

KNOWLEDGE OF NATIVE ELDERS  
TATIANA SAUNDERS  
SUMMARY BY LARRY CAGNINA 10/24/89

Tassie was a few minutes late for class today, and when she walked in she stated she had to do something before class started. She disappeared for a few minutes, and when she returned she was all dressed up in her traditional celebration attire. Needless to say she was in a festive mood, laughing, full of energy and enthusiastic like a young girl celebrating her sixteenth birthday. It was a delight for me, and I suppose the rest of the class to see her in this mood, especially after last week.

Tassie brought in some of her works of art, slippers, boots, purse, gloves, mittens, head band and jewelry that she had made. Tassie explained how she had made them and what they were used for. Tassie talked about using the head band with feathers in their stick dance ceremonies. She also talked about her first experience in making moccasins, with flour sack thread and beads she had found on some old slippers, and gloves. She had taught herself how to make her first pair of slippers, by looking at other slippers. Someone asked her if she used two needles when doing bead work, in which she replied that she did; one to hold the beads, and one to anchor them down. She also talked about the different patterns she used in making mittens.

One of Tassie stories was about making all these Christmas gifts, moccasins, slippers, high knit stockings, and gloves. It was still a week before Christmas and she had nothing to do. She woke up from a dream the next morning, in which someone had been telling her that she should make up a purse with an Eagle on it. She woke up at 5:00 A.M. and started cutting out the material from moose skin. By that afternoon she was putting the beads on for her Eagle. Tassie had found the pattern for the Eagle on a glove she had found. Most of the patterns she used for her bead work were taken from wrapping paper, or some pattern she would find laying about. A week latter she took her purse and went to the recreation center to show it off.

Tassie shared with us how she would make up about twenty pair of gloves, mittens and slippers of all sizes and patterns of bead work for the potlatch. For the tops of the slippers she would use beaver or rabbit skin. Tassie talked about how she made up different boots, for different seasons; like seal skin (from the coast) boots for spring break up, and knee high boots with seal fur around the top for winter. Winter boots were made of moose skin, and arctic socks were made up of caribou skin, with the fur turned in. Winter boots had no beads on the outer toe, because they had to scrape ice off them, and the beads would just come off.

One of her stories was how the tradition for becoming a woman worked. They put her in a tent, with a pot, grass, moss and charcoal, for one year. The first day she had no water or food. The following morning her grandmother brought her a cup of oil (fish gut oil).

Her grandmother also told her she would only be able to eat dry foods, fish etc. and no berries of any kind, for one year. Tassie's grandmother told her if she ate berries, her skin would turn all wrinkly, and she would turn blue. After two weeks, her dad told everyone that there was no need to suffer her that way, that this tradition was outdated. Afterwards her dad took the tent down.

Tassie explained why she wants to do what she is doing today. She feels by making mittens, gloves, slippers, and boots and showing others how to do the same, is a gift she can pass on. As she said; when she was young, they did not have the material used today, like thread and beads.

Tassie sang to us some of the songs that she would sing at midnight mass, around Christmas time. The class followed along, as she was singing. Many of us did not understand the words she was singing but, the tunes were very familiar.

One of the questions that were brought up by a classmate was: Is it appropriate to lend someone your gloves. Tassie explained that the reason for not letting someone use there gloves, was that they did not want to give their hand away. That there was luck associated with the gloves. Men would not let others use their gloves because when they trapped, they would use only one set of gloves, and they would not use them for anything else. The same thing would hold true when they would snare. It is a traditional belief system.

Tassie's story about going trapping with her husband in hilly terrain was a classic. Her husband warned her about going over this steep hill, and to use a birch tree to help her slow down. Tassie did not tie it down of course and, as she said; she was to stubborn. As she was coming back the dogs took off in a hurry to get back to camp, and the next thing she knew she was sitting on the ground with a torn up arm.

This was the last day for Tassie to share with us as a class, and I felt that what she had to say was very important. Tassie told us that she hoped what she shared with us, we would appreciate; that she would get back safely; for us to do our own thing, and to be happy. She also told us that she was happy to be with each one of us, and that she was happy to be able to do her work.