



A Talking Leaf

The Newsletter of Queer Oyate - the Two-Spirit Native American Coalition of POCAAN

Seattle, WA 98112 1.206.461.8241

FALL 1997 VOLUME 2 ISSUE 4

1997 Annual International Two-Spirit Gathering

by Wesley Thomas, Ph.C. (Navajo)

The night was quiet as we wound through a maze of street lights toward the site where the annual Two-Spirit Gathering was being held north of Minneapolis. Too quiet. I was traveling with Chrystos (*Menominee*) and Brett Basset from Seattle; the quietness made us nervous and we made a lot of noise asking one another loudly whether we were lost. We spent close to an hour exploring abandoned campsites before we reached the right place.

As we approached another well lit site, we saw a shadowy figure moving around in the parking lot. As we approached, we saw that it was Beverly Little Thunder (*Standing Rock Lakota*), unloading belongings from her truck. As soon as she recognized us, we all screamed, laughed, and giggled, meeting one another again after a year.

Two-Spirit people from across the country and from some of the Canadian provinces would be here. At the Gathering, old friends meet again.

Ptanyétu hanbépi wi héna - Autumn Moons

Hau Kola! *A Talking Leaf* returns with a belated Fall issue and a new quarterly publication schedule and only four pages in length. We are requesting more Two-Spirit coming out stories and who knows? Maybe you'll help a Native Brother or Sister to come out and enjoy the Two-Spirit circle of life.

The primary activity for Queer Oyate this season will be a Native American Plains Style Arts and Crafts Circle. Learn basic beadwork techniques (loom, lazy stitch and peyote stitch) for decoration and jewelry, as well as basic leather craft for making traditional clothing. Also included will be an upcoming date to make your own hand drum.

Queer Oyate will provide the tools, along with some of the basic materials needed for small projects. People wanting to do more complex regalia must provide additional materials for themselves. (Sorry! We cannot supply any Eagle feathers!)

Join Queer Oyate on 2nd and 3rd Wednesdays, 6:30-9:30pm. November meetings will be held at the POCAAN Conference Room, December meetings will be at our home in Lake City. We'll drum and sing and do Arts and Crafts and even have pizza! See page 3 for further details.

Mitakuye Oyasmin, Greg and Helen Redfox

We have kept in contact over intervening time by letter and telephone, email and grapevine—but seeing one another in person is always better. For some, it is a place to meet and make new friends who then become old friends and family. For others, it is a place where Native people reaffirm their identities as Two-Spirit, or come to define themselves as such. All these relations clarify one's identity.

Most importantly, though, the Gathering is a joyous occasion. It is always like returning home. Embraces are readily offered and given. Past joys are re-celebrated with loved ones, and sadnesses shared with tears. It is a time to come together to ease our pains and learn to accommodate our sorrows.

This year's Gathering was as it had been in previous years. Mornings consisted of meetings in pairs or groups, over breakfast, in the dining hall. People traded gossip, stories, and regional



Wesley's book. See page 4 for upcoming events.

news. Some wandered in with sleepy eyes, others wide awake and bejeweled from head to toe in beadwork or turquoise, like drag queens taking the stage with a distinctly Native character and flair.

Each day small talking circles emerged to discuss various topics. We explored issues on HIV+ status, women's and men's issues, offered or took instruction in Beadwork 101, and so forth. Others went canoeing, kayaking, or took long leisurely walks along the large lake.

Friday night was designated Talent Night. Anyone could stage a production. Seattle's own Princess Bubbles AKA Jay Johnson (*Shawnee*) made her debut as a New Age Two-Spirit shaman, making offerings to wannabes and giving instruction on how to find oneself. "It helps to go shopping to find one's inner peace," she claimed. Others told personal stories and tribal legends or recited poetry during the night, along with skits such as "How to Learn to Play the Trumpet."

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A Talking Leaf

is published quarterly by
Queer Oyate
the Two-Spirit Native American
Coalition of POCAAN

We welcome comments and submissions, especially via email or in Mac Word on a floppy disk. All submissions will become the property of Queer Oyate and will be edited for content, grammar and readability.

