Natives in Upper Midwest protect
their drumming tradition

Leech Lake Band celebrates the
transfer of 11,000 acres

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MN Indigenous Foods for thought and for nourishment

BY LEE EGERSTROM

Native food groups and their culinary experts are making Native and non-Native Minnesotans more aware of the healthy and environmental benefits of utilizing Indigenous foods while making them more presentable and delectable. The effort to reconnect with Indigenous, or Native foods, has been underway since the opening of fresh markets in the spring for locally grown and historical foods. It is scheduled to continue through the Minnesota State Fair at the end of August and well past the fall harvests and foraging seasons.

Evidence of growing consumer interest in Indigenous foods was visible July 11 when the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) held a rescheduled open house celebration at its Four Sisters Farmers Market at 1414 E. Franklin Ave. in Minneapolis. About 700 people gathered in NACDI’s parking lot for the Pow Wow Grounds coffee shop and All My Relations Gallery. It was a makeup celebration after a May rainout, said Destiny Jones (Ho-Chuck Nation), the Four Sisters Farmers Market manager.

The market runs every Thursday until Oct. 31. “This season has been great so far for market attendance,” she added. Attendance has been about double the numbers that gathered in past years at the mid-morning to mid-afternoon farmers market.

Historically, European colonizers learned about Indigenous foods that the Iroquois and other tribes called “the three sisters” — corn, beans and squash. The Minneapolis food market went with Four Sisters by saluting sunflowers in the mix, Jones aid. The Four Sisters’ new logo also includes wild rice “as it is often confused with a ‘sister.’ It is also such an important cultural touchstone for our tribes in Mni Sota,” she said. “We thought it deserved mention.”

Frequent vendors at the farmers market include Indigenous farmers and groups such as Dream of Wild Health, Growing Blue Flowers, Edible Arts MN, Wiishkoban, Gatherings Café, Rusty Patch Farm, Ninijaanis One of Ones and Botanical Atelier. Wiishkoban (“it is sweet” in Ojibwe) is a Minneapolis-based honey, bees wax and sweetgrass vendor for Anna Cardon.

Efforts to raise awareness of Indigenous foods bring together several important players serving the Native populations in the Twin Cities metro area. Among them are:

• Pow Wow Grounds and Frybread Factory Food Truck
Robert (Bob) Rice, proprietor of the Pow Wow Grounds, has added something new to his outreach in purveying Indigenous foods. In May this year he added the Frybread Factory, a food truck that takes similar fare from Pow Wow Grounds out on the road.

This vehicle approach is new but his restaurant has been catering for groups and special events over the years.

Gatherings Café menu: Indigenous, healthy, and gourmet

BY LEE EGERSTROM

The recently reopened Gatherings Café at the Minneapolis American Indian Center is a reconnection for the center with the expansive Indigenous food scene in Minnesota that is especially hot in Minneapolis.

The café was closed during the MAIC’s massive and recently completed expansion and remodeling project. It reopened in late June with a limited schedule.

But visitors are already finding the Gatherings’ phased in approach is serving up memorable food experiences. That was again displayed in July when executive chef Vernon DeFoe displayed his talents with a menu tasting for journalists. DeFoe (Red Cliff Anishinabe) joined Gatherings this past October during the remodeling that moved the café into expanded Franklin Ave. street front space. He has more than two decades of restaurant experience that started with highly awarded Sean Sherman and The Sioux Chef.

As the MAIC describes it, “Under Vernon’s leadership, the café reopened with an expanded team, kitchen, and dining space, increasing its capacity to serve healthy, accessible, Indigenous meals. The café focuses on food native to Turtle Island, combining innovation with ancestral knowledge.”

The tasting offered samples of cedar maple tea, wild rice pancakes, a “root veggie hash,” turkey sausage, “Three Sisters Kale Salad,” hominy cakes, a bison or veggie melt, and for dessert, chia seed pudding.

Breakfasts are served to the public from 8 a.m. to noon, priced between $7 for a breakfast sandwich of egg, roasted pepper aioli and cheese and up to $15 for The Good Way breakfast of scrambled eggs, bison, jalapeno pepper and smoked Gouda cheese.

Other main breakfast offerings include variations of scrambled eggs, wild rice, turkey sausage, pancakes, berries, beans, toast, and with a la carte offerings of greens, fruit, vegetable hash and the oh-so Indigenous maple syrup and Wojapi fruit sauce. Wojapi can be made with any number of Indigenous fruits. Hereabouts, and at DeFoe’s kitchen, it is made the Lakota/Dakota way with root flour and chokecherries.

Lunches are more extensive with bison, fish, turkey, vegetable melts, salads, seasonal offerings, and bison and grilled veggie tacos.

If readers pause for a moment, it should become obvious that core elements in the Gatherings’ menu are anchored in what tribal ancestors knew for millennia. Healthy eating practices and food preparation are connects. So are harvesting native food items from both foraging (nuts, berries and wild rice) and farming (corn, beans and squash), along with harvesting protein sources (meats and fish) from plains, forests, lakes and streams are all connected.

This is increasingly recognized globally through various United Nations units and multilateral agencies such as the World Food Programme and UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Awareness is increasing here in Upper Midwest states and adjoining provinces of Canada. It is owing in no small part to the work of groups such as the Indigenous Food Lab (see adjoining article) based in Minneapolis.

DeFoe studied and worked at the Indigenous Food Lab before sliding over to Gatherings Café.

~ CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 ~

~ CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ~
Meet the 2024 Bush Fellows

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PELTIER DENIED PAROLE
(FL) - Leonard Peltier, an American Indian Movement activist, has been denied parole and will remain in a Florida prison for the 1975 alleged killings of two FBI agents. Peltier, 79, has been incarcerated since 1976 and has maintained his innocence. His next parole hearing is scheduled for 2026, with a full hearing in 2039. Supporters argue that Peltier was wrongly convicted and that his case represents a miscarriage of justice against Indigenous peoples.

U.S. GOV. SPENT $23.3 BILLION ON INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS
(Washington DC) - The U.S. Department of the Interior, led by Secretary Deb Haaland, released Volume II of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report. This significant step marks the first time the U.S. government has quantified the financial resources dedicated to destroying tribal nations through forced removal of Indigenous children.

The Department of the Interior’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report revealed that the U.S. government appropriated an estimated $23.3 billion (inflation-adjusted) on Indian boarding schools and related programs between 1871 and 1969. The report highlights how other governments, like Canada, have addressed forced Indigenous education by providing nearly $7 billion in settlements and payments.

In light of this, the bipartisan Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act aims to continue the investigation into the U.S. government, religious institutions, and non-profits involved in these harmful policies. The bill establishes a national commission to further examine the lasting impacts of Indian boarding schools, including cultural termination attempts, human rights violations, and assimilation practices.

