



# Earl and Beverly Crum

*Great Basin Indian Archive*

GBIA 004



**Oral History Interview by**

**Norm Cavanaugh  
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Elko, NV**



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BC: The songs, the *Newe hupia*, that Earl and I share with people, are those songs that have been handed down through the oral tradition. It means you learn it from somebody older than yourself. The somebody who is older than yourself has learned it from somebody older than themselves. And so that's the way it makes its way down, that's the way oral tradition continues. But then, one day, if you stop doing that—

EC: What I learned for my own personal self is that, I learned it from my—my mother recorded some songs for me. And she put it on tape. That's how I learned most of them. But the ones we have, we are singing, were something that I had heard at different round dances. We call it Fandango. And possibly from older people that I've contacted in my lifetime, you know, as a child, or otherwise as I was growing up. I grew up with this stuff. So round dances is an old tradition with the Shoshone people. It goes way, way, way back. It's—it has to do with the closeness of the people. And the main thing is, the songs that goes with the dance. If you listen to the words, you interpret it. Lot of them, many songs can be interpreted in different ways. So if the people are dancing, one might interpret it one way, and another one might interpret it in a different way. But, I mean, generally, you had one central, main meaning. There are many, many round dance songs. Many more than handgame or bear dance. And I'm talking about with the few handgame songs, especially those that have words in it. And I kind of have a leaning toward that. But, most all round dances have words. And there's a story to tell. Where in hand game, it's just fun on it. And the bear dance has lots of words, but it's something that has been going on for years and years. They don't do that anymore, I don't think. When they talk about the Ute bear dance, well, that's different altogether. That's their culture. But we

have that culture, too. And all of our bear dance song have words. And then, all bear dances don't have—they're not singing about a bear. Some of them has to do with people, or other animals, like birds, or... That's what those are about. So, like I say, both kinds, but...

BC: Well, we try to pick songs that are—like you told us last fall, for example. You said, “This is going to be about water. The issue of water.” [Shoshone at 4:41] You told us already what the topic was. So, we just looked down into our songs, and those things that, songs that were about water in particular. Some things that had to do with the issue of water. No matter our closeness to it or whatever. And we picked those out. So that, you know, it would be, go along with you, what you needed.

Poetry songs was not used—the poetry itself, the words, was not used in isolation. It was a unified whole. The music, and the poetry, and the singing, they were a unified whole. You never pulled them apart and, you know. And so, this is what we're attempting by doing an oral presentation where we're reading just the poetry. See what I mean?

Because you'll keep repeating the same thing. That same thing over and over. And it's, one of the, some linguist who was looking, reviewed some paper I was having published. He says, “Why do the Shoshones keep repeating certain things? Why do they have that need?” I says, “You dummy! That's because they were dancing to the stuff.” And they were dancing to it, and they were singing it. It wasn't just poetry. It wasn't just—you know, “Tiger, tiger, burning bright / In the forest of the night.” You know, like *taibo* poetry. It was more like, like this one song— [Begins singing]

*Tamme yampa sateettsii*

*Okwai manti puiwennekkinna*

*Yampa taai, yampa taai, yampa taai*

*Yampa taai, yampa taai, yampa taai*<sup>1</sup>

See, you're singing it and you're dancing. And the poetry is all at once. But in the, but when you come to, when you get to isolating the oral presentation, the poetry part all by itself, you can say "Carries them away, carries them away, carries them away."

[Laughter] You see what I mean? That it has this—like, Earl, one of his songs will be that

[**Shoshone at 7:00**] It starts out by a—

EC: I'll sing it. [Begins drumming at 7:05, **singing in Shoshone from 7:08-7:50**]

BC: Okay, thank you, Earl. Thank you.

EC: See, you can put it in poetry now.

