to operate. They have been put there in order to keep the Universe going. I’m not just talking about Chumash People or Indigenous people. I’m talking about the well-being of the Universe. Of course that is a part of my spiritual understanding and of the way that I have been taught. Nobody has to agree with me. But what does need to be recognized and agreed with is that we as the Indigenous people do have certain rights. I don’t ask anybody to agree with my spiritual thoughts, because everybody walks their own path. But I do ask that our rights be recognized and honored.

I have spent a lot of my life struggling to protect these places, to have these rights honored and protected. In each situation of struggle we haven’t had many resources. Among our best resources are other Indigenous people. We help each other. Tribes help other tribes. There are many times that people from other tribes will help us in our struggles; and we will go to other tribes and help them. That is what I was doing down in Ward Valley. There was the attempt to establish a nuclear waste dump at Ward Valley, the sacred land of the five Colorado River tribes as well as the habitat of the very sacred desert tortoise. They asked me to come; as they have asked me before. So we go. We go and we do what we can do to help them out. We have gone up against international corporations, and up against city, county, state, and federal governments. We have gone up against all kinds of really huge and powerful people who wanted to do something on our land. And we were very poor. We don’t have huge resources. Yet we were able to be successful. We were not successful every time. We’ve suffered some really intense and terrible losses. But we continue to get up and we continue to fight again because we are of the land. We can’t let it go down; we can’t allow every inch of the land to be covered with resorts and cement and asphalt and shopping centers, and garages, and office buildings, and all of those things. We can’t allow that because if we do, we fail ourselves, we fail our ancestors, and we fail the generations that are still coming. We have a responsibility and we act on it. That’s how we survive. As we better understand what our responsibility is we act, we move, we go forward with that. Even when we suffer a loss we still get up and go to the next fight.
Duck and Her Two Daughters

A very long time ago when the Animals were People, there was a little family that lived in the area that today is called Santa Maria. The mother of this family was Duck, and she had two daughters. As sometimes happens in families, a parent will favor one child over the other. This is what happened with these two daughters. Duck favored her older daughter because she would look at her older daughter and think, “She is so beautiful. She can make these incredibly perfect and gorgeous baskets. She can weave these incredible rabbit blankets. She can cook and she can clean, and she does all these wonderful things! She’s very beautiful and she doesn’t eat very much.” That was important to the mother because the mother had to go out and find all the food for her family. So it was important that this girl was able to do so much to help the family and yet she didn’t eat too much. The mother did not care that much for the second daughter, the younger daughter, because the younger daughter really didn’t do much of anything around the house. She did not cook. She did not clean; she did not make wonderful blankets or baskets. She did not do anything. The one thing that she did do was eat. She ate a lot.

The mother was just getting exhausted. Year after year she was out there gathering all this food and bringing it back. She and the older daughter would just eat this small amount, but the younger daughter would eat and eat and eat. The mother just could never fill her up, and she was getting exhausted. And she would say, “Oh my God, I wish this girl would just go someplace else.” One night the mother was really, really tired and she didn’t think she could keep on going very much longer. Her younger daughter was making such huge demands on her. So when both of her daughters went to bed and were asleep, the mother took a long look at them. She thought, “I just have to get rid of the younger girl. That’s all there is to it.” She went over and she picked up her younger daughter very very carefully. Of course they always had a fire going inside their home at night, to keep them warm while they were sleeping. So she went over and she very carefully placed her daughter inside the fire. The little girl did not wake up or move or anything. The fire just wrapped around her and totally burned her up. There was nothing left of her.

The next day Sun came up and the mother and the older girl got up. The mother said, “I need to go and gather food.” The older girl responded, “I’ll take care of our home while you are gone. But where is my baby sister?” And the mother answered, “She probably got up early and went someplace. But the older sister thought, “That’s not like my baby sister. She never gets up early. And she’s always hungry and waiting for me to cook something for her to eat. Where is my baby sister?” The mother said, “I don’t have time to worry about it. I’m going to go get food. You take care of things. Don’t worry about it. She’s not too far.” And she wasn’t. She was in the fire. Anyway, the older girl became very despondent. Even though she had to do so much work for her baby sister, she still loved her baby sister very, very much, and she was very sad that she didn’t know where her baby sister was.

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4 The town now called Santa Maria is on Chumash ancestral land, approximately 50 miles north of Santa Barbara, California.
So she sat down by the fireplace. Of course the fire had burned down; it was morning and they didn’t need a fire right then. She picked up a stick and she started poking around in the ashes and thinking, “I wish my baby sister was here. I miss my baby sister.” As she continued to poke in the ashes she discovered the bones of her baby sister. Immediately she knew what had happened to her baby sister. Immediately she knew what her mother had done. And she knew that they were both in danger. What might the mother do next?

The girl took all of her baby sister’s bones out of the ashes. She went and filled a bowl with water and brought it there. Because she was so smart and had learned so many things, she knew the special plants and herbs to gather in order to bring her sister back to life. Back then when people died, if somebody wanted to bring them back to life they still knew how to do that. So she went and got the special plants and things and she mixed them all together. She put the water in with the plants and the bones of her little sister, and said special words. The little girl came back to life! Everything was perfect: all of her feathers, her eyes, and her bill. She was fine and she really didn’t know what had happened to her. She said, “I’m hungry. I want to eat. I haven’t eaten for a long time.” And the older sister said, “Don’t worry about eating. We have to go on a journey.” “I don’t want to go on a journey. I don’t like walking.” “Well we have to go. If you want to eat you have to come with me.” “No, I’m just going to stay here.” “You better come with me. If you come with me...look I have all of these special roots.” The older sister had placed these tule roots all over her body, and on her head. They are very delicious and very wonderful to eat. They were also one of the favorites of her baby sister.