White Buffalo Calf named “Wakan Gli” in Yellowstone
(WY) - In a celebration held near Yellowstone National Park, Native American tribes gathered to honor the birth of a rare white bison calf born in July. Named “Wakan Gli,” meaning “Return Sacred” in Lakota, the calf’s arrival is seen as a fulfillment of prophecy and a call for environmental stewardship.

Attended by representatives from various tribes, the ceremony featured dancing, drumming, singing, and storytelling. Chief Arvol Looking Horse, the spiritual leader of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Oyate, emphasized the importance of coming together to bring positive energy for future generations.

Although Yellowstone park officials have no record of a white bison being born in the park previously, multiple credible sightings and photographs from visitors, guides, and researchers led them to confirm the calf’s birth on June 4.

NATIVE AMERICANS CRITICIZE TRUMP’S VP PICK, J.D. VANCE
(Washington DC) - Some Native Americans are speaking out against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump’s running mate, J.D. Vance, citing anti-Indigenous beliefs and actions. Vance previously denounced Indigenous Peoples’ Day as a “fake holiday created to sow division” and opposed renaming Ohio’s Wayne National Forest, named after a general known for violently seizing Native lands.

Critics also point to Vance’s legislative efforts that may undermine tribal sovereignty. Indigenous leaders call for awareness of his record and the potential impact on Native communities should Trump and Vance win the election.

CONFLICT ARISES OVER NATIVE AMERICAN SITE IN N. CAROLINA
(NC) - Controversy surrounds a housing development in Carteret County, North Carolina, where thousands of artifacts point to a significant Native American village that existed for centuries before European contact. The discovery has ignited a political debate, as developers push to continue construction despite the site’s historical importance.

State archaeologists are calling the find one of the most significant sites ever uncovered, with thousands of artifacts suggesting the presence of a Native American village occupied for centuries before European contact. While the state archaeologist and indigenous groups argue for further exploration and preservation, some officials, including State Senator Michael Lazzara, side with developers in downplaying the site’s significance.

Critics of the development assert that the disregard for the archaeological findings highlights a continued dismissal of Indigenous history and culture.

OK TRIBES UNITE FOR HUNTING AND FISHING MANAGEMENT
(OK) - The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Muscogee, Choctaw, and Seminole Nations of Oklahoma have reached an agreement to recognize each other’s licenses for hunting and fishing on their respective reservation lands. Tribal leaders believe that this collaboration will not only strengthen their sovereignty but also promote a more sustainable approach to fish and wildlife management.

The Five Tribe Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement signifies a new era of collaboration among these tribes as they work together to manage wildlife within their reservations and protect their sovereignty.

The agreement will enable the tribes to honor one another’s licenses, allowing their citizens to hunt and fish on each other’s reservation lands while adhering to the respective tribal laws. This collaboration aims to promote sustainable wildlife management practices, ensuring the preservation of natural resources for future generations.

NATIONAL PARK VISITORS ENCOURAGED TO SUPPORT TRIBAL NATIONS
(SD) - A new initiative by the Lakota People’s Law Project aims to raise awareness and funds for tribal nations that were displaced from lands now designated as national parks and monuments. The Sacred Defense National Parks and Monuments Initiative encourages visitors to make donations and learn about the importance of these sites to Indigenous peoples.

The project focuses on 14 parks and monuments, with roughly 90 tribal nations connected to these areas. The initiative hopes to create partnerships with the National Park Service, outdoor brands, and other non-profits to expand its reach.

“Indigenous nations have had an ancient relationship with these places long before the concept of America was created,” said Lakota People’s Law Project director Chase Iron Eyes. “We want to promote the spiritual connection between the land, waters, and all people.”

In 2023, over 325 million people visited national parks and monuments, presenting a significant opportunity to educate the public and provide support to affected tribes.

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Natives in Upper Midwest protect their drumming tradition

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

At summertime social powwows and spiritual ceremonies throughout the Upper Midwest, Native Americans are gathering around singers seated at big, resonant drums to dance, celebrate and connect with their ancestral culture.

“I grew up singing my entire life, and I was always taught that drum is the heartbeat of our people,” said Jakob Wilson, 19, using the Ojibwe term for drum that’s rooted in the words for heart and sound. “The absolute power and feeling that comes off of the drum and the singers around it is incredible.”

Wilson has led the drum group at Hinckley-Finlayson High School. In 2023, Wilson’s senior year, they were invited to drum and sing at graduation. But this year, when his younger sister Kaiya graduated, the school board barred them from performing at the ceremony, creating dismay across Native communities far beyond this tiny town.

“It kind of shuts us down, makes us step back instead of going forward. It was hurtful,” said Lesley Shabaia. She was participating in the weekly drum and dance session at the Minneapolis American Indian Center a few weeks after attending protests in Hinckley.

“Hopefully this incident doesn’t stop us from doing our spiritual things,” added the mother of four, who grew up in the Twin Cities but identifies with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, whose tribal lands abut Hinckley.

In written statements, the school district’s superintendent said the decision to ban “all extracurricular groups” from the ceremony, while making other times and places for performance available, was intended to prevent disruptions and avoid “legal risk if members of the community feel the District is endorsing a religious group as part of the graduation ceremony.”

But many Native families felt the ban showed how little their culture and spirituality is understood. It also brought back traumatic memories of their being forcibly suppressed, not only at boarding schools like the one the Wilsons’ grandmother attended, but more generally from public spaces.

It was not until the late 1970s that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act directed government agencies to make policy changes “to protect and preserve Native American religious cultural rights and practices.”

“We had our language, culture and way of life taken away,” said Memegwesi Sutherland, who went to high school in Hinckley and teaches the Ojibwe language at the Minneapolis American Indian Center.

The Center’s weekly drum and dance sessions help those who “may feel lost inside” without connections to ancestral ways of life find their way back, said Tony Frank, a drum instructor.

“Singing is a door opener to everything else we do,” said Frank, who has been a singer for nearly three decades.

Mark Erickson, on right, leads others in singing on the drum during an open drum and dance night at Minneapolis American Indian Center on Wednesday, July 19, 2024, in Minneapolis, Minn. (Photos by Mark Vancleave for AP.)

Jakob Wilson, Isabella Stensrud-Eubanks, and Kaiya Wilson pose for a photo in Hinckley, Minn.

“The reason we sing is from our heart. Our connection to the drum and songs is all spiritual. You give 100 percent, so the community can feel a piece of us.”

In drum circles like those in Minneapolis, where many Natives are Ojibwe and Lakota, there is a lead singer, who starts each song before passing on the beat and verse to others seated at the drum, which is made of wood and animal hide (usually deer or steer).

A drum keeper or carrier cares for the drum, often revered as having its own spirit and considered like a relative and not like personal property. Keepers and singers are usually male; according to one tradition, that’s because women can already connect to a second heartbeat when pregnant.

These lifelong positions are often passed down in families. Similarly, traditional lyrics or melodies are learned from older generations, while others are gifted in dreams to medicine men, several singers said. Some songs have no words, only vocals meant to convey feelings or emulate nature.

