

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1994-04-09
Segment 3
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Dan Smoke reminds listeners to visit the first annual Welcoming the Nations Gathering held by the First Nations Student Association at the University of Western Ontario. After, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke tell listeners about their experiences at the Skydome Powwow in Toronto that they attended on the past weekend.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Sge:no. Skanako:ka? Aanii. Aniish na? And come on down to the first annual **Welcoming the Nations Gathering**. We are here, [to be transcribed]. This is put on by the **First Nations Student Association and Friendship Society** of the **University of Western Ontario**. This is taking place over at **Alumni Hall**. Admission is free. **Host drum** is the **White Eye Singers**. MC is **Dean George**. The **N'Amerind Friendship Centre** community eagle staff is present there. And it's been coordinated by First Nations Services Director, **Vivian Peters**. Over at Alumni Hall, dancing, drumming, singing will be taking place until about 5:00 this afternoon. So, we urge all of our listeners to head on down to Alumni Hall, where admission is free and you can be there to witness and maybe buy some traditional First Nations pottery, leatherwork, beadwork, anything that is pleasing to the eye and ears and all the senses are there.

I know there's some **sweetgrass**, medicine wheels, sweetgrass, dream catchers are also on display there. And talk! Talk to the craftsperson, talk to the person who made it. Ask them where they get their inspiration, ask them what it means. If you don't understand, please ask. You know, these people are very approachable. They're there so that you can learn. And this is a cross-cultural experience, this Welcoming the Nations Gathering over at Alumni Hall. It is very cross-cultural, cross-educational. We want to be able to inform and educate our brothers and sisters, our own **Anishinaabe Ongweoweh** brothers and sisters, as well as our non-native brothers and sisters about what is happening.

DS: Right now, we're going to talk a little bit about the **Skydome Powwow** that Mary Lou and I were at this past weekend. It's the first powwow that's ever been held in the Skydome. Two years ago, they had a powwow over at the **Canadian National Exhibition**, which was also international in scope, and it was just huge. It was a great event. It was a fun time, and it was upwards of 10 drums there with about a thousand dancers. That was at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1992. At the Skydome, I guess they had anticipated to have the same number of drum groups, the same number of registered dancers in attendance. Unfortunately, either through the media, through the promotions, publicity, there was nothing at all in Toronto, there was nothing to help promote...like, I didn't see anything in **the Star**, or **the Sun**, or **the Globe and Mail** to talk about this First Nations gathering. But the time that they did choose to hold it was **Easter** weekend.

First Nations people, not all First Nations people traditionally celebrate Easter. Easter's not...Easter is...you know, some of our First Nations brothers and sisters are **Christian** and they do celebrate Easter, but for a number of people of our brothers and sisters who are learning the traditional ways, Easter's not celebrated. But it is a time where we were able to reserve the Skydome for this traditional gathering. And there, the host drum was the **White Fish Bay Singers**, who are the best drum, the best singers in the world, who have won at a competition held throughout the powwow season and culminating down at the **Albuquerque**

Gathering of Nations Powwow which takes place down in **Albuquerque, New Mexico** later on this month. I believe in two weeks there will be the Gathering of Nations Powwow down in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The MC was **David White** from **Walpole Island**, now living in **Toronto**. And there was, I would say, at least 5-600 dancers there. There was six eagle staffs, and it was good to see these eagle staffs coming from all over **Ontario** as well as **Michigan**. I know my friend, **George Martin**, brother from the **Ojibwe Nation, Three Fires Confederacy**, was there and he brought in his eagle staff from Michigan, so it was good to see him. And Mary Lou, what were some of your observations on the powwow? How did you find the overall attendance, the overall singing, the overall feeling of everybody who was there in attendance at the powwow?

MARY LOU SMOKE: Well, I thought it was pretty good, Dan. It was really great to see a lot of people that I haven't seen in a long time. People that I haven't seen at other regular powwows that we go to. A lot of people came out for this special event that was happening in Toronto. And Toronto does mean *the gathering place*. I'm not sure if that's Ojibwe or **Iroquois**, but that's what it does mean in Indian. It was really spectacular to see the view on the screen at the Skydome, that great big huge screen you see all the time in the sports events. Where I was sitting on the top with my mom, way up at the very top when you first come in, you can't...the people down on the bottom look like ants.

DS: Yeah.

MLS: So, we really couldn't see the **Grand Entry** that well, and then they put it on the screen on the top and it was just spectacular. It was really something.

