

“Wu-ches-erik (Loon Woman) and Ori-aswe (Wildcat)”

Darryl Babe Wilson and Susan Brandenstein Park

Susan Brandenstein Park's home is small, white, trimmed with green. We went up to her door in Carson City, Nevada, and were greeted by loud barking from her daughter's puppy. My twin boys and I had traveled to Susan's home to look over her original Atsuge-wi field notes. It had been sixty years since she talked with a person from Atsuge-wi. Susan, an anthropologist, born in 1908 and a former student of Alfred L. Kroeber and Robert Lowie, opened the door. Later she said,

I did not know what to expect. I thought you would be older and I did not think you would have children. You are much younger than I thought you would be. You seemed to be more pulled together, more . . . better educated than most of the Atsuge-wi people would be. That is a snobbish kind of thing to say, but it's true.

I thought you would be older, I thought you would be without children, I thought you would be smaller. In my mind I keep thinking about the people I talked to as being small and thin, very shabbily dressed, but clean—most of them. Not all of them. You didn't look like any of the people I talked to. I don't know exactly what I did expect. I was surprised. You looked different than I expected, but I don't know what I expected. Somebody skinny, I guess.¹

Susan was a wisp of a person, soft spoken, and fragile. With a quick handshake we got down to business. She had a huge stack of field notebooks on her desk. They were very old and very worn—a green that had turned almost gray-yellow.

I quickly studied her materials. There in her scrawling handwriting in number-two lead pencil were the stories my people told her long before I was born. The more I studied, and the more the voices materialized, the

¹ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on June 24, 1992, Carson City, Nevada.

more I could see my elders talking with Susan long ago. I could see them gesturing as they spoke, their hands, bodies, eyes telling as much of the story as their words—perhaps more.

I could see the twinkle in their eyes and hear their gruff giggles whenever they told about Coyote getting caught in a trap. As we talked, Susan kept softly stroking her old field notes as if they were sleeping kittens. She looked into the distance and remembered the land and the people, the sweat bath that she took in Dixie Valley, and the long evenings with Sampson Grant on the edge of the pine forest in Goose Valley.

I had only enough gas money to go back to the University of California, Davis, and I dared not take the responsibility of possessing her original notes. So, I made an instant plan to return to the university and secure funding, then return to Susan's home and photocopy her materials in Carson City—in order that her very valuable originals not be separated from her; besides being precious, they were very fragile. We agreed that this was a workable plan. My ten-year-old twin boys and I returned to Davis late that night, excited but exhausted.

I trace my ancestry to two peoples: one residing north of the Pit River, Iss (Ajuma-wi), and one residing south of the Pit River, Aw'te (Atsuge-wi). Often the government combines these two people into the Pit River Tribe. Our homeland is in the area now known as northeastern California. We have always lived along Hati-wiwi (Hat Creek), one of the larger tributaries of It-Ajuma (Pit River). Hati-wiwi travels east from Tetta-jenn-a (Mt. Lassen) until it enters It-Ajuma just south of Lake Britton several miles from Jema-wehalo Tiwiji (Burney Falls) and thirty miles south of Ako-Yet (Mt. Shasta). Farther east, and along Horse Creek, are the Apwerake (Dixie Valley People). These two areas make up the land of my father's people. After years of humiliation by the local white ranchers and business people, Atsuge-wi and Apwerake still reside close to the old home places—as close as permitted.

In too many instances, the whites have systematically maneuvered my people away from the best grazing land and into the rock piles; land was usurped from Atsuge-wi while clouded, random titles to the earth were issued to the white people through a variety of American legislative measures. The Dawes Allotment Act (1887) was the most damaging for this purpose. No doubt most of Nil-la-du-wi (wanderers) presently living on our homeland wish that we somehow would vanish—as their history books constantly promise. But we cannot.

Atsuge-wi and Apwerake are languages of our ancestors, and we have our own history of the universe. Our elders remember when the moon was an "earth," but then the two powers clashed. One power wanted to exhaust

the resources because it was within their ability to do so. The other power wanted to save the “earth,” since they believed that there was an obligation to future generations to preserve and share it. In the battle over these issues, the “earth” was used up. In the end, each side consumed the resources of the “earth.” Eventually, a great fire began, and there was not enough water remaining to put it out.

Our ancestors also tell how this universe was made. A thought manifested itself first as a voice, then as the being *Kwaw* or *Qon*,² in English “Silver Grey Fox” (Silver). Silver, after dwelling in the silent vastness for many seasons, decided to think another being into existence. He failed to formulate his thought completely, and the resulting being emerged in the form of *Ma-ka-da* (Coyote). Together Silver and Coyote sang and danced for “a million years or more” and made a mist that floated to them. Silver caught the mist and breathed upon it, creating a substance that jelled and then hardened into a fragment of earth. Silver and Coyote continued to sing and dance, kneading the earth until it was an island large enough to stand upon. Then they stretched it in all directions, making the earth as we know it today.

