

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1994-04-09
Segment 2
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Dan Smoke reminds listeners to visit the Welcoming the Nations Gathering being hosted by the First Nations Student Association at the University of Western Ontario and enlightens listeners about the purpose of a powwow. Afterwards, Dan reads a statement from Leonard Peltier, written in February 1994.

Host(s): Dan Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Aanii! Sge:no! You're listening to Smoke Signals. That was Joanne Shenandoah and Paul Ortega. And we just want to encourage everyone who's listening right now to come on down to the **Alumni Hall** here at the **University of Western Ontario** where the **First Nations Student Association** is putting on their first annual **Welcoming the Nations Gathering**, [to be translated], *we are here*. The **host drum** is the **White Eye Singers** and there will be historical presentations by a number of First Nations representatives, and they will be talking about the **Lenni Lenape**, the **Onyota'a:ka**, the **Potawatomi**, and the **Anishinaabe**. This will all be taking place throughout the afternoon. The MC is **Dean George**, and the coordinator is the **First Nations Services** director, **Vivian Peters**, **Ojibwe Nation** from **Birch Island**. The **N'Amerind Friendship Centre** community eagle staff is also there to oversee, our grandfather is there to make sure the connection to **Mother Earth**, the connection to **Father Sky**, connection to our **Grandmother Moon** and our eldest brother the Sun is there. And that's what our grandfather, the kind of work that he does, he makes sure that the positive life forces, the positive energy, the positive healing energy is there to oversee and overlook that gathering and to help remove anything negative, help remove any of the negative worry, stresses that we carry around and we bring into that place.

So that's what a powwow is all about, a First Nations gathering is all about. It's about removing the negative and promoting and bringing in the positive. And that's what we do whenever we come together, all ages. We sing and we dance together, and we drum together, and we hear new songs, and we exchange songs from one drum to another. We exchange dances from one nation to another. Like the **Iroquois**, for example, we have the **Alligator Dance** which happens to be one of the most popular dances that we have. The Alligator Dance. But the alligators are not common to Iroquois territories, but the Iroquois people did extensive travelling all over **Turtle Island**, and so when they travelled down to the **Miami Nation**, which is down in **Florida**, down to where the **Seminole** people are, you know, we were welcomed into their territory and we extended a welcome to them that any time they want to travel up to the Iroquois country, they are definitely going to be welcomed with a roof over their head, with some food for them to eat. And this was the way we were welcomed down in their territory. And so, they gave us a dance, the Alligator Dance. And in exchange, we gave them one of our Iroquois dances.

So probably to this day, somewhere they're down there doing the **Moccasin Dance**, or they're doing the **Delaware Skin Dance**, or they're doing a **Fish Dance**, or a **Smoke Dance**. Could be any one of the Iroquois dances that they, to this day, continue to dance. But we have lots of fun with the Alligator Dance. It's one of our favourite dances. And speaking as an Iroquois person growing up with this acknowledgement of how we exchange dances, we also exchange a lot of songs. Many of our elders still retain those songs, and they still remember those dances. It is their duty as elders of our nations to pass on that knowledge, pass on that wisdom to the younger people because as young people, it is our duty in life to absorb as much knowledge and wisdom and traditional teachings and the customs and ways of our people from the elders

who have retained that, who are in the **thunder stage** of their life, who are in that teaching stage where it's their time to teach and their time to pass on that wisdom and knowledge. And so as young people, we have to remember to always continue to respect our elders, to always ensure that our elders are always looked after because of the knowledge, because of the wisdom that they possess. It is a very precious possession that they have and we have to always continually remember that our elders continue to retain this wisdom and they continue to retain this knowledge.