So the older sister walked outside of their house and threw down one of the roots. Her baby sister came running up, grabbed it and ate it. The older sister walked a little further and threw down another root. The little girl ran up, grabbed it and ate it. They proceeded that way throughout the area that we now call Santa Maria. They went to this special place just north of Santa Maria where you find the opening to the sky. So the older sister started to climb the path to go up to the sky. She knew that they had to get away from their mother. Of course the little sister was grumbling every step of the way. But the older sister would throw down the tule root, every now and again, and the little girl would run and catch up and eat it. That was the way they proceeded all the way.

While they were doing this, Sun was watching. Of course Sun knew what the mother had done and Sun knew what the little sister was like and what the older sister had done. He was watching them make their escape and he thought, “They’re just little girls and they are so tired. This is very hard for them.” It was a very long journey from the Earth to the sky. And so he used his power to make that journey much shorter for them. He told his daughters who lived with him in the sky that when the little girls came they should feed them and be good to them because they were the children of his cousin, Duck. They arrived at his house where they rested and were fed. They were taken good care of.

Older sister knew that she needed to find a place for them to live. So Sun helped them. Sun and Moon of course have a very special relationship. Sun was able to help the little girls find a place. They are now the two stars that you see right next to Moon at night. If you go out and look you will see these two stars. The bigger star is older sister. And the little star is baby sister.
After all this had happened Duck came home with all this food that she had gathered for herself and her older daughter. She looked around and she saw that older daughter was gone. She saw the disturbance of the ashes and what was left of the bowl of water. So she knew what had happened. She was so remorseful that her heart was breaking. She was so incredibly sad and tears came down. She said, “Oh, I’m so sad. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.” And she started to make this really mournful sound. But there was no way that she could bring her daughters back to live with her again. They were lost to her forever. And to this day you will see that little Duck running around and making these really sad sounds. That’s how the story goes.

Coyote Brings Back Cormorant from the Ancient Swordfish

This is a story that features Coyote and his visit to the very ancient Swordfish Men that live at the bottom of the ocean. Cormorant had gone out to the deep part of the Channel that runs between the mainland down by Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, on one side, and the Channel Islands on the other side. Cormorant had gone out there into the center area where the water is very deep and it runs very strong. Cormorant was out there fishing. He had been diving for fish and somehow during that hunting and fishing expedition, Swordfish captured him and took him deep into the sea. Cormorant died and was buried in the Swordfish home in the ocean. He was tied and hung by his feet from the rafters in a corner of the Swordfishes’ big house where they lived down there in the bottom of the ocean.

If you want to imagine that place, just think of SpongeBob. Most people nowadays know about the animated character SpongeBob SquarePants and the little village that he lives in underneath the ocean. This is the same kind of thing, but it was Swordfish living there. It’s a whole world with homes and everything. The homes have a smoke hole and they can make a fire there. It’s a whole world operating. The Swordfish had this huge Ap that they lived in, which is the same kind of structure that the Chumash People lived in on land, but they lived under the ocean. Cormorant ended up down there.

This was during a happy time before the Humans came to live on the land. The People. . .and when I say “People” I am not talking about Human People because this story takes place in the time before time, when the Animals were People. In any case, the People became worried about Cormorant who should've returned and hadn’t returned. They went and sought out Coyote because Coyote is a very powerful person. He carries a lot of power and has helped out the different people a lot, at different times. Sometimes Coyote gets into a little bit of trouble because he might a little bit too greedy or a little bit too curious or something. But he can also be extremely helpful and good. Anyway, the People went looking for Coyote. They found him, and they told him that Cormorant had gone out fishing at this particular place and hadn’t come back. They were worried about him. Would Coyote go and see if he could find Cormorant? Coyote thought about it. . .mmm. Finally he agreed and said, “All right. I’ll go and see if I can find Cormorant. You know it’s very dangerous, but I will do that.”
So he got in a boat and the People rowed him out to the middle of the Channel. He dove off the boat and went far, far, deep, deep down into the ocean. He got to the very bottom of the ocean floor. He landed right in the area where the Swordfish had their home. The Swordfish, as Coyote and everybody know, are very powerful old men. So he thought, “Maybe I need to go into the house here and see if Cormorant is visiting with them.” So he goes and knocks on the door. One of the younger Swordfish had been left behind to take care of the house.

The older ones like to swim out, and hunt for food. Their favorite kind of food to eat was Whale. Just to show you how powerful these old men were, when they would find Whale, they would kill them and they would use Whale as a toy, like a big basketball. As huge as Whale is, they would just toss it back and forth between all of them. They would just have a great time playing with Whale. Then they would bring Whale home and eat him.

They didn’t want this younger person with them, so they told him to stay home and take care of the house. When Coyote got there he found that younger person there. He told this young Swordfish that he had been sent by the People on the land to look for Cormorant because Cormorant had gone fishing in that part of the ocean and had disappeared. They were worried about Cormorant. The Swordfish taking care of the house told Coyote, “Well, Cormorant is here.” Coyote says, “Where is he? I don’t see him.” The young Swordfish answers, “He’s right over there in that dark corner hanging by his feet.” Coyote goes and looks, and sure enough, it’s Cormorant. He’s dead and he’s been hanging there so long that his body fluids are all dried up and he doesn’t look too good. Coyote says, “Mmm, poor Cormorant, he doesn’t look too good, but I think I better take him back home because People are wanting him.” Swordfish says, “No, no. You can’t do that. Not now. You know my uncles the Swordfish. You know how big and powerful they are. It’s time for them to come home; they are going to be coming home any minute now. So it’s not safe for you to take Cormorant and leave with him. You have to stay here.”

