

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1994-11-26
Segment 1
Episode Air Date: 1994-11-26

Dan Smoke explains the significance of the winter snow season as a time for rest and replenishment for all of creation. He also explains the significance of the oral tradition in Indigenous communities. Later, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke recount events they have attended throughout the month of November.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no! Shekoli! Aniish na? Skanako:ka? And greetings to all of our listeners of Smoke Signals, First Nations Radio here at CHRW 94.7 FM, London's real radio. My name is Dan Smoke, Asayenes, of the **Killdeer Clan, Seneca Nation, Iroquois**. And I'm in the studio this afternoon with my partner, co-hostess, Mary Lou Smoke. Boozhoo, Mary Lou.

MARY LOU SMOKE: Boozhoo Dan, boozhoo everybody! How did everybody like waking up to the white blanket on the ground?

DS: Yes, that time has arrived, and it's arrived a little bit later than usual, but it always arrives. There's no doubting that it will be here. That time is part of the four seasons, the time when everything is put to rest, everything goes to sleep, all creation. It is time for rest. It's time for that time to replenish and we as human beings look forward to that time. In many of our communities, in many of our families, we look upon this time as a time to also reflect on the past year, especially following the season where we harvest the crops that come from our Mother Earth who looks after us. And it's also a time where we also prepare. We're in preparation for the upcoming spring season when all life becomes renewed, when all life is awakened. And this is a time when we take to do beadwork, to spend time with our families. I guess one of the terms used to describe this time is we start to cocoon, and we are in reflection, and we are in a state of preparation because when we know that the time is coming when new life and awakening is going to be arriving, we have to be ready. We have to be ready for that, and we have to be in harmony with that. So, it's a good time.

It's nice to see the snow finally arrive. It's especially important to Native people, to both individuals, to families, to communities, to nations, that the time between the falling leaves...they say the falling leaves, when the first leaves start to fall, and the time between that and when the first snow arrives and the snow stays here, it doesn't melt and go away, it's here to stay for the rest of the winter season, that time is a time for us to be doing many of our ceremonies. Many of our ceremonies are done at this time to acknowledge that the **Thunder People** are now travelling south. They're now going to do their work in the southern parts of creation, and they are going down there to renew life in that part of the creation, in that part of Mother Earth. And we acknowledge that. We have a ceremony where we say goodbye to the Thunder People and those good things, and that we will be preparing for their return when it is their time to come back up here. So, it's also the time when we do our feasts for the dead; our feasts for the people who are in the spirit world; our feasts for our brothers and sisters who have gone home in this past year, and it is also the time that we make ceremonies so that they can be fed, so their spirits can be fed.

And so, we also acknowledge that at this time too. So, these are some of the things as to the way it is with our way, in our communities. And many of the conferences and happenings that

are going on in First Nations territories today reflect that. They reflect a time of coming together and a time to work with one another, a time to become one. Become one with their hearts and minds, with each other. Today's feature will be such a conference that took place in Hamilton. It was entitled **Healings Within the Circle**. It was an international symposium on health management held at the Hamilton Convention Centre, and the community forum that we will bring you an excerpt of today dealt with Indigenous people. This was on November the 13th, 1994, at the Hamilton Convention Centre, and the speaker that we are going to feature today, his name is **Vern Harper**. He is a fifth-generation grandson of **Mistawasis**, known as **Big Child** of the **Cree First Nations**. In addition, Mr. Harper is active as a Native young offender's court worker in Toronto with the **Aboriginal Legal Services** organization.

He is also a community elder. Mr. Harper is recognized as a **medicine man** and a spiritual Elder. He is author of the book "**Follow the Red Path**," New Canadian Press, and he was responsible for the founding of the First Nations School in Toronto, which was formerly known as the **Wandering Spirit Survival School**. He was also instrumental in helping see the **Padawan Lodge Treatment Centre for Drug and Alcohol Addiction** being founded, and he also worked with the **Native Crisis Team** at the Queen Street Mental Hospital in Toronto. Myself, I am very familiar with Vern. I am familiar with his teachings. A lot of his knowledge and wisdom that he's going to share with us today has to do with the theme of his presentation, was the sweat lodge, the place for spirituality in the healing process. We will also try to bring to you in the upcoming weeks some of these other workshops that took place at the Hamilton Convention Centre. For example, Alex Jamieson, a **Cayuga First Nations** faith keeper. He is going to be talking on the **Clan System** and Aboriginal issues. There will be a drum teaching by Gary Sue, **Little Eagle Feather's Drum**. And Greer Atkinson will be addressing the Wellness Conference, addressing the intergenerational health issues. Greer Atkinson is associated with the **United Councils of Potawatomi Nation**, I believe, and they have had, or she has been responsible for coordinating the Women and Wellness conferences that have been very important for the healing of the women in our families and in our communities.