BC: So, like, if I had to—when we translate it, it goes, "Hunter, hunter, hunter"—that's three. "Hunter, hunter, hunter. Hunter, hunter, hunter." So, you know, that makes it awkward reading. If it was just going to be, just the oral presentation. So, what I had to do was just say, pick out only, use that word "hunter" only once, after, you know, for the English translation. Then it made it a nice reading for just the oral presentation, understandable to the group. You're kind of lost in your hunter, hunter—how many "hunters" are go there? Is there one hunter? One, two, three, you know? You get to sing—but it's the same hunter, but it's... You understand? So that part, is the ones that we have diff[iculty] going from one culture to the other. That is kind of a neat little understandable problem once you get it under control. [Laughter] How about the one we just got through with? How about *Pia Isam Peentsi*?

EC: Oh, okay.

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<sup>1</sup> See Beverly Crum, Earl Crum, and Jon P. Dayley, 2001, *Newe Hupia: Shoshone Poetry Songs*, pp. 152-53.

BC: Go ahead with that one, you can sing it.

EC: [Begins drumming and singing at 9:10]

*Pia Isam peentsi*

*Pennan kwasin katsunka*

*U piyaatehki*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaattua noote.*

*Pia Isam peentsi*

*Pennan kwasin katsunka*

*U piyaatehki*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaattua noote,*

*Pia Isam peentsi*

*Pennan kwasin katsunka*

*U piyaatehki*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaatehki,*

*Piyaattua noote.*<sup>2</sup>

[Concludes at 9:52]

*Haiyawainna.*

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<sup>2</sup> See Crum, Crum, and Dayley, *Newe Hupia*, pp. 86-87.

BC: Okay, thank you, Earl. There, I could see—the writing system, I think the writing system is going to change the speaking part of it. Because, *noot*. *Piyaattua noote*. But, there would be, the sound, the “*noo-teN*,” the “*nnn*,” wouldn’t show up until there was something following it. Remember? One of the rules? One of the rules! [Laughter] Well, it’s the silent “n.” The silent “n.” So that, you really do need to have, like yourself, teaching a class, who is a Shoshone speaker. And the [Shoshone at 10:44] *newe taikwaken*, the *newe taikwa, tamme* \_\_\_\_\_. That’s language. Not the written part. That’s just symbols representing language. So that, you know, I’m really happy that you’re teaching. That’s all I could say for that. But that was about, *Pia isan peentsi*, furry wolf. *Pia isan peentsi*. Furry wolf, [sings the song back to herself quietly] he carries him away, carries him away, carries him away—there’s one of those repetitions again. Carries him away, on his tail he carries the child away. [Shoshone at 11:26] *Upi naah kwasipi* \_\_\_\_\_. When the—now, I’m 79, and back then a lot of the parents were still telling their kids that “*Ukka kai*”—if you don’t mind, a misbehaving kid, [11:43] “*Ukka kai en tenankanku, Itsappe en kwasi pinnookkwanto ’i!*” “If you don’t behave yourself, Coyote’s going to carry you off on his tail.” So, it’s just more—the song has to do with more of that part of our culture, not so much talking about Wolf. Not—or, *Itsappe*, either one. It’s not talking about either of them. It’s talking about that short saying. Every language in the world has sayings. Well, Shoshone’s no different. To children, how to keep them in line. [Laughter]

NC: So the stories had a way of, having a moral to the story, of letting children—

BC: Yeah! Yeah, without being preachy. A song is one of the good, really nice ways, yeah. Well, the saying, though, is hitting it pretty well over the head: if you don’t behave

yourself, Coyote's going to carry—who wants to be carried off by Coyote? I don't know whether the kids would still be afraid of Coyote this day and age, I don't. Or anything else, for that matter. Anymore, what *is* their bogeyman? [**Shoshone at 12:54**] You don't know? It'd be a nice research. [Laughter]

EC: But, first I'm going to start with a handgame song. It's about snow coming down. Well, [\_\_inaudible at 13:15\_\_].

