

Smoke Signals Radio Program Episode 1993-02-27

Segment 1

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*Dan Smoke introduces Mary Pitawanakwat from Birch Island First Nations who will share her negative experiences with discrimination and harassment in the workplace and empowers all brothers and sisters to speak out. Mary shares her connection with the Turtle Island Support Group in Toronto.*

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

**DAN SMOKE:** Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no, shekoli! Yes, you're listening to Smoke Signals, a First Nations radio program, here at Radio Western CHRW 94.7 FM. We are heard every Saturday from one 1:00 to 3:00, and we are changing the face of radio. So tune into Smoke Signals. My name is Dan Smoke, and my co-host is Mary Lou Smoke and I'm in the studio today with our technicians Hal Gilpin and John Turner and Hal's son, Justin.

**JOHN TURNER:** Hello people. Hello brothers and sisters.

**HAL GILPIN:** Hi.

**DS:** So it's a beautiful day out there today and we're in here to share some of that beauty that's all around us, and we have a good show lined up today. We are going to listen to one of our **Ojibwe Potawatomi** sisters, who comes originally from **Birch Island First Nations** which is located up on Manitoulin Island. She's presently living in Regina, Saskatchewan, and her name is **Mary Pitawanakwat**. And we'll be listening to her and what she has to share of her experience with racial and sexual discrimination in the poison work environment. And I think that what she has to share with us will help empower, you know, some of our sisters, brothers who are experiencing the same discrimination and harassment out there in the workplaces. You know, it doesn't have to be in the public service commission, or the public service where she was working within the Department of Secretary of State, it can be anywhere. It can be on the assembly line, it can be in the restaurants, it can be in the department stores, it can be in the assembly...or it could be in the factories. And this is a, you know, anything that is of a poison

work environment nature, it...this kind of discriminatory behaviour results in occupational stress, and Mary's gonna talk a little bit about that. You know, how the occupational stress took its toll in her life, and on the lives of her two children. So, we're very fortunate to have Mary able to come and share with us. She doesn't get out to Southern Ontario very much, but she just happened to be in Toronto speaking at an engagement there for a women's union this weekend. And she was also speaking for the Turtle Island Support Group in Toronto.

And it was through the Turtle Island Support Group, to whom we are greatly appreciative, that we are able to get her to come down to London to share with us at the **Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples London Chapter**, [to be translated], which is located right here in London. And she was at [to be translated], at the **N'Amerind Friendship Centre**, on Tuesday this past week. Tuesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>. So that's a little later on in the show. Just like to...you know, tell our listeners that, you know, over the past little while, we...myself and Mary Lou have been travelling. We went to the Trent University Elder's Youth Conference. This conference has been going on for ten years now. The theme this year was seeking peace of mind. And this conference hopes to, by bringing young people and Elders together in a good way, hopes to carry on the tradition that has been passed on to us from generations before us of absorbing and sharing of the wisdom and knowledge that Elders have to the future generations. Yeah, this is very in concert with the whole understanding that Native people have of creation, of the natural world, and the natural world processes. Everything is based on the cycle, everything is based on the circle, there is no beginning, there is no end.

There is just continuum, there is just everlasting peace and harmony. And as Native people, we are part of this big, sacred, huge circle and cycle of life. It is our duty as young people to absorb, to go out and seek out the Elders, the spiritual leaders, the ceremonial leaders, and learn from them the knowledge and wisdom that they have, the knowledge and wisdom that has been passed on down to them. It is our duty to go out there and get that and absorb that. And the only way to do that is to go where the Elders are, to go and seek their, their knowledge and wisdom by...either by asking them directly or offering them **tobacco** and asking for help. And just...going to them and approaching them with questions. Questions that seem to have no answers in our immediate minds and hearts as to, you know, what...why...who we are as a people. And as Native people, we have, from the beginning of our lives, we know that we are brought in this world with Native values, with a Native language, with our own songs, with our own dances, our own ceremonies. And all throughout our life, we have to figure out, you know, an identity to all that.

