

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: POWWOW (CREE) WORKSHOP 1
ALFRED BONAISE, ELI BEAR

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Need to return to traditional format of Indian ceremonies.
POW-WOW WORKSHOP

ALFRED BONAISE:

Me too, I am very happy the way the discussions have been for I know whatever is said is true and will benefit a lot of people. For this Grass dance and Round dances were given to us Indian people. Me, too, I have been to quite a number of Pow-wows for I truly believe in these different ceremonies. This is why I have come to listen to the old people; let's say I want to know more about how they used to perform these traditional dances long ago. And I also like the way they explained parts of how things were done. So I have not very much to say, for I come to listen to see how best we can perform our Pow-wow in the future, this is all I can say.

ELI BEAR:

About this Grass and Round dances - when I first remember I was twelve years old. I had an uncle, his name was Richard Bear; he was a very good singer. I can remember when they had a dance, they used to feed people apples in boxes. And I was only twelve years old. They used to put one of those apple boxes where the drummers were and I used to stand on top of one box and sing. We used small round drums for we never used the big drum for it was mostly Round dances; there was hardly any Grass dancing. It was kind of a competition, who had the best songs

for Round dances for there were words put into those Round dance songs. Today we do not know the words to these songs for some of these songs had words in them that were very nice. And also women and men used to dress up with a lot of ribbons for at that time there was hardly any beads. The only beads you would see is on moccasins; there were quite a few ribbons. If a woman had five ribbons on her, people would say that she earned them. And what was highly possessed by women was velvet. And another thing we do not see very much of is should beaded capes. These were beaded, also belts and moccasins. And people used to dance Round dance. There was a thing that was highly respected when a man cut in between two women and one of these women was his official dance partner. The man used to put something upon the woman's shoulders as a gift. My grandfather used to have Mrs. Bernice Franks as his dance partner. After this was done, my grandfather used to tell a story. The women in turn would do the same thing to her man dance partner. This was done at Round dances. There was no money involved; people used to help out. Or even one person used to make a dance and he used to do it because it was promised for certain reasons, maybe for the health of his loved one. They used all kinds of food. There was lots of soups and old people used to bless these. Also sweetgrass and pipe was used before the Round dances started.

You see it was one person who used to perform the Round dance. There were servants and servers, also a person called "nemehitoo okimaw," the leader of the Pow-wow. So I have taken part as a server and still do. Things are done in the proper manner. And this thing, when I first started dancing Grass dance I had an outfit made of beads. This outfit was made by my brother-in-law's sister by the name of Maria. She made the outfit for me from velvet and work was done with ribbons and embroidery thread. And when I first started dancing my grandfather gave some stuff away; also my mother gave a one year old horse. So from then on I was taking part in Grass dances up to until I was a young man and really taking part in singing and left out the dancing. It is not very long ago I stopped taking part in singing. After I quit singing I started emceeing for Pow-wows. This is all for dancing.

And now for leaderships in Pow-wows. It wasn't for nothing this person was put in a position. He was seen as a person who used to help in many Pow-wows, pretty soon he was put in as an "okichetaw". He is put there by people. A long time ago people used to go on war parties; this is where the people selected for Pow-wow leadership; it was for this bravery. There are a lot of different leaders in different traditional ceremonies. My dad was a Pow-wow leader for ten years and a little after that come in the dance they had on Christmas. Everybody helped. It turned out to be a big feast and a Round dance. This got so that later they had pie sales and basket socials but there was no fiddle dances; they were all Round dances. And when you bought a basket whoever made the basket you had to eat with him or her. They even had coins in cakes, so many coins. If you got one of them you all had to make a

dance. This is what went on in Little Pine for people were trying to get Pow-wow full force. We used to have a lot of visitors. I can remember a long time ago we had a round hall.

You know at that time you never saw anybody with the influence of alcohol. There were the odd old person but they never made a fool out of themselves. And after that stage then came the grants and from there our dances are slowly fading away. It got so that our hall was tore down. I always thought after the last war Round dancing slowly faded. For it was easy that time, for when the army boys got home they used to get liquor for other people. From then on I always think there was too much liquor used in dances; this is why it faded, this here Round dancing. So it got to a point where we are allowed to obtain liquor so there is no more dancing in Little Pine, not like the old times.

And we used to have a lot of real good singers. Today a lot of them turn to booze. This is the cause of all our traditional dances all fading away account of too much alcohol.

