



Seattle Clear Sky Newsletter

Thriving Through Education. Culture and Tradition



INDIGENOUS INVISIBILITY

By Cat Tetrick

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Gabby Petito was a young white woman from New York's Long Island who was reported missing on September 11, 2021. Supposedly Gabby and her boyfriend left for what was supposed to be a four month cross-country trip on July 2. On September 1, her boyfriend returned home, alone in the car that had accompanied the two of them. Later that week Gabby's parents reported her missing. On September 19, the F.B.I found human remains believed to belong to Gabby in a national forest in Wyoming. On September 1, a forensic examination had confirmed the remains were those of Gabby Petito and the death was ruled as a homicide. The New York Times, ABC, CNN and Fox news produced timelines of her case. National news outlets analyzed different parts of her case, including police reports, body cam footage, the search for her boyfriend and details of where her remains were found. People nationwide became fascinated with Gabby Petito's case and individuals on social media began investigating the case themselves, trying to help and share the information in any way they could. Recently people have begun to wonder why this same initiative is not being taken on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Woman.



Indigenous woman and girls are ten times more likely to be murdered than all other ethnicities. 55.5 percent of indigenous woman have been physically abused by their intimate partners, and murder is the third leading cause of death for indigenous woman. In 2016, the urban Indian health institute found there were 5,712 reported cases of murdered and missing indigenous woman and girls. In Wyoming, where Gabby Petito's remains were found, 710 indigenous people were reported missing between 2011 and 2020. "In the eight days between when Petito's family reported her missing on September 11th and when Petito's remains were found on September 19th, three indigenous people – Sterling Prinze Redstar, Markie Shea Williams and Cloelle Buck Elk – were reported missing in Montana.

As Gabby Petito's case continues to spark outrage and attention in the news cycles and media, indigenous people ask why there cases are not being looked at with the same initiatives and attention. "they don't argue that Petito's case deserves less furor, but rather that missing indigenous people deserve equal attention" while F.B.I searched Gabby Petito's boyfriends home, families of missing and murdered indigenous woman conduct their own searches. While people volunteer to help search for Gabby, loved ones

of MMIW offer thousands of dollars as a reward for any help they can receive. The direct attention towards these cases are not similar by any means. While Gabby Petito's name and face is now well known and talked about everywhere among media, very few people know about the thousands of MMIW cases that have been going on for years.

Zachary Sommers, a sociologist and criminologist said, "as a culture, we readily identify with white folks and white individuals who are victims, so we see a white person go missing in a few news stories, and we think, that could be my cousin or that could be my friend or my coworker or my brother or my sister. Whereas, we may have different connotations or associations with people of color. None of this has to be explicitly stated. This all might just be implicit perceptions that we have as a result of structural racism in this country.

Sources:
seattletimes.com 'contrasting coverage of Gabby Petito's case and MMIP shows absolute injustice'
NativeWomensWilderness.org 'murdered and missing indigenous woman'
Greatfallstribune.com 'missing white woman syndrome'



THE START OF AN URBAN NATIVE AMERICAN CLUB

By Kayla Harstad

As president of Urban Native American club the 2021-22 school year has become hopeful for me at Ingraham. Being a senior at Ingraham there has been little to no representation of Indigenous culture in the past 3 years. Starting an Urban Native American club has been a step in feeling safe and included in a school where I'm supposed to be comfortable and able to be myself. Having no representation of my own culture has become sad and uncomfortable, that it's taken 4 years to have my school and me be one. Since starting the club we have had many members come, we welcome all students in learning about Indigenous youth perspective, new opportunities, and cultural teachings. A step we are making is including a land acknowledgement that could be read at assemblies, morning announcements, and events. I hope that this year we are able to leave a mark on the school that can lead the rest of my indigenous peers to feel welcome and represented in the community.



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY

By Jazell Jenkins

Indigenous Peoples' Day is a holiday that celebrates and honors Native American peoples and commemorates their histories and cultures. But as long as you are on stolen land, every day Indigenous People's. Indigenous Peoples Day is about acknowledging and celebrating one another. It's also a day to recognize that we exist outside of white supremacy and settler colonialism. We are dynamic and exist through space and time. Taíno people and other Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean are often left out of conversations around Indigenous People's Day. They were the ones who saved Columbus from starvation-only to be met with war, genocide, and slavery later. This is a great time to remind folks that Columbus didn't ever set foot in so-called North America, and that not every first contact story happened simultaneously.

