

SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE

By Mary Lou Smoke
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Every day when I awake, I am greeted by music. No it's not from the am/fm radio alarm clock that sits on my dresser, it's from the birds that sing outside of my windows. They usually start to sing just before the sun begins to rise, when the first few rays of light invade the darkness.

I was born singing! Ever since I can remember I have had a song in my head or coming out of my mouth. When I was a young girl, my mom would wake me up at 2:00 a.m. after the hotels closed to sing 'Stand By Your Man' to friends and relatives who had gathered at our house. Although this was not a regular occurrence it did happen several times throughout my young life.

Over the years I have come to know many songs and have sung in many places. I learned how to play the guitar at the age of 19 and I can still manage to make a fairly decent noise come from out of that wooden box.

Vern Harper used to have Pipe Ceremonies at his home at the Maples in Toronto during the 70's. As a young family, my husband, son and myself would attend these Ceremonies. Vern would often ask me to sing and play my guitar before the Ceremony began. At that time I could not tune my guitar, and I was very fortunate that I could call up my friend Gabe Gaudet (who has since gone on to the Spirit World). He would listen to the guitar over the telephone and tell me which way to turn the keys to tune it to the right sound.

In 1977, my family was struck with a tremendous tragedy. At that time I hung up my guitar and quit singing publicly.

I continued on in this mourning fashion until the beginning of the '90's when my husband and I ran into Vern and his partner Jerrilyn. They invited us to a Sweat Lodge. After we had gone back for a few more Lodges, Vern asked me to sing one of the Sweat Lodge songs. This was to be my re-introduction to sharing the songs of my people with my brothers and sisters.

After attending hundreds and hundreds of ceremonies, sweats and rituals, people started giving me traditional songs. I have been taught by my teachers that the songs are for sharing and that you should know where the song comes from and what they mean - to sing the appropriate song at the appropriate time.

Singing and humming is terrific therapy for getting rid of those negative ions that seem to

attach to you for no reason. I very often will be at the sink in the kitchen, either preparing something or cleaning up from preparing something when the negative vibes will kick in. I will start humming the Strong Woman's Song, start singing it very gently, and then usually, by the time I'm finished whatever the project may be, I am singing that song loud and clear and the negativity is gone. I also sing a lot while going for my daily walks.

Songs are intended to warm the heart, to cheer the spirit and to strengthen the people. Songs are for our own personal healing and to help heal others when we share them. Songs are sung to celebrate the cycles of creation and there are songs to acknowledge the first fruit of the year and the first vegetable of the year.

There are songs to honor the fasters and songs to honor the sundancers.

All of these songs are sacred and are to be shared.

I do not belong to a secret society. My teachers have taught me to share the songs with all of my brothers and sisters. This is why I am teaching the songs of our Ancestors to many of the Anishinawbe women in the area - so that they can take those songs and use them in a good way to teach our people the ways of our people. This has been a good learning and healing time for myself and the women that I am teaching. We continue to meet once a week. We Smudge, pray, hug, share, then sing our hearts out.

There are few rules to follow. One major one is to not use the drum or sing Sacred songs when it is your Moon time. Another is to be Drug and Alcohol free. That's it. Pretty simple. Eh!

*Mitake Oyasin
Keep walking in a good way. If
you fail, then just start over
again.*

"RECONNECTING"