

Written by Elaine Quitiquit-Palmer

## “Qa’-soy”

When I was a little girl, I loved being in the yard with my Dad.

He would be up early every Saturday, and after I was done watching my early morning cartoons and having a bowl of cereal, I would put my shoes on and run outside to help him.

Typically, I would help Dad rake leaves or just help pile them into the wheelbarrow while he finished mowing the lawn. Then Dad would start weeding. Mind you, we never had flower beds or anything special, just random weeds that would grow along the fence or near the bottoms of the trees that were growing in the yard. I would kneel down and join him in pulling up all kinds of crab grass, foxtails, dandelions (for fun), or just throw sticks in to the wheelbarrow. But there was one grass that he would tell me to look out for. It grew a bit taller than regular grass and wasn’t as green. When we’d find it, we’d pull it up gently from the bottom to not pull out the roots with nuts. Then we’d bunch up a handful and I would run over to the water faucet and rinse them off to get ready to eat these “Baby coconuts”.

These sweet and milky little nuts were at the ends of the grass and literally looked like baby coconuts as we’d call them.

After rinsing and cleaning them off, I’d gather a handful of these different sized seeds and start popping them in my mouth. They were firm and crunchy and made that pop when you bit in to them. Yes, you’d get a little dirt taste in there, but “dirt is good for you” he’d say. They tasted sweet and a bit milky and nutty.

My dad and I would sit on the porch and just take a minute to enjoy these little finds.

When I was older, I remember asking him where he learned this trick. He said his mom had taught him to identify the grass and how to eat from it when he was a boy.

I didn’t realize it then and I know now that my Grandmother taught him a survival skill. She taught him something from her core childhood memories.

Every day no matter where I am, even in my own yard, I continue to look for these nutsedges. I haven’t been as lucky or maybe I just haven’t seen them in a while but I know they are there.

When I google nutsedges, I just see and read “how to get rid of this weed” and I think this was just another way of erasing Native people’s traditional food source; these “baby coconuts” or qa’-soy were a traditional part of our culture, albeit as subtle as they are.

I have told this story to my children and I have taught them how to identify the grass. I just hope that they remember as I do how to identify it. Maybe one day they can tell their children to look up from their devices and go outside and look for “Baby coconuts.”

The Eastern Pomo word for Nut or Seed is “qa’-soy” (KAH-soy).

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Sacramento River, in a small town called Courtland surrounded by pear orchards. Her Dad is Godfrey Quitiquit.