Those of knowledge say there is a dwelling beyond the sky that Silver Grey Fox made but later abandoned when he grew tired of Coyote’s changing and challenging his creations. He could not teach Coyote in the land beyond the sky, so he lifted up the center post of the *chema-ha* (sweat house), and, after carefully replacing it, came here and made this earth. First there was only water, but Silver Grey Fox sang until there was a little land floating upon the water. He sang more. The land mass grew, and, when it was large enough, he sang another song, causing a new *chema-ha* to appear upon the little island. He then began to make the mountains and rivers, animals and fish, birds and forests until everything was made perfectly. Using his own magic, however, Coyote came down onto this earth through the center-post hole of the *chema-ha* beyond the sky. Since then, nothing has been right.

My elders tell of the first white men entering the land and damaging all that they touched. They tell of the “Americans” who came in uniform and upon horses. The Americans rounded up my people like wild cattle and around 1862 marched them over the mountains in winter to Redding, California. My elders were then marched to Red Bluff on the Sacramento River, where they were put on large ships and sent downriver. Some were taken to Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay; others were thrown into the

²Depending upon who is telling the story (and where), *Kwaw* and *Qon* are interchangeable.

ocean; and still others were taken to Round Valley and Eureka, eventually being sent to Quapa, Oklahoma, Indian Territory. Some of those placed on Alcatraz returned; others from Round Valley escaped the military confinement and, like shadows, also returned to the old home places. My people have always been attached to our homeland. My people were connected to the land even before there was enough earth to walk upon, and after being brutally removed, we always found a way to return. Our stories explain why we cannot vanish: we were created from a dream and a song long ago, and, even before this earth was made, we were thought of and planned for.

Susan Brandenstein Park among the Atsuge-wi

Susan Brandenstein (Park) graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1930, with a degree in anthropology. After graduating, she asked to join an anthropology expedition to Fiji organized by the Anthropology Division at Berkeley, but her professors Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie both said that she should cut her teeth on a “simpler” culture, suggesting that she go to the land of my father, east of Mt. Lassen in the extreme northeastern corner of California.

Susan graduated just before John Collier’s term as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the legislation creating the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. John Collier was convinced that he was doing his utmost to advance the natives into modern society while protecting their societal rights. Compromises in Congress caused the IRA to promote government-created tribal and business councils. These tribal councils generally ignored tradition, opting to deal directly with the American government. They rarely allowed participation of traditional councils in their meetings and in their decisions. This tendency caused divisions in tribes and in families—an injury that has not been remedied to date.

When Susan Brandenstein entered our land, it was still the American policy to take native children from their parents and from their homelands and to ship them to boarding schools in distant places: Chemawa, Oregon; Stewart, Nevada; or Riverside, California. The children were forced to attend these schools and were forbidden to use native languages or to participate in their native culture. At this time my father, Herman Ira Wilson, along with many of my tribe, was at Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, although he was not an academic. Growing angry with administrative policies, he fought physically with the administration and was expelled before graduating. Susan was only vaguely aware of the

struggles my father and others were going through at this time:

I asked them [Atsuge-wi] what the effect of the school was on the children or the young people who were supposed to learn cleanliness and how to cook and how to dress themselves, and so on. And they all laughed. They said that is nonsense. As soon as they come back they fall into their old ways. They don't bring what they learned in these schools. They don't feel it is any good. It doesn't fit in with the way they live. But now I can't remember who I talked with. It was the older people who told me this. I don't remember talking to anyone who had been to the school. There was probably a lot going on that I wasn't aware of. I'm sure. I wish I could go back. Now I feel I have learned a great deal more. I could probably be more intelligent in my questions.³

Twenty years old, just out of college, and bringing only her trusting curiosity and a smile, Susan entered my father's homeland. Instead of walking in the soft sands of the Fiji Islands, she was sent by her professors into the land of lava beds, rutted roads, rattlesnakes, coyotes, and volcanoes and to a people who had every reason to be hostile to the American process. Of this experience she said, "To me, it was like going to the moon":

You asked how and why the Atsuge-wi people talked to me; it is simply that they loved to talk. They loved to talk about their histories. Today a man or woman going out to do fieldwork would have a list of questions that long: how to start, what to say.

I did not know where to begin, so I went to the Post Office in Cassel, California. There were many Indian men sitting around. Not talking, just sitting. I approached Lee Bone because he was a roly-poly, sweet-looking man and asked if he would like to talk with me about the histories of his people. He said that he would, very much, and asked if I would like to go to his home. So, we got in my car and we drove down to his home and sat on the porch, a dilapidated, old porch, and we talked and talked.⁴

Susan paid those who cooperated with her one dollar per day. At that time, those were good wages for the Atsuge-wi, especially when compared with nothing per day. Soon she learned of others who wanted to share their histories. So she drove around the Hat Creek and Dixie Valley areas, taking notes and capturing on paper the voices of anyone who would talk with her: Ida Piconum, Coyote Jack, Kaize Buckskin, Sampson Grant, Mary Wilson,

³ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on June 24, 1992, Carson City, Nevada.

