

Lucy Young (1846-1944)

EXCERPT FROM *NO ROOMS OF THEIR OWN*

Lucy Young, a member of the Lassik tribe of northern California, was known in the 1930s to her friends at the Round Valley Reservation as a seer, as a woman who had answers to questions about the past, to questions about life and endurance. With her kind, round face and quick, bright manner she impressed all she met and was a wonder to her people and to the eleven grandchildren to whom she told tribal tales.

She was herself but a child when the white people came to destroy her peaceful village and her people. It is believed she was born in 1846 near present-day Alderpoint, California. She was named T'tcetsa, meaning "small one," because she was a small baby. Her father, Tiltetz was an Alder Point Wailaki. Her mother, Yeltas, was cousin to chief Lassik of the Lassik Tribe who made their home in what is now the Six Rivers National Forest in southern Humboldt County.

Before the arrival of whites, her childhood was quiet and happy. Her family—a sister, a brother, and her parents—were close. They shared sparse but comfortable accommodations camping along the Eel and Mad Rivers or at the mouth of Dobbyn Creek most months of the year and moved into the cool, shaded pine and oak forests in the heat of summer. T'tcetsa and her mother gathered clover, grass seed, acorns and berries. Her father and brother hunted elk and deer, rabbits and other small game, and fished the streams. As a child, she and other Lassik children played jump rope and hopping games, made swings and ran foot races. They lived more or less in peace, although T'tcetsa remembered a conflict with a neighboring tribe, the Nai'aitci, when she was five which ended in the deaths of several of the young men in her tribe, and a retaliation as well.


T'tcetsa's tribal territory was first explored by whites in the 1840s, but because it was remote and there was no gold, it was not until 1861 that the decimation of her people and takeover of tribal lands became the object of settlers and state legislators alike. In that year, after a skirmish with settlers, her whole family was rounded up and taken to Fort Seward (now the town of Fort Seward northeast of

Garberville). While held there the elder women of her tribe, perhaps fearing the end of their way of life, tattooed eight vertical lines on T'tcetsa's chin and two slanted lines on each cheek, a traditional rite of passage for Lassik girls at the time of puberty.

Within weeks, her people were released, but the return to their lands was short-lived. Sometime in the following year, 1862, under the command of a Colonel Lippitt, troops stormed the village and in a three-day battle killed most of the men, including T'tcetsa's father and brother. T'tcetsa ran away with her mother and sister into the mountains, facing hunger, rattlesnakes and bears—enemies much less threatening than the white men in the valleys. T'tcetsa was later captured and again taken to Fort Seward, but she again escaped to the Hayfork Valley in Trinity County, although not for long.

T'tcetsa fell prey to men engaged in the widespread practice of kidnapping Indian children and selling them as servants to white settlers. Strong children brought two or three hundred dollars each in southern communities. These sales were sanctioned by a state law that allowed for the indenture of "apprenticeship" of Indian children. Probably sometime in 1863, T'tcetsa was bartered away as a nursemaid to the wife of a man who raised hogs. As T'tcetsa later reported, the women whipped her often, so she again ran away into the woods. She was captured again. This time she was taken south, but once again she managed an escape, walking more than fifty miles back to her territory then to Fort Seward and her mother. Her tribes people hid her and eventually smuggled her out, along with an aunt, by boat across the Eel River. Then they traveled by foot for several days to Cottonwood, and the house of a cousin who was under the protection of a white man named Abraham Rogers.

Several Indians lived at Rogers' quarters, and it seems they lived safely. When T'tcetsa was old enough, Rogers married her. He renamed her Lucy, and they had four children together, three girls and a boy. Whether Rogers




died or Lucy left him is unknown, but it is clear that they were together for more than twenty years, and that Lucy believed Rogers was a good man.

After this, Lucy spent five miserable years with a white man named Arthur Rutledge, who she later said kept her chained at his place because she always ran away. Rutledge beat Lucy and while she was with him she endured several miscarriages. “Lots of babies died,” she reflected as an old woman. Rutledge desired a white wife and finally let Lucy go when more single white women started coming west.

In 1914, Lucy was married to Sam Young, a member of the Hayfork tribe. They lived out their lives together at the reservation in Round Valley where Lucy lived to be about a hundred years old. She claimed to be 102, and perhaps she was: her exact date of birth is hard to establish.

In her old age Lucy became a resource for ethnographers, sociologists and botanists interested in native cultures and native plant life. When Lucy was ninety, she and Sam Young and Edith Van Allen Murphey, a botanist and friend of Lucy’s, journeyed by horse back up South Fork Mountain. Stopping at streams and in the forests, at special spots where Lucy’s tribe had performed ceremonies or found food or plants to use as medicine, Lucy showed Murphey the plants and herbs her people relied on for centuries, while sheets of Washington lilies nodded their heads in the wilderness breeze. Murphey also recorded Lucy’s personal history word by word as Lucy told it; excerpts of that history are reprinted here.