Indigenous Peoples' Day advocates say the recognition helps correct a "whitewashed" American history that has glorified Europeans like Italian explorer Christopher Columbus who have committed erasable and uncountable acts of violence against Indigenous communities. Native Americans have long criticized the inaccuracies and harmful narratives of Columbus' legacy that credited him with his "discovery" of the Americas when Indigenous people were there first.

Indigenous people do not only exist for today, or for the month of November, or whenever this settler society decides to "celebrate" us. We are Indigenous every single day of the year. Indigenous people protect the land, water, and air worldwide. We are also the most hunted by governments and corporations, which is why it's important to uplift and center those on the frontlines while also acknowledging that it takes many roles to build this world, we all dream of. Indigenous resistance is love for our people and our land. It's our ancestors' prayers and energy that cannot be stopped. Therefore those at the top fear us most when we work together in a system designed to keep us apart.

Indigenous people also do not need to conform to anyone's ideas of what being Indigenous is. We don't exist to perform, and however we choose to exist is valid. Know that we have always been here, are still here, and forever will be here. Building community and supporting one another is lifelong work and goes deeper than any infographic could explain. As we build the future together, we must extend grace to one another, continue to show up and give back, and collectively envision the world we are deserving of.



INDIGENOUS GRAVESITES AND COLONIZER SCIENCE

By Asia Gellein

Dr. Dumont talks about how the First Nations should have 100% say over what naturally belongs to them, including the remains of their people and belongings. I agree that the graveyards of many indigenous people's ancestors today are not collections of data waiting to be discovered by scientists who feel obligated to commit morbid acts of theft to find "truth".



The section of the article, "Who Has The Right To Tell The Truth", reminds me of Manifest Destiny. The morally obligated seeking of truth scientists say they're doing when the "data" they use is immorally taken and kept proves how their intention has nothing to do with morals. "This political strategy works to effectively inscribe a foundational "common sense" that evokes a patriotic self-confidence wrapped tightly in the language of scientific rationality—a potent ideological amalgamation" (p.111).

The archaeologists against NAGPRA believe it is their patriotic duty and scientific right to do whatever possible to keep these remains. It is a contest of power, and they think they're the rightful owners of what was never theirs in the first place because they think it is up to them to write history. "If these scientists cannot discredit Indian accounts of our past, then they cannot insist that their hold on the intellectual turf where 'clear and accurate understandings' are produced is maintained by some special cerebral skill—a skill they claim only for themselves and must therefore insist is not ultimately reducible to what I maintain has always been superior political power" (p.114). The scientists Dr. Dumont speaks of have an inflated sense of self where they believe they are the voice of reason and are entitled to do whatever it takes to have this sense of discovery colonizers have committed genocide for: To them, it is their destiny. To them, a graveyard of indigenous bodies, whether thousands of years old or only days old, is the buried treasure chest they seek to uncover. And they must be the ones to "discover" it.

"Their archaeological record is a product of their intellectual and political history. No Indian ever went to his or her grave with a sign on his or her forehead reading 'here lies the archaeologists' only hard evidence'" (p.116).

The morbid ways these sources of information modern scientists' work and discoveries rely on are buried beneath the image of their elite moral and political status. In modern colonial society, science is the new bible: a colonial tool made to rationalize their unjust actions and gain power. The position as the narrator of "truth" is the ultimate display of such force, which is the barrier in the pursuit of native sovereignty. "The only credible reading of their claims to speak for all of us is that they are engaged in a political tactic designed to erase the perspectives of those over whom they have always exercised colonialist power" (p.114). This kind of scientist was used initially as a political instrument for the colonial government. Suppose a community of them has this much racist and political background and enough influence for society today to believe anything and everything "verified" by scientists. How are they not the epitome of colonial power?