[**Begins singing in Shoshone at 13:16**]

[**Concludes at 13:44**]

That's Doc Blossom's handgame song. [Laughter] Anyway, maybe it's not his, but that's what he learned from somebody else.

NC: Okay, can you tell—or Beverly, can you elaborate, on the handgame? And maybe tell a little bit about what *is* a handgame song. How is it played?

BC: It's changed, over time. Remember how they do it in Fort Hall? Do you remember? How did they do? Do they use sticks anymore?

NC: Not hardly.

BC: Really? It's more the drum?

NC: The drum...

BC: Remember when it was all stick? They used the stick, completely. [**Shoshone at 14:27**] Oh, that was exciting to me, it was exciting! [In the background, tapping of a drum stick on the side of a drum, imitating the sound of two sticks clicking.] Like that. Oh, yeah! It's changed. I remember, as a child, the women had their own group, and the men had their own. And the women had a nice, slower—I was too young to really know what they were saying, but to me, the guys were *really* into it, *pum-pum-pum-pum-pum-pum-pum-pum*,

they were much more, what do you call them? Not *pum-pum*, but, the stick. It was much more peppy than, whatever.

EC: They put a log in the front, long one, front of the players. And they beat on that log. Like if they sit the log, then you'd hear [taps on object in room]. You'd hear it like that. And in unison. And they sure sound good!

BC: Yeah. They *lost* something by stopping that, *I* think.

EC: They got four—two sets of bones, who hands them out. They say, well, this is the white bone. The one's got a black marker on it. And you supposed to guess that unmarked one. But the players put it in their hand, the marked one and the unmarked one. The unmarked one is the main one. And so, they psych the other people out. They sing, and it goes: [Sings a handgame song at 16:05] See, it's got no words, they just sing that. Anyway, then you're going to have to try to guess me, which one's got the unmarked bones. And if you guess wrong, well, you know. They got ten sticks over there. Well, yours, and ten sticks on this side. Then if you can't guess it, you've got to give up one stick for the people on this side. And if you can't get guess at all, it's ten times wrong, you lose all your sticks. You lose that game. And you start all over again. And—

NC: Can you tell about what they played for? What's at stake?

EC: Well, nowadays they play for money. They bet any amount of money they want. Twenty dollars, 10 dollars. One dollar. Even the audience can get into it, offer money, you know. Then they put the money in a pot, in the middle, you know. And there's a judge over here that's, they're keeping track of everything that's going on. And that's what they're, what they bet on. They bet on, whoever wins get that pot. Then they divide it among each other. You bet all your money that way. You bet 100 dollars, you win 200 dollars.

[Laughter] So, you win your own back and, you know. That's the way it's played. One dollar, you get, you double it. [Laughter] That's gambling! Anything else?

NC: So, prior to the way they play it now, what did they used to play for? What did they used to bet?

EC: Oh, a long time ago?

NC: A long time ago.

EC: They bet, they said they bet, you know, something of value. Maybe a deer hide, a badger hide, or... any kind of a skin. If it has value, then they bet that. But when [\_\_inaudible at 18:28\_\_] come, then **it goes back** [\_\_inaudible at 18:34\_\_]. Coyote was gambling, playing handgame, and he lost everything that he had. The only thing he had left was his *mukua*. You know what *mukua* is? That's your soul. And he bet that soul, and if he lost his soul, they say there would be no more Shoshone people.

BC: [Laughter] [**Shoshone at 19:08**]. He's sitting there crying for fear that—

EC: He got lucky; you know, they get luck come in. He got lucky, they said that he won back his soul. But not only that, won that soul back, but he won all the stuff he lost. He had it, he won all that back, and then some from other people, the opposing players. He won their **tradition**, too. [Laughter]

BC: There's the bad luck—the one story he has, he not only won his soul back, his *mukua* back, but he won, they mention all the illnesses. All the human illnesses. He won all that besides! [Laughter] So, you know, the stories are really unbelievable, you know. Well made. They're second to none, in storytelling. Oh, just so good!