⁴ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on July 14, 1992, Carson City, Nevada.

John and Lyman LaMarr, and Bob Rivers. Soon her notebooks were filling with narratives. Although my people told her many stories, they kept her away from ceremonial practices:

They were very pleasant, but I was never allowed to go to a shamanistic curing. They would tell me that it was going to be Thursday. There was going to be a doctoring. So, come Thursday, the doctoring had taken place on Wednesday. It happened over and over again. In Wintun, I did go to a curing. But not in Atsuge-wi, never, ever.

I did not go to a Big Time [gathering of many people]. The Fourth of July, they would tell me, would be celebrated on the third, but it was celebrated on the fourth. So I never went. It wasn't unpleasant the way they told me, it was just that if I had been at a curing my presence would have interfered with the doctor's curing. It wouldn't be effective. That is the way I interpret it. And, I would spoil a Big Time.⁵

After assembling some of her field notes and narratives, Susan attempted to locate a publisher, but there seemed to be little interest in her labor. Finally, after a long battle with the editor, "Sampson Grant, Atsuge Shaman" was mimeographed for *Occasional Papers of the Redding Museum* (1986). Of the 1,000 copies printed, Susan said there are still 995 left in the Redding Museum.

Lacking support or encouragement from her professors, Susan worried that her field notes would never be widely read despite their value:

It was like living in another dimension—which is exactly what it was. It was a wonderful experience. In the version, for instance, that Dixon took he talked about earth-maker (1908). They didn't talk about earth-maker. The Indians, not any Indians—not your people—talked about earth-maker. It is a term that some fancy folklorist may have used. But what I wonder is, did some of these concepts such as the sky ladder and fe-fi-fo-fum kind of thing, were they imported from elsewhere or are these spontaneous thoughts that the people themselves have? I don't know.

I came from San Francisco. I went to Sacramento, then I went to Redding, and from Redding I went to Burney. From Burney I was headed for Cassel. That's where Dr. Kroeber told me to go, to Cassel. I went to the Post Office. Cassel was named after a German city which, curiously enough, is where my ancestors came from. I rented a shack for nine dollars a month, thinking it would impress them. But they didn't care, the Indians didn't care where I lived or the conditions. They didn't care. So, when I found that out, I thought "why not be comfortable?" So, I went to the Rising River Inn.

⁵ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on June 24, 1992, Carson City, Nevada.

I wasn't a bit apprehensive. I have had this feeling ever since a small child, that if you smile at someone that wins half the battle. So I smiled every place. This was true in Ethiopia,⁶ too, when I had gone places where there was a great deal of hostility. I guess I am just lucky because I smile at people; then there is no problem. Not always, but nearly always. Certainly it was true with the Atsuge-wi.

I got a house. The next day I went, because there was nothing to do in this house. I asked Mr. Williams where I could find some Atsuge-wi Indians. First of all he didn't know what I meant by Atsuge-wi Indians. He finally figured it out and told me to go to the Post Office, and there I would find a lot of people sitting around. And that was true. I don't know what they were doing because they didn't get any mail. That's how I started out. Having met Lee Bone and—what was his brother's name—Jackson.

The best stories were told by Lyman LaMarr and John LaMarr. They were the best storytellers. At least I thought they were. . . .

I came to see him [Kroeber] in the middle of my first semester. I was all excited. I said that it was wonderful to go and talk with the people and to hear what you have read about come out of the mouths of these people. For instance, you have a joking relationship with certain people and you have an avoidance relationship with other members of your group. Those who are a possible spouse, you had a joking relationship with. For instance, if you died, your wife would marry your brother. And that is very common. That is a very widespread practice. And that is the kind of thing he [Kroeber] was interested in.

Today the people go into the lives of the Indians with much more detail, with much more education, and with much more support. For instance, I went out with no preparation except reading about the Indians in that area.⁷

After her early attempts to publish her work about the Atsuge-wi, Susan turned to other work. Still she remembered her unfinished project. In 1991, Susan Brandenstein Park read an article of mine in *News from Native California*, a Berkeley based quarterly magazine published by Malcolm Margolin. I had signed my article with my name and with my tribal identity, A-juma-wi/Atsuge-wi, the very people Susan had studied sixty years earlier. Susan contacted Malcolm Margolin, and he gave her my address at the University of California, Davis, where I was a student majoring in English. Soon we were communicating. She told me about the thousands of pages of notes she had compiled concerning my father's people of Hat Creek and Dixie Valley. I arranged to visit her with my twin

⁶ Susan's husband was assigned as an anthropologist by the State Department to work in Ethiopia for several years.

⁷ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on July 14, 1992, Carson City, Nevada.

sons at her home in Carson City, Nevada.