MISSION STATEMENT

Queer Oyate is a support group for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender Native Americans that provides community building, leadership skill building, and health education and awareness around HIV/AIDS through resources, referrals, social and spiritual activities.

Queer Oyate's mission is to establish a positive Native identity and a positive sexual identity by acknowledging Native spirituality as a focus for healing the physical, emotional and mental needs of our two-spirit community throughout Turtle Island.

QUEER OYATE COUNCIL

Facilitator/Project Director
Greg Redfox
A Talking Leaf Editor
Helen Night Raven
Financial Accountant
Neal Graves

Organizations and individuals may request five or more copies of A Talking Leaf for distribution.



A few weeks ago, Greg Redfox left a message on my machine asking me if I'd be willing to write an article for this issue about coming out and being Native. Sitting down to start the task, it suddenly hit me.... I had come out as a lesbian almost 22 years ago, but have only come out as a Native American within the past ten months. Let me tell you how this came about. I grew up in a family that was ashamed of their color, of the strong indigenous blood that came from Mexico and from my grandfather's Navajo lineage. It was never said to me directly, but I picked up their cues early on. Somehow we didn't deserve to ask for a good life; the family motto was "work hard and suffer in life because that's the way God wants it." Funny thing is that they weren't particularly religious. It was just an old tape they'd played in their heads so long, it was all that came out when they needed to explain life. I never quite fit in with these people. They were good hearted people and did their best, and after all these years they still can't figure out where I went wrong.

In our house lived an elder. Not a Native American elder, but the matriarch of our family. She was my grandmother and my best friend. I was also her favorite and she let everyone know it. We slept together for the first 11 years of my life. When I was little, we squeezed into a twin bed, cuddling and telling stories. As I grew, so did the size of our bed, strong with the love and bond between us. My Grandmother was a tough old cuss, and she could do more of it than most men I know. She didn't say the "f" word, but everything else got plenty of air time. She'd sit in the corner in her rocking chair, smoking a Camel with the filter torn off, ranting about "those dirty bastards" down at City Hall, in the White House, in the Vatican, as well as her won offspring if the case warranted it. Damn I loved that woman! She put the fear of God in everyone but me. Her visiting 60 year old son would assuage her with "Oh Mom, you don't mean it," hoping to bring the conversation back before it got lost in her tirade. "Like Hell I don't!" she'd shoot back, ending that and having the last word as usual.

My Grandmother was the only person in my family to tell me that I could be anything I wanted to be. We'd be sitting together out on the back porch while my Aunt was in high gear cleaning

the never dirty house, and she'd say I didn't have to put make up on like all my friends, or date if I didn't want to and besides, it would probably be better if I just grew up and found a really good friend to live with, just like my cousin Dorothy who bought that house with that really good friend of hers and they're living their lives just fine. She'd take a pull off her glowing cigarette and smash it out on the cement step. Then she'd say "Let's go in and see if your @\$% Aunt is finished licking the walls yet."

My attraction to girls came early and one crush followed another. Sometimes it was a teacher, like Miss Pader, the only female instructor under 75 at my elementary school. The older I got, the more I knew I didn't belong to this family who had raised me. My escape came from the fact that I was one of the first cousins in our large family to even finish high school. I left Pueblo for the University of Colorado at Boulder in the fall of 1975. My Grandmother was the only one who noticed. I was finally 100 miles away and I could act and be exactly who I was: a lesbian of color unconsciously trying her damndest to be white. My close friends and partners were not people of color. I was 40 years old before I realized that I was carrying internalized racism for my own people and others of color. For the next two years, I was conscious of this but wasn't sure how to deal with it. I started to meet and become friends with women of color but my big jolt came via my friendship with a Native man serving a life sentence for murder. Through a prison awareness class that I took, I met this Brother who came to me with a request that I become the sponsor for the Native spiritual/cultural group at the medium security prison.

