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MOLLY NEPTUNE *Parker*

BY PAULETTE OBOYSKI

MOLLY NEPTUNE PARKER

is a gifted woman who has fully mastered the craft of basketmaking. Her baskets are a reminder of her Passamaquoddy cultural endurance. They are intricate works of art that are sought after by many and sell as fast as she can create them. Besides basketmaking, Parker has a repertoire of accomplishments and her kind temperament endears her to everyone she meets.

She was born in Indian Township (Peter Dana Point Reservation—Motahkmikuk) near Princeton, Maine on February 6, 1939. Her father, Lewey Dana, from Indian Township, was a welder trained at the Portland shipyard. He helped assemble submarines and was a top-ranked welder during WWII. After the war he came home and worked on the reservation at Legacy and Savage Garage. Her mother, Irene Newell, was born and raised on the Indian Township Reservation. Parker's parents raised ten children: seven were their natural children and three were their nephew and two nieces: Kenneth, Molly, Eleanor, Phyllis, Martha, Robert, Steve (youngest) and three cousins: Juanita, Franklin, and Charlotte.

As a child, Parker attended Peter Dana Point Reservation School—a two-room school for grades 1-8. After elementary school she attended Princeton High School. Parker then studied business at the University of Maine Orono for two years. She attended many Tribal certification programs and went to Alexandria, Virginia for twelve weeks of business school.

Parker married Moses Neptune who was the father of six of her children. They were married for 18 years. Moses Neptune was a truck driver and furniture mover who drove all over the United States. Moses was from the other Passamaquoddy Reservation at Pleasant Point near Perry, Maine. When Moses worked in Portland, Parker and the children lived in Naples where they purchased a home with help from Parker's basketmaking earnings. While living near Portland, Parker worked at Fairchild



Indian Township Tribal Building

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She says her children are her greatest achievements. She has a large family (9 children, 30 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren)—all of whom are high achievers. She stresses the importance of education to them. Her adult children and adult grandchildren have graduated college and the younger ones are usually on the honor rolls of their schools. She has also taught her children the traditions of basketmaking and the Passamaquoddy language. Some of their professions are: clinical social worker, Tribal leaders, game warden, grant writer, museum educator, health and child welfare consultant, firefighter and bookkeeper.

Semiconductor on fine spaceship electronics used by the first astronauts. The family moved back up north in 1975.

TC Parker was Parker's second husband and they were married for 20 years until he passed. TC Parker was a police officer for forty years and served as a Washington County Deputy Sheriff, in the Tribal Police and in other surrounding areas.

Parker raised the following children: Gordon, Dolly, Tammy, Frances, Janet (deceased), Elizabeth, Yolanda, Christopher Moses Neptune and Christopher Moses Neptune Parker.

Dolly Barnes, Parker's daughter, is a licensed clinical social worker and a master basketmaker. She attests that her mother is, "just totally incredible in her passion for her basketmaking and for people. She is extremely generous: if she has it she gives it...whether it is her artist ability in teaching people to make baskets or helping somebody who needs something or needs to go somewhere...it could be monetary. She would give you her food before she ate."

Barnes continues, "She is an excellent cook. She used to run a

restaurant. She still caters. She actually just got through catering to our tribal elders and served almost 100 people. Everybody I've seen said her food was so great. They ate very well." Parker had 45 people to her home this past Thanksgiving and 48 for Christmas. Every room was filled with relatives and friends.

Barnes is known for the colorful baskets that she creates. She affirms, "Mom and I usually do our baskets together. So we sit around at night after I get home from work. She makes baskets pretty much through the day. She makes baskets to sit with me because I'm making baskets. She probably should be resting."

Grandson, George Neptune is Parker's daughter, Elizabeth Neptune's son. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College and is presently an educator at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor. Since he was four years old, he has been making baskets with his grandmother, Molly. When asked about his grandmother, he said, "I would like to thank her for passing her traditions on to me, for keeping our language alive, keeping our traditions alive,

for fighting for our people's sovereignty and for most importantly passing those beliefs on to me and making me the person I am today."

Passamaquoddy Reservations

There are two Passamaquoddy Reservations in northern Maine: Peter Dana Point Reservation in Indian Township (Motahkmikuk)—located inland near Princeton, Maine and Pleasant Point Reservation (Sipayik) on the coast near Perry, Maine. Parker noted, "Many years ago both reservations were one. The coastal Pleasant Point Reservation was the Passamaquoddy summer home and the interior Peter Dana Point Reservation was the tribe's winter home."

The stately Indian Township Tribal Council building is located at the entrance to the reservation right over the bridge from the town of Princeton. There is a striking totem pole in the front of the building that was created by Ronald Frances.



