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Treaty DAY

What is Treaty Day?

Every year around January 22 we gather at one of our longhouses or another to celebrate this day.

We bargained for our right to practice our ancient religion.

William Shelton, Tulalip told the BIA's Charles Buccannan that we would call our celebration "Treaty Day!"

So, when you ask the question, "What is Treaty Day?" Please read about it here on these pages!

Every year around January 22nd we all gather at one or another of our longhouses, Tulalip, Swinomish or Lummi to celebrate this day.

For many years the U.S. Government and the clergy worried about civilizing the first people of this land. They called us Indians. We had our own languages and we practiced ancient beliefs. They, the Government and the Clergy, could not understand us. They were afraid of us. We might decide to fight all of the people who were invading our country. We were and are a disciplined people who have survived because we honor the rules that we are asked to honor.

We were instructed by the officials of the BIA and the churches, Catholic and Protestant to stop practicing our traditional ways. Not to speak our language or follow our ancient spiritual teachings. If we did not obey, we would go to jail. Because we were obedient, we stopped talking our own languages and we stopped practicing our ancient spirituality, at least, we stopped doing this out in the open; where other people could see and hear us. We did not want to go to jail!

William Shelton, a chief of Police at Tulalip was a very politically savvy individual. He realized that he could bargain with the powers that were smothering us with their rules, those rules founded on fear of hostility from the usually peaceful "Indians". Were we going to honor the treaty that Governor Stevens had managed to talk many of leaders into signing? William Shelton saw a way to bargain for our right to practice our ancient teachings without fear of going to prison. We would honor their treaty if they would allow us our rights to practice our spirituality. He voiced his solution to Buccannan, Buccannan said, "Can you prove to me that you folks have a spiritual power or a higher power?" Elzie Andrews [təʔulsəd] Upper Skagit, sang his song and asked his power to materialize. A big cougar materialized and walked through the building.

"Please, I believe you, now make it go away! You can now practice your ancient religion and we will not put you in jail. You must call this celebration "Treaty Day" this must be a promise." So it is that we keep our promise. Treaty Days is not the celebration of losing our land but, the re-gaining of our right to practice our spiritual traditions.

taq^wšəblu did not get this information out of a book. She heard it from her dad Charley Anderson, from Harriet Shelton Dover, from Morris Dan and other relatives who were there and saw and heard what happened on that special day.

We are all grateful that our people and their coming generations can benefit from our historians those who were brave enough and had the foresight to allow themselves to be tape-recorded in the language so that their wisdom and teachings can now be our teachers forever.

Thank you beloved teachers: Ruth Shelton, Tulalip, Samish, Clallam; Susie Sampson Peter, Upper Skagit; Hagan Sam, Tulalip/Skagit; Isadore Tom, Lummi, Skagit; Martha La Mont, Tulalip, Skagit; Alice Williams, Upper Skagit; Harry Moses, Sauk-Suiattle, Skagit; Louise and Charley Anderson Skagit, Samish, Chelan.

Plus we have many others from Southern Lushootseed whose stories and generous information are written and available to our young people. Lawrence Webster, Suquamish; Julie Siddle, Muckleshoot; Annie Daniels, Muckleshoot; plus other storytellers who shared information with us.

We are all grateful and we honor and thank you for sharing with us all of this valuable information. Now our young people can know who they are and they can be proud to remember what you now leave in their hands to pass on to the future.

Traditionally given by taq^wšəblu Vi Hilbert, Upper Skagit,
Director of Lushootseed Research - January 31, 2001