



# Making Indigenous Games by

**Mary Ellen Little Mustache**

*Oki! Tanikoo Nawaksaaki. Mii'noomhhtootoo  
Amskapi-Piikani kii Apatsi-Piikani.*

*Hello, my name is tobacco pod woman. I come from  
the southern Piikani and northern Piikani.*



*When we make traditional games, we are very conscious about the importance of each tree before harvesting it to make game equipment. Some people give an offering of tobacco to the tree and I would usually, but when I don't have tobacco, I sing (singing Napi's Rope). My song expresses my thankfulness in the best way I know how.*

*Selection of the tree depends on which games you are constructing. Today, I look for one that has a straight piece so I can make a Double Ball stick and hopefully the piece is long enough to make also make a Ring on the Stick. The tree chosen is a Choke Cherry tree, or Pakiipii. We cut the base of the tree at an angle so the tree will regrow branches.*

*With this particular tree I can also see a Run and Scream stick. We usually use the entire tree. Most of my work is done outside. Clean up is easy and the scrapings are natural compost for the forest floor. The tree is cut into portions necessary for each game. I can see this stick has personality which can be used to enhance different games.*

*The remaining sticks with leaves can be used as a fan, to swat mosquitos. I usually use them for kindling a fire. There are many uses for a tree you just have to use your imagination.*



*Playing indigenous games cost less much money. Teachers are encouraged to shop economically, in a simplistic manner that recognizes the poverty found in most Native communities.*



*Finding things from nature is preferable, but transportation costs prohibit this luxury.*



## **One of the most fun parts about traditional games is the toy making.**

*I have seen some wonderful things that people make out of trees. They can make dolls of humans and animals, just by cutting them into the proper shape. Bending and tying help them to dry into a stiff shape that endures. Making weapons and other adult tools are learned in this process.*

*Brain games and other matters of thought are stimulated with the use of sticks to teach counting, directional positions, and sound variation. The "Counting Sticks" game consists of three people. One person holds the sticks, dividing them behind the back, then pulling them out with two different amounts in each hand. The other two players immediately must estimate the side closest to them.*



*This is one way to get the mind working for estimation and numerical problems.*

*I can imagine myself in the old days peeking over a hill and seeing a group of buffalo and people asking "well how many?". We need to learn to estimate.*



*One of the reasons I really like to work with fresh trees is because they are bendable. You begin to see the properties of the tree. You don't just force it because the tree has ways to move just like how our arm moves when we move it, the tree has properties as well. If we're going to make a proper ring we need to understand those properties. Some areas bend easier than others and you can work with the tree to make a ring. Sometimes, I put something circular in the middle and tie the ring with a piece of sinew. This makes a perfect circle.*

*When we are gathering trees, we always are mindful of the medicine. Pakiipiists, the Choke Cherry trees, not only provide us with berries for nourishment but also with medicine for ailments. The green part under the outer bark for is used for stomach ailments. We can make it into tea to help settle the stomach and it has a subtle taste of choke cherry. We take this medicine and dry it so we can carry it in our medicine pouches for people as necessary.*

*You don't have to waste any part of the tree; with this one, we have medicine and parts to make into games. We have a stick for Double Ball: Natsii'pookoon, sticks for Ring the Stick: Sapiik'iisookhsatsit, and two for Run and Scream: Aksiistapooks kasi'oohkoomi and smaller sticks for counting games and guessing games all from one small tree.*