Lucy Young was, even at ninety, an exceedingly vital woman with a natural integrity and intense, sparkling dark eyes that drew people to her. Living her last years with Sam in what many in the white community might have seen as a simple lifestyle, Lucy saw herself as rich: “We got old age pension, buy li’l place here in Round Valley, keep our horses, keep cow, chicken, dogs, cats too. We live good.”



foot on it, something come up behind me. Grizzly bear growl at me. Wind blow from river. He smell me. I fall over back in tall ferns. I feel same as dead. Grizzly set there, his paw hang down. Head turn look every way. I keep eye on him. He give up listen, look, turn around, dig hole to sleep in. I keep still, just , like dead. Fainty, too, and weak.

That's time I run-when he dig deep. Water up to my waist. I run through. Get to Fort Seward before I look back.

At last I come home[Fort Seward]. Before I get there, I see big fire in lotsa down timber and tree-top. Same time awfully funny smell. I think: Somebody get lotsa wood.

I go on to house. Everybody crying. Mother tell me: "All our men killed now." She say white men there, others come from Round Valley, Humboldt County too, kill our old uncle, Chief Lassik, and all our men.

Stood up about forty Inyan in a row with rope around neck. "What this for?" Chief Lassik askum. "To hang you, dirty dogs," white men tell him. "Hanging, that's dog's death," Chief Lassik say, "We done nothing, be hung for. Must we die, shoot us."

So they shoot. All our men. Ten build fire with wood and brush Inyan men been cut for days, never know their own funeral fire they fix. Build big fire, burn all them bodies. That's funny smell I smell before I get to house. Make hair raise on back of my neck. make sick stomach, too.

That man what herd hogs, his Inyan boy speak my language. He say: "Why you come back?"

"That woman whip me every day," I say:

"What for she whip you?"

"Everything, little or big, she whip me."

Boy say: "White man say he gonta take all you folks over there, build you house."

White man got me, took to his house. I half cry, all time for my mother. After while, bald-headed man talk women long time. Gonta have big gamble over there, they say. Men got up and left. First, they give women grub, hog backbone, ribs.

These women say: "In four days you go stay old couple close by us." One um say: "I got white man, I come see you."

They leave for home. Little ridge, over hill. I hear Inyan talking, li'l way. I stand there and think. Only show for me to run off, now. Nobody there, I run in house. Match box on shelf. I put it in dress pocket. In kitchen, I find flour sacks. Take loaf bread, take boiling meat. Take big blanket from my bed.

I went out so quick, I never shut door. Then I went out to barn, open door, let all horses out.

All day I travel on edge of valley. I forgot I gonta have to swim Eel River. Then I see white man house, and lotta Inyan house, all smoke even-good sign. I go towards white man house. I go upstream, look for foot-log. Brush thick, too. I found big trail. 'Fraid then. Stop and listen, every li'l while. Pretty soon find footbridge. Just getting dark good. Star coming up. 'Nother big stream, shallow water.

Lotsa people there. Lotsa bell. Talk. Laugh. Pack-train stop there. I cross above camp. Water knee-deep. Go up long hill. Pretty near daylight, come out on mountain. Come out in big open country where Billy Dobbins' mother lived.

Owl commence holler, coming daylight. Way this side, great big rock. Big live-oak. Hollow place. I lay blanket down. Sleep all day; dark, I wake up.

Night come, I pack shoes one shoulder, blanket, 'nother shoulder pack grub in hand. Lotsa snow that time, Bell Springs Mountain. There I put on shoes.

Saw big mountain, went over it. I back-track li'l way. I see white man hunt for me on white horse. I lay still long time, travel all night.

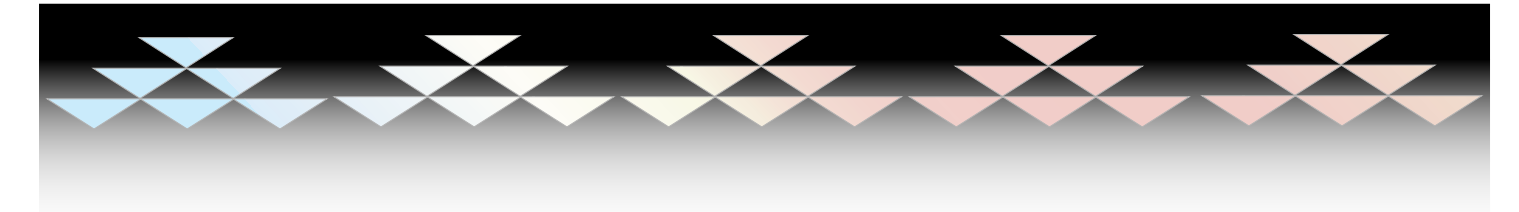
Went down in canyon, find big log all dry underneath. I sleep right there all day. Had to cross two li'l creek, went barefoot there. When I cross those two li'l creek, I home to old stamping ground not far from Alder Point.

Again, I lay down in sun to sleep. Three days I stay there, 'fraid go down to Fort Seward. Good weather. Think 'bout mother altime. Half-time cry. Two nights I stay alone, then I go to Fort Seward.

