

Patty Loew

I'm going to talk a little bit about media. Sharon, you didn't talk about HONORS successful boycott of treaty beer. I interviewed Don Crist, Dean's brother, in Washington when we were doing the documentary about co-management, and there was a big warehouse full of treaty beer and he gave me a can. I never opened it. I never tried treaty beer. But that was very successful boycott. That was one of HONORS high points, I think.

I remember that somebody said yesterday that this was voted the most important story of the decade. Actually it was the AP News Writers Association that voted the Chippewa Treaty Rights the most important story between 1980 and 1990. It was a media circus. Part of it involved the nature of news itself, which is very deadline oriented. Reporters have to take shortcuts. Many of the news operations that cover treaty rights were three to seven person operations. You got your story assignment at 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning and you had to have a completed story by 6:00 that night. That included travel time and editing and everything, so reporters take shortcuts. And for most mainstream news reporters, Indian reservations were way outside their comfort zone.

The other thing about news is that as a news reporter you're taught to get the official report, so you go to people in charge. And people in charge are the Governor and the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and tribal chairs. At that time, in terms of a television news report where a sound bite is a ten-second entertaining, witty, nugget, our tribal leaders didn't have that skill. Reservations are pretty isolated. I bet you didn't see news crews on a regular basis unless there was a crisis.

So here we have the *Stop Treaty Abuse* people and *Protect American Rights and Resources* who are churning out news releases. They're holding press conferences. They've got glossy media materials they're distributing. DNR is holding news conferences, and the tribes really hadn't gotten up to speed yet. And when news crews would descend on the reservation, they'd stick the microphone in front of somebody's face and our tribal leaders oftentimes really struggled with that. And as a news reporter and as an Ojibwe woman, it really pained me to see the awkwardness. This was not a skill that they had.

So the meaning of treaty rights, the history of treaties and the culture wasn't being communicated and all we were getting were these scenes that were very sophisticatedly polished and presented to the media by the anti-treaty groups. These were unequal rights. They were race-based rights. They were opportunistic rights. The Tribble brothers, they just found this little fine print in a government document somewhere and now everybody's jumping on the bandwagon. I mean, this is what the media was getting told. Or the one frame that did come out from the treaty support side was this is just racist. And that was the only scene that people in America got from the Wisconsin boat landings.

A lot of the national news coverage that came out of this time was woefully incorrect. There were so many factual errors. And I wound up actually doing an academic paper on it and doing interviews with some of the national reporters that came here, Jonathan Towers from CNN, Gary Reaves from Chicago. I remember calling Gary Reaves and saying because I was really interested in how much time they actually spent in northern Wisconsin, because the national media sort of just likes to parachute in and do a bunch of interviews and then they're out and that's it. So I asked Gary Reaves, "How much time did you actually spend in Wisconsin?" He said, "Never been there." I said, "What about the report you did?" "Oh, that was file footage

that we got from WAOW in Wausau,” and he basically just dragged an Indian, not an Ojibwe out of the American Indian Center in Chicago and said “What's this all about?” And the guy said “Oh, its just racism” and that was the sound bite that appeared on 10:00 news that millions of Americans saw that night on ABC news.

I never learned about treaty rights when I was in school. Civics class taught that we have local government, state government, and the federal government. You have three branches of government. They never taught anything about tribal sovereignty. So, now we have these journalists going into communities who don't have any concept of treaties, or sovereignty or self-determination. They're getting material from these well-oiled anti-treaty groups. They're getting sound bites from the governor and state agencies who are worried about protecting their turf. This is why the media coverage was so bad in those early days.

And then, I think, reporters started looking at the boat landings and when you see somebody holding a spear with an Indian effigy on it and you ask “What does that mean?” And the interview responds, “What do you think it means? Maybe it means I like Indians. Maybe it means I don't like Indians. Maybe it means I don't like them spearing fish.” And the signs read ‘Save a fish, Spear an Indian.’ It was really clear that this was really ugly. And the business community really started picking up on the fact that maybe it's not Indian spear fishing that's going to keep the tourists away. Maybe it's this violence and all this ugliness that's being projected that might be affecting business.

I think that the injunction that the tribes were able to get with the help of the ACLU caused those folks to stay away from the boat landings and the media descended on the landings and they looked around and went hey, there's nobody here. So, they went home, too, because there was no story and then it died down.

I think over the years my colleagues have educated themselves. I think part of it is Act 31. The younger journalists now have actually learned about treaty rights in school. I think the tribes have done a better job in creating communication systems. I was so disappointed in a story that appeared in June of 1997. This is seven years after all of this pretty much ended. The Wisconsin State Journal, had an editorial during the compact negotiations. It said, at one point, “What do you call race-based rights negotiated in secret?” “If the participants had Italian surnames, we'd call them mafia.” This is what appeared in our official state newspaper. I mean, it was just astonishing to me that this sentence would be an official record and somebody would write an opinion piece like this. We're not there yet. But reporting has gotten better.

The one thing that I would like to end with is, I guess, requests to tribal communities. We need to cultivate relationships with mainstream media people. We need to invite them to our communities and educate them because the next time you see them will be a crisis, and that's no time to be providing background information and trying to educate somebody. And during that crisis you won't have to invest so much time getting them up to speed on some of the issues that they should know about.

I know, as Native people, we often don't like to brag and toot our own horns, but let the mainstream media know about some of the really wonderful things that are going on in Indian country and get to understand their deadlines so that you make it as easy for them as you can. Don't schedule something at 5:00 in the afternoon because TV reporters have got a show that goes on in an hour and they won't have time to cover it. Nurture and cultivate those relationships because I think we need friends out there that can help explain some of these complex issues to a mainstream audience.

The other request is to support your tribal media. Since January of 2008, 39,000

journalists have lost their job because of consolidation and the slow death of newspapers. A disproportionate number of those 39,000 journalists are journalists of color, who are really struggling because they tend to occupy entry-level positions and lower-level positions. I guess that's not so surprising.

We have these tribal newspapers, tribal radio stations, who are in a really precarious position. Oftentimes in the organizational flow, you'll find them under the executive branch in the chart under the Tribal Chair's office and they tend to be public relation. People in the community don't really respect the information in them because they know it's being filtered through the tribal authorities. If a tribal journalist is really trying to do his or her job and looks at some kind of controversial issue and tries to gather multiple perspectives, he or she winds up getting fired because we're sovereigns and so we don't have First Amendment rights.

I'm not suggesting we model ourselves in a western way, but we have to figure out some way to create some space between our tribal journalists, who are operating for the benefit of the people and providing information from different perspectives and the tribal authorities, who when they get voted out of office, the tribal editor usually winds up going, too.

This is a real problem. We need to get information to our communities. Mainstream media aren't going to do it because we're too small of a population and we're not in their demographics as consumers. We don't matter to them as consumers. So who's going to do it? We have to do it for ourselves, and we have to help and support our tribal journalists to create that autonomous base so they can do their job. They can be professional and provide a service to all of us, without fear of losing their jobs.

I know that's kind of a little off track, but really if we're talking about protecting treaty rights and we're talking about educating the next generation, we as individuals have a responsibility to pass that knowledge on. We, as a community, need information systems so that we can systemically pass that information on and our tribal journalists are the ones that can help do that. *Miigwech*.