And on a deeper level, Native people all over Turtle Island are finding out that our culture, our way of life, is based on the value that everything is real. And the second major law, understanding, is that we are all related. And because of those two—that we are all related and everything is alive—we try to encompass that in our lives, we try to share and care for all creation. And so, we are, on a deeper level, we are related to everything. So, everything, the

animals, the air, the water, the fire, the Earth. Everything is our relative. And as our relative, we have to treat that relative the way we would treat our own brother, our own sister, our own mother. And we do, we extend that respect, that honour, in the way that the teachings that our Elders have share them to us. And the way that they share them to us is in these teachings that have been passed down to them. And they in turn pass down to us as young people. So that when it is our turn, when we enter into the thunder stage of our lives, it is our duty to pass on that knowledge, that wisdom, to the future generations. And we have to learn to, in our lifetime, to pass it on in the same way that it was passed on to us. The greatest gift that we can give to the future generations is to share all that knowledge, all that wisdom, all those teachings, unconditionally, the way that they have been shared to us.

So that is the basis of the cyclical nature of how Native people look at our philosophy of life. You know, we are part of this circle. We are part of the cycle of creation. And as a small, minute part of that big, giant circle, big, giant cycle of life, you know, we have certain responsibilities, certain rights, certain obligations. And to honour those, we acknowledge in our ceremonies, you know, how grateful we are to the Creator that he gave us, or that he's put here, here for us to use, to learn from, to be taught from. All creation. And so, when we look at the elements of nature—the air, the water, the Earth, the fire—you know, we have to give respect to the Creator and give thanks to him that he has given us that. And that we in turn, honour the air, the water, the Earth, and the fire by not polluting it, by not, you know, dirtying it, by not contributing to its demise. Because our basis law of nature is that if you ruin your air, if you dirty your water, then you're going to affect, harmfully, yourself in the long run. And you're gonna harmfully affect your future generations. So, we have to learn today what not to do and what to do so that our future generations have a place that they can live in that is clean, that is respectful, that is not harmful.

The life-giving forces that the Sun provides us, the life-giving forces that the wind provides us. You know, these are all...they give us life and we have to respect that. We cannot dirty that. And so that is the journey that a lot of Native people are on today. The healing journey. You know, healing themselves, healing their families, empowering their families to heal. And then when our families begin to heal, our communities begin to heal, and as we see our communities heal and get stronger, their unity begins to speak for itself because the unity is with...with unity there is power. They say that when you take one arrow, you can break it very easily. But when you put seven arrows, representing seven generations, representing the seven directions. You know, when you take those seven arrows, you cannot break them. And that's because it has power now, because there's unity. Native people are the same way.

And so, as Nations we have to help empower our Nations and then empower the other Nations. The Black nation, the white nation, and the yellow nation. So that together, we can all together heal our Mother Earth. And we can all heal the life-giving forces that today are harming us. You know, the water's polluted and we're drinking it, the air is polluted and we're breathing it, the Sun is cancerous, it's giving us skin cancer. You know, you can't sit out in the Sun. And these

are things...our own soil, the soil is starting to be polluted. And these are the things we have to start thinking about changing so that our future generations have clean air, clean water, you know, have a Sun that's life-giving, and have an Earth that's life-giving. So that's a little bit about the philosophy of First Nations people. And we're gonna hear a little bit about that throughout our show. And we hope to bring that message to our brothers and sisters out there who are wanting to learn more, who are wanting to become sensitized to some of the issues that are facing Native people. And, on a deeper level, we're finding out that, you know, we're all in this together. We are all trying to become humble, we are all learning trust, learning forgiveness. These are qualities that we were all given when we first came into this world, and for some of us, it takes us a long time just to start getting those qualities back. But it's never too late. And you're always in good company.