Songs and drums at the center of social events like powwows are different from those that are crucial instruments in spiritual ceremonies, for example for healing, and that often contain invocations to the Creator, said Anton Treuer, an Ojibwe language and culture professor at Bemidji State University.

Meant to mark the beginning of a new journey in life, the “traveling song” that the drum group wanted to sing...
at the Hinckley graduation includes the verse “when you no longer can walk, that is when I will carry you,” said Jakob Wilson.

That’s why it was meant for the entire graduating class of about 70 students, not only the 21 Native seniors, added Kaitya Wilson, who trained as a back-up singer – and why relegating it to just another extracurricular activity hurt so deeply.

“This isn’t just for fun, this is our culture,” said Tim Taggart, who works at the Meshkawad Community Center – named after a local drum carrier born in the early 20th century – and helped organize the packed powwow held in the school’s parking lot after graduation. “To just be culturally accepted, right? That’s all everybody wants, just to be accepted.”

The school had taken good steps in recent years, like founding the Native American Student Association, and many in the broader Hinckley community turned out to support Native students. So Taggart is optimistic that after this painful setback, bridges will be rebuilt.

And the drum, with all that it signifies about community and a connected way of life, will be brought back.

“Nothing can function without that heartbeat,” said Taggart, whose earliest memory of the drum is being held as a toddler at a ceremony. “It’s not just hearing the drums, but you’re feeling it throughout your entire body, and that just connects you more with the spirit connection, more with God.”

As dancers – from toddlers to adults in traditional shawls – circled the floor to the drum’s beat in the Minneapolis center’s gym, Cheryl Szocila, program director for its Culture Language Arts Network, said it was heartwarming to see families bring children week after week, building connections even if they might not have enough resources to travel to the reservations.

On reservations too, many youths aren’t being raised in cultural ways like singing, said Isabella Stensrud-Eubanks, 16, a junior and back-up singer on the Hinckley high school drum group.

“It’s sad to say, but our culture is slowly dying out,” she said, adding that several elders reached out to her and the Wilsons after the graduation controversy to teach them more, so the youth can themselves one day teach their traditions.

Mark Erickson was already about 20 when he went back to Red Lake, his father’s band in northern Minnesota, to learn his people’s songs.

“It’s taken me a lifetime to learn and speak the language, and a lifetime to learn the songs,” said Erickson, who only in his late 60s was awarded the distinction of culture carrier for Anishinaabe songs, a term for Ojibwe and other Indigenous groups in the Great Lakes region of Canada and the United States.

Believing that songs and drums are gifts from the Creator, he has been going to drum and dance sessions at the Minneapolis Center for more than a decade to share them, and the notions of honor and respect they carry.

“When you’re out there dancing, you tend to forget your day-to-day struggles and get some relief, some joy and happiness,” Erickson said.
Leech Lake band celebrates the transfer of 11,000 acres

BY MELISSA OLSON/MPR NEWS

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe celebrated the transfer of more than 11,000 acres to the tribe this week. Federal officials at the celebration acknowledged they represent the nation who took the land away and who have now helped enable the return.

Chair Faron Jackson Sr. described the transfer as “the largest achievement by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to restore the land base of our permanent homeland since it was originally established.”

An emotional Jackson told the assembled audience Wednesday at Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School in Bena, “to us, to me, it feels like it’s a relative,” said Jackson. “It’s a relative of ours.”

In the late 1940s and ‘50s, the federal government illegally transferred thousands of acres away from the tribe. Leadership of the Bureau of Indian Affairs incorrectly believed it could sell land without the consent of a majority of tribal landowners. At the time, an estimated 18,000 acres were involved.

As they identified parcels to be returned to the tribe, federal surveyors found an additional four thousand acres that were illegally taken.

U.S. Sen. Tina Smith, who sponsored legislation to address the larger parcel, said she will make sure more land is transferred to represent the recent discoveries.

“I will not rest until that piece of work is done,” the Minnesota Democrat said.


“When you entered into a treaty with the United States government, you thought you were entering into something that was going to be honored and respected by the federal government and then it was illegally transferred out of trust status,” said McCollum.

Michael Chosa, the communications director for Leech Lake, said the tribe worked with the Chippewa National Forest in choosing which parcels to transfer.

Several of the parcels will provide band members with direct access to Lake Winnibigoshish for the first time in many decades. Chosa said the agreement made with the Chippewa National Forest honors existing public easements and right-of-ways. Chosa added the tribe doesn’t plan to close any roads.

Agriculture Under Secretary Homer Wilkes said the return of land to Leech Lake will serve as “a template” for tribal land returns around the country.

Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, a tribal citizen of White Earth Nation, emphasized the land transfer to tribes “is intentional, detailed, hard work that we do together.”

The tribe shares more than 2,000 miles of boundary with the Chippewa National Forest, among the most of any tribal nation in the country. Nearly 40 percent of the forest lies within Leech Lake reservation, a geography it shares with Cass County.

Cass County Commissioner Neal Gaalswyk said he’s proud of what the county and tribe have done together. In 2014, the two governments signed a memorandum of understanding directing both governments to consult with each other over policies that affect both governments.

“Before we act, we talk. That’s good advice in any relationship,” said Gaalswyk. “This attitude, this way of doing business, has transformed, it has literally transformed the relationship between the county and the tribe.”

Leech Lake Chair Jackson also said some of the land will be used to address the shortage of housing on the reservation.

“With all this land that’s being returned, we’re going to have more available land to build homes for our members that are experiencing homelessness today,” said Jackson.

“That’s a priority for the council.”

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This novel for youth has weight - on many levels

REVIEW BY DEBORAH LOCKE

Ezra Cloud, an Ojibwe 15-year-old living in Northeast Minneapolis, is angry with his dad, fears and loathes a school bully -- Matt -- who will not leave him in peace, and is haunted by the premature death of his mother who died due to workplace toxic substances. The only light in his life shines from Nora, a bright, pretty classmate.

Ezra and the school bully have a confrontation followed by a fire at Matt’s house that kills two people. Matt tells the police that Ezra set the fire. To protect his son from what he thinks will be a racist investigation, Ezra’s dad, Byron Cloud, takes him over the border to “Red Gut,” the family’s home reservation where his parents live. The boy grows in perspective and maturity in Canada, where most of “Where Wolves Don’t Die” takes place.

The book, targeted for middle-school readers, is Dr. Anton Treuer’s (Ojibwe) first novel. Treuer is Professor of Ojibwe at Bemidji State University and author of many books. He has a B.A. from Princeton University and a M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. He is editor of the Oshkaabewis Native Journal, the only academic journal of the Ojibwe language.

In the book, once Ezra is safely housed at Red Gut at the home of Liam and Emma Cloud, he prepares to leave with Grandpa Liam to assist with work on a distant trampoline. In the company of his grandfather, Ezra learns Ojibwe history and culture, as well as the art and science of trapping.

