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## Perez Family: Margaret Perez (Elder)

Jillian Altfest  
*University of the Pacific*

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## STOCKTONSpeaks!

### **MARGARET PEREZ**

“Never marry a man from Mexico,” Margaret’s grandmother advised her. “They will kill you!” Margaret’s grandmother pressed her early in her life to marry within their tribe and to keep the language and traditions of the family. She wanted to ensure that there would be elders in the next generation to pass on important aspects of their culture.

Margaret and her family are members of the lone band of Miwok Indians. In lone, the tribe has a forty-acre reservation where Margaret and her family lived when she was young. Once a month they joined with five hundred other Miwok at a meeting on the reservation grounds. Those Miwok who live in Elk Grove, Tuolumne, and other areas used to have their own meetings, but now most Miwok go to lone.

Margaret and her family have been involved with this band of Miwok for as long as she can remember. She has early memories of dancing and cooking at the group meetings. Pow-wows and holidays are important events in Margaret’s family. The pow-wows feature dancing, music, beads, and pictures, each with a story behind it. Her family was always together for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. They would often go camping or eat outside. Growing up, her little brother and her cousins would hunt with their grandfather. They would go into the fields and shoot rabbits and other game with a .22 rifle. Even though rabbits were food for the family, Margaret always felt bad for the wild creatures, however, seeing in her mind’s eye how the little animals were lovingly depicted in children’s books. Sometimes the rambunctious boys would even want to shoot nearby cows as well, but they were restrained from doing so. At night, members of the family—elders, adults and children-- would all gather together to tell some ghost stories and share other tales from long ago.

When she was six years old, Margaret lost her mother, who died from tuberculosis. After this tragic event, she and her brother lived with their

grandmother. Margaret was close to her grandmother, who was diligent in seeing that the youngster learned the old Indian ways. Her grandmother taught Margaret how to live off the land, much as their ancestors had done. Their home in the Sierra foothills teemed with game, oak trees, and plants that grew in the wild. Margaret learned what wild mushrooms to eat, how to properly age deer meat by hanging it on a clothesline, how to boil and fry watercress, and how to make acorn soup. Margaret thought the acorn soup tasted like awful Jell-O, but her grandmother insisted that she make it and eat it. The grandmother thought it might one day help Margaret survive.

Her grandmother treated her like a little queen. Margaret was given anything she wanted. As a child, she didn't have to do any household chores, not even ironing, cooking, or cleaning. At times when she wanted to help around the house, her grandmother wouldn't let her because she might get hurt. Her grandmother thought that household chores were grown-up tasks, and that Margaret was too young to do them correctly.

But grandmother freely dispensed advice to the young girl. Even as a child, Margaret often ignored the advice. Her grandmother told her never to drink, smoke, or wear make-up, because they would cause wrinkles. Margaret laughingly admits that she has been smoking and wearing make-up from the age of thirteen, and as her grandmother predicted, she now has many healthy wrinkles to show for it. As a youth, whenever her grandmother would tell her to do something, such as come home after swimming, Margaret would stay out all night. Margaret admits to being a natural mischief-maker, and she remained unmoved by her grandmother's tales of ghosts or devils who would come and take her away.

Typically ignoring her grandmother's advice, Margaret fell in love with a Mexican man. Though her grandmother did not approve, he and Margaret were married and soon began their family. Having children marked Margaret's move to womanhood. Though she was still a teenager, once she had a family of her own, she was ready to master adult ways. To learn, she moved in with

her husband and his mother, who taught Margaret how to cook. She was soon able to prepare Mexican food, including homemade tortillas, beans, rice, and meat with peppers.

At age seventeen Margaret, her husband, and their children moved to Stockton. When her grandmother became ill, they would travel to Lone and bring her to their home for short visits. During one visit, Margaret prepared homemade tortillas, beans, and rice for her grandmother, who appreciated the good food. Realizing that Margaret's husband had introduced this cuisine to Margaret, Grandmother began to change her mind about this man from Mexico. In time, she fully accepted him as a member of the family.

When Margaret was in her thirties, she became a member of the Catholic Church. She had been attending services with her husband and noticed similarities between the Christian God and Yazu, a supreme figure from Miwok mythology. Her husband and his parents wanted her children to be baptized in the Church. They said that the children would not go to heaven if they were not marked with the Sign of the Cross. Soon thereafter Margaret adopted Catholicism as her religion and was herself baptized. She and her husband remarried in the Church and had all their children baptized. Some of her Miwok family did not approve of her decision to become a Catholic, but she didn't allow their opinions to influence her because she judged them distant relations.

Since the sixteenth century, Margaret's family has passed down a book from generation to generation. The book contains stories about her culture and family lineage. Throughout her life, Margaret has acquired many other stories, which she wants to preserve for her children and grandchildren. She keeps a record of these stories in the family book to ensure that the next generation will know them and take pride in their background and ancestry..

Of course, Margaret's own nuclear family is half Miwok and half Mexican; she wants her children to be proud of both traditions. She also particularly

hopes they continue to go to the meetings in lone, to learn the customs that the diverse members of their Native American community have to teach them.

Author: Tara Runnels  
Interviewer: Tonya Moreno  
Ethnic Group: Native American  
Generation: Elder