The resistance in returning the stolen indigenous bodies and the reburial of the remains is an example of the arrogance of much of the scientific community today. Who are they to tell the story of indigenous people who have been living here long before this scientific community was even created and are more than capable of telling their own stories if they weren't being discredited and minimized? "When I die and am placed in the ground, I don't want to be dug up and thought of as a book. We think it is very arrogant or ignorant. Where do you guys get off saying you know who we are?" (p.113). Another defense of the NAGPRA-opposed scientific community is that they must protect "the archaeological record", which is what Dr. Dumont describes as a "prejudiced European concept" (p.117). He states, "Indian memories can remind these scientists that their colonialist claims to narrate 'the real past' are nothing new" (p.114).

"They take them away from us, but it is our responsibility to prove that they were stolen" (p.121). - Klamath NAGPRA officer

CSA STUDENT OF THE MONTH: JAISEN QUINANOLA (COWICHAN)

Jaisen is a star CSA student that we wanted to highlight this month. He has had 100% attendance so far this year and has shown a real care for his education. He is in 10th grade.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you come to UNEA?

JAISEN:

I started with the tutoring program after reading about it in the UNEA newsletter.

INTERVIEWER:

What is your favorite thing about UNEA/Clear Sky?

JAISEN:

Community and all my classmates. I'm the only native person at my high school so I appreciate being with other native students. I like learning about stuff from my culture and traditions and things I haven't done before. I learned about the spirit plate in the class.

INTERVIEWER:

What has been the most valuable thing you've learned in CSA?

JAISEN:

Learning about the residential schools because I understand how blessed I am to be here on the earth because my grandmother and her siblings had to go through that and how I have it easier now. They were a lot more oppressed.

INTERVIEWER:

Any hobbies or interest?

JAISEN:

I like to cook and write.

INTERVIEWER:

One piece of advice for other students?

JAISEN:

If you could be anything in life, just be kind.



VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH: FRAN CHARLES (TLINGIT)

Fran has been a dependable volunteer the past few months. She comes to tutoring and basketball to help set-up, and you can see here lending a hand at Clear Sky Academy as well.

We appreciate all the help and love you've given to UNEA and our youth, Fran!

Q: How did you come to UNEA?

A: I used to go to the Green Lake recreational center and exercise there. I saw different flyers on the wall and spotted the UNEA flyer 3 years ago. I called the number on the flyer, and it was Sarah who answered. I got a health permit to be able to serve the food and make it safe for everybody.

Q: What is your favorite thing about UNEA/Clear Sky?

A: My favorite aspect of UNEA is that they welcome all cultures and all ages. They try to help others in any way possible, especially with schooling. The weaving workshop in Clear Sky Academy was really good. It taught a lot about the meaning of cedar. UNEA also hosts different events for holidays for the youth which are always fun and engaging.

Q: Why did you choose to volunteer for UNEA?

A: They are very open to all people. Everybody is welcome. Connecting with others from different cultures has been very nice.

Q: How has UNEA affected your life?

A: It's kept me busy. It makes me appreciate listening to all the young adults such as Asia Gellein. She is very smart. Seeing all the kids really trying to do something rather than play games all day is inspiring. It uplifts our community and moving through obstacles with COVID shows our strength.

Q: What has volunteering at UNEA done for you? What have you learned?

A: I've always liked to be around young people. It brings me joy. Treating everybody equally is a core principle in the organization.

Q: What advice would you give to new volunteers unfamiliar with UNEA?

A: If you say you will do something, stick to your word and be there.



TWO SPIRIT IDENTITY

By Joseph Aleck

On Oct 3rd Itai Jeffries came to a UNEA Zoom event to discuss their children's book in which they read aloud with the co-writer Victoria Persinger Ferguson and the illustrator Trae Middlebrooks. Itai read as Sam, the main character, who represents their experience with identity. Victoria read the Tribal Elder, Miss Mary, who teaches Sam about the cultural history of the plant sassafras. Which naturally grows in three ways, representing the three genders of the tribe: male, female, and two spirit.

Itai had grown up with the subject of gender without the knowledge of even the term Two Spirit. So what came with that perceived difference was the common factor in which they found themselves not fitting in with what's known, and because of this dealt with bullying at a young age.

