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Waimem's First *T^hamus*



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Indian Cultural Organization

Honor Your Heritage...Practice Your Traditions

This is a continuation of Waimem's first story "The Missing Moccasins". E learned in that story of Waimem and her suku and how Waimem became more aware and careful with her possessions

Brief History of ICO's Background

The Indian Cultural Organization (ICO) was formed by a grassroots group of Winnemem Wintu Indians in 1981 and incorporated as a non-profit tax-exempt organization in 1983. This community based organization focuses on four major goals:

- to assist and support the tribe to retain their religious rites and practices in order for the Indian culture and traditions to continue into the future;
- to provide innovative alternative educational approaches and methods in conveying academic standards for American Indian students;
- to restore traditional teachings, preservation of songs, dance, and language;
- and to provide and develop positive leadership and advocacy among diverse, disadvantaged, high risk American Indian youth.

About the author

Yeltiinas is the Headman of the Winnemem Wintu and the Father of Waimem and Pom Pahe Tot. He is Married to Chief Caleen Sisk. He enjoys telling stories and working to protect the cultural heritage of his tribe.



	Glossary
MiMi	mother
T ^h amus	moccasins
Suku	dog
loni q'ewel	family home
HaPa	father
Noop chir	deer meat
Nur chir	salmon meat
Chuse	wood
p'oh	fire
t'lab	brother
q'ewel	house
Ni	my
Mem	water
Nene	aunties
po'iila	little girl
k'iy	husband
Olelbes	Creator
x'ay noop qoqchii	buckskin
la'w	sinew
Winnemem waket	middle water river
Sem	hand
p'oqta	wife

Waimem and her *MiMi* worked for many days to prepare the leather just right for her new *t^hamus*. Waimem had learned, after her little dog, *Suku*, had destroyed her other pair, the importance of taking care of her things and the importance that her first *t^hamus* held for her family. She hung up her dresses and put all of her toys away, caring to secure them from her dog ... and her brother.

Working with her *MiMi* was always a treat for Waimem. She greatly enjoyed each opportunity and always offered to help her *MiMi* when she was working around the camp. As the two worked to prepare the sinew and bull hide for the soles of the new *t^hamus*, *MiMi* began to tell Waimem the story of the young girl's very first pair.

"You were born 7 years ago, in the middle of what we call "the moon of the last snow." The weather was difficult that year, very cold and we had to stay together, inside our *toni q'ewel* to keep warm. Your *HaPa* made sure that we had plenty of fresh *noop chir* and *nur chir* to eat and plenty of *chuse* for the *p'oh* always was out trying to help our people who had no other help.

Your *t'lab* was still too young to travel with your *HaPa*, so he cared for our *q'ewel*, making sure that we had plenty of fresh *mem* to drink and dry *chuse* for *ni p'oh*. As the day grew closer for you to join us here in this world, after the long journey you had made from the place of the little spirit people, I tried to make sure that all would be in readiness for your arrival. Your *Nene's* came by daily and helped make a place within our *q'ewel* for your arrival."

HaPa returned to his *q'ewel* later and held his *p'oqta* wife and *po'iila* to him.

He sang a song for them both and placed the *t^hamus* on the edge of his *po'iila's* basket.

He said to those in the room. "I have made these *t^hamus* for my *po'iila*. I have placed into them my prayers that she live long and walk the good road for her people and the people to come".

Singing another song and kissing his *po'iila* goodnight, *HaPa* left the *q'ewel* to fast before running along the river for his new *po'iila*.

But, that must remain a story for another time.

He also found */a'w* from the bull elk that he would be able to sew with and several strands of small shells collected from the banks of the

Winnemem Waket by which they lived.

HaPa set about the task of making the *t^hamus* for *Waimem*. He had measured her foot against the palm of his *sem* as he held his *po'iila* and now used that measurement to cut the pattern out of the leather.

Working steadily, singing song after song, *HaPa* continued his work until, at last, the *t^hamus* were completed. *HaPa* looked at them with a sense of satisfaction knowing that he had done the very best he could and that he had placed his heart and soul into his work.

"The day you were born, all was in readiness. You came into the world, a beautiful young girl, and from the beginning, you brought the smile of joy to your *HaPa's* stern face. You were a very special gift for him and have brought him many happy and many anxious times in his life. He loves you more than you may ever know. But I know this and share this with you know."

Waimem did not interrupt her *MiMi* as she spoke, because she knew the telling of the story sometimes told more than the story itself. *Waimem* loved to hear her *MiMi* speak. She remembered how her *MiMi* and great aunt would tell the stories of long ago around the campfire and how their rich, loving voices, joined by the deeper voice of her *HaPa* would sing the songs of the people.

MiMi told Waimem of the first *t^hamus* in this way, weaving in, what might appear to be the edge of the story to some, into the center heart of the story for her. It is important to see a story from all sides, in a circular way, the way in which we live our lives. To hear a story in a straight line would take too much joy from the teller and from the listener.

MiMi spoke of *HaPa* and how on the day of her birth he was there, being the first to hold his new *po'iila*. *MiMi's* eyes told the happiness her *k'iy* felt and the pride he had for such a fine, strong baby.

Following the birth, *HaPa* allowed the tired *MiMi* and the new born some time for themselves and went to a special place where he had stored the material he would need for this gift he was to give his child.

MiMi told Waimem that it was not right for people to name their children or accept or make gifts for them before they completed their journey from the spirit world to this one.

MiMi explained that sometimes the little spirit beings would be called back by *Olelbes* and not allowed to bring their wisdom to their selected parents. In keeping the tradition of not naming or gifting the child, should they not complete their journey, the grieving would be easier and the spirit being would not be called back to this world by the utterance of its name.

So, *HaPa* went to his cache and found the materials he needed. He found the fresh *x'ay noop qoqchii* he had carefully tanned and softened.