His formal education also continues as teachers in Minnesota send assignments by email. Evenings at the cabin are spent doing homework by kerosene lamp. In Northeast Minneapolis, detectives investigate the cause of the fire.

Several points here. First, I’ve never felt any interest or affection for wolves. By the end of the book, I viewed them as superheros. Explaining this attitudinal transformation gives away too much of the plot. I’ll refrain.

Second, Grandpa Liam and Grandma Emma have been happily married for decades. They survived the trials that life threw their way, including loss, and live with joy and purpose.

In an online essay from bookpage.com, Treuer wrote: “I wrote ‘Where Wolves Don’t Die’ to turn Native fiction on its head. We have so many stories about trauma and tragedy, with characters who lament the culture that they were always denied. I wanted to show how vibrant and alive our culture still is. I wanted to create a story that was gripping but where none of the Native characters were drug addicts, abused or abusing others, one more like the Native life that I know.”

The Native life many of us grew up in contained couples like Grandpa Liam and Grandma Emma. How sweet to read about a solid, caring relationship. Treuer added that the book “demonstrates the magnificence of our elders, the humor of our people and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

A third point. The story moves like a thriller with intrigue on nearly every page. I read late into the night to learn who did it and why, and whether Ezra and Nora fall in love, and just what was the impact of a patience and expectation on an angry 15-year-old. Once he was exposed to the quiet wisdom and example of Liam, Ezra finds self-worth. His grandpa’s lessons help the boy literally grow in strength and size during the winter months. His pain over his mother’s death lessens, along with anger at Byron.

Number four: Treuer includes references to popular culture, food, and local Twin City places and people. Minnesota readers will be familiar with Grandma Emma’s macaroni and cheese hotdish -- yes, hotdish. They may have seen the “Billy Jack” movie, know the American Indian Center in Minneapolis, or have dined at Sean Sherman’s restaurant. Maybe like Ezra, Treuer’s readers shared “Reservation Dogs” with family members on Hulu. Here’s one slight oddity: with exactitude, Treuer describes what characters are wearing. Why? Perhaps clothing matters a whole lot to this generation of middle school kids.

Number five: Roger Jourdain (1912-2002). The wisdom of the chairman of the Red Lake Nation is quoted in “Where Wolves Don’t Die.” That’s a nice touch. So, what may we conclude? I liked not only the content of this book, but the way it felt in my hand. It has weight, on many levels. I think you will like it, too.
The Senior LinkAge Line is a free, statewide service of the Minnesota Board on Aging in partnership with Minnesota’s area agencies on aging. The Senior LinkAge Line helps older Minnesotans and caregivers find answers and connect to the services and support they need.
Since he was a child, Rice and his White Earth Nation family members have harvested their own wild rice in annual treks “up north.” This supplies the wild rice he uses at the Pow Wow Grounds that he founded in 2011 and now at his food truck.

“This will be my 50th year (racing),” he told The Circle.

He needs a good supply. The Pow Wow Grounds makes his own recipe of chicken wild rice soup all year around and now for road customers as well.

Wild rice is also important for other Pow Wow Grounds and Frybread Factory menu items. It is included in Rice’s “Prairie Dog” hotdogs wrapped in frybread, and is used in bratwurst and other ‘dog’ products.

Frybread Factory shows up at various events around the Twin Cities metro area. Rice was finalizing a schedule to attend several powwows around the state at the time of this writing.

• Indigenous Food Lab Market and Owamni

Another hot spot for Indigenous foods is inside the Midtown Global Market, 920 E. Lake Street in Minneapolis. The Indigenous Food Lab Market is open Monday through Saturday. The food lab is a professional kitchen and training center that aims to integrate Indigenous foods and education within North American tribal communities. It has classes on Native agriculture, farming techniques, seed saving, wild foods, ethnobotany, Indigenous medicines, and related health and cultural subjects.

This is another creation of highly recognized and awarded “Sioux Chef” Sean Sherman (Oglala Lakota), who also founded the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS) nonprofit organization in Minneapolis and the Owamni Restaurant, 420 1st St. S., Minneapolis.

Owamni was opened in 2021 and used by Native chefs working with Indigenous foods and as a training site as well. NATIFS acquired it in September last year. That is explained as “paving the way for more hands-on training opportunities, guest chefs, Indigenous food R&D, and producer spotlights.” It likes to source is Indigenous food items from local Native producers.

While founded here, NATIFS also seeks to spread the word beyond the state. NATIFS explains it this way: “Reclamation of ancestral education is a critical part of reversing the damage of colonialism and forced assimilation, and food is at the heart of this reclamation. NATIFS will drive sustainable economic empowerment and prosperity into tribal areas through a reimagined North American food system that also addresses the health impacts of injustice.”

NATIFS works in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture with a program seeking to improve health on Minnesota’s reservations through a food distribution program. Also, the Indigenous Food Lab unit is expanding out of state and is establishing similar labs in South Dakota, Montana and Alaska.

Sherman spreads his messages on Indigenous food sovereignty and health to receptive audiences around the country. He was a speaker and panel moderator in January at a first U.S. Department of Health and Human Services “Food is Medicine” Summit in Washington, D.C.

-- CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 --

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Native foods such as nuts and berries, wildlife, botan
cacts. It also has pro
the Internet.
The center’s Culture Lan
among those programs are adult language classes
and the youth language, technology and cultural pro
ects. It also has programs for powwows, drum and
dance, podcasts and a film and art festival.
Another program is the Tradish Project. MIAC
describes it as a project promoting “the joy of traditional
dance by fostering a positive cultural identify and com
unity strength while combating obesity, heart disease
and diabetes.”
These activities include weekly traditional dance,
teaching circles for dance styles, stories and songs;
powwow aerobics for teens and adults, and a sewing
circle for elders to create regalia for young dancers.
Indigenous food is totally entwined with MIAC’s
focus on community health and tradition.
Defoe combines his interest in hiking, foraging for
native foods such as nuts and berries, wildlife, botany
and geology with his work with Indigenous foods,
including teaching and demonstrating to others how
to prepare these foods at home.
This has him working with MIAC’s elder and fitness
programs giving demonstrations and preparing meals
for elders. His food demonstrations for those programs
help people prepare healthier meals at home and aim
to reduce “negative health outcomes” within the Native
American community.
Another unit at MIAC, the Native Fitness and
Nutrition (FAN) program offers activities and educa
tional resources to fight health disparities in the
American Indian community. Its Native Elders Support
Team provides services and activities for local elders.
This ties in with MIAC’s fitness center and gym used
for exercise and community activities.
FAN’s programs returned to the new MIAC in May
after working from other sites during the center’s ren
ovation.
Tying healthy foods with healthy living is no small
task for a unique restaurant that remains a comparatively
small enterprise by commercial eatery measurements.
Diverse objectives are also revealed by special staffing
needs.
Sydney Ockenga was recently appointed café manager
to work in tandem with the executive chef and kitchen
crew. Star LaDeaux (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) has the
title of executive assistant and Gatherings Café
Grants Manager.
Not many – if any - urban restaurants have a ‘grants
manager.’ MAIC explains that by noting part of
Gatherings’ budget is handled by restaurant operating
revenue. But given its multiple objectives and educa
tional work, the restaurant and food operations also
rely on outside grants.