One of the stories that Itai shared during the event was about when they were invited by their community of women into a circle and within that defined by others acknowledgement Two Spirit in action from making decisions with women as a woman in that moment. That acknowledgement was brought to light by the realization of the circle being only women so then Itai said "I should leave". Rose Clay Watlington said "why" and Itai explained that they didn't have any say on the decision as a man in the space but she said "you're Two Spirit. You belong here". Which is an example of the beginning acknowledgements of Itai's identity through the wisdom of elders that saw what others hadn't thought of them. That was one of the things Itai spoke about in the event that wasn't in the story but helped define the importance of teaching children who may not know what they may identify with.

While rewatching the zoom meeting for this article that quote, "you're Two Spirit. You belong here" made me cry about the fact I hadn't been able to be acknowledged the same way. I even feel pain from the realization that I had been struggling with not holding balance with my feminine and my masculine side. I know where my hesitance comes from. Inside, I've felt horrible half the time I'm around my father. The history of status quos were reinforced in the moments he told me about holding in emotions as a man, and that being a man doesn't include hurting yourself or others so you don't have to deal with the hurt you feel. I was recognizing how he was uncomfortable with me being feminine.

I've also been put in a place from jokes that use my appearance to define my gender even if in the fact sex is a physical and biological aspect of my appearance. I can't really explain what makes me feel these ways, about being left out from women which I don't mind being that I'm a bit of a loner but still. Then there's also ways of feeling like how I carry myself when I'm comfortable, including how I talk like the women I've known. Well, felt accompanied with what makes me identify with women as much as I do with men.

To conclude I see that my history aligns with the fact that if you don't just accept someone in their identity it hurts. The book has a message digestible by a younger me and other children out there that could take away some connection to what they feel and can't yet explain. I believe it is on you, and all of us, to see how you could help someone with normalising the things that aren't really anything to debate outta someone when it's just how they exist as I do in my own time underneath all the barriers that vary from small to debilitating.



SASSY SASSAFRAS A TWO SPIRIT STORY



By Victoria Persinger Ferguson
& Itai Jeffries

Illustrated by Trae Middlebrooks



RIBBON SKIRT MAKING

By Sarah Sense-Wilson (Oglala)

On Oct. 23rd student scholars of Clear Sky Academy rolled up their sleeves to embark on creating their very own Ribbon Skirt. All young winyans in attendance are currently enrolled in our Clear Sky Academy Art and Culture (fine arts) course in partnership with Yellow Wood Academy at North Seattle College. The young Winyans each chose their fabric and ribbon colors with the assistance of volunteer parent Lenelle Jenkins. We had the good fortune of learning from master seamstress Alice Oligario (Naniamo/Squamish) and Karen Oligario. We began the project with cultural protocol (prayer and sage smudge) to cleanse our work- space, and center our thoughts and mind in preparation for ceremony. Each person was instructed step by step in how to measure, mark, cut and sew our fabric to create our own customized ribbon skirt. As I witnessed and listened to the laughter, smiles, joking, along with occasional frustration, hesitancy, and apprehension, I quickly realized our ribbon skirt making project was a bonding among women both young and old. We all learned about different teachings and thoughts about ribbon skirts with the overall understanding emphasized by Alice which is these skirts carry medicine, and wear them with respect and pride and most importantly wear your skirt whenever you are moved to wear it. We concluded our evening with wonderful succulent dinner catered by Jeremy Thunderbird 'Native Soul Food'.

Alice is a remarkable instructor, and an incredibly talented, gifted seamstress. Alice thoughtfully guided each of us in our sewing lesson to manifest good medicine and a collective celebration of our femininity and cultural pride. Our Winyans will be wearing their special ribbon skirts during our trip to Washington DC visit to Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall and Arlington cemetery. We plan to share an offering, sing a prayer song to express our gratitude to our veterans. Wopila Alice, Karen and Lenelle for your care, time, love, guidance and support with our ceremonial ribbon skirt making a memorable experience.



About Us! Seattle Clear Sky Native Youth Council (SCSNYC) provides:

- **Academic Support:** Instructional tutoring and mentoring.
- **Cultural Learning Activities:** Song and drum instruction, beading, talking circle, mural painting, storytelling, and art projects.
- **Individual Recognition:** Student of the month, monthly birthdays, and Native graduation acknowledgments.
- **Community Involvement:** Spirit Walk, social justice rallies, and field trips.
- **Leadership Opportunities:** Circle discussions, fund-raisers, community organizing, and leadership building projects.
- **Basketball Program.**
- **Student Service Learning.**

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