

Jamestown S’Klallam Tribal Storyteller, Elaine Grinnell to share tribal stories at Festival

“Today’s going to be a special day, my friends!”
-Elaine Grinnell

Eight master tribal storytellers will share traditional stories at the Fourth Annual Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival in Portland November 13-15 at Lewis and Clark College.

One is S’Klallam storyteller, Elaine Grinnell, who is also a basket weaver, linguist, and traditional cook from the Coastal Salish group on the Olympic Peninsula. Elaine became interested in storytelling as a child. During the blackouts of World War Two, her family turned off the lights in her house because they feared bombings from submarines along the Pacific Coast. Her grandparents would tell stories around a wood stove to entertain her on those long nights. She loved to watch the flashes of light from the wood stove as they illuminated their faces, and she never forgot that feeling.

Like her ancestors, Grinnell has been a fisherman for many years and she embodies the resilience of her people. Watching her speak, you sense a deep reserve of inner grace, vitality and wisdom, as she speaks of the many challenges she has faced in her life. Her storytelling and self-deprecating humor can range between legends, creation, animal lore, and fish stories. Her stories cover a lot of ground, including canoe journeys in the wild North Pacific Ocean, where death is always a possibility that must be faced, or tales of her childhood, when she and her father were attacked by the devilfish – also known as an octopus – and almost dragged out to sea.

“Give your kids the opportunity of culture,” Grinnell says. She is deeply dedicated to preserving her culture, which is why she tells stories of her roots. She is also involved in the resurrection of her peoples’ language from near extinction. In fact, it is now being taught in Port Angeles High School. You will hear some S’Klallam spoken when she talks.

Guest storyteller from Alaska, Woodrow Morrison (Haida) will also be sharing inspirational stories from his own rich cultural heritage over the weekend. Events will open with tribal drumming and singing. A Silent Charity Auction will be held during the Friday and Saturday evening festival. You can also attend the Storytellers Symposium on Sunday, November 15 at 2:00 PM as storytellers from Northwest tribes share their rich perspectives and colorful experiences about the essential role of storytelling in today’s cultural renaissance in Indian Country.

Tribal members can request information about Northwest Indian Storytellers Association membership and about the emerging storytellers’ workshop being held all day Saturday, November 14. Registration forms are at www.wisdomoftheelders.org or you can e-mail NISA@wisdomoftheelders.org or call (503) 517-9759. NISA was formed in October 2005 to encourage, preserve and strengthen traditional storytelling among Northwest

tribes and to share these gifts with public audiences. NISA was organized by Wisdom of the Elders, Inc., a Portland area non-profit committed to Native American cultural preservation, education, and race reconciliation.

Tickets will be available at the door on a sliding scale at Lewis and Clark College's Agnes Flanagan Chapel, 0615 SW Palatine Hill Road, Portland, OR (97219). Driving directions are at <http://www.lclark.edu/visit/directions/>.

-by Hale Mednik, author of the novel, The Twelve Tribes, dreamtidespress@yahoo.com.