That white man told Inyan boys watch for me come home Lotsa women there, man all killed.

I go where they get water, two-three places there where make buckeye soup. It ain't done yet. Nobody there. I taste buckeye all bitter yet. I drink water, outa basket setting there. After awhile I see woman coming. I step behind brush. She never see me. She pour water in buckeye. Talk to self 'bout being bitter. It was my mother! Then I step in plain sight. She stir soup with hand, shake drops off. Look around. "Who's you, she say. "That you, my daughter?" I say: "Yes." She hug me and cry. Poor mother!

"Inyan boy watching," she whisper. "You come in 'bout morning, 'bout midnight?" "No," I told her. "Got grub, got blanket, I sleep down here, some place."



“Shall I bring buckeye soup tonight?” “No,” I tell her. “Don’t fetch grub out, might they follow you, find me.”

Two nights I hide out. I go way down creek down under big tree roots. Sleep dry. Then I go to house. All time I never leave no sign. Mother and li’l sister hunt me. Make believe gather wood, never find me.

My uncle hunt me last night, I see him. Then I show up on open ground. He say: “Poor li’l thing, hunted, starving. ‘Bout midnight I put you ‘cross river in boat.” I say: “Tell mother meet me out there.”

He say them two li’l girl from that ‘nother woman. Cry all time.

Midnight, I go in, meetum. Watch stars for time. I eat. Mother give me ‘nother blanket, food too. Them two men don’t make no track-walk in leaves and river. Had big boat. Put my aunt and me ‘cross river. If mother let li’l sister go, white men would kill mother.

We travel all night, sleep all day till sundown. Had lotsa dry meat. Left most of my white-man grub with mother. Found some of our people at Poison Rock, pretty near sundown. I see old man pack wood. He been on look-out. He go in big bark house. I look in door, big fire in middle of house.

Man say: “Li’l girl look in door.” They get up, bring me in. Young girl lay there, sick, my half sister. That night she die. Snowing, raining hard. They dig hole right by house, put body in. All went out. Tore all house down, set it afire. Midnight, snow whirl, wind howl. Then we went over to ‘nother house; all left there next day, went over to Soldier Basin.

We stay there awhile, went to Cottonwood. Some of our people there. We went to head of Mad River, next day to South Fork of Trinity River. We stay all night. Tired. No horses. Next day to Cottonwood.

My cousin, Ellen, Wylackie Tom’s woman, was there. We found her right away. Then I stay at Cottonwood all summer. After awhile, my cousin living with white man, he want to kill her, she leave him. I stay with her and li’l boy.

Ellen’s cousin-brother say to me: “Take care my li’l boy, cause I gonta Hayfork. Maybe white folks kill me.” he say, “Take care my boy, takum way off.”

White man name Rogers come after this. Ellen my cousin’s man, went to work for him. I go with her to Hayfork, and take li’l boy too.

Rogers, white man, took me then to take care of, that summer. Marry me bimeby when get old enough. I stay there at Hayfork long time.

My cousin, Ellen, younger than me but she got man first. We didn’t neither one know much. Man told us cook beans. We cook green coffee for beans. Man cook long time for us.

Li’l sister, white man took her away. Never see her no more. If see her, maybe wouldn’t know her. That’s last young one taken away. Mother lost her at Fort Seward.

I hear it, I went back, got mother, brought her to Hayfork. Lotsa Inyan there, lotsa different language, all different. Mother stay with me until she die.

You ask ‘bout father. He got killed and brother in soldier war before soldiers captured us. Three days fight. Three days running. Just blood, blood, blood. Young woman cousin, run from soldier run into our camp. Three of us girls run. I lose buckskin blanket Cousin run back, pick it up. I roll it up, put under arm-run more better that way.

We had young man cousin, got shot side of head, crease him, all covered his blood, everything. We helpum to water. Wash off. No die. That night all our women come to camp. I ask mother “You see my father, big brother?” “Yes,” she say, “both two um dead.” I want go see. Mother say “No.”

Young woman been stole by white people, come back. She through lights and liver. Front skin hang down like apron. She tie up with cotton dress. Never die, neither. Little boy, knee-pan shot off. Young man shot through thigh. Only two man of all our tribe left-that battle.

White people want our land, want destroy us. Break and burn all our basket, break our pounding rock. Destroy our ropes. No snares, no deerskin, flint knife, nothing.

Some old lady wear moss blanket, peel off rock good.

All long, long ago. My white man die. My children all die but one. Oldest girl, she married, went way off. Flu take restum. Oldest girl die few years ago, left girl, she married now, got li’l girl, come see me sometimes. All I got left, my descendants.

‘But twenty-five years ago I marry Sam. Marry him by preacher. Sam, he’s good man. Hayfork Inyan. Talk li’l bit different to us people, but can understand him. We get old age pension, buy li’l place here in Round Valley, keep our horses, keep cow, keep chickens, dogs, cats too. We live good.

I hear people tell ‘bout what Inyan do early days to white man. Nobody ever tell what white man do to Inyan. That’s reason I tell it. That’s history. That’s truth. I seen it myself.