DS: Yeah, I know like, that screen is supposed to be something like seven storeys high, and it's really...it really captures, you know, each, as the camera focused on each dancer who came in the Grand Entry, it would focus in on them, and you could almost see the expression on some of the dancers' faces. You know, the seriousness, the intent, the good feelings that it aroused in all the observers and everyone who was there to stand in solemn silence to acknowledge our gratitude to the **Creator** for this gathering and for **Mother Earth**, and for all the traditional teachings that usually we hear a lot of at these gatherings. And like, we even saw, that's where we first saw our brother, **Lionel Whitebird**, whose picture was flashed up there on the screen. And I haven't seen him in a long, long, long time. And then it was really good because right after the powwow ended, the following day he came down to a purification lodge with us, and we all went in and had a **sweat lodge** ceremony together which was, again, part of our traditional way that we feed our spirits, cleanse our minds and bodies.

That was good to see him, and it was kind of another reunion of sorts. So, yeah, the powwow was a great event. Apparently, they're going to do it next year, same time, Easter weekend. And it'll probably be bigger. I'm sure that the word will get out now that they do, you know, make everyone feel welcome. They make the dancers feel welcome, you know, everyone from all over, they're accommodated. And there's lots of food there. I know McDonald's tried to tell some of the food vendors what they can and cannot serve as far as food, traditional native cuisine, but we just told them, you know, look, we're serving the kind of traditional foods here and no one can stop us from doing that. So, it was good to be able to have corn soup, strawberry drinks, and fry bread, [to be transcribed]. That was a nice traditional meal. And Mary Lou, anything more on you'd like to say about that, or I guess, just looking forward to the powwow season now?

MLS: Yeah, I am.

DS: Yeah. So am I, so am I. It's good to be able to kick it off first there at the Skydome and come home and right here in our home community, to be able to kick off another powwow.

MLS: And don't forget, we're having the **N'Amerind Friendship Powwow** at Fanshawe Park this year. It's changed location and it's going to be a traditional powwow instead of a competition, so everything's going to be different this year. If you want to volunteer to help on the planning committee, the meetings are on Thursday evenings at 6pm at N'Amerind Friendship Centre at 260 Colborne Street. You can call N'Amerind at [redacted] and leave a message for somebody to call you back if you want to get involved with that.

DS: That's July 2nd and 3rd. That will be at the **Fanshawe Park Conservation Area**. It's not going to be at **Longwoods** where it has been traditionally for the past 20 years, something like that. Okay. One of the vendors, one of the person, people, who was back there at the Skydome Powwow that we've come to know is actor, radio producer, radio show host, almost narrator, **Gary Farmer**. He comes from the **Six Nations Reserve**. He's been in a number of movies. He's been in a number of plays. We saw him in ***Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing***. He was also in the movie ***Powwow Highway***. And he was there selling his magazine called ***The Runner***. *The Runner* is a magazine for communicative arts. It's a glossy magazine, it's kind of plush. He edits it, and Mary Lou, you've been a contributing writer to it.

MLS: I sure have been, Dan. I've got my name put in the front cover. Wow. My mother's so proud.

DS: Yeah, well, Mary Lou has been writing about Smoke Signals, and that's a feature that the magazine has on all First Nations radio programs that exist in the province of Ontario. It's mainly for Ontario, and there's a lot of arts creative people living here in Ontario. Gary has regularly featured a lot of those artists in that magazine, *The Runner*. So, on the new issue, we saw **Tomson Highway** who was recently conferred here at the University of Western Ontario with a Doctorate of Letters. He's now called Dr. Tomson Highway. He got his degrees in English and music here at Western back in the 70s. Now he's been busy writing plays, he's been busy being the artistic director for the first Native theatre production company called **Native Earth Performing Arts** in Toronto. He has also been conferred with the **Order of Canada** for 1993. So, these are great honours bestowed on our Ojibwe brother, **Cree** brother. Cree brother from **Manitoba**, Tomson Highway.

But Gary gave to us one of his productions. It's called ***Our Natural Way***. This is a documentary on how Native children on the Oneida Reserve, now called **Onyota'a:ka**, which means *people of the standing stone*, near **London**, Ontario, are learning the Oneida language and culture. Now, today, over at the First Peoples Gathering, Welcoming the Nations Gathering, over at Alumni Hall, it was the young people from the [to be transcribed] Learning Centre, which is in Onyota'a:ka, in the Oneida language means *natural way learning centre*. It's like a freedom school. Children over there are learning the cycles of creation, and they're learning the language. Everything is done in the Oneida language. And so, what the children have been doing a lot in recent times is they're going to different functions and they're performing an opening **Thanksgiving** address where they are acknowledging gratitude to the Creator for all of creation. They start from the water. They start from the life that lives in the water, and they go up to the stars. They cover all life, and they do it in the Onyota'a:ka language. All done in the Oneida language. So, this is very exciting for them to be doing this at this first annual Welcoming the Nations Gathering at Alumni Hall. And so, they're carrying on a tradition. They're carrying on the spirit of our ancestors. So, this is a **Laughing Dog Play Production**, produced

and narrated by Gary Farmer. This program, he said that we could play for our listeners of Smoke Signals. This is ***Our Natural Way***, here on Smoke Signals.