

Jane Thing-Dumas
Teachings
2005-2007

Part One

Jane Thing-Dumas
Edited by Julia Doughty

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Introduction

Jane Thing-Dumas and Jane's long-time apprentice, Richard Bugbee, offered an Ethnobotany class at Kumeyaay Community College, Sycuan Reservation from Spring of 2005 to Fall of 2008. The class was held as a sharing circle; participants would bring in plant cuttings and share what they knew of the uses of the plant. And Richard and Jane offered their wealth of wisdoms regarding plants as well as local Indian practices.

The last week of August 2007, Jane suffered a stroke. She says, "I am now forced to use a walker. I can't teach any more, but I haven't given up." And Richard claims to have retired. To which I answer, "An elder never retires, never stops teaching." We are blessed to continue to have their wisdoms!

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When women are on their moon, they are powerful. They are cleansing. They should not work or do housework; the male partner should. If a woman doesn't show up for a class, I don't ask why. It could be the woman is on her moon. People think women who are on their moon are kept away from gatherings out of discrimination, but traditionally it's because they're powerful.

The woman is being naturally cleansed internally. This is why the sweat lodge has been for men only—they have to go do it externally [and Richard says it's the uncomfortable way] because they can't do it naturally internally.

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Cut your hair in the waxing moon to help it grow faster, longer.

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The game peon was in the very old days played by men. As time went on and there were less players available, women played, then children, and now adults, both genders.

It used to be a game played over at least eight hours, kneeling on the ground, very complicated, with subtle gestures and focused psyches.

My father played and he did many preparations before the game, that he didn't tell me or show me, privately.

Even when he was elderly, in his eighties, he would play on his knees. They never had a break to go to the bathroom. I went with a girlfriend to pick him up, and he was all wet. I couldn't say anything.

I played for a short while, they asked me to be a regular player—this was after my father passed—but I said no. I said my first responsibility is to be a provider, to pay my bills—I was working two jobs at the time, one at the clinic, the other on weekends as a waitress.

The game is played now without most of what it once was, and it's played not with the money that is in your back pocket, but large amounts of money, and it is all about the money now—which wasn't what it had been about.

People sit in chairs now because the elders had gotten to an age where they couldn't kneel that long. The chairs were brought in for the elders, and then it just stayed that way for everyone.

I don't see how in these modern times these younger people can sit many hours. And I don't see how, but it's marvelous they have faith in their desire to win. I guess they survive through faith—they make up their mind they can do it no matter what. They save money all through the year to play.

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Most young people haven't wanted to know the traditional practices or to carry it on. My two children were allowed to go to Baptist and Presbyterian churches because I was counseled not to stop them. Now my daughter practices some of the Native ways.

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Be careful where you get your plants. We're living in times where everything is polluted. I won't take black mud by a stream for my face because it would be polluted.

Evidently, I was speaking the truth back then when I cautioned people not to take stuff off the highway because of pollution: they say brakes release asbestos that's not seen, and it pollutes the plants.

The best way to plant natives is to just throw the seeds.

When I met Richard, he followed me around without saying anything; he just listened. I knew he would be a good person to teach.

Can you feel the energy of the plants, how some are stronger? There's healing going on, just passing these plants around.

The more powerful medicine plant it is, the more pollution it will take in.

I don't distinguish between traditional or not traditional plants, native or non-native.

Do you ever find if you come home worried or upset, and you're trying to think of what to fix for your family's dinner, and you cook it, but it doesn't come out right? Instead, if you just take the time, be calm, do it with love, even if you only have a few things to cook with, it comes out good.

The right state of mind affects what you do and its outcome. That's why someone can say, "How come I made the same recipe, but it never comes out like yours?"

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In Mexico they spell kumeyaay: kumiai.

In 1970 we changed the name Digueno back to the name Kumeyaay.

ippaay means "the people," t'ippaay, "the language that comes from the mouth."

Some words we've used were from the Spanish because we didn't have the thing, like a

car or window.

Kids in school would say, "Don't play with her, she's Indian."

You can only register with one tribe, according to U.S. law. It's a way to wipe out Indians. If you have two parents who are Indians from two tribes, you're half Indian.

We became citizens, according to the U.S. government, in 1924.

San Diego has the most reservations of any county in the U.S., eighteen reservations.

[Cabrillo National Monument has for many years held a Cabrillo Festival in September. Flags from various nationalities are present, and Jane Dumas for a number of years advocated for the Kumeyaay flag to be included. In 2005, this came to be.] This is history. We gotta correct history. We like to celebrate like anybody else. History said, "The Indians used to do it." We're still doing it.

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Isabel and Ambrosia Thing were my parents. Ambrosia was a peon player, Isabel a healer. I was born under an oak tree in Barret Valley near Tecate.

Tony Pinto, a peon player, had gangrene when he came back from WWII. He went to see my mother before going to the hospital—and she cured him.

