

Smoke Signals Radio Program Episode 1993-07-17
Segment 1
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Dan and Mary Lou Smoke recall that attending the N'Amerind Powwow. Dan and guest Hal Gilpin tell listeners about the emotional experience that comes with watching the Grand Entry at a powwow. After, Dan brings listeners' attention to the realities of young First Nations people dying and calls for collective consciousness of the problem to start to bring healing to Native communities.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke
Guest(s): Hal Gilpin

DAN SMOKE: Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no, shekoli! Skanako:ka? Aniish na? And greetings to everybody, all the Smoke Signals listeners out there. You're listening to Smoke Signals First Nations Radio, here at Radio Western, changing the face of radio. My name is Dan Smoke, and I'm in the studio this afternoon with my co-hostess Mary Lou Smoke and Hal Gilpin, our techie, our technical producer. Hi Mary Lou, hi Hal.

MARY LOU SMOKE: Hi Dan!

HAL GIPLIN: Hello Dan! Welcome back, you guys.

DS: Yeah, we have been away for a little while. I guess we should tell our listeners a little bit about what's been happening in our lives so that they can kind of catch up on some of the excitement that we've been witnessing out there as we've been travelling around. As most people are aware, we did a broadcast on the **N'Amerind Powwow** two weeks ago. The N'Amerind Powwow was right out here at the **Longwoods Conservation Area**. We had a couple special guests. **Gilbert Cheechoo** was the MC and **Alex Kakapshe**.

MLS: Yeah, Alex Kakapshe. He comes from up **Batchawana Bay**.

DS: Do you want to tell them a little bit about Alex?

MLS: Well, I don't know that much about Alex but I do know that he knows my father. They were friends up in Batchawana. And he knows my relatives. He was glad to see a fellow Batchawanian.

DS: That was really nice. I know that he was really heartened to meet you, to meet the daughter of an old drinking companion of his from early years, earlier in his life when he used to live a lifestyle that many of us have lived and are trying to change and heal from, and he was really glad to see that you're on that same journey as well. He did have a **pipe ceremony** the Thursday prior to the **Native Heritage** celebration, and then he had a **sunrise ceremony** Friday morning, Saturday morning, and Sunday morning. So, I believe these were well attended. Unfortunately, we didn't happen to make it to them because they were held out at the Powwow grounds on the Longwoods Conservation Area so that's quite a jaunt for us and we don't have a car, so we're pretty much dependent on someone getting us out there at 6:30 in the morning. That's pretty early for most people. Anyways, it was a really good powwow. We really had a good time.

MLS: I'd like to thank all the volunteers. There was many, many people who came out to volunteer and help in various areas that had to be attended to, and I really want to thank the parking volunteers on my committee that I was in charge of. Hopefully I can call on everybody next year, and everybody that's listening will volunteer next year, too.

DS: Yeah, I think if we got a little bit earlier start on the announcement of requesting of volunteers to come on out and help us out, I think that would be an improvement for next year. Something that we can learn from because I know I've helped with the parking the past two years and it's always like leaving it to the last minute and it's really hard, trying to get it organized in such a short time. But I don't know, maybe that's just the state of the way we do things, I don't know. But I do want to also thank all the people who did help out at the committee especially for the powwow, for another successful powwow. We did have some hot, hot, hot weather. Boy, was it ever hot! I know getting up there and dancing whilst in our tribals, I really was thinking about the air conditioner back at home. You know, many times, because it was just so stifling hot. And there was a lot of people there. There was a number of people, we did have a number of visitors. **KD Williams** from **Oklahoma**, he was there. He's **Cherokee**, Cherokee I believe. Or **Comanche**? Cherokee? Yeah, and it was good to see him up here sharing a little bit some of his ways. But I thought that Hal made an interesting comment. I guess it was one of his sisters that was talking about the **Grand Entry** that she happened to witness up at the **Ottawa Powwow**, up at the **Odawa Friendship Centre**, that they hosted last June. She was really impressed by the Grand Entry, which to me, I think is the most exciting, the most emotionally uplifting dance of the whole powwow.

