

We can perpetuate our Anishnaabe way of life



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Aaniin Anishnaabek, in this article, I wish to speak with you heart to heart. I am very concerned that we need to focus even more strongly on the first mandate of our tribal Constitution which is to “perpetuate our way of life.” Notice it says “OUR” way of life, not the “dominant” society’s way of life, but “OURS.” It is important to remember who we are as a people and not lose our identity under the heavy influence of the “dominant society’s” ways. Lately, I have been hearing our own peo-

ple say, “the State of Michigan does it this way (it should be good enough for us),” or “this is the way the federal government does it! (it should be good enough for us!).” It saddens my heart to hear our good way of life, our values and our Anishnaabe sensibilities compromised and judged as “less than” in these modern times.

Our Anishnaabe way respects our four-legged relatives. Ask our brother the wolf, which way is better? Our Anishnaabe way cares for the water, respects the water, HONORS the water as sacred. Ask Lake Huron, which way is better? Our beautiful Anishnaabe way would see our women protected from harm by EVERY man of our tribe, because it is understood that women carry the gift of life for our nation. Ask the woman who has been beaten by a man, which way is better?

I am not romanticizing the past, but from the food we eat to the water we drink, we have moved away from our traditional ways and our bodies are paying the price. All of creation, and especially our Mother Earth, is under constant attack from pollu-

tion, overuse, fracking and other forms of exploitation, and we will all suffer as a result.

Holding on to the values, language and beliefs of our ancestors makes us who we are. Our Anishnaabe way of life is to care about each other and all of creation. It is easy to get swept up and lost in the hectic pace of modern day living. But, we have to ensure, for all the generations to come, that we do not lose ourselves in the chaos around us. We must find that balance that not only perpetuates our beautiful way of life, but makes it possible to live it in a world not of our making. It can be done, it “IS” being done.

This month was a hectic one and presented challenges and blessings. In addition to my regular board duties and meetings, I attended our tribe’s homecoming powwow in Sault Ste. Marie, and saw our people living in our good Anishnaabe way. Dancing, drumming, singing and sharing a joy that is uniquely ours. Also, I traveled downstate for a burial. As my family interred some of my brother Michael’s ashes into the Great Lakes Veterans National

Cemetery, I saw an eagle staff and warriors waiting to honor seven other Anishnaabe veterans as they, too, were interred into sacred ground.

In Minnesota, I attended a regional meeting of tribal leaders from across the Midwest. We spoke in a great council about the issues that threaten all of our tribal nations and made plans on the best ways to have our voices heard among state and federal governments. I then traveled to Washington, D.C., and participated in a national drug court training conference aimed at helping tribal courts eliminate the drugs that are killing our people. Everywhere I went, and every tribal person I met, shared a love for our way of life and was working hard to make sure that our ways will always remain. Back home in the U.P., I sat down in a patch of blueberries and reflected on how powerful even the smallest effort to keep our Anishnaabe ways can be. As I looked about, I felt connected to all of our ancestors who, like me, found peace and love in the simple act of being in the woods, gathering berries for our families in that

good Anishnaabe way.

If we all take small steps, little by little we will reclaim that which the Creator gave to us all as Anishnaabe. Learn a few words of our language (there are great YouTube videos), help protect the water or the wolf, treat women as the sacred life givers they are, go to a powwow and listen to the drum or even just gather some berries, our ancestors are there. Together, we can perpetuate our beautiful Anishnaabe way of life.

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