

Statement by Monique Wynecoop:

"I'm Pit River (Atsugewi) & Mountain Maidu on my maternal side. I remember as a child hearing my mom tell me about relatives that froze under a tree, trying to escape boarding school and return to their families. She didn't know all the details, dates, or names but that story has stayed with me my whole life.

I do a lot of work with Tribal Fire & Fuels programs and cultural fire practitioners and also spend a lot of time getting out on the land mentoring youth in cultural activities, tribal culture and food sovereignty programs.

The BIA and boarding school treated Edith and my Great Grandma as wards of the state since their parents passed away when they were really young. They were forced into the boarding school system, but family on both sides were still trying to look out for them, including their maternal Grandma, Mattie Tom (who the school called an "ignorant old woman"). It made me feel so proud when I saw she fought so hard (for Edith) and spoke up to the community about the abuse and wrongs committed by the boarding schools. My Great Grandma Dora was taken in after leaving boarding school by her paternal grandma, Susie Buckskin.

My maternal Grandma, Freda Joseph and Great Grandma, Dora Buckskin both went to boarding school. My Grandma said my Great Grandpa, Lloyd Joseph never went to boarding school because he hid in the mountains whenever the Indian agents would come by. Because of this, he was able to speak his language and practice his culture and ceremonies his entire life.

A family member shared a thesis written in 2020 by Kate Mook, that detailed the 1916 tragedy that my mom had told me about as a child. In this thesis, Kate shared letters perspectives from the boarding school teachers, BIA agents, and family members of the girls that tried to run away. I realized that it was my Great Grandma's little sister, Edith Buckskin, who was the eldest of the children that tried to escape during the December winter in the Crystal Mountains, and who was treated as a scapegoat by the boarding school and authorities to cover up what was essentially murder, abuse, and child kidnapping. News clippings describe Molly's death as "exposure to the elements," and mention my Great Aunt Edith as the "Ringleader."

Initially learning the details of my Great Aunt Edith's story made me feel so much anger and deep sadness for her. As a mother, my heart and soul aches with the thought of any children being subjected to the abuse that she was subjected to. But learning her story also made me feel to my core her strength and the strength of all my ancestors. I learned from letters and historical records that Edith's family and friends all fought so hard to get her back, and never gave up fighting for her, but the boarding school wouldn't give her up, which eventually ended in her running away with other local girls and tragedy. I feel strongly that she wants her story to be heard and to get that justice that she didn't get that day. I strongly believe the spirits of our ancestors are with us and that we owe them acknowledgement of their sacrifices and stories, prayers, and, if we are able, justice so their spirits can be at peace.

Before she passed, my paternal Grandma, Geraldine Vitale (Crumb) told me, “You come from a long line of strong women”. My maternal Grandma, Freda Joseph wrote in 1979, “Times have not changed much: by withholding economic opportunities and quality education and the right to gain self-esteem, dominant society has crushed all but the most unwavering human spirits of the Maidu people.” I see this unwavering spirit and strength in the stories I hear about my ancestors. Despite all of the challenges they have faced, we future generations are here and strong. I have always been so proud of where I have come from on both sides of my family. My Grandmas on both sides were Nurses and very smart, strong women. I have always been strong-willed, and willing to stand up and speak up for what’s right. I inherited this love from my parents that always have protected me and had my back when I needed it.

Oftentimes, when I do something that my ancestors used to do, whether it’s figuring out life’s challenges, ceremonies, artwork, or being on the land, I feel like they’re with me watching over my family and loved ones and it brings me peace.”

Monique Wynecoop (2024)
Mountain Maidu, Pit River
Relative of Edith Buckskin

Discus:

- Initial response to this statement.
- Describe some ways you noticed children resisted mistreatment, from the script of primary sources.
- Describe evidence of native resilience you gathered from the content of this unit.

