

Sharon Metz

Good morning. It's good to be back here. Some of you are wondering what a nice white girl is doing here and I want to tell you a story. I really did some genealogy as I started working with the tribes. I looked to see if I didn't have an Indian relative in my family background. I looked and looked and all I found were Germans, so what you see is what you got.

But we have something in common and that is German people like to tell stories too. I'm going to prevail on you to listen to my story because there are so many young people here today, and what I see happening are seeds being planted. Seeds being planted in the hearts and minds of young people that may not blossom and may not flourish and may not grow for a while, but they're being planted.

I had a seed planted in me that I think prompted me to take this path. When my great-grandfather bought the place that we now live on, in the 1880s, there were some burial sites there. The neighbors said, "Oh, you know, dig them up, you'll never know what you'll find. You might find jewelry, you might find arrowheads and just go ahead, that's what we've done." And my great-grandfather was not an educated man, but he thought it wasn't right. So he decided that he would never plow or plant or build on these burial sites, but would preserve them. So they're fenced off. It was always there for when my grandpa grew up and my dad grew up and we could see them. You could go back in the pasture and see them.

Well, then in 1939, I was five years old and a big car came up our driveway. My dad looked at this big shiny car. My dad's a typical German farmer. He walked out to see what this person wanted and I tagged along. A man got out of the car and he had a nice suit on and a great big briefcase and he said, "Well, Mr. Weisner, I represent the University and the museum and the historical people, and we know there's some burial sites here on the farm. What we'd like to do is dig them up and put the relics in their proper place in the museum. We would level everything again and plant grass, or whatever you want planted, so you'd never know that we've been here."

And my dad is puffing on his pipe looking at this man, and I didn't know what was going on but I thought, "Don't let him do it." And my dad didn't say anything. Well, the guy thought he was holding out for money. So he said, "Well, you know we could put together a nice stipend for you for your inconvenience and we could pay you." And my dad puffed on his pipe and he looked at the man and he said, "You know, I don't think we're going to do that." He said, "I think we're going to let these people rest. We've done enough to them already." That was the seed that was planted in me and it didn't blossom for a while but it did blossom after a while.

Wisconsin changed forever in the '80s. It had survived the Peshtigo fire. It had survived a depression and World War II. I had thought that racial hostility was resolved because it had just resolved some of the racial issues by court case in Milwaukee. And then the treaties that were signed long ago didn't have the grace to disappear. They not only didn't disappear, but the tribal people read them and began to exercise what the treaties said was the thing to do. And when they read them, they knew it wasn't right.

And it started slowly at first with a few tribal people taking fish by spearing and starting to exercise the treaties, and the outrage was like a cork popped out of the bottle. All this hostility that had been underground and not apparent just popped out. It was outrage. Now, I come from a political background and of course I'm involved in campaigns yet, but I think, it's my opinion that Barack Obama got his slogan 'Yes, We Can' from the tribal spearers. It was just apparent in what they were doing and how they handled themselves.

And, like the ripples on the lake, the effects of the spearing affected many politically and economically. We've talked a lot today and yesterday and the day before about the natural resources and that's as it should be, but other institutions and entities were affected, too. The state, local, federal and tribal governments were all affected. The education system was affected. Believe it or not, religious organizations were affected. Citizen organizations sprung up in support of the tribal spearkers and opposing tribal spearkers. Media, definitely media was affected. Law enforcement agencies were affected.

The state, local and tribal governments scrambled. They scrambled to adjust to the new situation. The local governments tried to pass resolutions and initially tried to do something about it or thought they could and discovered we can't do anything about it, this is a federal matter. And in a way to some of the local governments, it was a relief to say, "It wasn't our fault. It's the federal government's fault."

The state government, on the other hand, was responsible for the safety of the people and the natural resources and the general peace in the community. Now some elected representatives and senators from the state deserve mentioning here. I don't remember how many of you remember Frank Boyle. He represented this area as a state representative. Raise your hands if you remember Frank Boyle. Well, I served with Frank Boyle and the late Pat Smith from Rice Lake, and they were fearless in the state capitol in trying to introduce legislation and to bring the state into the positive side of making peace. I watched Frank Boyle walk down the halls of the state capitol and he'd walk by other offices and other legislators, not their staff, not people who were cleaning the halls, but other legislators would go "woo-woo-woo-woo" when Frank Boyle walked by. He took it on the chin there, and some of you may not know that, but he was one of the people that really made a difference.

