

Claudia's daughter

by Rosalyn Troiano

God has truly blessed me. I get to be Claudia's daughter for my entire life. God decided I should start my earth walk in 1959 and since He already knew how many hairs would be growing out of my head, He wove me together in my mother's womb and so here I am, Claudia's daughter, Rosalyn. That's how most of the older folks refer to me on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation in Sanborn, New York, where my mother was born in the house her dad built and where I lived until I was five years old.

I like the idea of God getting busy weaving and knitting up all the people who will ever walk the earth, only He works with bones and sinews instead of fuzzy mohair or the pastel ombre polyester yarn I used to squeeze and squish at Woolworth's.

It is a great blessing to be created in the image of God, the Great Creator, and to have the choice to do good works in the manner of our Creator. Sometimes though, creativity can have an urgent purpose and edge to it, as I found out when my mom insisted we get our collective creativity into high gear during the last few weeks of the summer of '79.

My dad's home insulation business started to derail that year, indicating the first blip of the economic recession of the eighties, yet I still had to get back to music school in Ohio. Tired of hearing bad news all the time, Mom came up with a plan and it sure as blazes didn't include "taking a year off from school to work" or "moping around feeling sorry for yourself."

For Mom, the solution to this tough situation was simple; make something with beads and sell it. If there is a beadwork and merchandising gene, then it is the creative and entrepreneurial DNA that has connected and sustained generations of Tuscarora women.



Rosalyn Troiano wears the prayer vest her mother beaded for her to wear during her graduate school exams. Rosalyn received her Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.

It was definitely present in my mom and I as we gleaned our raw materials from boxes and bins around the house. With the days ticking by, numerous varieties of beads and leather, braid, feathers, and fabric were transformed into dolls and belts, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. We had to create a lot of merchandise, enough to last us ten days at the Indian Village of the New York State Fair.

Since the Iroquois are known as the “People of the Longhouse,” there are four large bark-covered buildings in the shape of a longhouse that are home to the Agricultural Museum, Fine Arts Building, Women’s Building for displays of quilts, canning, and beadwork, and one for more craft sales.

For the weary and dusty fairgoers, the Indian Village of the Six Nations of the Iroquois is an oasis of tall shade trees and rolling green lawns, offering a slower, quieter pace from the flashy mile-long mid-way amusements and the ear-splitting, exhaust-fume stink of the stock car races at the grandstand. Most of the artisans, dancers, singers, cooks, and lecturers representing the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora nations live in the Indian Village for the duration of the fair.

The focal point of the village is the dance mound, a raised stage in the shape of a turtle, signifying our Earth Mother, made of dirt and covered with a layer of asphalt, worn smooth over the years by countless performances of Iroquois social dances.

Next to a pond is the Soup House where people can wait in line for traditional Indian corn soup made of hominy, kidney beans and pork. It’s good with a side of fry bread, oozing with butter and strawberry jam. Since the Iroquois are known as the “People of the Longhouse,” there are four large bark-covered buildings in the shape of a longhouse that are home to the Agricultural Museum,



Authentically detailed dolls in traditional Iroquois dress made by Claudia Troiano to sell at the fair.

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Among the old-timers, this last structure was known as the Reed Building, referring to my grandparents, Lucinda and Tom Reed. My grandfather filled one side of the longhouse with displays of Iroquois artifacts and my grandmother gave lectures on leather tanning and domestic life to as many people as could squeeze in. At one end of the longhouse were tables of handmade arts and crafts of the Iroquois.

Dressed in traditional Iroquois clothing, my mom, Aunt Leona and Uncle Charlie took care of brisk sales. Though it was stressful getting ready for the fair, it was good to see the women elders from other reservations setting up their tables in the Women's Building. "Oh look who's here; it's Claudia and her daughter", they said.

After we hauled the last of our merchandise, cots and bedding into the Reed Building, Mom thought we should go down to the midway to get something to eat. The New York State Fair is held in Syracuse, New York, and after paying for gas and tolls we only had enough cash for one sloppy joe dinner, so we split it. Mom and I "broke the ice" or made our first sale the next morning soon after the fair opened for visitors. By the end of the day we had made enough money to buy a plane ticket for me to return to Cleveland and that night we each had our own sloppy joe dinner. Later in the week, I had enough for a new set of viola strings, some books for the semester and I could order the viola music my teacher wanted me to learn that year. My worries about returning to school turned into anticipation and gratitude, not only for the funds I needed, but also for the time Mom and I spent together.

I see a lot of my mom, Claudia, in the industrious woman in Proverbs 31:24 and 27: She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes (v. 24). She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness (v. 27).

I would also add that she'd be happy to share her sloppy joe dinner with you. 🍷



Some raised beadwork items made by Claudia Troiano to sell to tourists. Some of the designs have been handed down in her family for hundreds of years. Raised beadwork is a unique type of beadwork done by the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, which includes Claudia's tribe, the Tuscarora.