So Coyote says, “OK. If that’s what you think. Tell me, how will they come in the house?” Swordfish says, “Before they arrive there will be this big cloud like fog that will come in and fill up the whole house. You won’t be able to see them, but they will throw in their staffs; they’ll also throw in the Whales that they have caught and anything else that they have caught. It’s really dangerous because they just throw them in the house like that and if they hit you, it will very likely kill you. They throw them with a lot of force; they are very powerful. Coyote says, “Hmmm, that doesn’t sound too good.” Swordfish says, “Well, don’t worry. I will put you over here in this corner underneath these old Whale skins. They are from the other Whales they have caught. I will hide you. These Whales’ skins will protect you because they’re really sturdy. So don’t worry.”

He puts Coyote underneath all of these Whale skins, and had just barely finished hiding him when all of a sudden they hear these sounds, these voices, these walking sounds, and these swimming sounds. Here come all the old Swordfish! They are coming home and sure enough here comes this huge cloud and it fills up the whole house. Oh my goodness! Coyote is underneath the Whale skins just trembling and shaking. He is just so scared and he hopes that this young Swordfish is really telling him the truth and that he will be safe, because he is really
scared. He knew that they were going to start throwing their Whales and staffs and everything in
the house. Sure enough, they did. Boom! Boom! Boom! They threw a lot of them really fast and
really hard. He was trembling underneath the skins but he was protected because those Whale
skins are really thick and tough. The Swordfish come into the house, they stop, look around, and
they say to the young Swordfish, “You let somebody into our home. There is somebody in here
that doesn’t belong here. Who did you let in our home? Where is he hiding? Show him to us.”

The young Swordfish knows the game is up, so he goes over, pulls back the Whale skins. When Coyote comes out young Swordfish says, “This is Coyote. Coyote came to visit.” Coyote comes out and he is not too sure just what is going to happen. He is really polite and introduces himself. They look at him; he is pretty small compared to a Whale, but he probably would be pretty tasty. They were thinking, “Hmmm, it might be a nice little tidbit.”

Then they asked, “Why did you come here? What was your purpose?” Coyote told them he came looking for Cormorant, so he could take Cormorant home. The People were lonesome without him and they wanted him back. They said “Cormorant belongs to us now. You can’t have him back. Too bad.” Coyote said, “No, no, no. I promised them that I would hunt for Cormorant and bring him back to them. I really need to bring him back.” They said, “So you want Cormorant? Let’s see if you are really strong enough to take Cormorant.” They then took the skin off of the Whale they had caught, cooked it really fast in the fire, and they sliced him all up. Then they all sat down in a circle and said, “Now we are going to eat.” Coyote had a pretty good idea of what they were going to do. They’re big. The Swordfish are big. They all sat around and they cut up Whale, they all took pieces of it, and gave a big piece to Coyote and said, “You eat that!” They were eating their pieces and they were watching him. But they were not watching him closely because Coyote was in the center of their circle and could not really go anyplace.

Coyote had his flute with him and that flute carried a lot of power. He held it in secret, where they could not see it. He took it out of its hiding place and put it between his legs, in such a way that the Swordfish cannot see it. He took the piece of Whale and he started eating and saying, “Mmm, this is really good! Yum, yum, yum.” He starts eating his piece really fast. They looked at him and thought, “He won’t last too long.” When they weren’t looking, he takes the rest of the Whale and he puts it in the hole of his flute. It passes through his flute and goes out of the other end, and down into the ground, the ocean floor. In that way, the Swordfish cannot see that he’s not really eating all of the Whale.

He is still sitting there and he says, “Aren’t we going to have any more?” They said, “Yeah.” They cut more steaks off of the Whale and pass it around. They give him more, he takes it, he starts eating, and says, “Really good! I am so hungry! This is really yum, yum, yum!” As soon as they stop looking at him, he pushes it down into the flute. He is just eating a little bit, but they think he is eating the whole big chunk of meat that they are giving him. This goes on throughout the night, for a long time. They keep cutting the meat and giving him some to eat and he keeps eating it. They had figured they would defeat him in this eating contest. That’s what it was. If he ate too much, he would get sick and die and then he could not have Cormorant. Then they would also have Coyote to eat.
They could not believe that this little guy was able to eat so much meat. They said to each other, “Pretty tough little guy, he ate all that meat. I didn’t think he could eat all that meat. What are we going to do?” They stopped the eating contest because obviously they weren’t going to be able to defeat him in that way. The Swordfish conferred and said, “All right, we’ll have a race!” One of their Swordfish was really, really fast, so they knew they could defeat Coyote in a race, especially after eating all of that whale meat the night before.

The Swordfish told Coyote, “You did well with that contest. You passed that test, but it’s still not OK for you to take Cormorant. You have to pass one more test and if you pass that test, then you can have Cormorant.” Coyote says, “Just one more test? No more?” They answer, “Just one more test and if you pass, you can take Cormorant and go home. We won’t bother you.” He said, “OK, what is it?” They said, “We are going to sleep for a few hours tonight. Then first thing tomorrow morning we will get up and you’re going to run a race against this Swordfish here. This is the one that we want you to run against. You are going to go on this path, run this long course, and then come back to the house. If you win, if you are able to run faster than our Swordfish here, then you can take Cormorant. If you lose, then we get to kill you and eat you too.” He says, “All right. Sounds like a good deal to me.” Swordfish says, “Now everybody go in, lay down, and go to sleep. It’s going to be a big race tomorrow.” They showed Coyote what the course was going to be, what he was going to have to run. So he goes back into their house, lays down, and pretends to go to sleep, because he knows he has a lot of work to do that night if he is going to win this race. After a while one Swordfish starts to snore, then another one, and another one. Pretty soon they are all really sound asleep.

