

Notable Leaders



Stephenie M. Charley-Blackford
May 3, 1931 to May 20, 2010

Stephenie Charley-Blackford, was the daughter of Tommy Charley and Lillian James, and the granddaughter of Agnes James. Agnes James was the daughter of Charles Jules, the last of the hereditary Snohomish leaders to be appointed by the United States government to hold an official position as the representative of his community.

Stephenie remembered her grandmother teaching her how to get a drink of water from a horsetail, how to make a cup from a skunk cabbage leaf, how to find the little plant underfoot that would heal a cut or cure a sore throat. From Agnes, Stephanie learned how to bead and weave cedar. As she taught, Agnes told stories, some serving as lessons that applied to recent misbehavior, and many more just so that Stephenie would have them to pass on. In the 1990s, when the Tribes established the Cultural Resources Department, Stephenie heard her grandmother's voice telling her to "get in there and teach people how to make baskets before it gets forgotten."

So Stephenie "got in there" and taught a generation of new weavers how to make baskets, mats, hats, and dolls. Among her pupils was Lance Taylor, Lizzie Krise's great-grandson, now a master weaver. As she taught, Stephenie would tell her grandmother's stories, just as she had been told them when she was a learner.

Agnes James was famous for her dolls, which have been seen in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the Burke Museum. She began making them one Christmas when Stephenie asked for a baby doll, the kind you could buy at the store. Judy Gobin recalls that Agnes said, "You don't want a doll like that. You want a doll like us." She stayed up all night making a cedar doll for her granddaughter. As Stephenie grew older, Agnes would make just the head and shoulders of a doll and then have Stephenie finish it. Still later, Stephenie was entrusted with making the whole doll.

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