And she has also worked with the National Women and Wellness conference organizational groups. There is one in the east and there's one in the west, and she has worked with both of them. **Chief Earl Commanda** of the **Cutler First Nations**, up on the north shore of, I guess it would be Lake Huron, he was the executive director of the **North Shore Tribal Council**. He's also going to be featured in upcoming weeks. Dolores Wawia, who talks about laughter as medicine. And these are all being moderated by a brother of mine. His name is **Tona Mason**. Tona is a **Mohawk-Ojibwe**. His father comes from **Six Nations**. He's a Six Nations Mohawk. And his mother is an **Ojibwe** from **Rice Lake**. And Tona is going to be the person who will be introducing Vern a little later on in the show. And he is also himself a personal friend of Vern Harper's as well. But Tona lives right in the Hamilton area, and I guess he is replacing, or he was asked to help out when Walter Cook, who is an **Ojibwe Bear Clan**, he was the original moderator for this Indigenous forum of the health conference, he took ill, and he ended up in the hospital that weekend. So, we also hope his recovery is well. But Tona Mason ably came in and moderated a very good forum that took the most part of Sunday, November the 13th at the Hamilton Convention Centre. It was well attended, there were many people there. And we would also like to take this opportunity to thank our sister, Kathy Buddle, who was able to tape these features and these workshops that took place on that day.

DS: We ourselves, Mary Lou and I, we have been busy. We have been out and about and around Indian Country visiting. We have been seeing old friends. One particularly good friend, a teacher of ours, was able to come down to London at the beginning of November on November the 4th. **Doctor Joe Couture**, a **Cree** medicine man. He is also one of our teachers. He came to

give a talk, a presentation at the Westminster College, or Institute I should say, of Ethics. He gave a presentation on spirituality and ethics and following that was an old workshop. Following that, he did a **pipe ceremony** at the Unitarian Church located on Victoria Street. We'd like to thank the Unitarian Church for letting us use their facilities for this very important, sacred event also at this time. But Joe, it was nice to visit him. He is going to be leaving the Toronto area where he has presently been living for the past three years, and he's going to be going home. His home is in Alberta. He is originally from the Athabaskan region near Settle Lake, Alberta, and he will be returning back to, I guess it will be right near Edmonton. A place called Calling Lake. And he will be going home sometime in the spring/summer of next year.

But it was really nice to visit with him, and it's going to be now, once spring/summer comes, it will be a long-distance apprentice relationship that we will continue to have with our brother, Joe Couture. Unfortunately, we didn't tape any of the proceedings of that day, but you know, a lot of what we say, a lot of what we share when we are sharing with you, our listeners, comes from the wisdom, comes from the knowledge that we have absorbed in listening to people like Joe Couture. So, even though you don't hear him on a tape, or you don't hear him as a feature tape speaking on a specific topic, you will hear him through us, and that is the oral tradition of the intergenerational way of living, the way of sharing that Native people have maintained since time immemorial. We have always learned and absorbed from our Elders in this way. It is when these people enter the Elder stage of their life, their teaching stage of their life, it becomes their duty to pass on that knowledge, that wisdom on how to live, on how to live in harmony, live in peace with all creation. And we as young people, it is our duty to absorb that. It is our duty to absorb the wisdom and knowledge, and to seek out those people who we are comfortable with, people who we can communicate with in a good way, so that we can learn in a good way these teachings, these traditional teachings on how to live in peace and harmony with all the rest of creation.

And the rest of our life is the learning of that identity and the learning of that relationship in as best a way so that when it becomes our turn, it becomes our duty, it becomes our responsibility, then when we become Elders, when we enter that teaching stage of our life, we have to pass on that knowledge and that wisdom to the future generations. And that is the way, that is the essence of the way that our existence has been maintained for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. And to this day, when we go into certain ceremonies, we know that these ceremonies represent truth because they are being conducted the same way that the Creator gave them to us to be conducted many, many thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago. And we know that teaching, of how to conduct that ceremony, that has been passed on to generation to generation to generation, up to the present. And it is our responsibility to not get off the track, but to maintain the teachings in the way that we have been taught and to teach these ways in the way that we have been taught so that they are kept intact in that good way.