HG: Yeah, she was...she's from **Ottawa**, first of all, and she was up in **Northern Ontario** visiting my mother up there and she was...it was her first time she had ever attended anything like that and she was just, you know, to hear her talk about it, she was completely taken away. She was talking about warm feelings in the centre of her chest and looking around at all the other people, a lot of non-Native tourists and things like, people like that who were there and there were people with tears running down their eyes. It was an emotional experience that she couldn't compare to anything she'd ever seen before. She couldn't really describe it, she said, it's something you have to be there to appreciate.

DS: Yeah, I know, words really don't do justice to it because we've read a story that was written by the **Windspeaker Publication**. We read that story that was written by one of the powwow dancers who was in a Grand Entry and he was talking about the building up of the excitement as everyone's getting ready, and the MC as he announces that the Grand Entry is about to begin, and at the drumroll call is all said and the drums are ready with the Grand Entry song, and then this will be followed by the Grand Entry into the dance arena of all the various types of dancers who dance according to...the men come first with their traditional, fancy, **grass dance** outfits, then the women, followed by the **traditional, fancy, jingle** dress. And then you have the children after that. To see this procession into the dance arena is really...boy, I know for myself even being in the flag party, it's really exciting. Your mind is just on so many beautiful things, you know, you're just in the spaces of time and beauty where you just want to celebrate all life and you're part of it. You really feel like you're-

HG: Overwhelmed.

DS: Yeah! Like, to me, I know lots of times I think of how, you know, the powers, the forces, the energies that created the Earth, that created the Earth as we know it today, how it all came to be, how it created everything. And then I think, that same power, that same force, that same energy is inside each and every one of us, you know. And that's how I'm so connected at that

time during the Grand Entry. And like, I see it from a different perspective because I don't see it as it's coming into the dance arena, but I see it as they come around and finish the first full circle. By that time, I see some of the grass dancers, or the men's fancy dancers as they come, and I usually witness the women as they just enter the dance arena, and it's really special. Really special. And I know that the crowd must just, or all the people watching must really feel that doubly or triple the intensity with which I feel it because I didn't see the men – that's one of my favourites too, the men's traditional dance. Watching them dance, it's really unique.

HG: Yeah. Well, the way my sister spoke of it, it was beyond a spectacle, it was a feeling she couldn't really comprehend why she was feeling, what she was feeling, you know. She spoke of the drum and how the drum, you know, the beat of the drums-

DS: Heartbeat.

HG: Felt like they were going right through here.

DS: Yeah, heartbeat.

HG: She was really moved, really moved by this.

DS: Yeah, we call the drum the heartbeat of our **Mother Earth**, and boy is it ever appropriate at a powwow to hear that heartbeat because everyone's in beat with it, everyone's in tune with it, and it's just an incredible sensation to be so much a part of it like that. And last week, we went down to the **Kettle Point Powwow**, again there was a number of, a lot of people there as well. I met another fellow staff carrier by the name of **George Martin** from **Michigan** who I became friends with, that I met with over the weekend, so we've become friends now and exchanged phone numbers and addresses and hopefully we'll be in touch. Maybe I can help him out, maybe he can help me out, you know. When we look after something like **Eagle Staffs**, it's...sometimes the stress of that can affect us and we don't know it's affecting us. Another staff carrier would see that. Last night, we went down to the **Walpole Island Powwow**. We were picking **sweetgrass** down in Walpole this week and I ran into another fellow staff carrier, **Don McCloud** from **Cape Croker**, and he's down there with a food booth and he was just sharing with us some of his journeys so far this year.

He hasn't been at the same powwows that we have been, but usually we see him two or three times during the powwow circuit. But he was down at Walpole. That's where we would be today, at Walpole Island, but I'm glad we did get a reprieve so that we can be speaking here from our heart to our listeners here at Smoke Signals and kind of share that. One of the things that happened at the Kettle Point Powwow last week was that they had an **honour dance**, or a **memorial dance**, for **Rusty Thomas**, who was a champion **hoop dancer**. He's originally from **Six Nations**. He's a relative of mine and he went out west and he learned how to **hoop dance**. Now, hoop dance is quite an interesting dance because they take a number of these hoops, and they dance through them. They're a lot smaller than a hula hoop. They dance through these hoops, they put them on their arms, their legs, and they do different kinds of configurations, and they make different kinds of symbols using their arms and their legs, always keeping in time with the beat. The heartbeat. I guess about two, three years ago, he was dancing, doing the hoop dancing demonstration at the Kettle Point Powwow and I guess he made one turn and he was doing his 180 degree turns and he danced, he was going around you know, so that everyone can see what he's doing with these hoops as he's making these changes, and he died. He died right there on the dance arena, right there on the dance floor. And during that, I mean it was so sudden, it just took everyone by shock. You know, when you think about it, he died doing what

he wanted to do all his life, and that's what he loved, to dance. It was really nice that they did this memorial for him. The Rusty Thomas memorial.

