A New Native Story by Tish McFadden

Cultural • Environmental • Bilingual • Educational
Grandma Aggie

Agnes Baker Pilgrim was born on September 11, 1924, in the headwaters of the Siletz River. She is the eldest living member of the Takelma people, who lived in what is now called the Illinois and Rogue River valleys.

Grandma Aggie is the spiritual elder of the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and the guardian of the Sacred Salmon Ceremony which she revived after a 150-year absence. She is internationally recognized for her leadership and service to the community and as the keeper of traditional ways of living.

Aggie grew up gathering greens, picking blackberries and apples, riding horses, fishing and gardening. She graduated from Taft High School in Lincoln City in 1942, where she played six-string guitar, piano, and organ. Aggie pursued a variety of careers, including hiking far into the woods to gather cascara bark and other wild plants, singing in a band, being a bouncer at a nightclub and a barber in a jail, driving a log truck, racing stock-cars, working as a scrub nurse, and managing a restaurant.

Around 1970, Aggie decided to follow the spiritual path that she had always felt calling. She took on the medicine name of her Takelma great grandmother, “Taowhywee,” or Morningstar.

Aggie enrolled in Southern Oregon State College and earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology in 1985. She is a founder of the university’s Konaway Nika Tillicum Native American Youth Academy and the 2002 recipient of the university’s Distinguished Alumni Award.

Grandma Aggie is recognized by the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians as a “living treasure” and a founder of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, an alliance of indigenous female elders focused on issues such as the environment, internationalism, and human rights.
Honoring Agnes Baker Pilgrim ’85

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