

ONE MODERN DAY NATIVE AMERICAN

Oral History Transcript

submitted to Jim Harrington

by Dawn Nadeau

November 29, 1993

ONE MODERN DAY NATIVE AMERICAN
ORAL HISTORY OUTLINE

- I. Subject's background
 - A. tribe
 - B. reservation
 - C. Indian name
 - D. family

- II. Present day organization of tribe
 - A. leaders
 - B. voting

- III. Symbols
 - A. colors
 - B. directions (north, east, south, west)
 - C. others (sweetgrass)

- IV. Clothing

- V. Government funding
 - A. money received
 - B. medical, etc.
 - C. feelings

- VI. Traditions
 - A. Sundance
 - B. fast and prayer
 - C. sweats
 - D. funerals and burial

- VII. Continuing Native American Traditions

- VIII. Peace pipe

- IX. Indian religion
 - A. mixing with other religion
 - B. God and Jesus Christ

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Dawn Nadeau
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D=Dawn Nadeau (Interviewer)
C=Christine Blatt (Interviewee)

D: This is an interview of Christine Blatt conducted by Dawn Nadeau at First Aid Systems on 11/29/93 at 3:30 p.m.

D: When did you first come to Butte?

C: I came to Butte July 30, 1991.

D: And where did you live previously?

C: I lived in Rocky Boy (Reservation).

D: And what tribe of Native American are you?

C: I'm a Chippewa Cree.

D: And what's your Indian name?

C: Mountain Thunder Woman.

D: And you have two girls, is that right?

C: I have two girls and a son.

D: What are their Indian names?

C: Priscilla's Indian name is Little Flying Eagle, Dawn is Little Sitting Eagle Girl, and Billy's is Good Bear Boy.

D: And Jo (Josephine Petritz) tells me that your mother can cleanse blood with herbs. Is that right?

C: Well, it's not my mother. It's my mother-in-law. She makes this Indian medicine out of these herbs. I don't know what kind of herbs, but it cleanses your blood and stuff.

D: Have you ever taken the herbs?

C: Mmm-hmm. It worked when I had like stomach problems. It made my stomach feel good. And then one time I had breast cancer, and I went to the Indian doctor back home. He's a medicine man, and he made me some herbs and stuff with his medicine, and I got a clean bill of health when I went back to the doctor.

D: How is the tribe organized today? What sort of leaders do you have? Are there still chiefs?

C: I don't know if they're chiefs. They're called chairmen and a council.

D: Does everyone in the tribe participate in the government, or is it pretty much the council that runs things?

C: Pretty much the council.

D: Do you vote for your councilmen?

C: Yes, we do.

D: There's a lot of symbolism in your tribe. Is that true? Like colors. Don't you have certain colors that mean things?

C: Well, they do. Like we have the main colors: blue, red, green, and white. I don't know what they mean. They take them into the sweats - Indian sweats, and they also wrap them around the tree during the Sundance.

D: Directions, do they mean anything? Like north...

C: Yes they do.

D: What do each of those mean?

C: Well, east is for the sun. South is for the white buffalo. West is for the wind, tornadoes, and north is for the thunderbird.

D: Are there any other symbols, like do any plants mean anything, or anything like that? Sweetgrass, I heard.

C: Well, sweetgrass, that protects you.

D: What type of clothing? You just wear everyday clothing...but when you come together as a tribe do you wear certain clothing or do you still make clothing?

C: When they have the pow-wows and stuff they have the buckskin dresses; they have moccasins. I mean it's all decked out in beads.

D: Do you make any of those yourself?

C: Well, I don't make the dresses. I try to make the moccasins for my daughter because she dances. I do a little beadwork, but not too much.

D: Is there certain thing only Indians can do on the land? Is there white people on the reservation, or how do things work on the reservation?

C: Some of the white people live on the reservation. We have a Stone Child College on the Rocky Boy. And there is some teachers up there that's white. And in the elementary and high school they're white. We have the doctors and nurses.

D: Is it like on "Norther Exposure?" Do they have the thing where you pay for a doctor's medical school. If they come, they have to work in your area for a certain amount of time? Have you ever heard of that?

C: No, I haven't.

D: Do you get a lot of money from the government? How does that work?

C: Like right now when we're off the reservation, the public health, they pay for our medical, and the hospital bills, and stuff like that. And they also pay for the college tuition for my husband.

D: So he could have chosen to go anywhere, and it would be paid for?

C: Mmm-hmm. (Yes)

D: Isn't it true that your husband will be the first Native American to graduate from (Montana) Tech?

C: Yes, it is.

D: That's great.

C: He'll make history I hope.

D: How do you feel about the money you get from the government? Do you think that it's well deserved, or do you think there will be a time where the government should stop paying it?

C: Well, I don't know if they'll ever stop paying, but I don't think it's used right in some ways.

D: How do you think it's abused?

C: Well, they buy things that doesn't help the people back home or anything like that. They mostly use it for themselves - to go on these trips to Washington D.C. or to Billings.

D: Oh, instead of giving it to the people who really need it,

they use it for their cause more?

C: Yes.

D: Do you do anything for the kids? What do you do to continue the Native American heritage? Do you teach them the language?

C: Well back in the Rocky Boy, in the elementary school, now they have like, you learn your culture, like how to talk Cree - Indian. They have that right up to sixth grade.

D: Can you speak in Indian?