Actual menu offerings can be found at https://www.maicnet.org/gatherings-cafe.
For more information on how healthy living and
healthy Native foods combine with Indigenous culture,
check out various programs at MAIC

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Executive chef Vern DeFoe describes his Three Sisters Kale
Salad, along side of Cedar Maple Tea and a Bison Melt sand
wich at Gatherings Cafe. (Photo by Lee Egerstrom.)
Aztec unicyclist stopped in Bemidji with Unicon 21

The Sanford Center in Bemidji, MN presented “Unicon 21” in July. Organizers handpicked Bemidji “to create the ideal Unicon experience” according to its website. The Unicon experience included 1200 unicyclists coming to town from throughout the world. Unicyclists were seen in and around Bemidji heading to and from venues including the Sanford Center, home of the Bemidji State University NCAA D1 hockey programs, the Bemidji High School, a few elementary schools, and the Buena Vista ski hill.

The 21st Unicycling World Convention and Championships included six disciplines for the competitive part of the program. These included freestyle with individual, pairs or groups performing to music with costumes and props, hockey and basketball team sports, track events including 100m, 400m, 800m and shorter races in one foot riding, “wheel walking,” and coasting, urban with flatland, trials, jumps, and street categories, road racing including 10k and around Lake Bemidji distances, and Muni, off-road races with varying and unpredictable terrain.

There were a number of unicyclists at the entry to the Sanford Center riding on the concrete and the block walls and on a variety of one wheeled cycles. They appeared to be preparing for competition or just doing what unicyclists do in their free time.

Erick Gonzalez was among the unicyclists. He has lived in Flagstaff, Arizona for the past five years. He identifies as ethnic Mexico, or Aztec. He is hopping on and off the wide block walls in the front of the entry way on his unicycle. His long black hair hanging loosely past his waist may be one of the trademarks of this world traveler.

“I recently left my job teaching physics at a school in Flagstaff to start my own business,” said Gonzalez. “Speaking Earth Productions, has a mission to connect us to the possibilities of connection with the seen and unseen worlds in nature and the magic of who we are as human beings made of earth.”

“I make videos on YouTube which are portals into these possibilities, am available for video production work, and create experiences both in person and online to deepen our understanding and connection with the earth and who we are,” added Gonzalez.

Indigenous core values dictated how the athletes train and compete. Gonzalez chose not to compete in Bemidji in a world class event and these core values also guide him as an active observer.

“For me, riding at the highest level in mountain unicycling became less of a physical practice and instead a practice of training and understanding the mind to allow for extreme movement,” said Gonzalez. “To ride at this level became a practice of physical, mental, and emotional composure, and the techniques and practices that allow me to ride down things that push the possibilities of motion and carry high risk, for example riding down an incredibly steep 60ft tall slab on the Private Reserve trail in Flagstaff.”

There is always a story within a story. The filming of the “Muni” technique in Sedona, AZ also has another story. “I spent eight months filming and editing this video,” said Gonzalez. “My goal was to try and push the possibilities of what had ever been done before by finding the biggest and craziest possible lines to ride down in Sedona, which offers endless red rock features.”

“But at a deeper level it is also an exploration of intentional movement, of riding in relationship with land, and a love letter to Sedona itself. While my main goal was to blow people’s minds with my riding, the deeper goal, like the rest of my work, is to connect others to the magic of being human and all the possibilities we hold when we know ourselves and are intentional with our lives.”

Gonzalez shared the technical components of riding and making a connection to the land. He said, “Two important elements for me are riding in relationship to land, and the power of intentional movement. I have a deep understanding and connection to the land I ride on through many different dimensions of the human capacity for understanding, to ride is to leave a line of gratitude on the rocks I ride on, and there is immense power in this relationship.”

“Our movement is also expressive, and choosing what I want to express or an intention for the motion I create, all while also following the joy of movement that my body is made for, has led me to great power and impeccable command of my body and unicycle in the motion I want to create,” added Gonzalez.

While watching the freestyle competition at the Sanford Center, one would witness world class athletes performing amazing movements in head-to-head competition with two people taking turns with short timed routines. This was one of the disciplines that was experienced by several hundred spectators.

The Unicon 21 had been to South Korea and France the few years after Covid first came into the world. Now the stop in Bemidji, MN was definitely memorable for competitors and spectators alike.

Sedona Mountain Unicycling: https://youtu.be/kgw-Oq4Bkg0?si=gbP97X5JMt9j3S

Ellison gets 2nd drug manufacturer to lower insulin to $35/mth

BY LEE EGERSTROM

Minnesotan Attorney General Keith Ellison announced July 23 that his office has reached a settlement with pharmaceutical manufacturer Sanofi-Aventis U.S. LLC, commonly called Sanofi, to limit what it charges diabetics to no more than $35 a month for insulin.

This is the second such agreement that Ellison and attorneys general from several states have pursued in price gouging suits against three major drug companies. Pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly agreed to similar settlement in February and negotiations continue with the other major insulin manufacturer, Novo Nordisk.

This is especially important for the Native American populations in Minnesota and across the nation. American Indian and Alaska Native communities have the highest rates of diabetes among racial and ethnic groups. Death rates in which diabetes was a contributing factor is highest for Native Americans throughout Minnesota.

Nationwide, health officials say AI/AN indigenous people are 2.3 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to die from diabetes and are three times more likely to die from Type 2 diabetes than whites. The latter is linked to high rates for heart attacks and strokes.

In 2022 data assembled by the Minnesota Department of Health, 10.2 percent of Minnesotans had diabetes. The racial breakdown of this group had 16.4 percent of the AI/AN identified people, 10.9 percent of Black and African Americans, 10.1 percent of Whites, and 6.7 percent of the Asian population.

Data where diabetes were determined to contribute to deaths are also reflected for Minnesota counties that are home to large Native populations. Diabetes related deaths, per 100,000 population, were 240 in Mahnomen, 183 in Kittson, 146 in Mille Lacs, 139 in Red Lake, 130 in Itasca, 129 in Renville, 128 in Redwood, 125 in Carlton, 122 in Roseau, and 112 in St. Louis counties. In contrast, the urban metro counties of Hennepin and Ramsey had 95 and 108 death rates linked with diabetes per 100,000 residents.

Ellison filed suit against the pharmaceutical companies in 2018. It charged the manufacturers with deceptive pricing that required uninsured and underinsured Minnesotans to pay extremely high prices for insulin.

The settlement went into effect July 19. Ellison’s office said Minnesotans with insurance can also choose to pay no more than $35 a month for their insulin if they choose. Consumers, however, “will need to enroll for a savings card on a Sanofi affordability website affirming their eligibility for the program.”