Coyote gets up. He’s got his flute; he’s got his feathered string, and he has a plan. While he’d been laying there he was thinking about how he would win this race. He had looked at that Swordfish who was still pretty young and he was strong. He knew that he was probably the fastest one that they had. He also knew there was no way he could beat that Swordfish unless he did something special. So this is what he decided to do. He went out and went from one place to another, on the whole long course of the race, the whole circular course that he would have to run. At regular intervals, every now and again, he took the earth from the floor of the ocean and he made a sculpture out of this wet sand. It was an exact duplicate of himself. Then he used his feathered string and he made that sculpture come to life. He gave each sculpture the same instruction: that tomorrow he had to run this race, and he needed them help him run it. They would do it in relays. He would start off and run to the first sculpture. Swordfish would be ahead of him. When Swordfish would pass he would come to this first sculpture and he would wake him up. Then that sculpture would get up and run. That sculpture would touch the next sculpture and that sculpture would get up and run. So it was a relay of one imitation Coyote after another, over the whole distance of the course. He put them all to sleep and told them to rest for the next few hours because they were all going to have to run really hard the next day.

He went back, lay down, and pretended like he was sleeping. When it was daylight they all awoke. It was time to get up. It was time to start the race. So they told Coyote, “OK. Do you want to run this race? Or do you want to concede? If you just concede we will just kill you and eat you. You won’t have to wear yourself out by running the race because you are not going to
win anyway.” He said, “No, no, no. I am going to run the race!” They said, “All right. It’s up to you.” They took him to the starting line along with Swordfish. They started the race and ran, ran, ran. Both of them were running as hard as they could. Sure enough, Swordfish, without any effort, went way ahead of Coyote and Coyote ran, ran, ran. They said, “Look at that! Coyote is already so far behind. There is no way he is going to be able to catch up. We might as well go back in the house and wait for them to come back.

Coyote ran and ran. He went to the first sculpture that he had made. He touched that sculpture and it woke up, came to life and started running, running, running. By the time that sculpture got tired it had reached the second sculpture. He touched the second sculpture and it woke up all fresh and strong. It ran and ran and kept gaining and gaining on the Swordfish. Finally they passed Swordfish and they were far enough ahead that Swordfish couldn’t see the one sculpture touching the next one. He couldn’t see that he was running against this relay of Coyotes, not just one Coyote. When they got near the end of the race Coyote was there at the very last part of the course so that when the last sculpture arrived Coyote put him down to go back into the Earth, back into the sand. Coyote ran the last couple of yards of the race, way ahead of Swordfish. The other Swordfish couldn’t believe their eyes: Here comes Coyote running in, way ahead of their Swordfish champion. They just couldn’t believe it!

Not only did Coyote run way ahead of Swordfish and beat him, but Coyote looked really fresh and strong. He didn’t look bad at all. They couldn’t believe how good he looked. They just looked at each other and they said, “He won. Can't believe that, how did he manage to do that? Look how good he looks; he’s not even tired.” Coyote says, “OK. I won the race.” They said, “Yes, that’s true.” He says, “Now I want my prize. I want Cormorant and I want to take him home to his People.” They said, “OK. You won.” Coyote goes in and he gets Cormorant down from the peg where he was hanging on the wall.

Poor old Cormorant! He looks really pathetic. He is all dried up, his feathers look bad, and he doesn’t have any life in him whatsoever. Coyote takes him in his arms, and he says, “I am going now.” They say, “Goodbye!”

Coyote takes him and heads on home. He swims and swims and swims. He has a long way to swim to get to the surface. Finally he pops up and he looks around and oh what good luck! The People with the boat had waited for him. There was the boat, and he climbs on board. He’s got Cormorant and Cormorant looks bad. So they say, “Well what can you do for Cormorant? He looks really bad.” He says, “I will take care of him, don’t worry about it.” They start heading the boat back to shore, back to mainland shore.

Coyote starts working with Cormorant. He unties him, he lays him out real nice. Coyote then works with his feathered string. Pretty soon Cormorant starts to come back to life; Life Force starts to flow through him and he starts spreading his wings, shaking his feathers, looking around. He says, “Wow! I was gone. I didn’t think that I was ever going to be back and be able to be with my relatives, be on this ocean.” Coyote says, “Well, that was almost true. But I went down to the home of Swordfish and rescued you, brought you back to your People. He says, “I really do appreciate that.” That was how Coyote rescued Cormorant from the very powerful Swordfish People.
One of the things that was always important to me were my visits to the schools. I love to talk with students, from kindergarten, through all twelve grades, and at different colleges and universities. I used to go to the schools and do storytelling, and I did storytelling in other contexts also, like at festivals. But I didn’t just tell stories. I went to talk about the people and to talk about the culture. When other Indian people and I get invited to the elementary grades to talk to the students, it is usually the fourth graders in California, because the fourth grader students study this state’s history, including the mission system. I really, really enjoyed my time in the classroom. The children would be so interested. They would listen to every word and when it was time to ask questions you could tell that they had been listening because their questions, even with the very youngest ones, would connect with what I had presented.