Now I am not bragging but my sister, Winnona Frank, was last chosen "okichetaw ikwao" for she was a woman who used to help out by bringing all kinds of soups in pails also cakes and stuff like that. She used to dance in the hall with a bag full of her give-aways to visitors. This is why she was given that position. And the one that was given the position of "oki-chetaw" died quite a few years ago; his name was William Sapp. This man was used in all of the different ceremonies. And not very long ago, just recently, money came out to start Pow-wows again in reserves, but there was a shortage of singers and dancers. So from there Fort Qu'Appelle, the Assiniboines, first started the big tops. There were a lot of United States Indian people there. I used to go up there for I used to like the way the Grass dancers dressed for they had outfits like that long before we did. So this is where this idea of Grass dances started from but it was brought in from the States. It got to North Battleford and now it is all over in reserves. So this is what has happened. Ever since we got money everything seemed to die away, like helping in Pow-wows, the give-away, etc.

But now it is the future. We say we are happy for these Pow-wows for there is lots of beadwork involved in the outfits. But now we don't have what it takes to tell them and teach them. I am sad we stop too early way back from where we could teach our young and from where they would be kind of scared to what they are doing now. We should have not stopped; we would have shown what it is like to really enjoy real Grass dances and Round dances. But now we are trying to revive the old ways, we seem to forget. You take like some last year and this fall the Moosomin Band started at that place. Long ago I was there for three winters and they used to have real good Round dances. There was one old man although he was blind he knew how a person could have fun and enjoy himself. For he even used to sing too. And not very long ago the Moosomin Band put up a dance. There were a lot of young people but now to try and tell

them what the Indian way is trying to say.... Because sometimes when you drop an item of your outfit there is somebody there to pick that, a warrior or somebody of importance. In turn the person that picks it up used to tell a brave deed he did. And if we ever do go back to that stage I cannot recall nor can I recall of a person using medicine. Today they say that, when they lose some part of their outfit, especially when there is competition. But that old man that told me, he said, "It is not the medicine been used but it's the person. He has a weak medicine. It is the women who are not well that are present. They are the ones that do that. Or even a woman falls herself."

This is what this old man said. And this is one thing we have to understand, to respect this type of dancing. Maybe if we can bring this up to its standards like old times, maybe we can have the truth to tell our children and bring them in that Indian way, traditional way, of dancing. The old people used to say that if a person truly believes, he is gifted with a clear mind so he can think things out to him towards the good things.

This is the thing we have to try and do something about - not only the way to be an Indian but also to do the things Indian ways. The way the person performs, also the way he or she dresses, also the way they learn to respect it. These are the things that are really wanted. This is the thing I want too when I work for Pow-wows. Also the singer wants too, for they work hard; it is one of the hardest jobs in a Pow-wow.

There is a lot of times I have to call and call singers but they always say, "Let them first pay me." Long ago we used to sing for Round dances and Grass dances; we never got paid. Why? Because there were a lot of singers available. Today there are a very few. There are some, but singers wait they want to get paid first. Today this is what it looks like in anything you're asked to do, you feel like you have to get paid, while in the old days you never thought of pay. And when a person sings a song from away back they say, "What is this fellow trying to sing?" Today you don't know the songs they sing. You take in Pigeon Lake, there was an old man. He was the leader singer of the young group. He was singing real old songs at Sweet Grass Pow-wow just recently but just a little bit different. I don't know how I felt when I heard them. There is one song used for the members of the "cowboy" group. It is used in every Pow-wow for Grass dances. See this was a song only used for that group and nowhere else. Why? Because they do not understand what those songs are for so they used them anyway. There was one time at Battleford big top, one group sang a song on one side. After the song was finished, the other side got up and they danced. These were from the States. They were dancing in the same place and the rest got up to give donations for the song that was just sung was a very great honored song in the States. They said a chief used to sing that song. And this song was sung by the Mosquito Juniors. This is what I mean, we are two-sided. We do not know their special songs and they don't know our special songs. This is what I say, we have to know all these things. This is all I can

say. Only I can say is, it is very hard in whatever you do.
 Just like when I emcee for a Pow-wow it is difficult for me.
 There is times I have to pray for myself so as nobody

misunderstands me so as I don't get anybody mad for I have
 children of my own who take part. There are four of us in the
 family who are going to dance in Pow-wows for I think this is
 the only way I can lead my family toward the Indian way of
 life. This is why I am going to dance too, hoping that my
 young people will carry on for a long time. You see these
 young people get down-hearted if the parent does not take part
 in dancing or helping in the line of work in the Pow-wows.

(End of Interviews)

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