Molly's handmade baskets

Passamaquoddy Tribe of Indian Township

Indian Township's history is closely aligned with the Tribal Community's natural resources and their more than 2,500 year history of life within the region. Hunting, trapping, and fishing territories in these watersheds were divided among families and the early Passamaquoddy fully occupied their tribe's territory. During the 1800s the Passamaquoddy living at Sipayik, or Pleasant Point, subsisted chiefly by fishing and sealing. Farming and logging were the mainstays at Indian Township (Motahkmikuk), supplemented by hunting, fishing, trapping, basket making and guiding. Later in the century, Indians worked in logging and lumbering with side occupations in fur trading and the making of snowshoes, ax handles, canoe paddles and canoes. One of the primary cultural resources of the Indian Township community is the continuing use of the Passamaquoddy language, still spoken in homes, churches, and schools.

The Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement was completed in 1980; the tribes and the state reached agreement on the purchase of up to 150,000 acres of land by the Passamaquoddy Tribe, conferring the powers and responsibilities similar to that of a municipality onto the tribes and the "right" to tax their inhabitants.

Language Prayer

When asked to speak in his Passamaquoddy language, Parker's Grandson George Neptune chose *The Language Prayer*. This prayer sums up how Molly Neptune Parker has lived her life.

Wolasuweltomuwakon

Nuhkomossok Naka Nmuhsomsok,
Woliwon 'Ciw Latuwewakon
Kisi Monuwehkiyeq 'Ciw Nilun.
Nilun Oc Tokec Nuleyutomonen
'Ciw Weckuwapasihitit.
~Nit Leyic~

Giving Thanks

Grandmothers and Grandfathers,
Thank-you For Our Language
That you Have Saved For Us.
It Is Now Our Turn To Save It For
The Ones Who Are Not Born Yet.
~May That Be The Truth~

The Passamaquoddy Tribe is making great efforts to keep their native language alive.

To learn more about the Passamaquoddy language, you can view the Passamaquoddy-Maliseet Language Portal online: www.pportal.org



Frances Neptune (Granddaughter), Molly, Judith Metcalf, Kathleen Mundell at Traditional Arts Program



Indian Township Tribal Building with Totem Pole by Ronald Francis

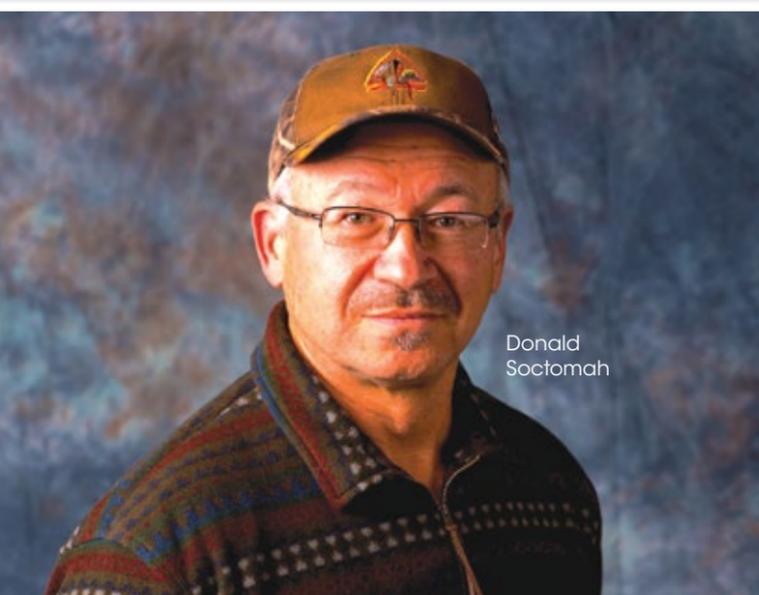
Parker, along with her husband, Moses Neptune, organized a basket-making co-operative at Pleasant Point Passamaquoddy Reservation, and created and sold utilitarian baskets for fishermen. She also worked on the Indian Township Tribal Council.

Throughout her adult life, Parker has been civically engaged with the Passamaquoddy Tribe. In 1984, Parker became the first woman Lieutenant Governor (Vice Chief) at Indian Township. She worked for the Tribal government, directed the housing authority, and served as the director of the health department and tribal government child welfare. She testified before Congress a number of times in Washington, D.C. for the funding of the Tribal police, forestry, and ambulance service.

In the 1980s Molly served as the director for a million dollar block grant to purchase old homes on the reservation and rebuild new homes in their place. The Housing Authority supplied temporary housing for the tenants until the new homes were built.