Very few plants are cooked raw. Even miner's lettuce was steamed. My mother told me when I was picking a raw green bean, not to eat it.

My mother usually used fresh plants. She didn't gather and dry herbs because that would mean you're expecting someone to be sick. So if someone came to her with an illness, then she'd go out and get plants in her area.

Certain plants in a group are harvested to let others grow and send out seeds. If sage is in bloom, don't pick it because it needs to make seeds.

I am very careful when and where I gather plants. Find the plant that appeals to you—that has the medicine, power.

My mother would send me out and tell me which plant to get, and from the north side, or east side of the plant, etcetera.

Plants now in the forests and deserts and beaches are limited to use because of legal rights to accessibility and pollution. Elders still know the uses of plants, but they have difficulty getting to the plants. Everything's polluted; you don't know what was in your yard twenty years ago.

Food is medicine to maintain the body.

There are certain times that you aren't supposed to eat fried or fatty foods, women's moons, certain ceremonies. During the time of the loss of family members, you only eat boiled foods.

The main food of the Kumeyaay was wild meat, which has very little fat. So we got our fat from acorn.

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My father died in 1980. He told me you only bring two candles to the grave site because you can't carry four lit candles. Just two for each grave. With these two hands, put the candles for the cross, one on each side below the cross. Always walk around a grave.

I make a wreath by rolling newspaper and covering it with green paper and paper flowers. It used to be crepe paper flowers, but now you can't get crepe paper any more. So you can use tissue paper, or silk or plastic flowers. We always have a dinner on All Soul's Day, too.

I won't use a styrofoam wreath from a crafts store because I can't afford it.

My top priority is my spiritual world. I don't want my long time gone relatives to forget me; I want to keep them in my heart.

The tribes are bringing the old ways back. Anna Sandoval [Sycuan tribal chairwoman] has a ceremony for November 2 [All Soul's Day].

When the creator calls us, we don't ask questions, we just go.

Buying wreaths and already made things isn't the same as making them.

I make the wreaths in the last two weeks of October. My hands didn't hurt this year [2005] because I had help this year. You'd think I'd be o.k. because I'm short, but bending your back over that many times to put wreaths on the gravesites, your back hurts—if you have ten kids, it helps. And you replace the cross with a new one and bury the old one.

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We speak from the heart. We take into consideration the way the person is. All my life I took my language for granted. "Mat" is for earth. "How are you" is modified to if the person is sitting, standing, or lying down. [Richard says, smiling, "You have to be careful not to say, 'How are you in bed?'"] Also, when you approach someone, you take into account how they feel, how they appear to be right then.

Indian medicine people talk and work from the heart. That's why people seek them out. It's like a baby who cries for help and wants to be cared for. When a child cries, you pick them up, and they quit crying—they just want attention.

If you need forgiveness for something, light a candle, burn some sage, and ask the creator to forgive that person, and ask for help to keep your heart in the right place, and be thankful.

People need to learn to be quiet and respectful.

Our language and way is slowly coming back. The younger people might learn some of the old ways.

I'm doing this class for my mother—because it would make her happy.

I didn't become a healer like my mother because she would send me out to get the plants, sometimes, not always, and she didn't say why. She'd say this person's stomach hurts, but that could be because of a lot of different reasons.

I couldn't probably have been a healer because I'm a worry wart. But I read a lot and pick it up that way.

In 1945 my husband came back from the Philippines with malaria. The doctor gave him medicine, but my mother treated him. The doctor said he'd have to take medicine all his life—but my mother treated him, and he never had to take the pills from the quart jar. We dumped them out. He lived until 1988.

I was an assembly worker at Honeywell. Then I was asked to be a community

health worker. I would hug an adult who was ill, and it helped their health, helped the medicine take effect. An adult needs it as much as a baby. And if I told a child to take a pill, they would take it. I learned from my mother and picked that up, how to be with people. And if

According to what's written about the human body, certain parts of our body go dormant— if we don't use it, we lose it.

My mother would invite someone who was ill to the house, even when our family had only a tortilla in the house. She would always give two or three things, squash, corn, we always had something. And we always ate well.

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My uncle thought it was important for the kids to have education—because they would need it. Otherwise, we would have worked on ranches, ranch to ranch.

Another uncle told us kids to be respectful in 1933 because we would need it. We were fooling around, and we didn't know what he meant. Then the second World War came.

There was a man who had gangrene—he was scheduled for amputation of both his legs—in 1945. My mother helped him. The doctors couldn't believe it. And he was fine the rest of his life.

My mother told me what to do when my son had a fever of 104. My sister-in-law's kids ended up in the hospital, but my son was fine.

I worry about the people, especially when someone says they have diabetes. We don't say, "My diabetes, my stroke, my anything." It's like a stray dog coming to your door. I say, "I'm going to take my survival pill."