

## The Legend of Tasin Wot- the chief of the wild mustangs.

This story of a wild mustang, that I call Tasin Wot, came to me from my ancestors. The story is based on my Chumash beliefs and Chumash history. The story is part truth and part myth. The words are from my Father, my Aunts, my Uncles, my Grandmother, my Grandfather and my Elders.

In the early 1800s mission life for California Indians was a very difficult time in their history. The Chumash Indians were losing their traditional hunting and gathering territories. But, their beliefs of being one with the earth and all the animals was still strong. In order to survive California Indians had to learn how to live a mission life style. Many of the Indian men became expert Indian Vaqueros and Indian Cowboys. The Indian people used their ways to train the wild mustangs. They respected the horse for their power and beauty. The mission soldiers had a different way of training horses.

One day the mission soldiers had caught a wild sorrel mustang stallion and most of his herd in the mountains north of the San Fernando mission in the early 1800s. The soldiers were able to train and tame all of the wild mustangs, except for the sorrel stallion. The Spanish and Mexican vaqueros tried their best to tame this magnificent mustang, but none succeeded.

The Chumash Indians at the San Fernando mission had named the sorrel mustang, Tasin Wot. Tasin Wot was a magnificent sorrel stallion. Tasin is the Chumash word for red and Wot is the Chumash word for chief or leader. The Indians at the mission knew he would never be tamed by the vaqueros.

The vaqueros were very forceful and brutal in their training methods. For they believed you had to break the spirit of a horse in order to tame him. These methods worked on most horses but, not all of them.

Two vaqueros would rope Tasin Wot, each pulling as hard as they could in opposite directions. Choking and keeping the stallion off balanced at the same time. One by one the vaqueros would try to ride the wild mustang. All were thrown off, chased by the wild stallion as they scrambled to safety outside the corral. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten days the vaqueros tried without success to tame the wild mustang.

Tasin Wot, the wild mustang, became a symbol of freedom for the Chumash, Tataviam, and Tongva Indians that lived at the San Fernando mission. The Indian people believed that all animals should be treated with respect. That not only humans, but also all the animals have a gift and strength that we all can learn from.

Now, there was a Chumash boy and a Chumash girl who had been sneaking down to the corral every night. The boy feed the horse apples he had picked from the mission orchards. The girl would sing Chumash songs to the mustang stallion every night. The wild mustang knew the Chumash boy and girl were his friends. The boy and girl had been watching for days and days the brutal attempts to train the wild mustang. They knew that the vaqueros were realizing that they would never tame the wild stallion. The boy and girl feared for the mustangs safety. So, late one night, while everyone was asleep, the young Chumash boy and girl snuck down to the corral where Tasin Wot was tied-up.

They opened the corral gate and untied the wild mustang. They had never seen a horse run so fast.

Within seconds the mustang was gone. They ran after him, for they too wanted their freedom. They ran all night through the foothills and into the mountains. By early morning they were both exhausted and fell asleep underneath a large oak tree. After sleeping several hours they were awakened by the gentle nudging of their friend, Tasin Wot.

They were glad to see their friend. When they stood-up they thought the mustang would run away. But, he just stood there as the boy and girl hugged and petted their friend. The mustang nudged the boy and girl towards his back. They realized he was telling them to hop on. The boy jumped up on Tasin Wot and then helped his friend get on. Tasin Wot took them along a trail that they had never seen before. They continued along the trail down a mountain. As the three came around a big curve in the trail the boy and girl saw a beautiful valley. In the valley there were 15 -20 mustangs, mares and colts all grazing on the abundant grass. There was a creek going down into the valley. The boy and girl got off their friend. They all drank and drank the cold refreshing water. Then the stallion bolted like lightning to the herd. The boy and girl knew instantly that the stallion was a Wot, he was the leader of the wild mustangs.

As they walked around the valley they saw many plants and animals that their people had ate and hunted before the missions were built. The boy and girl had listened carefully to their elders tell them of the old ways. They knew that they are people of the earth.

They knew how to hunt in a good way, paying respect to the animals that will give their lives for us to survive. They knew how to collect just small amounts of the plants that Mother Earth has given us to eat.

Making sure to leave some for the animals and for other people.

They knew they could never return to the mission. For they would have been punished severely for releasing the mustang. They knew this was their new home and in the mountains they would be safe. The elders back at the mission would say that the young boy and girl never left the mustangs, they stayed with them forever. The legend of Tasin Wot and the Chumash boy and Chumash girl was born.

Other Chumash, Tataviam and Tongva Indians escaped from the missions. They lived in the mountains and moved to other tribal lands. They fought to save their way of life. The wild mustang, coyote, eagle, swordfish, and bear are still symbols of freedom for the Chumash Indians.

There are stories of early American settlers seeing a wild Chumash Indian man riding on a beautiful sorrel mustang in the mountains north of Los Angeles. But, no one could catch him because the wild mustang ran faster than any horse that the vaqueros or cowboys rode. There were stories of people traveling through those mountains and hearing a woman singing beautiful songs. But, no one ever saw her, they only heard her off in the distance at night. Some people believe there are still wild Chumash Indians living in those mountains. Some people think that there are Chumash spirits in those mountains. I know with all my heart that there still are wild Chumash Indians in those mountains, also along the coast and in the valleys. You just have to look with your eyes, your heart and your spirit to see them. We are still here.

I will tell this story to my grandson so, he will know that his Chumash ancestors are proud people. That the Chumash respect the animals and Mother Earth. And that like the spirit of Tasin Wot we will always embrace our wild spirit.

Alan Salazar 3/21/09