After this first encounter, the twins and I returned to Davis, where I immediately began a search for funding. Seeking support from the Rare Manuscripts and Special Collections Division of my own university as well as other libraries in the California system, the California Historical Society, the California American Indian Heritage Commission, and various other funding agencies, I learned that there was little immediate interest in supporting such a project. "Maybe next year," was the common response. Finally, the Women's Research and Resource Center at the University of California, Davis, came through with two hundred fifty dollars, and we were on our way. The Saturday after the funding came through, we left Davis in the early darkness and before sunup were having breakfast in Carson City. Susan was up and ready for us and suggested that I take her original field notes back to Davis and photocopy them when I had the time. Although I worried about risks involved in taking such valuable materials, her suggestion made sense because the fragile notebooks had to be handled very carefully and would require several days to photocopy.

When I called Susan to tell her that we had finished photocopying and would be returning her originals the following weekend, I thought she would be delighted, but she was almost in tears. A strange and awful event had occurred. She had been gathering old photographs, genealogies, names, and addresses, as well as words and partial thoughts scribbled on small scraps of paper, in a cardboard box to give to me on my next visit. She had placed the box on top of her typewriter. While Susan was resting in her bed and her daughter Nancy was away from the house, children from across the street had entered her home and set fire to the box. Metal in the typewriter likely slowed the fire and prevented the entire house from being destroyed. When Nancy returned, she discovered the door of the house open and the house on fire. Later, the children confessed to the police. A precious box of Atsuge-wi memories had vanished. Susan explained,

The newspaper delivery boy called the fire department because he'd seen the fire. My daughter had gone out for about ten minutes. . . . I was still in the house. I was lying down. I made the mistake of telling the kids from across the street that they could come in and play with Gesha (her Keesehound puppy). So, the door was unlocked and they came in. It was very dangerous. This is an old house and it would go up in a couple of minutes. The fire department came and they called the police and the police sent some social workers. The child (a boy, twelve or thirteen) was taken and put in jail overnight. He turned out to be quite a nice boy in my opinion. It was just a couple of days before Christmas and I begged them

not to take him.⁸

If her original field notes had not been with us in Davis, her life's work could have vanished along with the other precious memories of my people. That next weekend we returned the original notes to Susan. None of us thought they were safe in her wooden home, and we considered placing them in a library. We talked at length about alternatives, but, in the final analysis, Susan thought that her children might want something original of her history. With some hesitation, she kept the original field notes at home.

With financial support from Malcolm Margolin and the Flow Fund (a branch of the Rockefeller Foundation), I then began the labor of deciphering Susan Park's handwriting and entering narratives into my word processor. Reading the pages was a lengthy process because Susan's handwriting, in her own words, is "horrid, ghastly!" I began by searching the pages for a word that I could clearly identify and then read again until a pattern emerged: a shadow, then the story gradually became clear on the page, like the watery image of a photograph in a dark room. I then typed quickly, page after page. Finally, there it was, a narrative, an "old story," readable. Eventually I managed to decipher and enter drafts of forty different narratives from Susan's notes.

Then the process of editing began. No matter how hard I tried, or how many attempts I made, I was unable to decipher narratives in their entirety because of the "ghastly" handwriting. I felt like a paleographer of ancient written documents, probing, pondering, wondering, and seeking. By transcribing the voices speaking in the narratives, I felt I had the power to bring my people back to life as they were sixty years ago, standing, breathing, dancing, singing, and teasing. Piecing the narratives together from the notes, I also felt like a basket maker, taking a shattered basket, studying it, inserting new ribs, and then weaving the original pattern with new and fresh materials. The basket recovers its original shape and, when mended, has a purpose again. I worked with Susan, polishing the narratives. I read the materials I had typed from the notes, and Susan followed along, reading (with a huge magnifying glass) from her originals. Soon we were satisfied that what I had typed was what she recorded long ago.

The journey that began with Susan seeing "Atsuge-wi" in *News from Native California*, her letter to editor Malcolm Margolin, and his letter to me concerning the Susan Park field notes has been an upward climb, but

⁸ Conversation with Darryl Babe Wilson on April 18, 1992, Davis, California.

this work cannot be considered a complete reconstruction, nor should it. To continue the process I now must take the mended “baskets” to my people. Furthermore, there is now a missing link in the reconstruction. Susan Brandenstein Park has, as my people say, “gone on ahead.” She died just before Thanksgiving, 1993. She rests just outside of Carson City, Nevada.

The Story

Lee Bone told this story to Susan Brandenstein (Park) on June 24, 1931, at Dixie Valley, California, and it appears in the third volume of Susan B. Park’s original field recordings (9-21).⁹ The story was restored by Susan B. Park and Darryl B. Wilson, December 19, 1992. The major characters are as follows:

<i>Wu-ches-erik</i> :	Coyote’s Daughter who later turns into Loon Woman
<i>Ori-aswe</i> :	Wildcat or Mountain Lion
<i>Nichnika</i> :	Old Lizard, who has lots of magic
<i>Naponahai</i> :	Cocoon Man or Night Flying Butterfly, who helped to create the world
<i>Itui-minumu</i> :	Daughter of Eagle Woman
<i>Yadi-ow-mas</i> :	Cousin of <i>Ori-aswe</i>

We have chosen to leave the text exactly as Susan recorded Lee Bone’s narration in order to retain the narrator’s voice. To alter the words or to “correct” the grammar would detract from the original performance.