Almost invariably, especially with the younger children, one of the children would ask me how old I was. I thought it was great that they are so uninhibited. I know they looked at me and thought, ‘This lady is reeeeeeally oooold.’ The teachers would get so embarrassed and say, “No, no, you are not supposed to ask people questions like that.” For me it was fine to hear that question, and I had developed what I thought it was a great answer for them. I would tell them, "I am as old as the Universe." Their little eyes would get very big and they would ask, “Really?” I would answer, “yes” and just leave it at that. Nothing is new, you know. Everything that exists was created at the beginning, so we all are as old as the Universe. I just think it’s a great answer to give to people when they ask, especially kids.

They would ask all kinds of questions about how I lived. They had been exposed to the Hollywood and television version of Indian people, so they had different ideas. Almost invariably, some of the children, sometimes quite a few, would raise their hands and tell me that they too were Indian. They would tell me what nation they belong to and talk about that. You could tell how the family had participated in the Indian world by the different comments they would make. You could tell that some children, unfortunately, were not learning very much about their culture. Others, on the other hand, were learning quite a bit, and that would be reflected in their comments. Some were coming from families that were involved in the big time Pow Wow circuit. You could tell. It was just really very interesting.

Of course I always talk about our ancestors and I tell some of the old stories from that long-ago time, like how Human Beings were made at Zaca Lake, different Coyote stories, some about the stars coming down, different things like that. I felt that going to the schools and being able to interact with the students, whether they were kindergartens or all the way up into university level, was an opportunity to add to what they might have learned about Indian people. It was a very enjoyable time in my life when that was happening quite a bit.
**Interview with Fourth-Grader Esmeralda Broyles-González**

**EBG:** Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I am nine years old and a fourth-grader at Isla Vista School, Goleta, California.

**PK:** My name is Pilulaw Khus. I am a traditional Chumash elder and the mother of the Bear Clan of the Chumash People. My tribal group is the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation.

**EBG:** My fourth grade class, like all California fourth-graders, is studying the Catholic mission system. I would like to hear a Chumash perspective of the Spaniards’ mission system. I’ve noticed that in our school materials they try to glorify the missions. The mission system is described as a good thing. Why do they hide from us the violent things that the Europeans did to the Indian people?

**PK:** There are many reasons. You have to whitewash history in order to justify what exists today. The mission system was a big step towards taking over Indian lands and peoples. At the time of the missions, when the priests and the military came here together, their purpose was to take over the land. There were many Chumash People living in this area; they had lived here for thousands of years. So in order to take over the land, the Spanish Catholic priests and military had to get rid of the people who were already here and put them into positions were they had no capability of exerting any power. To accomplish that takeover they brought a death march over the land. It was a genocide whose intention was to get rid of the Indigenous people. The invaders did that in very vicious and brutal ways. Whenever people do such terrible things they try to whitewash history. They write a false history. They create a falseness about what happened during that time in order to protect themselves. They make themselves look good. That’s why they are doing that glorification concerning the missions. They themselves don’t want to admit to what happened here.

One example of that effort to write a false history is the current effort to make Junipero Serra a saint. The Catholic Church is in the process of trying to canonize the mission priest Junipero Serra. Serra is one of Spanish priests who first came here with the missions. He was the man in charge. With all of the brutal things that happened in the missions, the person in charge is finally the one who is responsible. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church and some prominent Santa Barbara citizens want to make Serra a saint. That’s the process of creating an illusion. In truth, Serra was responsible for vicious beatings, enslavement, rape, and the destruction and genocide of the Native people.

**EBG:** One of our school assignments is to “describe a day in the life of a mission Indian.” Do you know what “a day in the life of a mission Indian” was like?

**PK:** I know to some degree what it was like. But it’s not just a matter of one day. You have to look at what came before any of those days: Indians were often captured and forced to live in those missions. What also came before was the planned destruction of the Native people. The missions were one tool in that process. Once Native people were in the missions, families were torn apart. The men had to live in men’s houses, while the women and children were kept in separate housing. They weren’t allowed to live together as families. Also, there was a
dislocation of the people; families who had always lived in one area were taken to live in another area.

When you think of the total numbers of Indigenous people, it was a relatively small number that went into the missions. The Spaniard priests and soldiers beat them; they destroyed Indigenous life and social systems; the colonizers separated and relocated family members. We know that some Native peoples escaped over the mountains to freedom. Others did go to the missions, perhaps thinking they could find safety; many, like I said, were captured by force and taken to the missions. There were also some that thought they could go to the mission and visit family, but when they did that they could not leave. Once they got in there, they weren’t allowed to leave. And if they tried to escape, the missionaries would send out the military to bring them back. They would beat and punish them for long periods, for having run away. It was a vicious time for people to be living.

What happened inside and outside the missions was the destruction of everything that goes into making Indigenous society: the political, social, economic, agricultural, spiritual, health care, building arts, the arts themselves. All of Indigenous society was disrupted and sometimes completely disabled. Indigenous society was disrupted to a degree that it at times looked like the Spanish invaders had accomplished their goal of totally destroying it. But because Indigenous people are as strong as we are, you know, they haven’t destroyed us.

So back to the question of “what was it like in a day of a mission Indian”. The Native people would get up very early and the first thing that they would be required to do would be to go into the mission church and go through the performance that the priest would do. They were not even given seats to sit down on. There would be long Catholic ceremonies that the priest would be putting on. They would have to stand throughout that time. If you look at the way the missions were constructed, you almost always see these long, big rooms and then there is a narrow room going off to the side. The narrow room to the side was for the Indian people. There were no benches there.