The eleven federally recognized tribal governments were scrambling. They were trying to figure out what to do. They had people in their own communities that were active in spearing or not active. Some of the tribal governments at first weren't supportive, but they knew they had to do something. And the white ignorance about tribes just became very apparent. Now, of the eleven tribes in Wisconsin, we know there are six Chippewa tribes. Well, I had an Oneida friend, who obviously, was an American Indian. You could tell when he walked in the room, and he said, "I'm looking for hats that say 'I am not Chippewa' because to white people all Indians were alike."

Recognizing education, protection of the natural resources, and the federal state partnership was key. The federal government held the cards. They held the cards because of the treaties. One of the watershed moments came when Senator Daniel Inouye brought his committee to northern Wisconsin. He brought resources, money for a fish study and grants that would help in saying, "It isn't about fish, it's about treaties." He also, brought with him the stature that the federal legal system had spoken. It was federal law, make no mistake about it. You couldn't argue with Daniel Inouye.

The Indian children in the school districts in Wisconsin felt the impact. Some of you were probably in the grade schools and have your own stories to tell. Some Indian children stayed home from school because it was just too much. And one of the effects is there are more Indian tribal schools. We also have Act 31, the act that requires that teachers take a course in Indian education and that it is taught three times during the school life of the child all through Wisconsin. Sometimes it's not implemented very well. Sometimes the teachers aren't all that interested. There's work to be done. The fact is the law is there and the frame work is there.

The religious institutions were affected, too. Churches and synagogues and religious

organizations struggled with the whole situation. You know, the premise of love your neighbor is one thing, but spearing on our lakes, that's something else. And they struggled. We got reports that the church council president or some of the big givers in the churches and synagogues had been seen at the boat landings protesting the night before. The effect in the pews was pretty significant because some of the clergy were afraid to speak out and some of them were not.

I don't know if you remember Bishop William Wantland, himself an Indian person. He was an Episcopal bishop and was on the side of the treaty rights and he was very articulate. He did a couple videos that were widely circulated. And he brought the National Council of Churches' Racial Justice Working Group to northern Wisconsin for a fact-finding mission. That got a lot of publicity in church circles but not so much in northern Wisconsin. It had a big effect on the churches.

And today many of the churches have Indian ministries. Many of them have taken their examples from the Friends Committee on National Legislation which has always been a stalwart resource for Indian people. And even the fact that Indian people have their own spiritual practices and beliefs is now on the radar screen with many religious organizations. They don't fully understand it, but they're trying. So it did have an effect. The spearing did affect the churches too, as an institution.

And the media outlook was quite a heyday. You couldn't even script anything like that. The graphic picture of Indian people at night in boats with these lights and a thousand people on the shore and the shouting and the drumming, was just a media person's dream. You couldn't script something like this. We had media from not only all over Wisconsin but national media too. It dominated the 10:00 news for weeks and weeks, and after that, it was always a story line on the 10:00 news, radio programs and radio talk shows. The media had a heyday with this, and there was a slow evolution because media people, like everybody else, really didn't understand that it wasn't about fish. It was about treaty rights. And slowly they began to catch on too.

The newspapers editorialized. They felt compelled to take a stand. The stands that the newspaper took were ranged from "Yes, these are legal treaty rights and we all ought to recognize them" and "No, the Indians ought to not exercise them." One stand was "We'll recognize them if the Indians would only have the good sense not to exercise the treaty rights." Some stands were "This is ridiculous, we ought to abdicate the treaties and get rid of them so we can save the fish in northern Wisconsin." And just a few courageous newspaper editorials urged "Wisconsin to get with it. These are legal rights and let's settle down and recognize these legal rights." So the newspaper industry and the media, they were all over the map, too.

Law enforcement agencies were another story. Some of the local law enforcement agencies really sided with the protestors, so any protection and law enforcement was half-hearted at best. The state had to step in. It was their responsibility to the citizens of the state, and so the state had to keep sending north more and more officers. As the protesting grew and the crowds grew they had to have more law enforcement. The figure that sticks in my mind, it's just imprinted on my brain, is that the state spent eight million dollars just on law enforcement; not on education, not on anything else. They spent eight million dollars on law enforcement alone. Now, eight million dollars sounds like chump change when we're talking about billions and trillions, but to a state the size of Wisconsin, eight million dollars was a lot of money, just on law enforcement.