EC: That's where the handgame come in. You know, they were talking about.

BC: The earlier handgaming.

EC: The earlier, yeah. But see how it's changed. And now it's all money, you know.

NC: Okay, Earl. If you could talk about the Bear Dance. And maybe have you sing a song for us, and then I'll have one of you explain what the Bear Dance is. About it, and how people danced the Bear Dance, and why it was called the Bear Dance.

EC: Well, long time ago, when I was a boy growing up in Battle Mountain, the Indians used to do the Bear Dance. They took a washtub, an old-fashioned washtub, and they turn it upside-down. And they get the stick, they get the stick, and then they rasp it. They call it "rasping" that, so [uses drum stick to make rasping noise on drum]. It makes that kind of sound. And then, they have the men and women, they're standing in a row here. Like, the men on this side, and then over there, the women will stand over there. They face each other. Then, they get to singing. At first, they choose partners. So women choose. The women would pick out any man they would choose, she's interested in dancing with. So she pick that man out. And the men are, there's a circle of people here, like in this area here. Then there's an outer circle. Those people are spectators. But the inner circle are the people who's going to perform the dance. And the women, it's their choice, they could pick a man out, and the man can't refuse. If he refuse, he's got give her money. So, she has, **then she'll go** pick out someone else. But, if it's okay with her man, then those two pair off, and then other women will go and do the same thing. And they pick their partners. Now, for this dance you have a whole bunch of dancers. Say there's a partner in a row, and the other partner over there. And the singers will start to, they warm up, you know. [Rasps with the stick.] Start singing their songs then. Then when they dance, they stand facing each other. Like we're facing each other now. When the music start, they come toward each other. And they intertwine hands, like this. Then they go around like

this, and then go back around, their original position. They go together. This is one, that's one way. Other, they start dancing. They dance with each other, and they go back and forth, back and forth, like this. And that's the way it was done.

BC: I've heard it referred to as [**Shoshone at 23:52**], you know, the Hugging Dance? Or else [**Shoshone at 23:55**]. The rasping dance. It wasn't called "Bear Dance." Don't know where that came from.

EC: Anyway, I'll sing that song for you. This is, not all Bear Dances is about Bear. There's lot of them, but this one's about the bird. This is what I learned from our old folks.

[**Sings in Shoshone from 24:33-25:31**]

They say that the song is about a bird. The flicker. You know what a flicker is? It's like a kind of woodpecker? Anyway, the bird, it's real—it's got a certain style of flying, like this. [Makes rhythmic motions with arms.] If you ever observe it, that's the way he flies. And [\_\_inaudible at 25:55\_\_], that's the name of the bird, some people call it that.

[\_\_inaudible at 26:00\_\_]. Because of the sound that it's making, the noise from the throat. It's got its own special cry. And then their [\_\_inaudible at 26:15\_\_] **are red**, you know. Like this. [Taps.] That's a **rope**. They write it in that song, [**Shoshone at 26:22**], it needs to [**Shoshone at 26:29**]. We use that word now, but, [**Shoshone at 26:33**], the old people use that word. He's pecking at the wood. [Taps to imitate pecking sound.]

[**Shoshone at 26:42**]. Because that's, that mean. [**Sings in Shoshone from 26:50-26:55**].

That's, that's the flying motion that it makes. That's what that song is about.

NC: So the Bear Dance was like the mating dance for native songs? Where people got together at the—

BC: Not *mating*, but more... social. Not so much—mating songs are more, animals.

[Laughter]

EC: It might. It might lead to marriage, but you know, it's fun. Supposed to be, anyway.

Anyways, there's something about Bear.

**[Sings in Shoshone from 27:39-28:41]**

**[Sings second song in Shoshone from 28:44-29:50]**

BC: *Haiyowainna*. [Laughter]

NC: And what was that song about, there?

