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Corral Family: Robert Pena Corral (Elder)

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ROBERT P. CORRAL, SR.

Robert Corral, a Native American who can trace his roots to the Northern Valley Yokut, Ohlone, and Mi-Wok tribes, was born in Crockett, California. In many ways, his story is a challenge to federal and state policies designed to assimilate native peoples.

Robert did not live on an Indian reservation; he grew up speaking English and Spanish. Although the government would ration one buffalo a year for meat for his family, Robert hunted for their food, going after wildcat, bear, deer, and beaver with bow and arrow. Robert also traded animal hides for various staples. Though native peoples were often pressed to give up traditional belief systems, his family did not convert to western religion but instead formed their own belief system by combining Catholic traditions with their native practices.

Robert's father worked in the timber industry where he used dynamite to fell trees. Unfortunately, as a young man, his father was careless in handling the dynamite, and blew off a portion of his hand. He eventually recovered and could continue working, but was always disabled.

Robert's mother contributed to the support of the family by cooking and doing laundry for the various migrant camps in the area where they lived.

Like many Native Americans in California, Robert faced discrimination, He was rejection from society, and segregated in everyday activities from others his age. In part to respond to the pain of isolation, family members maintained cohesive bonds with extended relatives through family gatherings, camping trips, and ceremonial activities. It was during these family gatherings that the old ways and traditional teachings of native peoples were passed to succeeding generations.

Though Native Americans, Corral and his family were often thought to be of Mexican descent because of their appearance. They did speak Spanish as well as English; however, they were proud of their Native American heritage and

were proud to follow its customs. They didn't want to simply "assimilate" and lose their heritage.

Robert Corral has patterned his life after the model of his parents; both were hard-working people. He left school at a young age and has worked hard all of his life. He has found his own way, living a life enriched by his cultural heritage, a heritage that has shared within and without his family circle.

Author: Tammy Hunt
Interviewer: Grant Ashley
Ethnic Group: Native American
Generation: Elder