Sewing Basket Beginning



Donald Soctomah



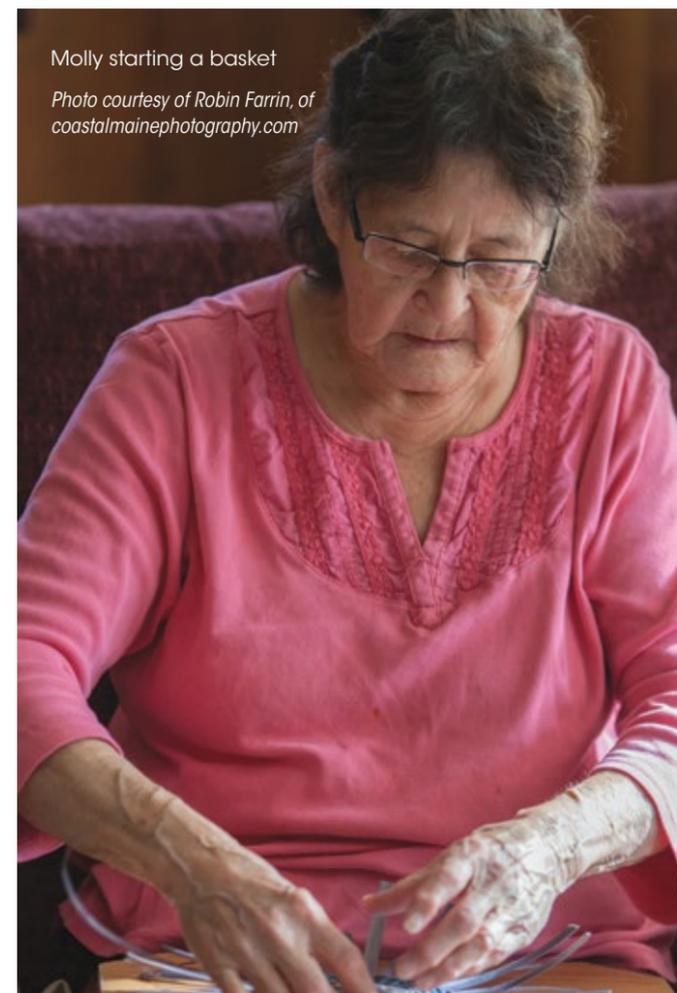
Sewing Basket Completed

For twenty years, between 1985 and 2005, Parker owned and operated a restaurant right down the road from her home, appropriately called, “Molly’s Restaurant” where she cooked home-style food.

Donald Soctomah is the Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. He has known Molly Neptune Parker since his childhood. She is the grandmother to six of his eleven children. He states, “Molly has always been a leader in our community. She has been the person that everyone goes to about everything from tribal politics to refined basketmaking. For as long as I have known her she has been busy with her various industries: her restaurant, catering business, cabin rentals and basketmaking classes, to name a few. She keeps our language and traditions alive with her teachings and is a well-respected elder.”

Hobbies

Parker’s hobbies through the years have been hiking, hunting, fishing at her camp and also right in her back yard, which



Molly starting a basket

Photo courtesy of Robin Farrin, of coastalmainephotography.com



Top: Grandson George and Molly Creating Baskets.

Bottom: Molly and Family at MIBA Fair.



Parker, along with her husband, Moses Neptune, *organized a basket-making co-operative* at Pleasant Point Passamaquoddy Reservation.

Creating Baskets for More Than 71 years

Basketmaking was a tradition in Parker’s family when she was growing up. She learned this art form from her mother, grandmother and aunts as a young child. She continues to teach anyone from her tribe who wishes to learn and has remained dedicated to keeping this practice alive. Parker has taught basketmaking classes within Maine and all over the country.

overlooks pristine Lewey Lake. She says, “The lake has whitefish, pickerel, perch, black bass, sunfish and eels. We can catch salmon off the bridge nearby and can ice fish in the winter when the lake freezes. I love where I live and love going outside because it is so beautiful here.” She also likes to read—especially books about reincarnation.