Ellison said his office will release information on how to register once Sanofi establishes that website. And Sanofi is required to make similar pertinent information available at pharmacists’ counters. Along with that, Sanofi will continue a Patient Connection Program providing free insulin for Minnesotans who have annual household incomes equal or less than 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which is $124,000 for a family of four.

Sanofi provides insulin products named Admelog, Lantus, Toujeo and Apidra. The settlement will also apply to biosimilar products Sanofi may market.

This settlement follows the $35 maximum payment limit set earlier by the Biden Administration in rolling back insulin prices for American seniors covered by Medicare insurance. That was part of the President’s 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, Ellison said.

Diabetes patients and their families are painfully aware of how insulin prices affect their lives.

Along with the other state attorneys general, Ellison said “the litigation has already had a huge impact on insulin prices.”

“In 2018, when this lawsuit was filed, the list price of a five-pack of Apidra in an injection pen was over $625. Today, we reached an agreement bringing that price for a month’s supply of pens down to just $35.

“This is a big victory for the people of Minnesota and will do so much to help families across the state afford their lives,” he said.

That will have a disproportionately big impact on Native Minnesotans.

For more information and how to sign up, see: https://www.ag.state.mn.us/MNinsulin35.
Kingbird-Haugen focuses on academics at U of MN-TC

Sidney Kingbird-Haugen is an enrolled Red Lake Band member. His Indian name is “Waabiizheshi” which means Pine Martin. He was active in Bemidji High School varsity track, football, and cross country. He’s attending the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities and plans to study economics and business law.

“In sports and life, I’ve always followed the seven grandfather teachings of the Anishinaabe,” said Sidney Kingbird-Haugen. “Humility and respect have always been important in competition.”

Kingbird-Haugen talked about the connection to some of the seven grandfather teachings. He said, “Honesty is huge in training. Being honest with myself and my coaches to figure out what’s best for me is the only way to successfully train. Bravery is huge for the marathon as it’s hard for anyone to not back down when you have a solo 18 mile training run or on race day when you have to endure the 26 miles of pain.”

“My top athletic accomplishments have been competing at the state meet in cross country, making the 800 lb. club in weight lifting, and successfully running my first marathon,” said Kingbird-Haugen.

He was among the 20,000 finishers at the 2024 edition of Grandma’s Marathon in Duluth, MN. According to the website, Grandma’s Marathon has turned into a world class event.

“My top academic accomplishments are being awarded the academic letter at Bemidji High School and being awarded the Herbert E. Olson scholarship from the University of Minnesota,” added Kingbird-Haugen.

“One of my mentors has been Richard Toward as he’s encouraged me to pursue greatness in not only academics but also athletics,” said Kingbird-Haugen. “He has also sparked my passion for economics which I’ll be studying at the U.”

“Economics is a daunting subject for many but when Sidney Kingbird-Haugen walked into my college level Macroeconomics class his second semester of his senior year I knew he would be up to the test,” said Rick Toward. “I have watched this young man work his way through his high school years in the classroom, running the trail and on the football field with a dedication and commitment to excellence.”

“I first saw Sid’s desire to take on a new challenge during his junior year when he showed up at tryouts for the soccer team. He had been a varsity cross country runner the previous fall and wanted to continue to run but also play on the soccer team,” added Toward.

“In the end, when Sidney was selected for a team, his excitement was tempered by the fact that he was going to have to choose one sport over the other,” said Toward. “Participating in both soccer and cross country at the same time was not going to work, there were simply too many conflicts in the schedules. In the end, he thanked me for the opportunity but had chosen to run.”

All marathon runners have stories to tell from start to finish and all points in between. Kingbird-Haugen is no different.

“Training for my first marathon was tough,” said Kingbird-Haugen. “On my first run over 15 miles, I thought I had gotten a stress fracture and couldn’t walk without an extreme limp. I went to the hospital and got an X-ray and was lucky enough that it wasn’t a break.”

“I did about five runs between 16-18 miles in my training and only ran three times a week to avoid injury,” said Kingbird-Haugen. “I have been very injury prone in my career.”

“Eight weeks later it was race day. I woke up at 3:45 AM and drove to the area that would take me to the race start. It was a chilly day, 52° and rainy, but it felt great once I started to get going. I took running gels every 40 minutes and made sure to stay hydrated at drink stations. At around 18 miles I was shocked thinking there’s no way I could run over eight more miles but I finished remembering how many hours I had put into this and that I wouldn’t waste such an amazing opportunity,” added Kingbird-Haugen.

Kingbird-Haugen said, “I’m striving to do well enough to attend a top tier law school and become an attorney.”
In the West

My wife, Maj-Britt, and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary in January. And in July, we gathered the family for a belated celebration. This was our first all-family trip that included our two adorable little grandkids. Our son Max, who’s been living in Copenhagen, Denmark, for the past five years, flew in with Silvia, his Italian girlfriend. So, we were 10 people, in three cars.

Our vacation took us to the Badlands and Black Hills, in what is now called South Dakota. We spent most of a week in an Airbnb rental, a house high in the hills outside of Lead, the old gold mining center. I hadn’t been in the Black Hills in many years and was struck anew by the natural beauty.

I’ve been through Badlands National Park several times, but never saw so much green vegetation in the valleys and on the buttes. Beneficial rains have created a lush landscape in a place that usually looks parched — the Yellow Mounds area was especially beautiful.

We drove through Custer State Park and saw the buffalo herds; my youngest son, Isaac, and I drove up the Needles Highway and marveled at the spectacular rock formations. We also traveled through idyllic Spearfish Canyon, on the way north to Spearfish, where we enjoyed the scenic town park and the adjacent D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery, its pools teeming with various species of trout.

Max, Silvia and I drove north and into Wyoming one day to see the Bear Lodge (Devil’s Tower). We went on the 1.3-mile hike (in 95-degree heat) around the magma formation that rises some 1,300 feet above the Belle Fourche River.

While in the Black Hills, I thought about the sordid history of the place: the discovery of gold by former Union Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer’s expedition, in 1874; gold prospectors streaming into the area; and the U.S. government’s abrogation of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Again, there is much to see in the Black Hills. What you don’t see are Native people.

“They’re not meant to feel welcome in many instances,” commented Brett Lee Shelton (Oglala Lakota), a staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund (NARF). I had a recent phone chat with Shelton, who comes from Lake Creek, a village on the Pine Ridge reservation.

In late July, I contacted NARF about speaking to Shelton, regarding the Lakota Nation’s ongoing claim to the Black Hills.

In the way of background, I used to attend the International Indian Treaty Council conferences, the annual summer gatherings sponsored by the American Indian Movement. In 1980, I attended my first IITC conference, which was held that year on the Fort Belknap reservation.

During the conference, we learned that the U.S. Supreme Court had decided that the taking of the Black Hills had been illegal and $106 million was set aside in compensation, thus concluding a 60-year legal battle. This news upset the Lakota people attending the conference; some of them were weeping.