Also, there was an unfortunate circumstance down there. There was a death in the community. A young man by the name of **Bill Herman** who Mary Lou and I have come close to. He was the doorman for the **sweat lodge** down in the community of Kettle Point for a good friend, for a good brother of ours, **Dick Bressette**. And young Bill was learning a good way. Dick had taken him under his wing and was showing him and sharing with him the teachings that he's absorbed down in his travels throughout **Turtle Island** and Bill was learning this. And the last thing I remember about Bill in a real good way was I was watching on TV, Channel 10 news, how they were witness at a school function. I guess there was a powwow at one of the local schools down by Kettle Point, and during the Grand Entry ceremony, the cameras and people were taking pictures of this Grand Entry and not respecting the idea that you do not take pictures of something as sacred as that. And there was this young man who was running around, stopping people from taking pictures and asking people to take off their hats because he was wanting them to respect the ways of the First Nations people of Turtle Island and so the interviewer, or the person who was doing a story on this, came up to him and got a few words from him, and I remember Bill, when they flashed on Bill, I recognized Billy right away and when it flashed on him, they said it was Bill who told the journalist that we don't take pictures of something as sacred as this.

This is something that we record with our minds and our hearts, and these are the types of things that we don't try to commercialize or take pictures of and we hold that in our hearts because it's a feeling that we always want to have, and we don't want to cut that feeling off which picture taking does, which hand clapping does. I mean, you wouldn't want to cut off the good feelings that you have from seeing a beautiful sunset or witnessing the birth of a baby. You don't want to cut those feelings off, and in this instance, that's what they were doing. They were trying to freeze that moment which you can't do. I mean, that moment has to live on in all of us. So he stood up and said, how would you like it if we started taking pictures or started disrespecting the national anthem? I know if the tables were turned, there would be a very adverse reaction by the general populous. So, that's something that along the way, he learned this and he's standing up for it, he was defending Native rights, and it was really unfortunate that whatever personal problems he had, he couldn't share them. There still is a code of silence in our communities and we...there's this fear that we still, that's still lingering that is the direct result of the intervention of Western civilization on Native communities and Native families and Native individuals. So, we're still dealing with that and it's circumstances like that that really set us back and we really, actually, will give us more incentive to start, to begin that healing journey so that we don't lose more of our youth.

As Hal was bringing up, pointing out to me earlier today, up in Northern Ontario, the **Nishnawbe Aski Nation**, NAN, they are now dealing with a number of suicides that are just rampant all over Northern Ontario because the young people don't have anything to do. And yet, what does the government want to do? They want to send in psychiatrists, they want to send in church people, they want to send in all these people that are just going to find out very simply that there's nothing for the young people to do and that's what we have to start looking at, finding out things for them to do in a constructive way that's not destructive like alcohol and gasoline sniffing and glue sniffing. But that's the communities that are right across Turtle Island. A lot of our isolated communities are like **Davis Inlet** and you know, when the media aren't sitting right there camped on the doorstep, these things are happening all the time and we don't know exactly how destructive that is because our people are dying and it's time that we raised awareness for that, and it's time that you know, as awareness is raised that our collective consciousness can

begin that healing. It's up to us as individuals so that our families become empowered, so that our communities begin the healing, and as Nations, we heal each other. We help heal each other, and bring back that sacred circle, and bring back those sacred items, bring back the language, the songs, the dances.

DS: One reason I brought this up was because the spirit world is a new journey and the funeral that was held down in Kettle Point was a very sacred, traditional ceremony that was conducted by a friend of ours, **Sugar Bear**, from Walpole Island, and it was really beautiful the way that it was all done, outside in a traditional way, which is our way that was given to us and it was done with the utmost of respect and honour for our departed brother, young Bill Herman. So we'd just like to dedicate this song to young Bill. It's called "**Journey to the Spirit World,**" by **Buddy Red Bow**, from the album entitled *Journey to the Spirit World*, here on Smoke Signals.