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Spokane Tribe of Indians Vice - Chairman David BrownEagle

Commentary August 17, 2017

I shared a story concerning my grandmother with many people along my way.

“My grandmother and I were walking down this one street in Spokane. I was around 9 years old. My grandmother wore a ribbon dress, with earrings and necklace, a shawl on one arm, holding a beaded bag, a scarf wrapped around her head, braids coming together at their tips, and had on a pair of high top moccasins. She was beautiful and at that time many of the elders dressed this way every day. As we came to this one block there were three teenage boys standing in front of this one building and as we neared they nudged one another and nodded in the direction of me and my grandmother. As we passed each one began to make whopping sounds as they put their hands to their mouths, mimicked dancing movements, and made rude and disparaging remarks directed at my grandmother.

Even though I was 9 years old I got angry. This was my grandmother. I looked back at them and I looked at my grandmother and again at the three teen boys. I was confused. My grandmother wasn't showing any emotion whatsoever, just a look of contentment and quiet serenity.

After we got passed them, they stopped and went about being teen age boys. We got to the corner and stopped for traffic. I again looked back at the three 'ignorant' young boys and then I looked at my grandmother and asked, “Didn't you hear what they were saying to you and about you? Didn't you hear the war whoops? Didn't you see the fake dancing? Why didn't you say something? Why aren't you mad? I wanted to fight them?” I was confused and angry. Then my grandmother looked at me, all 4'8" of her, and with the grandmotherly look she smiled, then looked across the street as though she saw something only she could see, then she replied, quietly, softly and with dignity and pride, “I know who I am.”

Through the years I slowly in time came to understand what she meant. Why react to things that aren't true? If one has acknowledged oneself, all the experiences and knowledge of what has happened and made happen, and learns of oneself within community, culture, family and life then one learns of self. That all there is in relation to the world. The ignorance of the few should not diminish one's knowledge and acceptance of self. The reason I bring this story is, as you know, the ugly face of racism, bigotry, and hate is there, never has been gone, but has been given permission to come out into the open.

Let us not be angry. It is their anger not ours.

Let us not do as they do. We are as the Creator has made us to be. Let us not be fearful. Our strength is our belief, values, and teachings from the generations past. Let us unite with those who love and understand as we do. Not as those who hate and are ignorant. Let us not be one of them. "I know who I am."

We know who we are.

Spokane Tribe Forever!

Dave BrownEagle Vice Chair, Spokane Tribe of Indians