So every time that one of our elders passes on into the spirit world, we mourn that loss of that knowledge and that wisdom that has gone with them because maybe they didn't, weren't able to share and pass on, you know, what they really wanted to. So, we have to pray for that spirit to go on into the spirit world in a good way that what they did share, what they did pass on is what was meant to be passed on, what was meant to be shared. And so, we help them go into the spirit world, we help them as they go home. And so, to this day, we are kind of reflecting what we're seeing in the natural world around us. When we see the tree die, we notice that that tree when it decomposes, it's also helping the ground become fertile, helping the ground become ready, helping the ground prepare itself for new trees, for new trees that can grow in that area where that tree is setting the ground up, is preparing that ground so new trees can grow. And these new trees will grow into bigger trees, into older trees, and when they die and they pass on, then again they will prepare the ground, they will prepare the Mother Earth for that cycle to be continued. And as people, as human being people, we have those same sacred instructions. We have to remember that whenever we make decisions, whenever we make sacrifices today, we are doing it for the future generations. We are doing it now so that seven generations down the road, there will be a Grandmother Moon here. That Grandmother Moon life force will continue to look after the female life, the female life which are the givers of life. We pray so that seven generations will also have the heat and the light from our eldest brother the Sun, and that that life force will continue to provide that heat, that warmth, that light for all creation so that life force can continue for us to grow, continue to give us that nourishment we need. And for our Father Sky, that the Mother, her lifeblood the water continues to be cleansed, continues to be purified, continues to be...every time that the Grandmother Moon shows her face, the water from the depths is brought to the surface and the water from the surface goes down to the depths so that the water is recycled and that water continues to be cleaned. We pray so that seven generations down the road, that they continue to have that clean, purified, recycled water that we have today. And that they have that clean, purified, recycled air that we are receiving today from the rainforests that continue to be the lungs of Mother Earth.

So these are things that we have to acknowledge that this is our tradition, this is our way, and these have been passed down orally from generation to generation. They are not recorded in a book. They are not recorded on a video tape or an audio cassette. They come from the heart. They are recorded in the minds and hearts of elders, and then those elders, when they pass it on to us, it is our duty to record with our minds and our hearts. But as...what we do at Smoke Signals is when we go out and seek out the elders, we have to ask them permission with the **tobacco** that they allow us to record their wisdom and knowledge so we can bring that back and play it over the air, and play it so that our brothers and sisters can benefit from their teachings and benefit from their oral words in the same way that those of us who were there benefitted when we first heard those traditional teachings being passed on to us orally in the spirit of our ancestors.

DS: One of our brothers who has been incarcerated for a number of years, [to be translated], **Leonard Peltier**. Leonard Peltier, who is of the **Ojibwe-Lakota-Oglala Nation, Sioux-Ojibwe**, he has been incarcerated now for 18 years. He has continued to plead for his innocence of a

crime of killing two **FBI** agents, which he did not commit, but he does know the person who did it, but he's not saying who that person is. But he has served, he was sentenced to two life terms in **federal prison** down in the **United States**. Presently, he is now incarcerated at **Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary** in **Leavenworth, Kansas**. And there he has been for a number of years. And just recently, he was in **Springfield**- or no, I'm sorry, **Marion, Illinois** to have some dental work done on his teeth. But apparently, they could not provide him with that dental work so he is back in Leavenworth State Prison right now. We have just received a letter from the **Leonard Peltier Defense Committee**. Now, Leonard is a spokesperson of traditions. He is a spokesperson of a traditional way of life that has continued, and is starting to be revived, and we're starting to witness that re-traditionalization that is taking place all over Turtle Island.

And I'd just like to read to you, our listeners, the statement of Leonard Peltier which he gave in February of this year. This is Leonard Peltier: "Dear friends. I am thankful for this opportunity to greet you and to wish you well. It would be wonderful if I could take your hand in mine, but that is impossible. After nearly 18 years, I am still here, imprisoned for a crime I did not commit. I wonder how much longer must my sacrifice be? This holiday season has brought both happiness and sadness to us. It was wonderful to be able to give my grandchildren the best **Christmas** they've ever had, which included a trip to **New Jersey** and into **New York City**. Yet, just before all of this, the **parole board** on December 14th recommended that I serve an additional 15 years before they'll reconsider me for parole. Of course, this decision is not yet final, but it was a hard blow to us all. The other thing that has caused me major concern has been the actions of some individuals who are supposed to be my allies yet try to override my decisions with their own. To lay to rest some of the worst of these rumours, I have not gotten a new office staff. I am very happy with the progress being made on my case by the current Leonard Peltier Defense Committee staff. I am happy that **Jeanie Palmer** has joined my full-time crew and is helping Lisa, Michelle, and Cohen. My speaker's bureau remains unchanged. In short, I run the **Leonard Peltier Defense Network**. It is my organization, and what I say goes."

"As you know, 1993 was the **United Nations' Year of the World's Indigenous People**. Yet, all around us, our planet decays, and it seems so many of our contemporaries are unaware or apathetic. What have we done today to heal a little piece of the world? What will you do tomorrow? We have made our way through another holiday season, another time for brotherhood and generosity, yet thousands of children and elders did not receive gifts or eat a holiday meal. This season, my staff and supporters gathered an enormous amount of clothing and toys to be distributed in the **Dakotas, Connecticut, Oregon, Kansas**, and elsewhere to Indian and non-Indian alike. I have done this every year of my incarceration. I beg you to join me in remembering those less fortunate all year round. When will we join hands and forces to remedy this woeful predicament? I see the world now through the eyes of two of my grandchildren. To them, the sky is blue, the grass is green, the flowers still smell pretty. Yet even in their tender youth, they sense something amiss. There are so many homeless, hopeless Indian brothers and sisters that have passed through their lives. There are so few opportunities granted for the healthcare, education, and employment of their friends on the reservations and inner cities."

