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## **Saving Language from Extinction**

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# Saving language from extinction



Ancient words have stirred a lifelong ambition for one young Linfield College woman.

Jaeci Hall '05, a Rogue River Indian raised in Veneta, is one of 12 learners reviving Tutudin, a Native American language. In the process, she is helping to rekindle a fading culture.

"I can't put into words how important this is, how it feels to learn this and connect myself to my heritage," Hall said. "This is my life work. I will do this for the rest of my life."

The Tutudin language was spoken by a number of Rogue River tribes, which separated in 1856 following the Rogue River Wars when federal troops forced natives to march on a "trail of tears" from Southern Oregon to reservations in Siletz and Grand Ronde.

Gilbert Towner, 75, and his uncle, Eddie Collins, are the two remaining Tutudin speakers. Both were fluent as children, but have spoken English most

of their lives. In 1993, Towner stumbled across audio tape of an aunt speaking Tutudin and, overwhelmed by the words that had gone unspoken for decades, he set out to revitalize the language.

In 2002, Hall attended the first Agness Tutudin Language Workshop, a two-week intensive course facilitated by language experts. With an incomplete grammar and only Towner to teach 12

learners, experts initially deemed the language extinct.

"But by the end of the two weeks, we were speaking the language," said Hall, who has since helped coordinate the annual workshop. "We brought it back from the brink of extinction."

Hall and the others learned to read and write basic vocabulary and greetings that year – jala means hello – while sitting in a circle on the bank of the Rogue River. Since then, they've moved on to verb phrases and more complicated aspects of the language.

"It was amazing to be able to say these words that hadn't been said for years," said Hall, who also speaks Spanish. "When we started learning, things began to happen. Eagles would fly down over us and whirlwinds would come up."

The workshop changed Hall's life.

She returned to Linfield, switched her major to anthropology and immersed herself in language. She has since participated in the Northwest Indian Language Institute at the University of Oregon and is learning Chinuk Wawa, a Native American trade language, as a volunteer at the Grand Ronde Immersion Preschool. Her senior thesis, "How to Speak Grandma's Tongue or Learning to Learn Tutudin: A Language Towards Language Revitalization," focused on the methodology of language teaching.

"Native American thought isn't based on the linear academic European model," said Hall, who earned the Gebauer Prize in Anthropology at Linfield for her effort. "Language is more than just grammar and vocabulary. It's cultural knowledge. If you don't have the language, you can't have that culture."

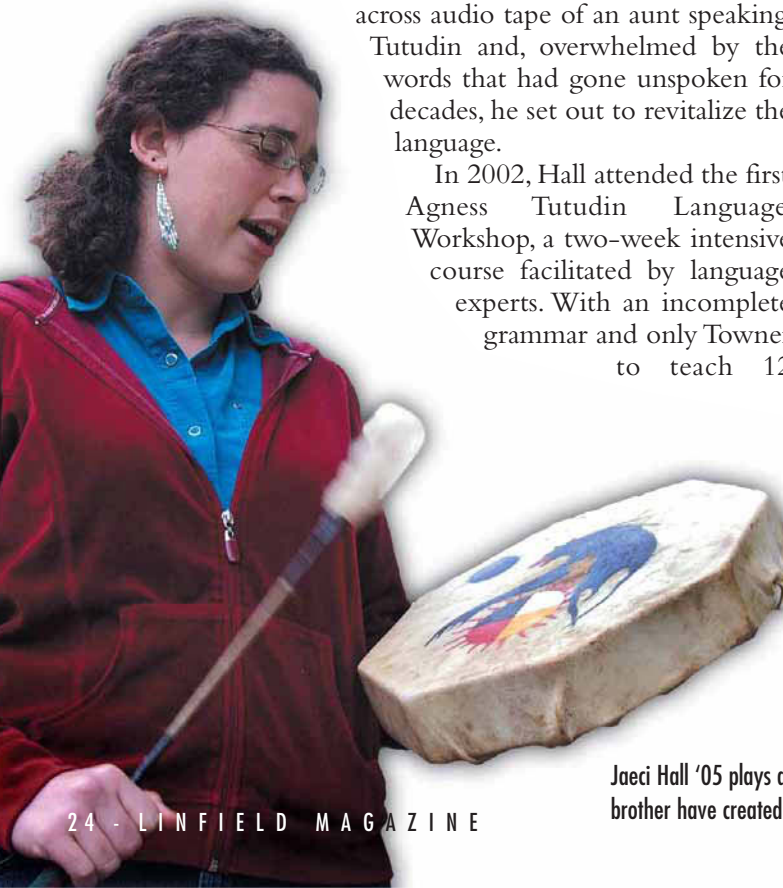
Hall's work to revive the language is critical to preserving the culture, said Joel Marrant, professor of anthropology.

"The fact that it is a vision of revitalization, for an entire people and not just herself, suggests something of Jaeci's unique character and personality," he said. "I have only known a handful of students who even approach the depth of her dedication to a vision."

"It is hard to find the right words to describe Jaeci," he added. "I am sure they exist in Tutudin. Maybe one day I will have the privilege of knowing and saying them."

– Laura Davis

*"If you don't have the language, you can't have that culture."*



Jaeci Hall '05 plays a hand drum to help her learn and teach Tutudin words. She and her brother have created nearly 50 songs in Tutudin. The hand drum is also used in prayer.