After that, they would be given very small amounts of food. The missionaries themselves even documented this in the missions: how little they gave the people to eat. Then the Indians would go and they would work in the fields, or within the mission buildings or whatever it was that they were required to do. By the end of the day they probably come back again for more of the ceremonies within the church. A mission Indian saw a great deal of violence from overwork, rape, beatings, slavery, and from watching their children die. It was not a happy time because our people really loved each other and loved being free on Earth and being able to go out and be in the water. We are Ocean People. We love being able to gather our food and work with it together. We love to spend time together, a lot of time singing. We’re a very musical people. We are a very spiritual people. A lot of that life was taken away from us in the missions. So the time of the missions was a very sad time and the death toll skyrocketed. The number of babies born dropped dramatically. All of that is related to the devastating times these people were living in. Why would a woman want to have a baby when all she could see was that her baby would grow up in these really hideous conditions? It was pretty sad.

**EBG:** From what kinds of places do you get this information?
PK: Some of it comes from the documents that were created, established, and archived by the church. Some of it comes from journals of different Spanish priests or military people. A lot of it comes through the Chumash families because we’re still talking about all this. This is not that far back in history and the families have handed the stories down from one generation to another. It’s part of the general knowledge of the Chumash People. But a lot of it also comes from the documentation of the European People who came here in various capacities.

EBG: Why is it that all the Chumash we study are in a long-time ago? There is never any talk about today’s living Chumash People. Why is that?

PK: Scholars, be they anthropologists or archaeologists, as well as schoolbooks, discuss Indigenous peoples exclusively in the past tense so they don’t have to deal with us in the present. They often take an interest only in the distant past. That is a form of genocide. It’s genocide when educational institutions and the population in general continue to look only at what happened in the distant past. It’s a genocidal impulse when they can’t conceive of listening to people who are alive today, or who lived not that long ago. They often focus their attention on the time before colonization, which they refer to as “pre-contact” or “prehistory.” Their focus on “pre-contact” is a way of setting us in the distant past where we don’t have to be dealt with. We no longer exist. In fact there are people, scholars and people in prestigious positions who will say, “There are no Chumash. They no longer exist. They’re extinct.” They have said this to our faces. There are institutions and people of great local prestige who have decided that they will be the ones who officially “know” about the Chumash. They will, for example, determine who is a Chumash person and who is not a Chumash person, what is “authentically” Chumash and what is not “authentically” Chumash. It’s an absurd power play.

On the national level we also have the institution of the United States government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs who have taken it upon themselves to grant or deny federal recognition to Native peoples. They have taken it upon themselves to determine and decide about who will receive recognition as an “Indian.” They decide who is “truly” an Indigenous person and who is not. How dare they! That is the genocide that comes out of that way of thinking. It’s a way of thinking about Indigenous people as only being “truly” Indigenous if you are talking about and working with information of “pre-contact” or not too far into the colonization process. They don’t want to deal with us. They don’t want to recognize us. That’s the kind of thinking about Indigenous people that is often found in classrooms and other learning situations. That disregard for the living Indigenous people of today happens over and over again.

As long as the Indigenous people can be relegated to a time in the distant past, to a time so far back that there is absolutely no possibility of a living person from that time being able to speak out, then they can do whatever they want. They can do their oil exploration. They can test their military bombs. They can pollute the waters and they can pollute Earth and the air. They can do whatever it is they want because they don’t have to deal with the living Indian people. But as long as we are here they have to deal with us.

The schools also actively “disappear” the Indigenous peoples into the remote past when they study them. There is a California law mandating that all fourth-grade students study the California mission system. Every year all California fourth-grade classes are given the
assignment to construct a mission in their classroom or at home, in honor of the missionization of California. In the eyes of the schools, Indians only exist in the remote mission past. That’s how the school system keeps re-enforcing the idea that the Indigenous people are no longer here and that we do not have to be dealt with. But in fact we are here and we do have to be dealt with.

Every time that mission-building assignment happens in the schools, that idea of Indians belonging to a long-gone past is reinforced. This kind of school assignment is one way the system tries to make us “disappeared.” My grandkids have all encountered that mission assignment and they have done different things. When one of my grandsons was in the fourth grade, he was given that assignment to construct a mission to honor the missionization of California and to write an essay about it. Of course he knows the brutal mission stories. When I was a child growing up I heard the brutal stories, just as my young grandchildren are hearing the stories. So he wrote a little essay about what the missionization process really was about and he constructed his little mission model. When he was showing us this and explaining it, I said, “Well honey, did you put a whipping post for the Indian people?” and he answered, “Yes” because he knows that and he needs to know that. This truth and this remembering are acts of guerrilla resistance within our families.

Our families take those school assignments and turn them on their head. We use them as a mechanism for learning. I have to say in praise of the teacher of that class: she had my grandson stand up and read the essay to the whole class, and they discussed it. So it was an opportunity to expand the thinking. Those things can happen. Why? Because not all of the people who are here as colonizers over this land are wicked people. There are people who do care about what happened before their ancestors came here. There are people who do care about Earth, the land, the water, and the air. Those people have stood with the Indigenous peoples at different times during these battles, and they have contributed strongly in these battles. But they have their things to deal with too because they are part of the colonization process and they need to resolve those issues within themselves. This is not to idealize the Indigenous people but it is to recognize that we are here. This is our land. This is where Creator put us.

**EBG:** I was not told about the mission whipping post or mission slavery at La Purísima Mission, which we had to visit. I didn’t know until my mom started telling me. So it’s weird how history books and people try to hide all this bad stuff.

