

Dwight “Bucko” Teeple

Boozhoo, Waabanidong indizhinikaaz. Giniwzhekaaning indoonjibaa.

I come from the east end of Lake Superior just west of Sault St. Marie, Bay Mills Indian Community. We know it as the place of the Pike. And that name tells our relationship to those rights that we have, not only treaty rights but aboriginal rights.

I want to pay tribute to the memory of a couple of folks before I begin. One of those is Mr. Jondreau from up in Keweenaw Bay and, from my community, a gentleman known as Big Abe LaBlanc. Big Abe was a big man, not only in physical stature but in presence. And when Big Abe walked into the room, you knew it. He drove around in a Cadillac and it didn't take him long before the Cadillac was going down the road on an angle. He was well over 6'6" and 400 pounds.

In the early days of fishing rights, in Michigan, there was violence on the beaches. Our fishermen walked those nets out from the shores at times, sometimes they went out in 16 foot boats. During the height of that violence, there were hearings throughout Michigan on what was happening with the fishing rights, and Big Abe would invariably show up at these meetings.

The Michigan DNR had a gentleman there and his name was Asa Wright. He touted himself as the expert in Indian fishing and the expert in commercial fishing in Judge Fox's court. He was giving a presentation at one of these hearings and he was talking about Indian fishing and how it was raping the lakes. He was telling the folks in the community of Petoskey that the bay was being decimated and there would soon be no fish in there and that the Indian fishermen are fishing it out. When he was saying that Big Abe jumps up and says, “Wait a minute, that's a [expletive] lie.” He said, “I was out there last night with one net and I got 500 pounds.” That's the kind of a man he was. And that's been the leadership that many of us young folks had as we were on those beaches.

Indian fishing rights started in Pendalls Bay in September of 1971 with Abe setting a net. It went through the Michigan court system. He was convicted at the district court level in Sault St. Marie and went on to the Court of Appeals and to the Michigan Supreme Court and ultimately it was picked up and went to *U.S. v Michigan*. It's a long story on each of those, but I won't go into that. Needless to say, that case ruled in our favor most of the way through for most of the issues.

In 1973, we began planning for a pow-wow in Sault St. Marie, but there was an incident that happened in early spring. One of our members at Bay Mills Indian Community had a child with a lady from Wisconsin. The local sheriff's department come on the reserve and delivered that child to the mother, who in turn brought the child across the state lines to Wisconsin. Myself and others in our community didn't think that was right and we didn't feel that the sheriff's department, state police or any other law enforcement department had the right to be on our reserve, let alone take children.

So we set up road blocks. There was only one road in and out of the reservation. We never had a whole lot of resources in the community. We had an elected tribal council and oftentimes only one or two employees on that tribal council back in those days. As a result of that road block, I believe that monies were kicked free to establish our court system, our law enforcement, and establishing our system of written codes and laws for our community. After two or three years, the sheriff and the state police were let back on to the reserve. The DNR,

however, were not allowed to be back on the reserve for quite some time, they had to call for permission just to drive through.

The early days of fishing was just in the Whitefish Bay area. I fished with a friend of mine. I got out of the military service in 1971, he got out in '72. His name was Andrew LaBlanc. We fished together with a 16-foot boat and we considered ourselves like the vanguard of the fisheries back in those days. We fished mainly Whitefish Bay and Whitefish Point, the Sault St. Marie area, and many of our people started picking up fishing again. So, it was starting to get too crowded around Whitefish Point, so we decided to move west to Grand Marais and then further west to Shot Point Munising and Marquette, down on the southern part of the peninsula on Lake Michigan side, to Petoskey and even on down to Ludington.

You have to remember that the 1836 Treaty area was approximately 13,638,000 acres of land and an equal number of acres of water; quite a large area. When we become successful in fishing places like Grand Marais, others of our members saw that and moved into those areas. That was like the vanguard of opening up the whole treaty area to commercial fishing for our people.

Once while in Munising, we were in a place called Trout Bay. The DNR came in with one of their about 25 or 26 foot Chris-Craft boats and it's pretty shallow towards the shore there on Trout Bay. We saw them coming, so we went right to shore and pulled up the boat and sat down on a log and they were coming in. They got on the loud speaker and they asked us to come out there. And we told them what they could do with themselves, but they'd have to come in and talk to us if they wanted to speak to us.

So, they came on in and one of the first questions that they asked us is where our registration was for the boat. And we pointed to the 16-footer that we had right up in the front in the bow, where the boat numbers are generally placed, we had an upside down American flag. We told them that was all the registration that we needed. So they arranged for us to go have a meeting in Marquette the next day.

