

CAROL DANA

The Younger Generation



By Lynn Kippax, Jr.

“They were talking in class at the university one day about being culturally deprived as a minority, and I thought to myself: ‘You’re culturally deprived if you don’t know who we are or who I am and don’t want to know!’”

Carol Dana was describing the path that led her back to pride in herself as an Indian.

It was a long journey, for she was born of a generation that was taught to turn its back on Penobscot culture, a generation whose parents felt—from their own bitter experience—that their children would fare better in the outside world if they avoided all things Indian.

This included language, traditions, folk-

lore, even marriage to an Indian. ("My mother wanted me to marry a white man.") The Old Town taunt, "dirty, ignorant Indian", had taken its ultimate toll when Indian parents wished to make their children as non Indian as possible.

"A lot of the parents here thought that it would interfere with our learning in school, so they thought they were doing the best thing by not teaching the language at all. A lot of them knew no English when they went to school. They thought that it was too hard, too much of a struggle.

"Our parents went through it harder than us. A lot of them dropped out of high school because of economic reasons. There has never been very many jobs. People lived off the island and many of them made baskets.

"You get tired of this heaviness on you all the time because you're Indian."

"I'm proud of that. You become proud when you know your parents struggled through a lot and made it."

Carol Dana spoke with a care and deliberation that left no doubt about her loyalty to her parents or her willingness to try to match their tenacity. She is an intent, watchful young woman, her face as neutral as a blank page if she is not sure about you, as responsive as a child to a good story teller if she is.

She was poised for flight, seated tentatively on a weathered bench near the community parking lot. She had just come from her work, needed to buy groceries for her family, but also wanted to say words she has been thinking for a long time.

"I did a lot of looking into traditions myself, and one day I just said, 'I'm not going to buy what you get 'outside' any more.' I guess as

you grow, you define yourself.

"I went to school on the island through the fifth grade and then I went to Old Town. I had some difficulties there with their views of who I am.

"I was shocked. I was called a dirty Indian and they called us 'squaws'. It's too bad that people couldn't understand us more for who we are instead of trying to make us into a stereotype.

"I was all A's when I first went to school, but later I wasn't putting all my mind and efforts on it. It wasn't a good atmosphere for me. It was more middle class and I didn't fit in. I guess I had sort of a complex.

"You get tired of this thing, this heaviness on you all the time because you're Indian, and you play into it. It makes you hard, and it makes obstacles for you when you believe it.

"We (Indian children) always bound together for protection. It was good to be with someone who understands and knows you, and you don't have to say anything. You were just together and it feels good.

"I was talking to my cousin one day and I sort of summed up my whole high school days: 'I don't want to be treated different, but I want my differences accepted. I want to be treated equally.'

"Education opened my mind up to the outside world and it's too bad that it wasn't the other way around, too—that they could not open up to who I am instead of labeling me.

"I would like to be a teacher, go back to school and be a teacher here on Indian Island. I don't know. It's hard to do." She has six children (her "tribe", she calls them) and has completed four semesters of college at the nearby University of Maine campus in Orono. She is, already, a teacher at home.

"I found some books of Algonquin tales while I was at the university, and I brought them home to my children. They liked them. Most of them are explanations of the world and why it is. They have teachings about characters and situations.

" 'Why do you want to bother with those



By Mark Emerson

foolish stories?' (people ask her). 'They're more fantasy than fact.'

"Maybe so, but they still have a lot of teaching in them."

Carol is grateful for the job she has as research assistant to Dr. Frank Siebert, a man who has made a forty year study of the Penobscot language and is now developing a

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Penobscot dictionary. "I've learned so much from it," she says, adding that if she had known the things she is learning now about Penobscot history and traditions it would have made a great difference when she was growing up.

That's why she wants her own children to learn the language and the traditions. "Some

people say that the language is dead, but so are Latin or Greek." Revival of the language can provide a "common ground" to explore Indian heritage in the schools, Carol says.

Though there is a need for "more understanding on both sides", she is not certain that an active effort to educate whites about Indian culture is the best method to achieve this, at least for her.

"They want to tie us into the mainstream society, but people still have those attitudes. I don't know how to deal with it. They want us to go out and talk in other communities for better relations, and I don't know whether that works. I don't want to go out and teach all them.

"I want to stay here and bring up my children proud and strong to deal with that, because I can't change the whole world. I'm for Indian education for Indian children, so you don't have to play into the stereotype, so you're not lost and fumbling around."