**Leonard Sam Ricing and Fishing**

When we were young, we were taught to harvest wild rice.  After my mom got done ricing, she would let us go out on a boat.  Eventually we turned into pretty decent ricers.  My sister soon turned into one of the best ricers around.  Ricing even became a contest for all of us.  I still rice today, although I don’t do it as quickly as I used to.

When my mom got older, she knew she had to pass down everything she knew about ricing to the next generation.  I’ll never forget the day she broke down and told us she couldn’t rice anymore.  She admitted she was too old.

Today it’s difficult to find someone to continue the ricing tradition.  The younger generation is busy with their jobs, so I guess they just don’t have the time.  Ricing is not being passed down from one generation to the next anymore.  Back in the early days, we did ricing as an income.  Now we do it to keep the culture alive.

Ricing is hard work.  It’s dirty, but it’s good.  After you get done, you really feel like you accomplished something.  Ricing has become a part of my life, a part of who I am.  Even when I was in the service, I would come home to rice.  I missed it.

Ricing is very strenuous.  It usually takes two people:  one to push the boat around and one to knock the rice.  One can do it, but it’s hard work.  You get off the lake, sack it all up, and take it home, where you dry it out and get it ready for parching.  To parch the rice the old-fashioned way, you need a fire and a kettle, stirring the rice constantly.  Rice always tastes better if it’s done by hand.  Depending on how hot the fire is, you parch the rice about 20 minutes a batch.  Usually I can do about 24 to 28 batches a day by myself, so parching takes time.  The old-fashioned way is difficult, but that’s how we did it when I was growing up.  When we were old enough to thrash the rice, we would tie a piece of cloth on a stick or thrash it with our feet.  Now most thrashing is done mechanically since it’s more economical.  After the thrash, the final step is to winnow the rice by throwing it up and down in a basket.

It takes time to learn how to rice properly.  Kids have to watch grown-ups to learn how to do it.  Just like any other tradition, you have to pass it on.  Today I sell the rice to our tribal people as much as I can, since I know a lot of them don’t pick rice.  It’s a way to keep our culture alive.

Another important tradition is fishing.  My father taught me how to fish, and I still do all my own fishing today.  When I go fishing, I usually fish with a net instead of a rod and reel since that’s how I learned to do it with my dad.  After I get my fishing permit, I try to throw out my net as early as possible in the evening and pull it out early in the morning.  For the best catch, you have to spread your net close to shore.

Fishing and ricing will always be a part of my life.  My mother taught me how to rice, and my father taught me how to fish.  Back then, we did everything as a family.  I hope I can pass on what I learned from my parents to the next generation to keep our traditions alive.