Wu-ches-erik (Loon Woman) and Ori-aswe (Wildcat)

There was a *chema-ha* and these two girls lived outside. Wu-ches-erik (Coyote’s Daughter) and Itui Minumu (the daughter of Eagle). They were outside by themselves. The two were in one house and all the boys were in the *chema-ha*, and no women were there.

This boy, Ori-aswe (Wildcat) and Yadi-ow-mas, went out to Wu-ches-erik every night. The girl sleeps too sound and she not found out who did this to her because nobody would come there, not her brothers would come.

She thought. One at a time they went, these two, to that girl. And this girl went out trying to get pitch. “I’ll find those boys!”

And she got pitch and put it all over her arms and legs and body.

⁹ I have a complete copy of Susan’s field notes. Her daughter, Nancy, in Carson City, Nevada, has the originals.

And Wildcat (Ori-aswe) went that night and so this girl sleep sound and he went right in and Ori-aswe got pitch all over him. All over his body. And he knew he'd be caught because he had little specks of pitch all over him.

And that morning Wu-ches-erik got up and she wants to get the boys. She want to know who it was and she got on top of the *chema-ha* and she was singing and she wanted them to come up. She wanted to see who it was.

And Old Coyote went up first because that was his daughter. And Old Coyote told her she'd better go back. "Don't tell me anything."

"And tell all the animals that are in there to go on," Naponahai (Caterpillar) told them that.

Then Naponahai told them to go up. "She wants to know," that what Naponahai told us long ago.

He said, "You fellows go up! Go with her!" The last, the two boys, wouldn't go up. And she sent all the others back. "Go back, I don't need you and this hair, this long hair, that's the one I want," she said.

When they didn't come up, that's what she wanted, Yadi-ow-mas. And Yadi-ow-mas and Ori-aswe had to follow. And they went up this ridge up here. She took them wherever she wanted to go and she stopped overnight about eight miles from here.

And they made a little *jouts-che*, a little wind break, and they all stopped that night and early, daylight, the girl slept soundly and the two boys got up and got little log, dry logs, and put one in each of her out-stretched arms. And the girl slept all the time.

They went home, the two boys, to the *chema-ha*. And everybody was ready to go in the basket. They knew the boys were coming.

And Old Lizard (Nichnika), the smallest lizard, was there.

And the girl woke up and looked at her arms and saw the logs and she got up and she said, "That's all right! Those boys! I'll find you boys!"

So, she came back, right down here, with the fire and went into the *chema-ha* and everybody had gone up, already to the sky.

Nichnika had made the basket. He was the boss. And this girl stood around and her power had come ahead of her and set the *chema-ha* on fire. And she thought, "Everybody inside has burned out already." And she watched outside with a long stick of skunk berry and she twisted it and twisted it and watched from outside.

And Lizard was in the center of the basket and he opened a little hole in the basket. "I want to see how my *chema-ha* is, see if it still burned out."

And he opened a little hole in the basket and they all fell down into the *chema-ha* and they fell into the blaze and one man popped first. His heart popped out like a bullet and Wu-ches-erik caught that one. And everyone's heart popped and she caught them as they did this and she missed one, Yadi-ow-mas. And she thought, "Oh! I missed one!"

And she got scared and she knew she had missed one. And she missed Naponahai's heart. His heart went way out to Klamath.

And little snake, Olop-kai-na invenbai, she missed their hearts. And eagle was way up, too. And she couldn't find him and everybody was

burned out of the *chema-ha* and Wu-ches-erik listened and she got all the hearts.

Wu-ches-erik fixed the hearts like beads on a necklace and she put it around her neck like a necklace and she looked at it all the time and thought that the hearts were pretty.

But, she lost her husband, Yadi-ow-mas, and she was thinking about that all the time. She went in the water, in a big lake so they couldn't find her. And Eagle went around and looked all over in this island. All her brothers used to be camping all through and used to be camping through here.

She made a little mountain and made a big mountain the second time and she found the bone—good bones. And she took some of these good bones because she thought then she'd take everything. She'd go to the two boys and live.

And she went over there, this Eagle Woman, to the two boys and she went into these boys' house and they hadn't come back. They had gone to hunt for a deer as they did all the time and she only saw the old lady, the two boys' grandmother.

And the old lady was lying when she told her, the old lady said, "They went out to hunt little ducks. They'll be back pretty soon."

And the two boys came back and she, Eagle Woman, told them she, Wu-ches-erik, killed everyone.

And the two boys, when she told them that everyone was dead, then they said, "Tsnu-na, wah hah hah." And that meant they were sorry. And Ori-aswe said, when they stopped, "No use to do that. I'm a man, too."

