

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1998-09-05
Segment 5
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Dan Smoke discusses the meaning of the Thanksgiving Address, which gives thanks for everything that has been put on the Earth by the Creator for people to live in harmony. Dan Smoke also discusses the importance of listening to the sacred instructions and passing those teachings on to future generations. After, Dan and Mary Lou Smoke encourage listeners to attend a screening of "Smoke Signals," a landmark film in the fact that it is the first feature production to be entirely created by Indigenous peoples.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no! Shekoli! Koolamalsi! Wâciyê. Greetings to all of our listeners of Smoke Signals, First Nations radio, here at CHRW 94.7 FM, London's radio with a difference. And that was **Don Pullen** from the **Common Sacred Ground** CD on the Blue Note label. And the song you just heard was "**The Eagle Staff is First.**" The eagle staff, one of our sacred symbols that is the flag of our people, a flag that precedes all others on this, our Turtle Island, our Mother the Earth. And this, our Turtle Island, in our creation stories we talk about how we give thanks. We talk about how we acknowledge our gratitude for everything that the Creator has put here to provide for us so that we can survive, so that we can live, so that we can have peace and balance in our lives. And we acknowledge all of our beginnings with an acknowledgement we call the **Thanksgiving Address**. The Thanksgiving Address basically gives greeting, gives thanks for everything that has been put here for us to live in harmony and balance. And it is a way for us to acknowledge all the gifts that the Creator has bestowed on every life support system, on every life energy force. So, everything that you see in creation has a gift, has a purpose, has a reason for being. And in our way, we call that the "sacred instruction."

And the sacred instruction is what we as human beings, we are given these sacred instructions, and for us the Native Peoples, we have different forms of sacred instructions. For the **Iroquois**, we have the **Great Law of Peace**. The [to be transcribed]. And it is recited about once every two years in our longhouses, and it takes a long time to recite. And it's recited usually in our language, but in recent years, it has been recited in the English language. One of our Elders who has just left this Earth and passed on to the other side, **Elder Chief Jake Thomas** of the **Cayuga Nation**, of the **Killdeer Clan**, he recited, and he taught the Great Law. A man of great respect, an educator, a founder of the Iroquoian Institute, founder of the Jake Thomas Learning Centre, history language culture professor at Trent University most of his latter years until his retirement. And he has been a great power of example for Native people in how to live according to the instructions that the Creator has blessed us each with. And this Law, the Great Law of Peace, he was able to recite entirely from memory, which is quite a feat because he, in recent years, when he recited it, it would take him upwards of 12 days to recite. 12 days to share the purity of the Great Law of Peace.

The Great Law of Peace is a law that is based on peace of the people, peace amongst the people. It's based on the power of the people, the unity and the strength of that unity of the people. And it's also based on the welfare of the people, the righteousness of the people. And so, the Great Law talks about the collective construct of our culture, of our society, and how we work collectively to achieve sound decisions, to achieve sound laws that will apply equally to everybody, men, women, children, Elders. And also, very important, make sure and ensure that the law applies to the future generations of our people. The coming faces, we call them. The

future generations. The future generations are going to be the inheritors of what we pass on to them, so it is very important that what we absorb in our lifetimes today, we absorb in a good way. We absorb the best that we can, and we share that, and we give that away the best that we can. We give that to all of our brothers and sisters and we pass that on, the sharing of our own collective knowledge and wisdom. We pass that on to younger people, to the future generations. And that is our sacred instruction. That is what we are put here to do. And that is what we try to accomplish in our short time that we are here walking on our Mother the Earth.

And we acknowledge our Father Sky. We acknowledge our eldest brother the Sun, who continues to follow his sacred instruction, rising in the east, setting in the west, providing us with heat, providing us with light. And we also acknowledge our Grandmother the Moon who also provides us with light in the nighttime sky. And she continues to follow her sacred instructions. She continues to purify the water. She continues to look after all female life. She continues to follow her sacred instructions. And then we acknowledge the stars, who are our relatives. They tell us in the constellations. When the constellations move about in the sky, they tell us when it is time for us to do our ceremonies so that we know it's time to harvest, or it's time to plant, or it's time for the strawberries. And we watch all these signs, we watch all this knowledge as it's passed on to us from our Elders. They tell us to watch our relatives the stars. And then we acknowledge the Four Thunders, our Uncles, and the Four Protectors, the celestial beings who look after all spiritual matters.

So that's a little bit about the sacred instructions of the First Nations, and I just wanted to share that and begin our show this day, this [to be transcribed], this beautiful day, with you. And to give you good greetings, and to give you acknowledgements, and to welcome you to journey with us this next couple of hours today.

DS: Today, we wanted to talk a little bit about the movie *Smoke Signals*. I'm in the studio this afternoon with Mary Lou, my wife, partner, of the **Anishinaabe Nation** and **Bear Clan**.

MARY LOU SMOKE: Boozhoo, everybody!