We set out at Shot Point, got about 500 pounds of whitefish, and sold it, after cleaning it over at the old fishery, and then went to the DNR Regional Office in Marquette, all full of fish guts and smelling. We walked into this well-carpeted office and these great big plush chairs and sat down. Apparently a couple nights before, at Whitefish Point, one of the officers or a couple of the officers were patrolling along the beaches and they had gotten shot at, so they had some suspicions that we might have done that. Of course, we didn't do something like that.

But anyway, we sat down there and had the meeting with the regional director and they told us they wouldn't arrest us unless they gave us 24-hour notice and we could get our nets pulled out. We never did hear from those guys again after that. But that's just one example of how we encountered some of the things on those beaches.

I'll have to step back a little bit. In 1968, I worked for the Pendalls Creek National Fish Hatchery and, if you know anything about the national fish hatchery system in the Great Lakes region, the national fish hatcheries raised and reared lake trout because of decimation by sea lamprey. There were originally six species of lake trout out in those lakes and there are only two species left of the lake trout. But they raised and tried to bring back populations of lake trout by rearing them in the hatcheries and then going and planting them off of break walls and boat launches.

When I worked with Pendalls Creek in 1968, I went to help to plant those lake trout, and you can imagine they mature about six or seven years and come for spawning, so in '73 and '74, that was that maturing age for those lake trout. My knowledge of working at the hatchery and

knowing where they were planted gave me a heads up to where they might be coming back in, which break walls and which boat launches, so that's where we'd go. Oftentimes, we wouldn't even have to use the boat to set, just walk the nets out. You could feel the fish bumping off your legs, sometimes, the bullets splashing around you. The fish wars or beach wars, for us, were more dangerous than being in the Army. Oftentimes, we had to face crowds on the beaches of 100 or 200 people coming into landings like at Grand Marais.

One more story I'll tell you. In Grand Marais, one boat landing had about 200 sportsmen in it, so we decided the safest place to come in would be right downtown Grand Marais. There's a little park there where we came in. We always left one person on the beach guarding the truck and watching the tires so they wouldn't get slashed or whatever. When they seen us come in at the downtown location, they come over there, and all of the sportsmen migrated over to that area as well. Remember, we were fishing and carrying rifles on the boats with our nets because of being shot at.

The landing was uneventful with a big crowd about 100 yards away. They sent over a small contingent of probably 15 or 20. They came over to give us a little bit of harassment. And we had to put down our rifles, I put mine inside the pickup. Andrew had put his down next to a fish box and nets and while we were occupied trying to load the nets in the boat and everything on the truck, one of the sportsmen grabbed his Winchester rifle and racked it.

And when he racked it, his face got all red and he said, "This thing's loaded." Everybody just stopped and looked at him. Andrew, just came back from two tours in Vietnam, goes around and opens up the truck door and pulls out my rifle. He racked that and told that guy that, "This one's loaded as well." What Andrew didn't know and what I knew is that my rifle was not loaded. I was about, approximately, in between those two and they were focused on each other. I was able to quickly move forward and take the gun from the sportsman, after he sort of fell on the ground. That sort of settled the situation down a little bit.

With *U.S. v Michigan*, our community went through quite a bit of turmoil in terms of the settlement of the fishing rights. In 1985, there was a special master appointed by the federal district court to bring all the parties together. We went to Lake Superior State University and had negotiations for about three days straight nonstop to try to settle the allocation dispute. They come out of there with what is called a *consent decree*. Our community disagreed with the consent decree, and we tried to fight that in federal district court. Eventually, it was crammed down our throats. I was appointed by our tribal council to go down, along with a few other folks, to make decisions on behalf of the community in that court case.

I didn't fish very long, but when I did fish, I tried to make it important. Our law enforcement included our rules and regulations that we adopt to regulate ourselves. Those were early things that we did at the Bay Mills Indian Community. I never sat on the Conservation Court, but I did sit on the court for the community. I was a community judge for a couple of years.

The Bay Mills Indian Community considered itself a leader in a number of different areas. Today, we have a Repatriation Act, that's a rather recent act from 1973. In Mackinaw City, Michigan, tourist shops had on display remains of Native people that they had dug up in graves including over 300 skulls and other bones and remains. We were able to repatriate those in 1973. It was probably one of the first repatriations in the country. We buried those in the old Indian burial ground, there on the shores of the lake.

Before the Repatriation Act, approximately 25 percent of our kids were going out into non-Indian foster care and adoptive homes. The young people got together and tried to do

something about that with the formation of the Indian Child Welfare Act, testifying all across the country and traveling around trying to make a difference. And I'd like to tip my hat to one of the non-Indian legislators, the Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill, for the passage of that act back in 1978. It made a difference in our community. I'd like to say that we made a difference in gaming, although the first tribal gaming operation was an individual commercial enterprise done by Fred Dakota.

