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Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections

Cultural Conservation Narrative Stage: Balladry continued: Conserving American Indian Culture

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WEBVTT

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: I'd like to ask Valana and Patty and Louise, -- you've made an enormous attempt to recover information about traditional plants,

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: and the way they were used in Luisefño culture. Why is that, why would you do that?

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: Well, now people can go to the drug store, or go to the doctor, or whatever.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: Why -- why have you made an effort to find again all the people who knew about the use of plants

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: and the things done with plants. And, what, uh, what good is it to do that now?

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<i>Speaker 2</i>: Well, I didn't think that myself. There was a lady that came and asked me about different plants; what it was, and did I know the plant.

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<i>Speaker 2</i>: And of course we know, I, and my sister and my brothers. We know it; so we told her. We know a lot of them.

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<i>Speaker 2</i>: Right on our own place, close by, in our reservation. That's why we did it, because the lady asked us, you see. We didn't know what we were doing, you see.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: Wait a minute. Wait. *[[laughs]]*.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: I think that when you're struggling to preserve and get into preserving your culture,

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: that just the conversation here today, in that the Seneca ladies here can't complete their baskets because of lack of material,

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: I think that we need outside help with ecologists, environmental people, and these types of concerned citizens

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: that will help us keep our waterways and help us preserve some of these materials so that we can continue to use them.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: Further, I think that when we're going back to preserving our language, that those are in fact true.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: We have the Indian names; the uses of them. They're beautiful.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: And I believe that teaching our children, our people, or anyone who's interested, the use of these materials, is very important to help us continue.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: Most people don't know that about 45% of the medicines you use today have one product of natural origin.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: Most of those came from Native American sources. In fact, the aspirin that everybody uses and takes today is a Southern Californian invention.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: It was something that we used to get from the willow. We would boil the bark of the willow.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: There's all kinds of things we used. We had decongestants, we had -- I mean -- most of the things that people use today.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: But what's important about this issue about ecology, the environment, and losing traditions, is because most of the environment has changed in California, as everybody knows.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: I mean, out of all the places that were settled by the Spanish in the last 100 years,

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: that's undergone more change than any other place in the world that was, you know, settled by the Spanish initially.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: And a lot of the plants -- the reason why we went through the effort to do this is some of the plants that we used to use exist no longer.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: Some of the plants that we used for basket weaving are extinct. And a lot of the plants that we -- the places where we would go to gather are fenced in, or places are developed.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: Marshlands are going away. We, at one time, occupied almost every ecological niche; any that you can think of from coastal to mountain, as I said before.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: It's important to preserve this stuff because a lot of people don't know, they don't know the scope and the breadth that Native Americans had, especially in California.

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<i>Speaker 4</i>: We were some of the best at using our environment. We used everything in the environment, and we knew plants very well.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: I just wanted to point out that the whole culture conservation effort here, with various Native peoples from North America,

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: and many, many Native peoples from Central America, and Laos,

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: who have come here, have come here partly, not only because their physical selves were threatened, but because their environment is deeply threatened.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: When we talk about Native art, we're talking about the land; we're talking about the physical environment.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: When plants are threatened, when the water when the air is threatened,

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: we're not just talking about the disappearance of things to make artifacts with, but really the disappearance of a way of life that's essential.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: I just went over while y'all were talking and picked up a plant that's common all throughout the southeast, and the south, the plains states.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: I've found out since that it's even common in Hawaii. I, we call this bearpaw.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: And my folks use this to make kind of a decongestion with; you walk on it on the mall, everywhere. [[laughing]]

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: This particular plant is very common; used by a number of Native peoples. I say that to you, just to point out how careless we are in some ways.

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<i>Speaker 3</i>: Right.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: How little we know about the very ground we walk on. And most Native peoples;

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: it's not just a matter of finding the cedar to make this mask and hoping that the seeder doesn't get destroyed by acid rain,

<i>Speaker 1</i>: the way pine trees are everywhere, or the black and white ash to make Seneca baskets.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: But it is part of a really deep way of life. And so to talk about Indian art, to talk about craft is really to talk about--

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[[Cross Talk]]

<i>Speaker 3</i>: Culture

<i>Speaker 1</i>: -- the whole environment and the whole way of life.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: And if we have any point to make here, it is, it is that everything is related.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: Even things that may seem strangely unrelated like weeds; what some people call weeds, [[laughing]] that they tromp on in the mall. [[laughing]]

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: And for us, it is a kind of importance. Our workshop time is coming to an end, and I hope that some of you who will come back to the festival, will join us.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: We'll be having different workshops here. We'll be talking about the Federal Cylinder Project

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: which is aiding in the preservation of Native music all over the country by doing some of what Greg Colfax was talking about.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: That is, uh, returning once again to tribal people, the music that was recorded and put on cylinder so long ago.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: And we hope that you'll come back and join us and talk with us about the preservation of tribal culture and the things that we are doing to, to enhance that.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: In a way, you help us do that, simply by being interested in that very effort.

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<i>Speaker 1</i>: So, thank you for coming today, and come back and visit with us again. Thank you. [[applause]]



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