Since I have long been comfortable with my sexuality, at my first meeting with the Brothers I came out as a lesbian and as a Native with little knowledge of my culture. I offered them my open heart and a willing spirit to learn from them what they could share with me. They have welcomed me into the Circle and here I feel at home.

Chris Anne Galvez

Please share your story! In sharing our stories, our community is strengthened as we offer encouragement to all who listen. -HNR



Queer Oyate Craft Circle

Plains Traditional Arts & Crafts: Beadwork, Leatherwork, Jewelry, Drum making, Painting
All Skill Levels Welcome - Novice to Advanced - Learn and Share Skills
Basic Tools and Supplies Available for use at each session. Refreshments provided.

Second and Third Wednesdays of each month starting November 12th, 6:30-9:30pm.
November 12 & 19 at the POCAAN Conference Room, [REDACTED] Seattle.
December 10 & 17 at [REDACTED] Seattle.
(206) [REDACTED] x241

Sponsored by Queer Oyate, POCAAN and Broadway Cares

Saturday night was Pow Wow night. We had all looked forward to this during the preceding year. It started with the women's drumbeats. Dancers stepped out in rhythm with the drums and bells. Some Two-Spirit people danced the night away — men and women with shawl fringes snapping and feet keeping time. Several men wore traditional women's outfits from their respective tribes.

As Sunday was the last day, it was marked by a traditional giveaway. At Sunday's end we departed with embraces and promises to keep in touch. "I will see you next year!" echoed throughout the People. Some wept as we separated from one another. A light wind ruffled the leaves of the nearby forest, and Two-Spirited people drifted out and away from the Gathering site, back to their own worlds.

At home now in Seattle, the jokes, the laughter, and the stories live on as I remember the time celebrated at the Tenth Annual International Two Spirit Gathering in Onamia, MN. I look forward to next year's Gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.



Seattle, WA 98112

UPCOMING TWO-SPIRIT EVENT

Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality
 Edited by Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, Sabine Lang

There will be a reading and signing at Kane Hall, U of W campus, on Thursday, December 4th 7pm. Sue-Ellen Jacobs and Wesley Thomas (*Navajo*) will be joined by contributors: Michael Red Earth (*Sisseton Dakota*), Jason Cromwell, Beverly Little Thunder (*Standing Rock Lakota*), Doyle Robertson (*Sisseton/Wahpeton Dakota*) and Terry Tafoya (*Taos/Warm Springs*).

The book is published by the University of Illinois Press \$21.95. For more information, call Wesley Thomas: W: 206/ [redacted]

Akigle Timche

"family times"

Slim Buttes, SD Gift Drive Offers Winter Assistance to Lakotas

as reported in *Native Connection Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 9, Nov. 1997

Queer Oyate will sponsor a gift for an Elder from the Slim Buttes, SD community on the Pine Ridge Reservation through a cooperative effort of members from the Slim Buttes Native community. Will & Leena Peters (*Lakota*) are helping create a connection to the Northwest people with the help of Heidi Bohan Bennett.

Heidi and the Slim Buttes community are asking individuals, families and groups to foster a child, family or elder and begin a relationship between the Slim Buttes residents and Seattle residents. This is a long term project to continue through the Spring and Summer seasons, bringing material and monetary donations to our Native peoples on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Heidi Bohan Bennett has a list of donations and/or help needed such as help with packaging and shipping, cash donations, newsletter production and mailings.

Queer Oyate members can call Greg at POCAAN 206/ [redacted] x241 or Heidi Bohan Bennett 425/ [redacted] for details.

I would like to help in the following ways:

- Foster a child for Christmas (est. cost \$35-135). Create a gift package including clothing, bedding, and school supplies.
- Gift for an Elder (\$25-35). Give warm clothing, blankets, special food items.
- Christmas Dinner for Family (\$25-35). Checks or cash.
- Donate blankets and winter clothes (new or used, especially for the kids).
- Help with packaging and shipping.
- Make a cash donation.
- Help in another way.