And Eagle asked these boys if they see that kind. "Well," these two boys said, "I never know. But early in the morning she makes a noise, 'oh, oh' — like that."

That's what they told Eagle. "Well, I guess that's the one," Eagle told the two boys, "and I guess that the one we see early in the morning she comes down when the water is like glass," that's what they told her.

"Looks like it's people—doesn't look like they'd kill nobody"—that's what they thought. And they said, "I haven't any way to kill that woman," and Eagle went out and she brought back this bone and she gave the bone to the two boys. "Well," they said, "I can use this," they said, and there were two bones. And Eagle told them to divide the two.

They fixed the bones one day and when everything was ready and fixed the bones like arrows with a point, "Well," they said, "We can get that one. She comes early in the morning."

And they went early in the morning before she came and they went with their tule boat and close to the shore so she wouldn't see them.

And they went in the thick tules and made a round hole so they could see her when she comes and they watched for her.

At daylight she made a noise and they knew she was coming. "She's coming" they told themselves.

"Let me shoot!"

"No, let me shoot first!" The old [other] fellow said.

“No, let me!”

And as they were talking she came pretty close, looking at herself and admiring her necklace.

Then the two shot at the same time and they got her and she dived down and they thought they missed but they saw the blood, and it came up for a long time.

And they took her out and put her on their boat and when they put her in they wanted to get some duck for their breakfast and they took her back and they took some duck.

And they went back and they said, “We couldn’t get her,” they told them.

“Maybe that’s not the one,” Eagle told them. And they went out to see who it was. Eagle went out to see and she looked at it and said, “That’s the one! That’s the one!” And she took the necklace of hearts off her and they got the hearts and took them back to the *chema-ha* and took them off the string and put them in *ko-pai* [burden basket] and dragged them back to the house.

They took Wu-ches-erik’s heart out and they were going to dance with it, and they made a war dance.

The old lady, when the dance was over, she said, “Don’t kill people like that.” And then she said, “A doctor will know you and then it will be power for him.”

And when this was done Eagle said, “We got to go home,” she told the two boys. So Eagle went back to her *chema-ha* and she fixed over again her *chema-ha* and she cleaned it up everything that was inside, pine needles, put all around and she lay down that night and she put the hearts in the water and then she fixed the pine needles for a bed in the *chema-ha* and Eagle lay down in the *chema-ha* with her head in her arms so she couldn’t see.

And at daylight, early daylight, they all hollered. Everybody was happy when they came back and they all came back to the *chema-ha* and Eagle didn’t get up yet and everybody came back and she heard with her ear which one came back.

And everybody came back. And she got up and she went out. She had another house where she belonged. That’s the end of it.

Discussions

What the narration meant to Susan Brandenstein Park

Susan traveled into my father’s country for two years, collecting a variety of narratives that often change from teller to teller with different meanings applied to various situations. One moment in 1993 while we were verifying my typing, I asked Susan what the particular meaning was in

this story:

She [Coyote's Daughter] was kind of a narcissist. To me it is just a story. I am not able to go beyond that. I am sure there is some hidden meaning. It must have meant a lot to the people who told the story. It is very widespread in California and in the Great Basin.

Why did some hearts pop and others not pop? What is the reason for that? There is no reason given. Coyote was her father. Coyote was not a very nice character, anyway. Why would she want the hearts to make a necklace? Why would just the hearts pop out?

She was killed by the hunter. Then the hearts all came back to life. They hollered and came back. So many times the people come back to life in these stories, over and over again.

What the narration means to Darryl Babe Wilson

Imagine you were Lee Bone, sixty-five-years-old in 1931, sitting at the Post Office at Cassel, California. Your language is Atsuge-wi, and you are stumbling over a second, English. You have watched the Americans flood into your ancestral homeland. You witnessed them systematically denying your riparian rights, your rights to travel, your rights to equality, and your rights to the land where you were born and that you identify as home. You and other members of your tribe use the Cassel Post Office as your "employment center" and location for social gatherings. No mail is expected; day after day you sit on the worn board porch, waiting for a job and hoping that eventually a local rancher will ask you to dig a ditch or mend a fence.

Hope is all that you and your people have—hope and the Post Office. The Post Office is the best location to be because people on federal property are not easily charged with trespassing. The American government continues making laws that confuse you, and they are now taking the children to distant places to teach them other ways of life. Sitting at the Post Office all summer and surviving in this society is oppressive. In this atmosphere, a young woman, a smiling American anthropologist approaches and asks to talk with you about your people. She will pay one dollar per day for work. Not only is your opinion wanted, but it is also immediately valuable. You now have an avenue whereby you can express your thoughts. An American has looked at you and has seen something more than a "coyote."¹⁰ Finally, you are invited to tell "your side" of the history that is

¹⁰ "Coyote" has often been used as a derogatory term referring to Native American people.

unfolding. “Pay just for talk!” The old ones would say, “Look out! Americans must be crazy!”