DS: And last night, we got to go and see *Smoke Signals* the movie, directed by Chris Eyre, screen written by Sherman Alexie, and acted with a number of major First Nations actors—Gary Farmer, Monique Mojica, Irene Bedard, **Tantoo Cardinal**, Cody Lightning, Evan Adams, Elaine Miles, Michelle St. John from West Bay. All First Nations actors, a lot of them right from Ontario. And I guess a lot of them were at the premiere in Toronto back on June 26th.

MLS: Yeah, they were, Dan. They were just hanging around, just like ordinary people. They were waiting for their friends and relatives to come. Another one that was there was **Michael Greyeyes**. He was one of the basketball players.

DS: Yeah!

MLS: And last night, at the theatre, Shirley Johnson was there. Her and I went with Mary Sturgeon. We were all excited. But we already knew when to get excited and when to start feeling sad because we had just saw the movie.

DS: Yeah, so, even seeing it the second time, how was it?

MLS: Well, I thought it was really good. It portrayed the relationship of a father and son, and it's very much like many other relationships that are happening today and happening years ago

when we were younger, so I think a lot of people can relate to it. Seeing it a second time, I wasn't as moved as the first time, but I still was overcome at the end.

DS: And that's...well, we don't want to tell our listeners, we don't want to ruin the ending for them. But it is playing down at the New Yorker until Tuesday. We encourage all of our listeners to go out and see this movie. It's a landmark film, just to mark the fact that this is the first film that's totally Native controlled. A feature, full-length production, fully controlled, directed, acted, produced, everything, by First Nations people. We've always said that it's time for us to tell our own story. It's time for us to tell our stories because for too long, for 500 years, we have been listening to his story. Now it's our turn. It's our turn to be heard, as Art Solomon says. It's our turn to tell our story. And we're starting to do that. We have writers now like Sherman Alexie who are writing our stories, who are the keepers of the stories. Lenora Kesha Tobias comes to mind as well. Many, many, many writers, communicators of our stories. And it's interesting because a lot of people don't know that, you know, First Nations people, because our stories are the oldest stories of North America, of Turtle Island, that we are the Elders of Turtle Island. We are the Elders of this land. But people don't recognize that, they don't give any recognition to that.

So, it's time to be heard as well. And by virtue of our stories being the oldest, talking about our relationships with each other, father and son as in *Smoke Signals*, our relationships between us, the people and the Creator, and as I talked about the Great Law, that came directly from the Creator, and we still practice that today. Our relationships with ourselves, and our relationships with all of creation. That is why we do our ceremonies. That is why we conduct ceremony, so that we can become connected to the natural world, to the cosmos, to the spirit world. This connects us. This acknowledges our connection. So that's why we do these ceremonies. So, we urge you to go down to see *Smoke Signals*. It's a great entertainment, it's a great movie. I found that myself, I was very moved, I was very touched. I laughed—it's humorous! It really makes you laugh. Some of the humour may not be readily apparent, but if you've lived on a reserve, as many of us have, grew up on a reserve and witnessed some of the things that are shown in the movie, then you will be moved too. You will identify. And a lot of the things that you see in the movie, you don't have to have lived on the reserve. You can live in the middle of the city someplace and have experienced the same thing. It crosses all boundaries.

And it's...I guess it's just a statement about how we as Native people have learned a behaviour that is negative. We have learned from our oppressors. And it...a learned behaviour that is something we are starting to acknowledge is wrong, and we are starting to heal from that. We are healing in a way that we're stopping the cycle of lateral violence. We're stopping the cycle of alcoholism. We're stopping the cycle of teenage suicide, the cycle of the high rate of incarceration. These are all negative social pathologies that we have somehow inherited from the previous generation, and we have seen the healing that can happen if we want it. And all we have to do as a community of people, as families of people, as individuals, as nations of people, we have the power to change that, to turn that around, and to heal from it, so that no more do we have to live with the family violence. No more do we have to live with the domestic abuse that we grew up with and that many of us are examples of. And so, this is a movie that helps tell our story, and helps us understand better our relationship to each other, and the relationship that we have to solve it. We are the solution. It has to come from us. No one else is going to do it for us, we have to do it ourselves. And that's going to take courage. That's going to take honesty. That's going to take respect, truth, wisdom, humility. It's going to take all of these teachings, all of these values, and that's the way we're going to achieve it. And that's what we want our younger people, that's what we want the future generations to be proud of. That's what we want to pass on to them.

DS: So, a little later on in the show, we're going to listen to **Adam Beach**, a short little interview that we did with him some time ago, and an interview—actually, not an interview but a presentation—by **Gary Farmer**, two of the stars of *Smoke Signals*. Right now, we're going to listen to **J. Hubert Francis**, **Mi'kmaq Nation**, and **Eagle Feather**, his group. This is "**The Indian Song**," from his CD *Reverence*, here on Smoke Signals.