So, with that, we'll talk...I just wanted to share that about the Elder's conference because there were a number of exceptional Elders and traditional peoples. Just to give you an idea who some of these traditional peoples were, and a little bit about what they do, I'd just like to run off some of the names. **Avis Archambault**, she's **Lakota Gros Ventre** from Fort Belknap, Montana. And she's working in the area of alcohol counselling, alcoholism, substance abuse. And she has pioneered the talking circle. For some of our listeners who are not too familiar with what the talking circle is, it's a way for our brothers and sisters to come together. It's a way for our brothers and sisters to remove the code of silence, and I'll just tell you a little bit about it. A talking circle, or healing circle, is the process undertaken to promote a healing based upon Native traditional belief systems. We keep in mind at all times the teaching of the rock, which is faith, the eagle feather, which is balance in our lives, or the talking stick, which is honesty in our lives. The sacred circle begins with the smudging of **sweetgrass** or **sage** to allow participants to be of one mind and of one heart.

The spiritual beliefs say that our prayers are carried out with the smoke to the Creator. The participants then join hands in prayer for guidance in the circle. The talking circle begins with the first speaker holding a sacred rock, given to the circle by our respected Elder. The rock is passed around in a clockwise direction to allow each person an opportunity to speak from the heart. Nobody is interrupted at any time, as patience and good listening skills are highly regarded within the Native knowledge systems. It is believed that each time we speak, or listen, to another's struggles, or our own, a bit more personal healing takes place. Particularly to those who are experiencing a breakdown in their family relationships or personal lives for whatever reason. All that is shared in the circle is highly respected and not repeated outside the circle, thus honouring the trust that is established in the sacred circle. People are not obliged to share if they so choose. And this is also respected. In traditional Native society, a sharing of one's journey is a great teacher, for it acknowledges that the pain, laughter, and love that we experience can bring us closer together and help us to learn from one another's experience. That's a little bit about the talking circle, healing circle.

**Ernie Benedict** was there. **Eddie Benton-Banai** was there. He's the grand chief of the **Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge**. **Paul Bourgeois** was there. He's an **Ojibwe** from Sarnia. He is a member of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. Maria Campbell. She is of **Cree**, Scottish, and French descent. She is a writer. James Carpenter, Barbara Clifton, **Dave Courchene**. Dave Courchene is known as **White Sun Man** of the **Eagle Clan**. He is a spiritual leader of the **Anishinaabe Nation** from Manitoba. Joe Couture was there. He is a **Metis** Cree who is a personal teacher of mine. He is now currently working in corrections for the Canadian government and as an educational consultant. His interests lie in Native ceremonies, western therapeutic techniques, as well as Native adult and youth addictions. Nick Deleary, he is an Ojibwe Anishinaabe from **Munsee**, and he lives presently out on **Oneida**. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto and a second degree **meday** of the Three Fires Lodge. Ralph Fireman was there. David Gahew, a **Mi'kmaq**, a wise man, medicine man, healer. John **Hookamaw** from Ottawa [to be translated]. Anne Jacques, she is a **Mohawk** Elder from **Akwesasne**. Janice Longboat, she is from the **Turtle Clan**, **Six Nations of the Grand River**, she's from the **Cayuga Nation**. Sylvia Maracle. Sylvia's a Mohawk woman of the **Wolf Clan**. She is executive director of the **Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres**. Peter **Ochse**, he is a respected Elder in the Native community. He is my...he is Joe Couture's teacher. He is often referred to as the Elder of the Elders. Michael Thrasher. Michael Thrasher is Metis from Alberta who now lives in Victoria, British Columbia. Shirley Williams, she is **Odawa** Ojibwe. She was formerly from **Wikhi**, now she lives in Peterborough.

So, these were some of the people who were at the Elder's conference. We do have some footage of Dave Courchene that we're able to get and that we will share with you on a future show. I'd just like to say, at this time, that we're looking forward to sharing with you other Elder's conferences. There's one that's coming up in March. It'll be on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>. And we will, Smoke Signals will be there, and we'll hopefully bring back coverage and some footage from that conference as well to share with you. Right now, we're gonna listen to **Paul Ortega** and **Joanne Shenandoah** and their album **Loving Ways** and the song we're gonna hear is "**Indian Love Song**," here on Smoke Signals.