Such was the situation Susan Brandenstein discovered in 1931 at Cassel, California. Given this context, perhaps it is not surprising that the vindictiveness, the contrariness, and the ugliness of Coyote are reflected in many of the narratives that Susan managed to collect across Hat Creek and Dixie Valley. Coyote’s Daughter is a silent-lake reflection of her father—contrary, vindictive, and unworthy of trust. In the narratives of the Atsuge-wi, the power of Coyote and his offspring lies in revenge, especially through fire. Coyote always manages to use fire in a wrongful way, threatening all forms of life that can be eradicated by this means.

In this particular narrative we see the animal and bird beings gathered after Coyote’s Daughter has caught the boys who had fondled her every night. She is able to find them because of the “long hair” that she had in her possession. Hair has always been a mysterious and extremely personal element within the lives of my people. With a single hair an Atsuge-wi “doctor” can either cure or kill the person from whom the hair comes. Such a doctor is one who has the power to harness a part of nature, often through the aid of a “helper.”¹¹ The helper must obey the doctor’s command, responding to the wishes of its father or mother. Sometimes the effects are helpful, sometimes fatal—but always beyond common understanding, reaching far into the realm of magic. The doctor must be in total control of the helper or the helper may attack and kill its mother or father. Coyote’s Daughter has a hair belonging to Ori-aswe (Wildcat) and providing proof of a wrong-doing.

A large *chema-ha* used for ceremonies is generally at center of the community. In addition, other *chema-ha* are constructed as dwelling places. In this story, the boys leave their *chema-ha*, one used for ceremonies, and go outside to where Coyote’s Daughter and Eagle’s Daughter are sleeping. Coyote’s Daughter, because of her lustful reputation, receives little respect from any male in the community. She is viewed only as their source for immediate pleasure. Eagle’s Daughter, on the other hand, is respected by males and is not bothered by the boys. Further, in the concluding cycle of the narrative, she returns life to all of

¹¹ A “helper” is an object of personal power that my tribal people need in order for us to cope with life more effectively. The “helper” can be in the form of an animal, a star, a tree, a thought, or even a dream. Without such a helper, a person is weak and alone. A helper comes to a person while he or she is seeking guidance on a spiritual quest. Sometimes this power is mischievous, but usually it is serious and assists the person who “owns” it whenever there is need. Often a person has more than one helper.

the beings whom Coyote's Daughter killed in the fire. In contrast to Eagle's Daughter who can give life, Coyotes have only inherited the power to *change* things, not the power to *create*.

When she discovers who has been bothering her, Coyote's Daughter decides to wield her power to invoke fear. She takes advantage of her authority over Ori-aswe and Yadi-ow-mas and forces them to travel with her. In this way she shows the other beings, who are studying the situation very carefully, that her every wish must be fulfilled. Through this process she thinks that she can also show that she is loved, thereby honored—that she is not something simply to be used and then abandoned. She, like her father, slips across the earth, knowing that either she will be satisfied or there will be war.

Embarrassment, to many Atsuge-wi, ushers in a sense of shame, and perhaps a hesitation to move among the other beings. Embarrassment to Coyote, however, means an instant retaliation—in this case, destruction by fire. In this story, the boys have deeply embarrassed Coyote's Daughter. They like her neither for her personality nor for her beauty but only for the momentary pleasure she can offer. She, however, decides that once the boys have fondled her, they have no choice but to love her; it is their obligation to curtail her embarrassment. By making the boys obey her wishes, Coyote's Daughter displays her elevated position to the other beings and alleviates some of the pain of being used. She feels used despite the fact that she may have intentionally “slept too soundly” to notice their advances.

Coyote's Daughter takes the boys on a journey. Together they construct a small hut in which to sleep, but the boys flee to the *chema-ha* of Nichnika (Old Lizard). All of the beings know that Coyote's strongest power is fire, and, in anticipation of Coyote's Daughter's retaliation, Lizard prepares a magic basket to lift the beings away to the safety of the world above. Everybody, including Old Coyote, expects a vicious revenge. The burning *chema-ha* serves as a symbol of Coyote's destructive nature and teaches young people not to be possessive, to love one's self above reason, or to covet. Instead, one should accept only those things that are one's own, given by nature.

During the fire, the beings are in the magic basket prepared by Lizard for this burning. As the basket hovers, moving skyward, Lizard wants to look back to see the condition of his *chema-ha*. “Looking back” has always meant disaster. Making a small hole, Lizard looks back, and the magic causing the basket to fly vanishes; the beings then fall from the small hole in the basket into the burning *chema-ha*. Old Coyote helps his daughter catch the hearts of the beings as they cook and then pop out of the fire.

However, they miss some. Coyote's Daughter then strings these hearts on twine made from the skunk berry bush. She makes *Yoken-aswi Yusji*, a necklace of animal hearts. Of all of the kinds of twine, she most likes the kind made from skunk berry bush, the fruit of which coyotes often eat.