EC: **[Repeats lyrics in Shoshone at 29:57]**. It's, over there, other side of us, there's a mountain that's covered with evergreen forest. The bear is over there, scratching on trees. He's marking his territory. [Laughter] That's what that song is about.

NC: Well, in the time we've got left, could you both share just a little bit about yourselves and your childhood? Where you grew up, and how things were when you were growing up? Maybe Earl, you could go ahead and start it, and then we'll finish with Beverly.

EC: Okay. When I was growing up, lived in Battle Mountain, during that time of the Great Depression, what they call the Great Depression. Hundreds of men used to ride the freight cars. They'd go back and forth on the Union Pacific, probably between Sacramento and Ogden, Utah, or wherever, you know. It was a time of unemployment. People were looking for jobs, and they can't find any. So all these men were idle. They go back and forth, back and forth. And we used to listen to them—when we were kids, we used to listen to them. And they talk about Ogden or Reno, you know. And they always warn each other about the bull. Back then I couldn't understand, I thought it was real bull, you know. [Laughter] They're referring to cops. You know, the railroad

policemen? They're talking about it. They taught each other how to avoid 'the bull.'

[Laughter] Anyway, that's some of my experience then. Occasionally, one or a few of them used to come to our house. Used to live at the west end of Battle Mountain. That's where all Indians live, in one place. And occasionally, couple of them have come over, and they would beg for food. And we had bunch of old dried-out bread. So, they say **ranching** life was hard, you know. So, Gram make a big pot of coffee. Probably can't sip it that high. And when they come over, she'd give them coffee and the hard bread. Then they dip that hard bread in the coffee, and they eat it.

BC: Sounds good.

EC: And then, in appreciation, you know what they did? In appreciation, they steal a sack of coal from the coal trains. And they bring it over to the house. That's what we used to burn. That's the only one thing I remember, when [\_\_inaudible at 33:24\_\_].

NC: How big was the Indian Colony there in Battle Mountain at that time?

EC: I imagine there was about, anywhere from 150 to 200 people. Counting everybody, men and children. And women. You know. My grandfather, he was the shaman, the Indian doctor. And different old men would come over, and they did bloodletting. They made a go out there and make a little [\_\_inaudible at 34:03\_\_], with a sharp, pointed end. And they would place that on the side of the **podium, maybe on this side**, and then take a **large, like a weight**, and hit it like that. And a pool of blood would pour out down there. That's what they call bloodletting. I don't know whether it's, that was to prevent stroke, or... But anyways, it was for my doctoring people. That I remember as I was growing up.

NC: What was his name? What was your grandpa's name?

EC: They call him Shoshone, [34:48] *Natapaibui*. “The one who sees the sun.” Or, some of them call him “sharp arrow.” *Mutsipaka* [34:58]. Others would call him, [35:04] *Puyapekken*, “duck down.” He had all the names. Those are two main ones that he used. But his English name was Dick Crum. And he got that name from, he’s **a Shoshone, he’s a white associates**. Somewhere, he got along good with the white people. Mainly, his peer group, his own age group. So one of the ranchers close by—my grandfather had a land there, and when the homesteading came in, the white rancher came and claimed that land and homesteaded there. Telling my grandfather, he said, “Dick,” he told him, “you were here before we were. This land is really your land.” So, the old man believed him. And he lived on that ranch where they claimed, and they claimed that was the—actually, it was a part of the Homesteading Act. And the old man, that old Crum died. That’s why he has the name Crum. From the white man. And he died, and his son took the ranch. And one day, he had a confrontation with my grandfather. And that young Crum told my grandfather, “Get off my land!” You know. So, Grandfather moved to the town of Battle Mountain, just on the west side of that—which later became the Indian colony. Then dad had a—in them days, he used to live like a white man. So he bought two lots in town. And he built three little houses, made it with two-room houses. And Grandpa and Grandma living alone. He live in the other one. Us and the kids live in one. Third one was for my mother’s moon house. And I guess **Frances** was up in the house. That’s how we lived. Anyway, about early part of 1930, an Indian activist came through Battle Mountain—I’ll never say the name. I know who it is, though. He even told my dad. He said, “You know, Jim”—my dad’s name was Jim—“You know, Jim, Indians aren’t

supposed to pay taxes.” My dad was paying taxes on our land. My dad quit paying taxes. And the county foreclosed his land.

