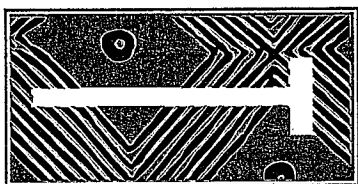





# The Indian Basket

BY MICKY ROBERTS

ANTICIPATING: Write and/or discuss a trade you have made, either in the past as a child or more recently. Maybe you traded some item for another or traded space like a bedroom with a brother or sister. How did you measure the values of each? What kind of deal did you make? How difficult was the decision? Do you feel the trade was fair on both sides?



he year was 1988, a bitterly cold morning in early winter. I held the small Indian basket, beautiful and artistic in the distinctive Native American tradition. It was clearly no copy of an Indian basket—it was the real thing and I did not have to be told that it was authentic.  The basket was laid out on a table at a garage sale and the ticket said it was for sale for \$250. I inquired of the owner as to who had made the basket and was told it was made by "The Thompson River Tribe." The owner went on to say the basket was well worth the money, for the Indians no longer made these works of art. I did not satisfy an urge to ask if tribes made baskets, for, being fair to the man, he could not have known the name of the Indian artist when it had never been asked for in the first place!  As I stood holding the basket, I remembered a bitterly cold day in the year 1939. It was the beginning of the winter season. We walked the streets of Bellingham—my mother, my great-grandmother, and me. We were selling Indian baskets. I was a very small girl and I kept saying I wanted to go home but my mother kept saying, "... just one more house." 

We all carried baskets—large ones, small ones, round ones, square ones. Some of them were rectangular, with perfectly fitted covers, which were

designed to be used as picnic baskets. How many hours of hard labor these baskets represented for my grandmother who could speak only in her native tongue! My grandmother had worked hard all her life and she had raised many children and had also raised my mother, who was her granddaughter. Somehow she had survived the changes that life had forced upon her with the changing life in a different culture.

At each house my mother would ask the occupant to look at the Indian baskets and suggest a price of a few articles of used clothing. If the woman of the house decided to look at the baskets and bring out some clothing she didn't want, the bargaining would begin. As in the case of our tribe's treaty, two generations earlier, the main decision would be at the discretion of the newcomer, and many hours of labor would go for a few shirts or dresses.

These days the price of Indian baskets is very high, and they are mostly owned by non-Indians. These treasures, obtained at less than bargain basement prices, are now being sold at premium prices, if they are obtainable at all. They are collector's items, but the name of the person who labored to make them is rarely known.

As we peddled our treasures in those early years, we probably appeared to be a pitiful people. We were, however, living in as dignified a manner as possible while selling a part of our culture for a few articles of used clothing.

We really hadn't much left to give.

