

A STUDENT REFLECTS: MARY HELEN CAGEY

As I sat down in a chair right across from Mary Helen Cagey, I began to get nervous as to how I was going to “break the ice.” Right when my head started racing to find something to say, she jumped right in and made a statement that was very forward. “I’m a grandmother, a great grandmother, and a great, great grandmother. I am five generations of children.” This statement automatically made me think of how great it would be to know that much and be full of so much life and love. I think that the fact of Ms. Cagey knowing so much and being able to share only a little of her story was the most interesting part of the Oral History Project. I was also taken aback by the many different ways she could tell her story and how vivid the descriptions were.

When I had first heard about this project, I was worried that it was going to be extremely boring. I figured it would just be one of those projects that I would have to stick out and do no matter how boring it was. Then, I found that the project ended up being a lot more interesting than I had first perceived. Another thing I was worried about was insulting Mary Helen Cagey. I think some of the activities in class really helped me get over this, and the interviewee was very cooperative and understanding so I ended up being fine. All in all, the interview went well.

The information I gained from Ms. Cagey was amazing and totally different from the information I received from my teachers. They say that the best lesson learned is one from experience. In the Oral History Project, I truly learned and proved this saying correct. What Ms. Cagey had to say is very valuable and I will remember. The information I learned from my teachers went in one ear and out the other.

Before this project, I had heard of the Lummi Nation and the reservation, but I didn't know anything about it. Now, I know somewhat about the way of living of the Lummi people. I learned how extremely easy the new generations have life. Also, I have expanded my knowledge of another group of people. The only lifestyle I know really well is my own. Through the interview, I understood a tiny bit of another lifestyle.

The Oral History Project turned out to be the exact opposite of what I expected. When I started the project, I got more interested the more involved I was. The interview was great and I learned so much. My interview was great because Ms. Cagey played her tribal song for us. She was also the person who designed the Lummi Nation logo. Another thing that was interesting was her memorabilia. Ms. Cagey provided us with books, newspaper clippings, baskets and hats she had woven, bead work she did, and other arts she had created. Other things she created included afghans, fans, and clothing. My group truly got a look at the lifestyle of Lummi Native Americans.

I was really surprised and amazed at how much Ms. Cagey wanted to share with us. She would have talked to us for weeks maybe months if she could have.

I was also very privileged to work with the other people in my group. They were very easy to get along with and they are both efficient workers. I am pleased to have had them as group members.

This entire experience was excellent. I really enjoyed the immediate bond between my group and Ms. Cagey. I feel as though she taught me something that I could not learn from anything or anyone else. There isn't any experience that could teach me about the same subject better than this one has. I am privileged to have met Ms. Cagey and her words will echo in my head for forever.