BC: So much for doing it like a white man, huh?

EC: That’s when he moved to Owyhee. [Laughter] That’s the way—yeah, so that’s a true story.

NC: So that’s how you guys, that’s how you ended up in Owyhee?

EC: Yeah.

BC: Had no more land. [Laughter] I think one of the joys of my childhood was when my dad and mom would go up to the mountains in the falltime of the year, because, you know, you had to have burning wood? Everybody went after wood, up to the mountains. So we’d do that. While we were up there, it was the time of the year we could pick chokecherries, see, because mom and dad had a lot of us kids where we was spending a lot of time picking chokecherries. And so when my mom gets home, she could make patties out of them and dry them for the winter. That I remember really well. The times when I’d be there at home.

NC: So most of your childhood, you grew up in Owyhee?

BC: Not most of my—*some* of our childhood. Because of my health, I had to be sent off to a TB sanatorium in Idaho.

NC: In regards to your family, that’s where you learned a lot of your stories, as well? The Indian stories and the legends?

BC: Yeah. My mom was a storyteller. But my dad worked with Julian Steward and those early anthropologists. Then he’d come home at night, and he’d tell us about what those old people told Julian Steward. That was in the 1930s. Some of the really old people were

still living, who were probably... I doubt it's when the reservation started, was the 1930s. They were very old already. And so he just said, "You could spend days with one particular old people, because [**Shoshone at 40:33(?)**]." They were just full of stories to share, and were fun to work with. And others, he said, really had—they were not able to do that well. I tend to the conclusion some people must be storytellers, and so are maybe able to retain more or something. So...

NC: Okay. Is there anything else you want to add, Earl, or Beverly, before we complete the program?

BC: Well, I would say that the passing out—the reason we wrote the *Newe* [*Hupia*—the songs, Shoshone Poetry songs, is that we could pass it on to other people. Because the language is quickly—if we're not careful, we don't have too many more years for it to continue, right? Less and less children are speaking it. And a lot of the old people, either aren't willing, or whatever the reason, is not passing it on. I keep telling them, "When you die, it's going to go with you. When you die, it's going to go with you." So for that reason, it was important for Earl and I to do something like this. It took us a lot of soul-searching. Honestly, it's like we're giving something away to *taibo*—but that's not the purpose. We had no choice. We had the opportunity to do something, to save something. Desperate measures, as it were. You really do.

NC: Okay, well, that's hitting hard, there, Beverly, what you two have done in regards to putting the songs—

BC: And the grammar. The grammar, all this was a spirit of love. But we never got any grants to do either that, no money, no grants, zero. The same way with the grammar. I'd already gotten a lot of it translated before Jon Dayley, the linguist, joined me. I had really done it

for four years, working, and—the thing he did was expertise. Realistic expertise about the sound system. But Wick had already put the grammar together, so we already had something to work with. The orthography was already done. It was not never intended for Owyhee, it was intended for Goshute. But it's applicable to all of Shoshone—because we're the same sound system. Little tiny of changes, like someone would say, [43:16] *tso'o*. *Tso'o*, with a distinct “*ts*.” Others say *tho'o*. *Tho'o*. But then you could still spell it the same way. And still know that they could still say it that way: [Shoshone at 43:30]. So there's stuff like that. And I'm saying, no big deal if we have such a big stake at hand, us losing it completely, with nothing left. And it could happen to little small tribes like the Shoshone—because we *are* a tiny little tribe when you think in terms of the world globe. It's really small.

[End of recording]