The economic effect on the school districts was they didn't have much Indian material. Their teachers hadn't been trained. They didn't know where to get materials. Not much existed at the time, so they were being forced to make expenditures that were not budgeted for, and this

caused turmoil in the school boards. Act 31 was sort of half-heartedly received but there was an economic impact.

The federal government even had an economic impact because it had to deal with court cases. It had to deal with the grants and the money and programs that Senator Inouye had forwarded. Senator Inouye was just a stalwart in trying to get money to the tribes and money for the natural resource studies.

The fishing-based tourism industry suffered some, in terms of people didn't come up to fish because of the controversy. That was offset because the hotels and motels were full. They were full of media people. They were full of curiosity seekers. The sporting goods stores were out of wrist rockets. And most of you know what a wrist rocket is. It's like a slingshot you strap on your wrist and many of the people were shooting ball bearings from them, trying to hit the Indian spearers. The restaurants and the liquor stores and the gas stations all benefited from the protestors and the curiosity seekers that came up. The little temporary blip in the drop in tourism was more than offset by other people that came up here.

The tribal budgets were affected. The tribes were struggling to cope with the whole situation. Tribal budgets never had enough to go around to start with. They had to cope with transportation, law enforcement, publications, meeting places and personnel. They were being asked to come up with support and those budgets were strapped.

Well, where are we today? Overall, I think we're better than we had been. The cork, maybe, is back in the bottle. We have to be sure that the cork doesn't come off again and explode into another situation. I don't think it's going to happen because I see young people here today to carry on. You know, you have to remember that if you don't know your history, you're destined to repeat the mistakes. So it's very important what we're doing here today and listening to the stories. You know, the whole fear that there wouldn't be enough fish, that really never took place.

There were some turning points. One of the turning points was when the Chamber of Commerce people from northern Wisconsin had a major press conference that this has got to stop. And on the same weekend, the Wisconsin Council of Churches led by Reverend John Fisher representing the Wisconsin Council of Churches had a major press conference supporting the rights of Indian people to exercise their treaty rights. These two simultaneous press conferences did capture the media attention and people were starting to rethink this.

One of the organizations that sprung up as a result of the treaty rights was *Protect American Rights and Resources* out of Park Falls led by Larry Peterson. They promoted people going to the landings and put out a newsletter and a lot of misinformation. And previously on this panel, we talked about Dean Crist of *Stop Treaty Abuse* and his activities in literally trying to abdicate the treaties and bring the tribes to their knees.

A couple pro-treaty organizations sprung up. I was pleased to be part of organizing a group called HONOR, Honor Our Neighbors Origins and Rights. The person who doesn't get that much credit, who helped me brainstorm that and bring it to fruition, is Sue Erickson. She was the quiet person behind the scenes sort of holding my coat. She needs to be recognized, too. Another group was the Midwest Treaty Support Organization that organized counter demonstrations and provided a presence of non-Indian people at the landings.

There were lots of ripple and spin-off effects and today we are better off. I think, we're moving ahead and while the Indian education courses need some work, some attention and better participation, the frame work is there. And politically, the tribal governments have gained in credibility. They've gained in expertise. They've gained in participation and the tribal

governments have made quantum leaps in terms of their participation on the scene as equals. Sometimes they have a better sense than the local, state and federal governments.

I think, there are two continuing factors that we have to deal with. One is the perception by all non-Indian people is that Indians are all rich because of Indian gaming. That perception is just really hard to counter. It sort of goes along with all Indians are alike and there are some successful casinos and so all Indians must be rich. That's something that has a ripple effect on the economy because it means that there's less support. There's less federal and state support for Indian communities and the needs of Indian communities because they think Indians don't need it. That's an underlying, unspoken kind of premise.

And the other is, and it's always been frustrating to me, that people don't recognize that every band and tribe is unique. You know, it just boggles my mind how someone can compare the Hopis and the Anishinaabe people. It's just every tribe is unique and that concept still hasn't penetrated the psyche of most non-Indian people.

Where are we today? How did we get this far and what made it happen? Why are we here today in relative peace? Jim Zorn asked me to comment on that and my response is: Duh. Of course, everyone was hurting because of the controversy. There were upsides to it and people began to realize it. And so it's better to have peace and harmony and work together, but it took a while to realize that.

And then I think about the civil rights member who responded to the question: "What are you doing next, where are you going to go now, what are you going to do?" And the response was: Just keep on walking, just keep on walking. Yes, we can.