The heart of Naponahai (Night-Flying-Butterfly), one of the beings assisting in the creation of the universe, was not caught as it popped from the burning *chema-ha*. Therefore Naponahai could help Eagle Woman bring all of the people back to life. Coyote's Daughter now knows that she is not in total control, although she has effectively shown the beings that, if they choose to cross or disobey her, their scorched hearts will also hang around her neck! The beings tremble as they plan to preserve themselves.

Eagle Woman (Itui minumu), who is no longer a companion of Coyote's Daughter, and the hunter-boys, who are out gathering food for their grandmother, are not in the *chema-ha* and thus escape the inferno. Eagle Woman then assists in killing Coyote's Daughter by supplying the hunters with a special leg bone from deer, bones which are then sharpened and used as arrow points. No other bone would do for this specific assignment. Because Coyote characteristically kills and disturbs deer, even digging into the earth to eat their bones, the arrow points made from the deer's leg used to kill Coyote's Daughter signify the bond between the deer and the hunters against their common enemy, Coyote, and teaches the beings to work together.

By powers in nature similar to magic, Coyote's Daughter transforms into Loon Woman the moment she places the necklace of hearts around her neck. She accomplishes this transformation so that she can admire herself and her necklace on the mirror surface of the lake. Still loving herself above all else and adoring her necklace, she swims early in the morning while the lake is placid, her reflection with the necklace crystal clear. Loon Woman, with her necklace of hearts, is beautiful; however, she must die, and the necklace of hearts must be taken to the *chema-ha* so that the people whose hearts make up the necklace can return to life. The hunters hide in the tules and shoot Loon Woman and then return to the Eagle Woman. When Eagle Woman sees the necklace of hearts, she knows that justice will now prevail and that the beings burned in Lizard's *chema-ha* will return. She then cleans and purifies the *chema-ha* for this returning.

In a weak moment the beings are as vindictive as Coyote's spirit: they take out Loon Woman's heart, impale it on a lance, and begin dancing around, "mocking" her. A wise elder woman tells Eagle Woman and the rest of the beings not to dance in mockery because there may be a time when a doctor could use the knowledge of their revenge against them—perhaps even a "Coyote Doctor" with very strong powers. They

cease to dance, and Eagle Woman takes the necklace of hearts into the *chema-ha* and puts them in a basket of water. At daylight all of the beings, whose hearts have been in the basket soaking, return to life after having been killed by the fire. The return of the beings shows that good will overcome evil in any situation. The story tells Atsuge-wi that all people must struggle and make sacrifices but that by working together with the aid of wisdom and magic, we can prevail.

In this narrative the Coyote spirit possibly represents weaknesses in our characters—adversaries within each of us. Some of us are capable of suppressing, while others of us are not. Therefore, it is necessary to study the destructive nature of Coyote and Coyote’s children in order to establish a better life. Coyote’s Daughter, then, embodies the conflict for which we must prepare in order for there to be a better life for all of the elements of nature.

Conclusion

In my imagination I see my people gathered at the Cassel Post Office. Susan Brandenstein, a very young white woman, walks into the gathering of men, causing a ripple. She introduces herself to Lee Bone and they talk for a while; then to everyone’s surprise, Susan and Lee drive away in her coupe. Goomes Mullen looks at Bob and Style Rivers sitting in the shade of a juniper and hooks his lip while swinging his head in the direction Susan and Lee just traveled. It is very clear that everyone waiting for a fence mending job or a ditch digging job is now wondering about Lee Bone departing and saying that he is going to “work.”

A few days later, Lee Bone arrives at the Cassel Post Office at the regular time in the morning. He waits for a rancher to hire him to construct a barn or dig a ditch. The rest of the men look at him, wondering what type of “work” he did with that young white woman. Lyman LaMarr and Joe Wilson stop talking. Instantly the gathering quiets, everyone waiting for Lee to explain his activities. “Akh waisa” (“I talk”). “Waisa!” Somebody whispers that they all could talk a hundred days for a dollar a day, and all wonder how much money the white woman from down below has to give away just for talk. They laugh. They settle down, waiting for a ditch-digging job, wondering if Susan will someday record their thoughts, their worries, their concerns, for even a half dollar.

They could not have known that “just talk” may have resulted in a collection of Atsuge-wi narratives that in the 1990s would help revive interest in the language, culture, and tradition of the Atsuge-wi, a revival

much needed by a generation dangerously close to assimilation and acculturation and one that is generally only able to speak selected words in Atsuge-wi, and these words often out of context. Through these narratives we hear the voices of our ancient people who display a vivid, colorful history that refuses to fade away.

*San Francisco State University
Foothill College, Palo Alto, California*

References

- Dixon 1908 Roland B. Dixon. "Achomawi and Atsugewi Tales." *Journal of American Folklore*, 31:159-77.
- Park 1986 Susan Brandenstein Park. "Sampson Grant, Atsuge Shaman." *Occasional Papers of the Redding Museum*, 3.
- Wilson 1991 Darryl Babe Wilson. "How the Great Canyon Was Made." *News from Native California*, 5, iii:4-6.