“The consensus of the people remains: that’s an un-compensable issue. They want the land back,” Shelton told me, regarding the ongoing dispute over the Black Hills.

According to press reports, the original $106 million settlement, which has been rejected by all the Lakota tribes, has accrued interest and now totals $1.3 billion.


Clarren investigates the lives of her Jewish ancestors who fled violent persecution in the Pale of Settlement (Eastern Europe) and landed in the American West. Her great-great grandparents took advantage of government “free land” giveaways and prospered out on the South Dakota prairie and as merchants in the Black Hills. Clarren’s informants include Lakota people whose forebears were victimized by U.S. government policies. Apart from the massacres and dispossession of the Lakota in the late-19th century, Clarren provides a cogent analysis of how the U.S. Congress continued to legislate the theft of Native land into the 20th century.

Shelton and I discussed the #land-back movement, and I wondered how that can work in South Dakota, which is a very backwards state politically. Shelton laughed and agreed with my characterization. “Absolutely,” he said, and then mentioned that progress has been made in areas of land co-management, or co-stewardship, between tribes and U.S. government agencies.

There’s much more to say on the topic.
August 15, 18, 21
Mille Lacs Indian Museum Fun Run
Stop to explore the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post during our annual Open House! The Historic Site is open for special Sunday hours and is free for everyone. Visit the exhibits, including the popular Four Seasons Room with life-size dioramas. Then, head next door to shop for American Indian arts and crafts at one trading post. The site will be open from 10 am-5 pm.

Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post, 54511 Odeena Dr., Jolimania. For info, see: https://www.mnhs.org/events/1567 or call 320-532-5632.

August 18, 16 - 17
2024 SMSC Wacipi
Representing dozens of tribes from across the United States and Canada, dancers dressed in traditional regalia compete for top honors in various dance style categories and age groups, while drum groups and singers surround the perimeter of the arena. Native American artists and crafters display traditional beadwork, jewelry, and handmade goods, while food vendors offer a variety of tasty, authentic meals and treats. Free admission. Grand entries: Friday at 7 pm, Saturday at 1 pm and 7 pm, and Sunday at 1 pm.

August 16, 18 - 20
Mille Lacs 58th Annual Traditional Powwow
MCS: Joel Syrette and Mike Sullivan. ADs: Percy Benjamin and Melvin Buckholts. Host Drum: Indian Hill and Little Otter. Invited: Young Kingbird, Cedar Creek, Pipe Stone, and Crazy Elk. Grand entries at Friday 7 pm, Saturday 1 pm and 7 pm, and Sunday at 1 pm.

16501, 16587 Zhaaboshkang Grounds, 16387 Zhaaboshkang. For info, see: https://www.mnhs.org/events/1567.
Aug. 25

Native Peoples’ Day at the MN State Fair

NATIFS is hosting Indigenous Peoples’ Day at Dan Patch Park at the MN State Fair again. Main stage programming runs from 9:30 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. and features indigenous artists from around the country. The schedule for the day:

- 11:30 a.m.: Traditional Food Preservation Demonstration
- 11:30 a.m.: Interactive activities and presentations from various venues such as Grand Marais Art Colony in Minnesota, the Agaspis isana national Lakemore in northern Wisconsin, and Split Rock Arts Program in Duluth.
- 12:30 p.m.: Buffalo Weavers Musical Performance
- 1:15 p.m.: Traditional Dance Group:
- 1:15 p.m.: American Indian Community in southwestern Minnesota.
- 2 p.m.: Atlantic Indians Cultural Society
- 2 p.m.: Red Tree Drum Group
- 3 p.m.: Native Pride Dancers
- 3 p.m.: Anishinaabe Powwow
- 4 p.m.: Native American Music and Arts Festival
- 4 p.m.: Ponemah Bring Back the Fire, 1265 Snelling Ave N, St. Paul. For more info, see: https://www.mnstatefair.org.

Aug. 26

Lacrosse Demonstration

The Twin Cities Native Lacrosse Association will provide an overview on this game and nanos-on teaching. 1:15 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. Part of Indigenous Peoples’ Day at Dan Patch Park. Minnesota State Fair, 1265 Snelling Ave N, St. Paul, For more info, see: https://www.mnstatefair.org.

Aug. 27

Red Tree Drum Group

Red Tree Singers is from the Lower Sioux community in southwestern Minnesota. Members have danced, sung and drummed in ceremonies, funerals and powwows all their lives. Part of Mental Health Awareness at Dan Patch Park. 1:30 p.m. Minnesota State Fair, 1265 Snelling Ave N, St. Paul, For more info, see: https://www.mnstatefair.org.

Sept 1

Native American Music and Arts Festival

A day titled with music and art for everyone. There will be over two dozen artists and one demonstrator that will be sharing information about their art.:

- 10 a.m.: 4 p.m.: Drum Circle at Dan Patch Park.
- 10 a.m.: Young Kingbird, Ponemah.
- 10 a.m.: Mark R. Levenson & Associates.
- 10 a.m.: Ponemah. For info: see: https://www.mnstatefair.org.

Sept 15

Mendon Discontinuance

The Mendon Discontinuance includes the Dakotah 27th Traditional Wacipi Powwow. For info see: https://www.mnstatefair.org.

Minnesota Voting Schedule

Aug. 13: Primary Election

Sept. 20: Vote by mail or in person through November 4.

Oct. 15: Register in advance to save time on Election Day.

November 5: Election Day
In August I danced for the first time

BY ARNÉ VAINIO, MD

(Editor’s note: This was written in 2015.) At the end of August I danced for the first time. George Earth has wanted me to dance ever since he came back in to our lives. He introduced my mother and father back in 1957 when my father owned the ill-fated Good Luck Tavern in Sturgeon, Minnesota. Business was booming, but he wasn’t a good businessman and would go on to complete suicide there when I was just a few months shy of my fifth birthday.

My mother was left with my older sister and me and my two younger brothers. She was drinking sometime shortly after the suicide and left my sister in charge. She was six or seven at the time and it wasn’t long before we started playing with matches and burned our house to the ground. George was in his twenties at that time and we lost track of him when his mother was hit by a car and killed as she was walking home one night. His life changed when hers ended and he was lost to us after that.

George thought about us often over the decades. My wife, Ivy, spotted him at a powwow and we’ve been family again ever since. George is a traditional dancer and his regalia has come to him piece by piece over the years. He has always said dancing is what saved him from a downward spiral that started when his mother died. When he dances, every step is a prayer for the healing of all Indian people from all tribes and we have spent late nights with him telling me the things I needed to know.

He lives several hours away and we stay in touch by phone when we can’t see each other. I call him when I have my feet in the ocean or when I’m listening to the night and when the fireflies first come out and fly through the trees with only me outside. We put our asemaa (sacred tobacco) out together at those times.