In our community, we were the first tribally owned and operating gaming facility. It opened up on July 4, 1983 with Independence Day. We called up the FBI and the Michigan state police and told them that it was going to be opening. Prior to its opening we only had bingo. The bingo operation evolved from the bingo operation that was operated by Big Abe LeBlanc which he opened up in the mid '60s. He was also the technical assistance provider for the Seminoles in their bingo operation, but in the mid '60s, he opened up a bingo operation. It was car bingo. Everybody bought cards and played bingo out of their car in a big field. We had some big speakers up, and if you had a bingo, you blew your horn. Abe had 13 kids, they worked the bingo so wherever that car blew, those kids were running over there to get the cards and bringing it up and confirming those numbers.

But anyway, he was one of the guys that went down and provided technical assistance to the Seminoles, which later, was challenged by the State of Florida and went all the way up through the Supreme Court and become *Seminole v Florida*, which was decided in 1983. Remember I said the Child Welfare Act and that I worked at the Michigan Child Welfare Agency. In my work with them, I encountered an individual at the Michigan legislature named David Hollister, who was a representative from the southwest part of Michigan and got to know him pretty well. When *Seminole v Florida* was decided, I called David's staff. I don't know if he knows that yet to this day, but I called his staff and asked them to send us everything that they had on casino nights, Las Vegas nights, lottery and bingo. Like I said, the only thing we had going was bingo and we only had about \$3000 to open it up, the first gaming operation.

That was on July 4th. Our unemployment rate was between 80 and 85 percent, I would estimate. Andrew LeBlanc and a brother of mine took on the responsibility to try to organize and open up that first casino. They had to talk people into working without any guaranty of a paycheck until they made enough money to make payroll. Today, we'd never get any 40 people to volunteer on the 4th of July to work on anything. Back in those days, times were tough and we had the people volunteering to do so.

There are many stories that I could tell you about fishing rights in that area and the struggles that took place. Those battles were not only treaty rights battles, they were aboriginal right battles, sovereign rights battles, and battles that are going on today. Among the battles that are going on today, is the battle to preserve, promote and protect the language for those future generations that we have.

Bay Mills Community College is running a six year Anishinaabe and *Anishinaabemowin* program to get people to a level of comprehension after active listening for 2,000 hours of comprehensible input and speakers talking with prompts. It's producing folks that have that comprehension level at 2,000 hours. There are some of those students that are beginning to speak the language. I'm real proud of that fact, that's happening there at Bay Mills Community College.

I want to thank one of our tribal council members, Terry Carrick, that's here in the audience for helping and standing behind an effort that I've got going right now with a project which I call ATKRP, Anishinaabe Traditional Knowledge Recording Project. I'm going to be recording in high definition the language. We've got about 75 hours of recorded language right

now. We're going out and recording traditional knowledge projects, including such things as black ash basketry, collection of birch bark and berry picking. We're going to be recording that in high definition and preserving that knowledge as best we can. All of our communities should be doing that, I believe, because we have people that are older than myself in our communities and we're losing them every day. Every day that we lose someone we're losing some priceless knowledge.

Two years ago, I went to Australia to look at what was going on there in their aboriginal communities. Those communities are like our communities were 40 years ago, with no running water in your home, outhouses and all kinds of junk cars around the yard. They are living in real hard conditions, but they too are a proud people. They're losing their language as well. They're losing their knowledge as well, but two of their elders stepped forward and proposed that the young people begin learning.

They already know what technology is. They already know how to operate computers and they already know about iPhones and Blackberries. They already know what technology can do and how to access it. What those elders did is they developed a training program that they call TKRP Australia. There are six communities over there that are doing that now.

In the Great Lakes region we have a couple of communities that are interested in beginning to do this TKRP work. One of them is Cape Croker, Ontario. Bay Mills Indian Community and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi are looking at doing a similar thing. For our young people, that will be the connection to the elders. We need to collect that information so it can be transmitted. Some of that information will be proprietary. They will need to password protect it, but it is us who will have control of the dissemination of that information.

I'd like to encourage those youngsters, to know that technology. You see the YouTube clips containing 5, 10, 20, 30 minutes of different songs and stories. Those same things done in *Anishinaabemowin* can be done with that technology, with the help and the consent of our elders. It's going to be a lot of work but I believe that's our future. I believe that's what our treaty rights, our aboriginal rights are all about. That future generation, and how to transmit that knowledge that we have to them.

So miigwech, ahaw.