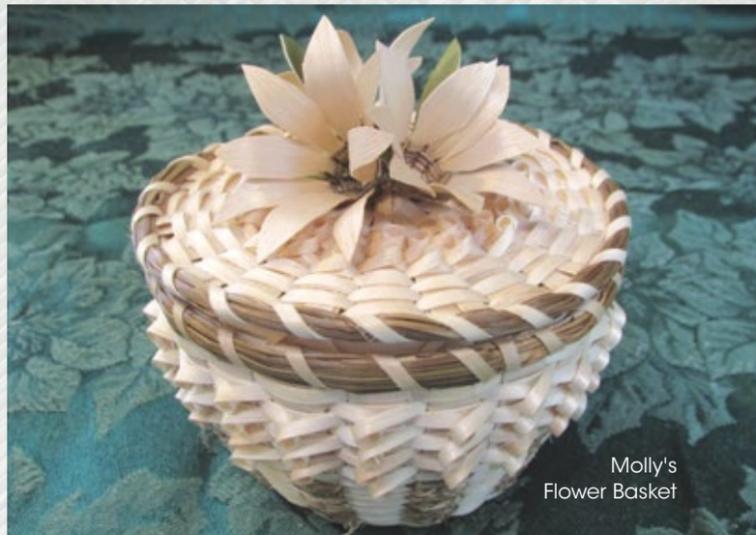
Molly Neptune Parker

by Judith A. Metcalf • Director of the University of New England Geriatric Education Center.

Parker is a tremendous example of a traditional artist that not only demonstrates exquisite creativity and talent in basket making but is devoted to sharing her passion with others, especially health professionals, health professions students and older adults. She is very articulate in telling her personal story of how basket making has shaped not only her life but has contributed, by passing along her wisdom and basket making legacy, to the well-being and happiness of her many family members. I first met Molly and her grandson George Neptune when they participated in the University of New England Maine Geriatric Education Center's "Living Art—Living Well" Studio seminar series for health professionals. This five year project funded by a federal grant (HRSA) and the National Endowment for the Arts, from 2010 - 2015 provided health professionals with an understanding of the important link between art and healthy aging and why it is so important for all health professionals to know what makes each of their patients hearts sparkle. What gives them passion, what makes them want to get up each morning? Molly was a guest artist, as one of the Maine master traditional artists who have taught in the Maine Arts Commission's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. She participated in each of the 5 years of this project as it traveled to different regions of Maine. Each year she was accompanied by one of her grandchildren who was her apprentice sharing her life story and that of those who through the generations passed on basket making to her. Her story has been of hard work and accomplishment, discipline and excellence in basket making from her and from those she teaches. She spoke of the importance of passing on the legacy of basket making to her grandchildren and their responsibility to pass this on to generations to come. Molly is quite a woman and I personally have been so fortunate to have learned from her and been the recipient of her wisdom over the past 5 years. Through Molly's participation in our project the sharing of her life story, the obvious joy, and the importance that basket making brings to her life she has had great impact on health professionals and older adults alike. Health professionals have a



Molly and Judith Metcalf



Molly's Flower Basket

richer understanding of the importance and commitment to ask the question—what makes your heart sparkle, what makes you want to get out of bed in the morning? Then to collaboratively work together to optimize the person's ability to continue to enjoy these passions whatever they may be. Thank you Molly, you are truly an inspiration!

Molly Neptune Parker's Awards and Accomplishments include:

- 2012 National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellowship
- Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Bowdoin College in 2015
- Maine Arts Commission's Fellowship Award for Traditional Arts
- New England Foundation for the Arts - Native Arts Award
- First People's Funds Community Spirit Award
- Demonstrated Basketmaking at 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival
- Distinguished Achievement Award from University of Maine at Machias in 2013

In her basketmaking, Parker uses brown ash and sweetgrass, which is traditionally used by the Passamaquoddy. She has been creating baskets for over 71 years. At one time, she and her husband, Moses Neptune, made 100 scale baskets per week. These baskets were used by the fishing industry for collecting the fish scales that were used to make nail polish. Now she makes the kind that she likes to create: fancy baskets with flowers, sewing baskets, acorn and strawberry baskets.

What does Parker like about being a Maine senior? Parker says, "I do not have many worries. I would not change my life if I were given the chance. Basketmaking keeps me young and I can make everything from scratch."

Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA)

Parker is a founding member of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance and has been the President for the past ten years. The current Executive Director, Jennifer Sapiel Neptune states, "Molly has tirelessly helped to preserve this tradition of basketmaking in our tribal communities. She taught at all



Molly working on rim

Photo courtesy of Robin Farrin, of coastalmaine photography.com

inter-tribal workshops and is a carrier of our culture of food, language and basketmaking. She is really important to us."

Kathleen Mundell has known Molly Neptune Parker for twenty years. She is Director of the Creative Aging and Traditional Arts Programs at the Maine Arts Commission. Parker has been a master artist in the program, teaching new generations the Passamaquoddy traditions, history and language. According to Mundell, she exemplifies the role of an elder: "Molly is both a keeper and a generator of her culture; a source of strength, knowledge and creativity for her family and the entire Passamaquoddy community."

MSM

Publishers note: Paulette Oboyski the writer of this article purchased one of Parker's handmade baskets, not just because the basket was a beautiful work of art, but because Molly Neptune Parker is a beautiful work of art.



Molly with National Award