"They have, on their own, donated many of their toys to the needy. And when they ask, quote, 'why Grandpa?' unquote, what words can I tell them? I cannot erase the prejudice and pain that will surely scar their hearts in the coming years, and I certainly will not raise them to be scornful, racist, and hostile. When I hold my grandchild, grandchildren in my arms and smell the scent of their hair and feel the warmth of their hands enveloped in my own, I want nothing short of happiness for them. A secure future in a safe world. Is that not what any father or grandfather

would want for his offspring? We are responsible for these children. We are responsible for all children. We simply cannot watch kids die of disease, famine, or war, and do nothing about it with the excuse that they are not our children. They are ours. We must allow them their time on this shared planet. I don't know how to save the world. I do not have the answer. I have no secret knowledge of how to fix the mistakes of generations past and present. I only know that without compassion and respect for all of the Earth's inhabitants, none of us will survive.'

"1993 is over. What tangible improvements have been made for the world's Indigenous peoples? I have sacrificed almost 18 years of my life for a principle. If my imprisonment does nothing more than educate people about the terrible conditions my people must survive, and in fact, the terrible conditions shared by all Indigenous people, my suffering has had a purpose. On Christmas morning, my grandchildren were up bright and early begging Lisa, her parents, and sisters to rise so that they could drag everyone to the tree and to their gifts. Lisa took a lot of pictures that I saw when they came to visit the following week. On Christmas morning, I got on line and waited for my turn for my allotted 15 minutes on the phone. I heard my grandchildren laughing and singing, but I didn't hug and kiss them, or see the bright sparkle in their eyes, or make lavish compliments on their Christmas outfits. The phone automatically clicked off and I returned to my cell, and wondered, are they behaving? And hoping that they were happy. My heart breaks each time I miss these things. I missed both of their programs at school. Alex sang. Cyrus had three lines. They both danced, but I did not get to dance with them. They celebrated Grandparent's Day with a special lunch at school. Lisa went with Alex. Cohen went with Cyrus. I wonder if my grandchildren know that even though I cannot be with them, they are very lucky to have so many people that love and provide for their needs."

"Many people lack even that. I am sad to lose the precious moments of their childhood, but sadder still for those who are stripped of their innocence. How many will die from the cold? How many will be lonely? How many won't have enough to eat? Every day I think, if I were free, I could truly make a bigger difference. Will I ever get that chance? You out there can make a difference. Please do not let your own personal problems get in the way of helping others. No excuse is good enough. We finished up the holiday season and now is the best time to start the healing process that should continue throughout the year, and for the rest of your life. We are in this together, my friends, and we share responsibility for Mother Earth and those who live and breathe upon her. In the spirit of crazy horse, Leonard [to be translated] Peltier."

That comes from Leavenworth State Prison, from our brother Leonard Peltier. Now, Leonard has always said that whenever we commemorate him and offer our sacred thoughts and our sacred prayers to him, that we use him as a symbol for all of our incarcerated brothers and sisters who are living in an inhumane system, the justice system. And for those incarcerated brothers and sisters, we acknowledge that Leonard Peltier, who is a symbol of all of you who are inside those walls, those iron lodges, that someday when you will be free, you will be able to walk and talk and share and feel the same life forces that we pray for our seventh generation to have, and that when you see that and you feel that and you become a part of that, you will know that your spirit has brought you out, and has touched and has been reconnected to those life forces, to our Mother Earth, to our Father Sky, to the Grandmother Moon, and to our eldest brother the Sun.

DS: So that was the statement from Leonard Peltier, and right now I think we're going to have another song. This song that we will be playing now is **Floyd Red Crow Westerman**. Floyd Red Crow Westerman was recently honoured by Buffy Sainte-Marie at the **Native Beat Two Concert at Massey Hall** where he was commemorated as a "Creative Native" by Buffy. Buffy has had this project for a number of years, where she presents them with this medallion. This

album is entitled ***Red Crow***. Floyd is from the **Oglala-Sioux Nation**, and the song is “**Custer Died for Your Sins**,” here on Smoke Signals.