DS: So, we have been also busy, also were in attendance at...what were some of the other things we did, Mary Lou? There was a film festival in Hamilton that also took place, I believe, in the beginning of November. It featured films from all over Native North America. One particular film was ***Dance Me Outside*** that was filmed on the **Perry Island First Nations**, and it was also featured at the **Reel Raves Film Festival** right here in London. A brother of ours, Cree brother, Vern Cheechoo, was featured in that particular film, and it was directed by **Bruce McDonald**, who was also at the premiere of *Dance Me Outside* when it was here in London at the Reel Raves Film Festival here in London at the New Yorker.

MLS: We also attended a play that was held at the Lorne Ave Public School. It was put on by the [to be translated] Theatre, and the name of the play...I can't say it in Indian, can you?

DS: *New Voices Woman.*

MLS: Oh (*laughter*). Well, that was really an interesting play. We knew one of the performers, Levi. He comes from Montreal. He's originally from Manitoulin Island, so it's always nice to run into a fellow lodge brother.

DS: On November the 10th, there was a press conference up at the **Ontario Institute for Studies in Education**, OISE, up on Bloor Street and Saint George in Toronto, and it dealt with the Innu situation. The Innu are struggling with the fact that the low-level flights currently being tested and being run over their territory is starting to drastically and negatively impact both the people, the **Innu Nation**, as well as the rest of creation. Animals are dying as a result of these flights, just like 50 feet overhead. And they're so fast that they come out of nowhere, there's no advanced warning, and animals will have a sudden heart attack as a result of this sudden burst of noise and sound as these low-level flights swoosh overhead. And this has drastically impacted upon the Innu people. They have been asking for help from the federal government. The federal government, in turn, has been asking for nations like England, France, Germany, to increase their level of participation because the NATO countries such as these pay the Canadian government to be able to run these test flights over this territory which they consider to be empty, to be desolate, and to be of no use, whereas this is in direct contrast with the Innu people who have lived there traditionally for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, who have always hunted and trapped in this area, who depend on the hunting and trapping as their way of life in order for them to get their sustenance, to get their food, who depend on that in order to live. And these low-level flights are starting to negatively affect them. And so, this press conference, with the help of people like **David Suzuki**, is starting to raise the national profile of the Innu situation. It is very interesting to note that in the Innu community, in the Innu Nation, one of their main spokespersons, activists, is a grandmother by the name of Elizabeth Penashue. Her son, Peter Penashue, is the president of the Innu Nation. Both these people were also in attendance at this press conference. And we will be bringing you some feature tape on that as well.

MLS: Oh, another place we went to was on November 13th, we went down to **Walpole Island** for their annual fowl feast. There was a lot of people in attendance and a lot of people that we knew, a lot of brothers and sisters from not only Walpole Island but the surrounding area. And it's a good time to go down and see Walpole Island, and it's a good time to share in their fowl that they have over there. Sometimes they have fish. So, if you ever do have the opportunity to get invited down there, please do take it up.

DS: And most recently, we have been having conversations with people, artists, who have recently released three new CDs. Three new compact discs. One is **No Regrets**, that was released by **Tom Jackson**. Tom Jackson can be seen regularly on Tuesday nights on CBC. His show is called **North of 60**. He plays Peter Kenidi, and he's on **North of 60** every week. But he has come out with this new release called **No Regrets**. We had a chance to talk with him. We'll also feature that in upcoming weeks. This week, we talked with **Florent Vollant** of **Kashtin**. Kashtin has recently released a new CD at the beginning of October. It was called **Akua Tuta**. **Akua Tuta** was also featured in the series **Native Americans** that was debuting on the Turner Broadcasting station out of Atlanta, Georgia. **Akua Tuta** also features not only Kashtin, but it also features another well-known singing, playing artist, **Robbie Robertson**. Robbie Robertson himself has released a new CD. It is entitled **The Native Americans** by Robbie Robertson and the **Red Road Ensemble**. And we are now going to listen to the song "**Mahk Jchi**," which is the

“Heartbeat Drum Song,” here on Smoke Signals. This is Robbie Robertson and the Red Road Ensemble, from his new CD *The Native Americans*.