George and I traveled to the Wind River reservation in Wyoming last October so I could speak at a healthy heart conference, and they asked George to do the opening prayer. We spent four days in the car together as we drove through the Black Hills and went to Chief Crazy Horse Monument. We stood under the vastness of the Milky Way under the endless night sky somewhere in Wyoming. I never turned the radio on once during that trip, and George told me stories and why the important things are important. He was supposed to travel with me to the Association of American Indian Physicians conference on the Tulalip reservation north of Seattle right after his 80th birthday in July, but it didn’t work out.

I’ve been feeling a sense of urgency about getting those of us who need to go into medicine aimed in the right direction and I think I let some time pass when I could have done more. George is also feeling that urgency. He’s been having a hard time breathing and he can’t make it around the dance arena any more.

At the end of August, he passed his dance regalia to me at the Cha-cha-baing traditional powwow in Inger, Minnesota. It was bittersweet watching him take each piece separately from his van and he held each piece reverently and for a long time before handing it to me. I wasn’t even certain how to put all of it on. The bells fell off my ankles during grand entry and the leggings below my knees fell off a couple of dances after that. I had people come and dance with me to welcome me and I appreciate that more than they will ever know.

Naakiiyaa Kitoo-daronco made the beaded medallion I wore and this was a gift from her and totally out of the blue. I still take it out and marvel at the intricacy of the work. Herb and Patty Sam and Arianna have taken me in as part of their family and Herb has been teaching me our old songs. He had a hand drum made for me when he read the story “It’s the only thing I have left for you” about a dying veteran who taught me a powerful lesson. I still have much to learn. I don’t feel I’m ready to sing, but I sing when I feel I need to.

George has always told me seeing a doctor dancing would be healing for everyone and I discovered that meant me as much as anyone else.

Richard is a young grass dancer and he has worked hard to be in the arena. We bonded right away and we danced side by side. He dances every dance and he clearly feels the drumbeat somewhere deep inside. George watched us dancing and he slowly crossed the grassy circle between songs and sat at one of the drums. I danced next to Richard as George sang and I could see him with the other singers and I knew he was singing for his regalia and he was singing for his mother. He was singing for all the past times he had been in the arena and he was singing the prayers he used to dance.

He was singing for Richard and he was singing for me and I tried to listen for his voice as we made our way around the circle.

It blended in with the voices of the other singers and it blended in with a slight breeze that blew through the trees and across the arena. It blended in with the sound of Richard and I laughing as we showed each other our dance moves.

I will learn to dance for healing for our people and I will learn to dance for our dying veterans, the veterans here now and for the veterans yet to come. I will dance for those contemplating suicide and those left behind, and for all the hurt and all the beauty out there.

I will learn the old songs Herb is teaching me and when I sing them, George’s voice will be a part of mine.

Arné Vainio, M.D. is an enrolled member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and is a family practice physician on the Fond du Lac reservation in Cloquet, Minnesota. He can be contacted at a-vainio@hotmail.com.
Life can turn on a dime and nothing is ever the same again. Such happened to me recently and I’m a total mess. I’m so very sad and mad that it all went down and now I’m left alone with my own miserable self with the ‘woulda coulda shouda’ swirling in my heart and head. When this happens I turn to YouTube and watch animal videos, especially cats, to distract myself from my sorrow. When that doesn’t work, I reach into my memories of events and people that made me laugh. I will share some of those stories with you.

My beloved Gramma Rose passed on over five years ago now, at the age of 100 years and nine months. I still talk to her daily and am blessed to have her in my life. Rose was a lively little lady and kept all her faculties until the end. She loved to tell stories, even on herself so here we go:

I was visiting Gramma at her little house where she would greet me with, “Welcome to Elizabeth Taylor’s house!” and ask for money to tour it. One time her voice got low and she told me she thought that Pa, her husband, had thrown her away in the dump. She began hollering for Pa to save her and he did. Gramma had fallen into her closet during the night. Once I fell into my closet but thankfully it was a soft landing.

Another time I picked her up after my job and we went to a local Bar & Grill for Happy Hour. She liked to get out of the house now and then. We sat at the bar and I was painting my nails when Gram asked me to paint one of hers. I asked ‘which one?’ and she said any one so I chose the nail closest to me. Rose knew the bartender that day because she used to be a pull-tab worker so she called him, “Dave! Hey Dave! Look!” and smiled just big. Dave looked at her in confusion because she was waving the ames, ‘bird finger at him. I gently lowered her hand and any time I brought it up she would get mad at me.

Once Gramma and Grampa were at a tavern on Rezberry, long since gone. Rose and her friend began to fight about whose kids were worse, and Pa told her he could only see gray underpants as they tussled on the floor. Gramma would pull her chest out just proud of winning the scrap. That is who I come from. Her blood runs in my veins and I’m so very grateful for that.

Another relative now. My sister had a big shin-dig for her son’s high school graduation. A lot of people showed up and were inside and out through the screen door on the lower floor. My sister told everyone very loudly to not break it. She did that all day and night. When it was really late but still dark out there were only a few people left, like seven of us or so.

There was a brief silence when all of a sudden my sister busted out from inside holding the screen door in front of her like a shield at a gallop. (I just about peeled myself remembering this). I laughed so hard I almost lost my breath. Karma? Is that you? When it got light out my snag and I lay down in an unoccupied tent. We just got comfortable when a man opened it up. It was his tent. Later on I told my sister that a ‘strange Indian’ had run us out of there. Aren’t we all strange in some way?

As an Indigenous brown woman I am beyond excited and thrilled that our next POTUS is also brown too and an accomplished woman in her own right. There is no comparison to her and ole peestain, none. VP Harris is fresh air to all the moldy old pink men in power with their despotic designs. Vote. And moi? Writing this out helped me feel better but it still ain’t easy! As an Indigenous woman I was born with trauma and live in a world where we were not supposed to have survived. I talked to an Indigenous woman advocate on a helpline and she said words that helped my broken heart, enough to live another day. If you take nothing else from this column, know that you are worthy and loved. Peace out, Love n Hugs!
Organ donation can turn a tragedy into something positive for many people.

If you’re considering organ donation, you should know that it is such a gift to be able to help so many patients and their families when you leave this world.

One of the common myths that we sometimes hear is that the doctors will not work as hard to save your life if they somehow find out that you’re an organ donor. That’s completely false. We always prioritize saving someone’s life and are not aware if people are registered donors when we’re treating them. We will always work as hard as we can to preserve life and donation is only considered after all other options have been exhausted.

Dr. Thomas Wyatt
Shawnee/Quapaw, Chair of Emergency Medicine at Hennepin County Medical Center and LifeSource Board Member

DID YOU KNOW?

144 American Indians in the Upper Midwest are waiting for an organ transplant

50% American Indians are 50% more likely to experience kidney failure than white Americans

75+ One donor can save and heal more than 75 lives

LifeSource
AT THE HEART OF ORGAN DONATION

Find answers to your questions and register to be an organ donor