**PK:** But do you understand now a little bit why they try to hide it? It’s kind of like when a child does something that they know they’re going to get in trouble with. The first reaction is “Oh boy I hope my parents don’t find out.” Or “I hope my teacher doesn’t find out!”

**EBG:** And they try to hide it.

**PK:** A lot of kids will try to hide it. What is really important is just to come right out and be honest about it. That’s what I keep saying about history writing. Many of the Euro-American People who are in charge of the official history need to come out and just be honest about it. That would be very helpful for everybody involved.

**EBG:** You mentioned “acts of guerrilla resistance.” Can you tell me more about Native people who resisted the missions? Did they do protests like they do now?
PK: Yes. There were various Chumash uprisings here in the northern part of the Chumash land and in the Santa Barbara area. There were also uprisings against the missions in other parts of the state. Once the Spaniards left, the Mexican government ruled here for a few years. The worst oppression came with the Americans in the mid 1800s. The way that I understand it was that there were a lot of ongoing resistance actions; also guerrilla actions. People did not just accept everything. There were always Native people who were trying to drive the colonizers out through guerrilla tactics. Those freedom fighters are, in official history, now called “bad” people, bandits and criminals. The best designation is when somebody calls them “social bandits” and the best-known person who led people in that way was Joaquin Murrieta. I am very proud to say that part of my family rode with Joaquin. Other Chumash People also rode with Joaquin. They were resisting the destruction of their people and the takeover of their land. So, yes, there was a strong resistance to the invaders.

EBG: Last year there were these women that came to our class from the Botanic Gardens and they told us there are no “pureblood Chumash.” So what would be your opinion about that? What would you say to that?

PK: My comment about that is that they’re using an inappropriate tool to talk about people. They’re coming from a science that grows out of the academic Western European mentality. They’re talking about looking at blood, the physical blood of people, to determine what racial or cultural group they belong to. If you actually look at the blood of people from different races under a microscope, there’s no way of telling the difference between them. So when the Botanic Gardens folks use that “blood” term to make any claims, they are saying, “this is how we can determine whether somebody is Chumash or not” It really doesn’t make sense. It’s not an appropriate way of looking at it.

But that is the way that a lot of people look at Indian people. They try to decide: Are they full-blooded? Are they a quarter blood? Are they half-blood? Do they have one-sixteenth blood? That “blood” thinking is a political tool that the United States government has established in order to make us disappear. It’s another genocidal tool and they use it in order to say there are no more Indian people. They would like to get to a place where they could say there are no more Indian people. Then they won’t have to accommodate us and deal with us. If we follow their logic, we would soon all be gone, as far as they are concerned. So that would get rid of some of the evidence of the really hideous things and Death Force that the U.S. government has perpetrated in history.

It’s another cover up, a way of trying to get rid of the Indigenous people. That kind of thinking about “blood” doesn’t make any sense because a person is more than their blood. That’s why I say it’s an inappropriate tool. Studying blood and genes doesn’t take into account what makes a person. What is the wholeness of the person? The wholeness of a person is not just their blood. Just like the wholeness of a house is not just the framing that goes into building a house. Does that sound pretty clear?

EBG: Yes. My next question doesn’t really have to do with the missions, but I think it does have a pretty fair amount to do with Native people. What effect did the California Gold Rush of the 1840s have?
**PK:** Yes, the Gold Rush had a lot to do with Native peoples. There are quite a few stories. Probably the best-known stories about the Gold Rush involve Native people like Captain Jack of the Modoc Nation, or Ishi. There are many stories of Native people who were brutally assaulted and even wiped out by the White people coming here looking for gold or to take the land. Again, you have to look past just the immediate event that you are looking at; you have to look more into what was the larger context of this event. What was happening around it? The context is that there is a really extreme thing that happens to people when they decide that they are going to go looking for gold. They go crazy. In fact, they pretty much go totally crazy with gold fever. All they can think about is getting that gold. They’ll put themselves and others through extremely difficult ordeals to try to get to the gold, to try to obtain gold. Also, the killing of people becomes a matter of fact thing.

So of course when the Gold Rushers came here to California they were being driven by this greed to get gold. The Indian people were just another obstacle for them to get rid of so that they could get to the gold. If there might have been some ethics in their dealings with people, those ethics were completely gone once they got the gold fever. Even among the European descendants, they talk about the gold fever and what happened there. It was a time of horror for the Native people. The closer that you were living to where the gold fields were, the more horrible it was. The Gold Rush was a major chapter of the Native Holocaust.

**EBG:** I understand that the Gold Rushers didn’t really care about the Natives. In a lot of these stories of the missions and the Gold Rush, the Native people were just another obstacle to get rid of. The Europeans and White Americans had no respect for the Natives.

**PK:** Many Europeans did not regard the Native people as human. At the time there was a lot discussion in Rome about whether Native people were really human or not. The general public carried the attitude that Native people might resemble humans, but they really weren’t humans, so it was perfectly OK to just kill them, to torture, enslave or do whatever you wanted to with them. Worse than that, the church and the people within the church, not just the Catholic Church, but also other Christian churches, looked at us as being the spawn of the devil. They felt that what we did had to do with Satan and the Devil. That was even a stronger motivation to get rid of us.

