

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Beatrice Alva

Beatrice Alva was interviewed by CSUN student Jesus Modina on May 8, 1982 for the Cities of Destiny Oral History project. Alva, who is from the Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe, discusses her family's history including some Tribe customs, such as food and song. In this clip, Alva explains the importance of acorn in the Gabrielino-Tongva Tribe, and through song shares the Tribe's language that she learned from her mother.

Transcript:

JM: You as a descendent of Gabrielino Indian peoples on your mother's side of the family?

BA: Right.

JM: How much do you remember about the Gabrielino Indians as your mother told you? How much of that culture has survived in you, as a descendant of them? How much of their language or their handicrafts can you, you know, count as having been preserved by you? There are corn, cooking, and things like this.

BA: Well, my mother used to talk to me about the acorn, of course, that was a very great staple of the Indian, and she used to say that it was a very hard dish to prepare because they had to leech it out, leech it out because it was so bitter and they had a cradle effect. She remembers the cradle effect, where they would, once the acorn pounded to more or less a meal, then they would put it in this cradle where they—sort of a sieve-like cradle and they would just put water and water, run water through it until it came out all bitterness came out and it came out clear and sweet. Then there, they would make sort of a pudding-like mixture, cook it, and they would have it like that or else it would make like a meal and make their little bread or cakes, whatever you call it. Then, she would tell me, we'd go out to the garden or out in the field and she says, "Oh, we can eat that," and it would be a form of a—to me she described it more like a form of a spinach and it did look sort of spinachy-like, it had long leaves and you still find it and that they would use for cooking, vegetable, I guess they would use it as a form of a vegetable, and then her artistic talent didn't go that far. I never knew anything about her, if they had did any basket weaving or any kind of rock, if they had any kind of mortar utensils, or anything like that, but she did tell me that she had seen that used where they had the mortar made out of the rock or soapstone with the pestle or the mano.

JM: Mm-hm.

BA: And where they would grind the corn, similar to the Mexican metate.

JM: Mm-hm.

BA: And also, in the language area, she did leave me with a few, well, say a couple of phrases. The first phrase was, "Hamiroami. Hamiroami." She told me that meant, "Where are you going?" Then, she said, "Tobaharo" and I would say, "Tobáharo" and she says, "No! Tóbaharo." That meant "sit down" and interpreted to mean, the "TO" part interpreted to mean that "you sit down." Tóbaharo. So, that is all I can ever recall her telling me, but she did also teach me a little Indian song that she used to sing to us in which I, in turn, sang to my children and they've used it in many

little plays at school pretending to be Indian and they use the words choyote and coyote in it, and she, my mother always said that it had something to do with a bear and a coyote coming down from the mountain. That's as far as she got in telling me the meaning of the song. That song went similar—of course, she sang it the Indian way. She didn't give it any melody and I tend to put a little melody into it, and it goes sort of, "Cha cawela me choyote cha cawela me coyote ianini iawana ianini iawana cha cawela me coyote." Now, she sang it, so therefore, I took it to mean that it came from the Gabrielino language, whether it did or not, I'm not certain.