C: No I can't. My husband does. He can talk it, and he understands it.

D: What's your husband's name?

C: Vance.

D: Can you tell me a little about the traditions? Like the Sundance. What goes on there?

C: Well, during the Sundance, you go in there and like you're praying for health and life and things like that. Or you're praying for a family member that's been in trouble or something like that. And you can't take your eyes off the main pole in the middle of the Sundance lodge. And it's all wrapped in different colors, the four main colors I told you. It's all wrapped and you can't take your eyes off that pole. And the woman can't go around that pole when she's sick or when she has her menstrual period. It will make the Sundancers sick. It rains all the time during the Sundance.

D: What about when you go to the mountain to fast and pray. Is that the pow-wow, or when do you do that?

C: Well, you do that during the summertime. There's a mountain back home. They call it a sacred mountain. It's called Bald Butte. And we went up there, me and my son, and we had to stay up there for four days and four nights. We come down at twelve midnight on our fourth day. You can't eat or drink.

D: For four days?

C: For four days. You go up and you have a vision. After you finish your fast, they say the grandfathers, they take care of you from then on.

D: How about the sweats? What are they and what do you do there?

C: I'm not sure, but they're made out of canvas like the tepees. They have a big hole in the middle of the ground, and they carry these rocks in that are really hot. They have the medicine man in there. You sit around and sweat in a circle. The women are on the west side and the men are on the east side.

D: Is there a reason for that, or do you know?

C: There's a reason for it. I don't know what it is.

C: And then the medicine man sits way up in the front like that, and they're singing these songs for the spirits to come in. And then they splash this water on the hot rocks. It's really hot in those sweats.

D: What kind of funerals do you have for your people?

C: Well, we have wakes where - they will take them to the mortician to get fixed up - and then they bring them up. Sometimes they bring them to the people's homes, like their homes. And they'll set up for about three nights, and then they'll bury them on the fourth day.

D: Is there a reason for they days?

C: It's just that...in directions, you have four directions and stuff. So that figures on the fourth day that you walk home.

D: Do they bury them in the morning, is that what I understand?

C: They bury them in the morning so that by nighttime they'll get where they're going. That's what the Indians believe. They'll be where they are...get to where they're going.

D: Like a long journey home?

C: Mmm-hmm. (Yes) And then after the funeral they'll have a big feast. They set all this food out on the floor. They have the medicine man praying over it with sweetgrass. You have to go in a circle. The people that are serving the food...See everyone is sitting in a circle, and the people that are serving the food, they have to start at one end and go into that circle

D: Are your people just buried at a cemetery, or is there a particular burial ground?

C: Just buried at the cemetery, up on a big hill back home.

D: Do you smoke some sort of pipe, like a peace pipe?

C: The only time a woman gets to smoke that is when she's up on that mountain doing her four directions. The medicine man gives her a set of directions for herself like when she's in trouble or

something like that. She can pick up that pipe and smoke it. The medicine man has to give her that set of directions, though.

D: Can the men smoke it any time?

C: Oh, the man can smoke it anytime. They have it in sweats and the lodge.

D: Does that make you mad that the women can only smoke it sometimes?

C: No, because I think it's a tradition from years ago for just the men to smoke a peace pipe.

D: What religion are you?

C: I'm a Catholic, but I also follow in the Indian religion. I try to go up on that mountain maybe once or twice...well, once a year I'll go up there and stay for four days and four nights.

D: Is it hard to do both religions? Do you get confused?

C: No, because you can follow the Indian religion...it's a lot different than the Catholic, but I think, like right now back home the Catholic church, they have the sweetgrass, and they burn the sweetgrass.

D: Can you tell me a little about the Indian religion? What they believe in. Do they believe in God and Jesus Christ like a Catholic, or do they believe in different gods and spirits?

C: They believe in God and Jesus, but they also believe in the grandfathers. Those are who come into those lodges and sweats, and they tell you what you are doing and things like that. Like that one year I went up to the mountain to go fast up there. Nobody knew that I took a set of rosaries with me, and when I came down that mountain and went back to sweats, all those grandfathers were telling this medicine man I shouldn't mix Catholic with Indian religion. So they're the only ones who knew I had that set of rosaries up there - the grandfathers.

D: Oh really. So you didn't even tell anyone?

C: I didn't tell nobody.

D: What exactly does the medicine man do? What's his job?

C: Well, he prays, he's really high up there. And when he becomes a medicine man he has to be tied up to a tree - our medicine man had to be tied up to a tree for eight days. And those spirits would come to him and things like that to tell him what he had to do to become a medicine man.

D: So he's pretty important?

C: Mmm-hmm. (Yes)

D: Is he paid?

C: A medicine man should never accept money. They have to accept tobacco or maybe a blanket or something like that. Never money.

D: Does the medicine man live on the reservation?

C: He lives on the reservation.

D: Do most of the people in your tribe live on the reservation?

C: There's a bunch of people who live on the reservation, and there's a lot living off the reservation.

D: Well, thanks for your time Christine. I really appreciate it.

C: Thank you. I hope it helps.

we, Christine Blatt and Dawn Nadeau,
(Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)
surrender all rights to all or any part of the material contained
in this oral history for future research, reference, or quotation.

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(Person Interviewed)

Dawn M Nadeau
(Interviewer)

11/29/93
(Date)

Butte, Montana
(City & State)