**EBG:** I did not know that many colonizers didn’t consider Natives human. That is very shocking.

**PK:** It is. But again, if we ever hope to get to a place where we can live in peace together and in a good way, there has to be truth. If there is no truth at the foundation, our hope of being able to live in a good way on this land becomes more remote. And you know that. You know from your own life. If you’re trying to keep something a secret, you start telling one little lie to cover it up and keep that a secret. Then you tell another lie to cover up the first one and keep your secret. It just doesn’t work. It’s very destructive when people start behaving that way. So here we have all of this effort to keep this lie about Native peoples in place: within the educational system, within the political system, within the social system, within the medical system, within the religious systems. How can we move into better relationships with each other? The truth has to be told, even though it is shocking.
EBG: Wasn’t there an event recently where the Catholic Church announced it was going to apologize to Native peoples? Did they apologize?

PK: Native people from different native nations came together in the Los Angeles area and decided to do a 500-mile spiritual walk to Sacramento in 1998. On the way, they stopped at Santa Barbara Mission. There was an agreement that had been reached ahead of time. The agreement was that the Mission priest could come out and meet with the Native people and apologize to the people for all the suffering and death they caused. I was contacted and told that this was going to happen and it was going to be in the morning, down in Santa Barbara. It took me quite a while to drive from where I lived to Santa Barbara. I got up really early in the morning because if the priest was going to apologize, I really wanted to be there to hear it.

I drove there and when I arrived I saw the mission priest, Virgil Cordano, talking with the Native people who were the leaders of the walk. They were talking about the Papal Bulls that were written a long time ago. One Papal Bull had declared Indians non-human. They were talking about all these different things. At one point Cordano asked that the Indians “forgive the Catholic Church for the abuses and injustices more than 200 years ago.” But Cordano did not apologize or say, “I’m sorry.” So one of the Chumash men who were there came over and asked me if I would speak and so I did. I told the priest that I had gotten up really early that morning and drove all the way down there to hear him say, “I’m sorry” and I still hadn’t heard him say that. So after some discussion he finally said, “I apologize.” He was standing on the grounds in front of the Santa Barbara Mission and he had his official robes on. So I think that was something of an official statement when Cordano finally apologized. That’s that story.

EBG: Thank you for sharing all of that. I really appreciate it.

PK: Well, thank you. You are the future and you are a very extraordinary young woman.

A Chumash/Pilulaw Khus Chronology

Indigenous peoples of the Americas continue to demand that the Vatican (“Holy See”) revoke in particular three papal bulls or edicts from the 15th century: Dum diversas of June 18, 1452, Romanus Pontifex of January 8, 1455, and Inter Caetera of May 4, 1493. These three edicts set the foundation for the colonial relationship based on the abuse of power and domination. The three edicts in question, for example, call for the overthrow of “barbarous nations” and authorize the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs to reduce Native peoples of the Americas “to perpetual slavery.” The demand to rescind the edicts was most recently delivered in person at the Vatican by the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers in July, 2008. See http://www.grandmotherscouncil.com (accessed May 2009).
A partial chronological list of Pilulaw Khus’s/Chumash activities; intended as a guide to readers. PK is the abbreviation for Pilulaw Khus.

1932: PK born in Los Angeles, California

1978-1979: Point Conception Occupation to prevent PG & E and Western Liquefied Natural Gas Company construction of a liquefied natural gas facility at sacred site. Pilulaw was Head Woman responsible for care of the people.

1979-80: PK works Assistant Director of Tucson Halfway House for American Indians

1981-83: PK was Elder and community leader at Gaviota Traditional Community; helped develop and maintain a traditional-based, Chumash community

1983-85: PK works as a counselor, Klein-Bottle Advocates for Youth, Santa Maria

1986-90: Northern Chumash Council Elder; provides guidance for the Council regarding social and political issues

PK elected to Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation Board; works on various cultural and land-related issues (continuing)

PK active as Cultural Resource Monitor

1986: PK was among the Native American elders who receive the sacred Flame Spirit at the United Nations, along with Tom Porter (Mohawk), Leon Shenandoah (Tadodaho of the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations), Antonio Romero (Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians). Together they inaugurate the United States segment of the Flame Spirit Run, a global torch relay for world peace. (See photo)

1988: PK forms part of the leadership of the American Indian Action Group organized to protest and also meet and communicate with President Ronald Reagan, following upon hostile remarks he made about Native Americans in Moscow. Chumash invite Reagan to meet at his ranch on Chumash land.

1989-present: PK leads Summer Solstice ceremony at Painted Rock in Carrizo Plain.

1990: PK leads Earth Day opening ceremony (San Luis Obispo) highlighting Chumash/Environmental Alliance

1991-present: PK active as cultural resource advocate: educational lecturer, consultant, and advisor with environmental and Native American activists
1992: PK active as responsible medicine person during the UNOCAL Oil spill at Whale’s Cave; provided guidance for Chumash Monitor Team and agencies engaged in clean-up operations; ministered injured and dying animals victimized by the UNOCAL oil spill. Team Leader for oil spill mitigation plan (pressured UNOCAL and San Luis Obispo County to follow-through)

1993: PK organized and helped lead Chumash resistance against Wal-Mart’s planned construction of shopping center at Chumash village and burial site now in Paso Robles without a mitigation plan to preserve ancient village site. PK, Dick Pierce, et al file lawsuit on 2/19/1993

1995: PK participates in the Ward Valley Task Force at the invitation of the Ft. Mojave & Colorado Tribes who organized to stop nuclear waste deposits on Mojave land

2000: PK invited to give testimony on nuclear energy in Native America before the Nuclear Truth Commission at the United Nations. Along with the other members of that panel she also speaks on Amy Goodman’s radio show Democracy Now! (May 2, 2000)