

Greatest threat? Loss of language and culture



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Four times, now, I started this article and erased what I had written. I started to write about the federal legislators I met with in Washington, D.C., imploring them to stop the sequestration; I began to write about the

state legislators in Lansing, the many regional tribal leaders who pulled together during the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes impact week, as well as the state tribal leaders during the meetings of the United Tribes. I wanted to mention how hard our staff is working and the positive things that they are doing. I thought to tell you of the elders' meetings, the membership meeting held in Lansing and the JKL Bawating MEAP scores. But as I looked back over the events of the month, I found that I needed to write about something bigger. Something so important it touches every man, woman and child of this tribe.

In my opinion, we have a threat to our sovereignty that is more dangerous than cuts to programs and grants, decreased revenues and increased costs (not that these are NOT important,

because they certainly ARE).

The greatest threat to our tribe is the loss of our language, our culture and everything unique to being Anishinaabe. If we lose that, we have lost everything. If we no longer speak our language or practice our culture, there are those who say that we no longer have the right to call ourselves Anishinaabe. That thought has been brought home hard to me this past month.

One of the elders of my family died this month. My uncle, Owen, crossed over into the spirit realm and took much of his knowledge with him. He called me often over this past year, encouraging me, guiding me, sharing things he knew, and now he's gone. He left quickly with so much left unsaid. The stark reality of my loss, and the realization that every year there are many of our elders leaving

this earthly realm, has brought clarity, an increased urgency and a call to action to our people to reclaim your language, learn the ways of your people and teach it to your children and grandchildren! If you want to learn, I will help.

I am an educator by profession and I KNOW that everyone can learn! I do not claim to know everything, and I am not a fluent speaker, but I will share what I know. Beginning next month, I will include language and cultural lessons in my monthly article. I will share links and resources.

At the membership meeting in Lansing, I shared this message, "We are Anishinaabe. Speak your language. Practice your culture." Many of our people came to me after the meeting asking for help, and that made my heart soar!

As you all know, our tribal Constitution lists the "perpetuation of our way of life" first. It is what makes us Anishinaabe. My Uncle Owen told me often how important those ways were and he shared those ways with me and many others. Today, my mother presented me with his drum. Holding it in my hands, I could hear him tell me he loved me, and I remember the last words I ever heard him say, "Stay strong for the people." And so I am sharing his last words with all of you, urging you to "stay strong." Reclaim your language. Learn the ways of your people. Teach it to your children and your grandchildren. My Uncle Owen unselfishly shared his knowledge with me and I offer to share with you as well, "for the people!"

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