

Whitney White

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Experiential/event Paper

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“Eight local women are stepping into character to portray women such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Coretta Scott King, Sojourner Truth and Julia B. Nelson for this year’s Diversity Festival, which focuses on women and the rights of women.” (Amber Mensen, Republican Eagle).

This year the town of Red Wing Minnesota, which neighbors my reservation, the Prairie Island Indian Community, had their annual Diversity Festival on Saturday September 16, 2006. This year’s focus for the Diversity Festival was women and their rights. Our local town, Red Wing has the Diversity Festival every year to celebrate different cultures, or just diversity itself. This year was different then others because it focused on women’s issues. There were eight women selected by the Goodhue County Historical Society to represent important women in history, but in a range of different time periods.

Some of the portrayals were of local women, like Julia B. Nelson, a historical character from Red Wing, who has ties to women’s rights movements. Also involved in women’s rights issues was Elizabeth Cady Stanton portrayed by Pat Sween. Sween had her costume custom made and was in Friday evenings Seneca Falls project. Sween got as close as she could get to the kind of Civil War era attire. Sween chose to portray Stanton because she had completed previous research on her.

I portrayed my great grandmother Lucy Williams. Lucy and her three other

sisters, Julia, Mary, and Emma are the four sisters that basically created the Island (Prairie Island). I say this because the family tree's of everyone in our community goes back to these four sisters, and they connect everyone. However before they were put on the Island by the government they originated by the Wabasha, Minnesota area. I remember my mother telling me that my great grandmother and her family had a seasonal camp along the Mississippi River, by the park in town known as Bay Point Park. There is a picture of teepees along the river, and that's how my grandmother lived with her family.

The portrayal of these historical women was accurate, and a few marched throughout the Diversity Festival on Saturday carrying quotes by their characters. This was appropriate to strike up conversation with guests at the festival. The festival itself was full of authentic food with a wide range from different cultures. There was authentic Chinese food for sale along with Italian lasagna, and Mexican tortillas. There were also plenty of crafts for sale. One for example was Native American crafts and jewelry sold by my mother. There were also a lot of informational booths about smoking, health conditions, and various kid activities.

Other entertainment that was multicultural was a jazz group called The Girls from Minneapolis, a folk violinist, The Asian Lion Dance Team, where they showed us a traditional dragon dance, and the Prairie Island Drum Group was suppose to conclude the festival, but was unable to make it.

It just felt good that the town of Red Wing tries to celebrate diversity annually, and that groups being represented are actually representing themselves because I know we talked about that in class. How certain groups are being represented in certain activities such as this but the group being represented usually isn't present or doesn't

participate. Well the town's community tries to participate as much as possible, and it's just a great experience. I'm just glad that everyone tries to get together and accept that the town is becoming very diverse, and it makes me proud to see people accepting that by joining in on the festival. Another thing is that we talked about how it's hard to talk about ethnicity and by doing events such as this people are finding it easier to embrace it and talk about it. People are more willing to explain about their cultural when people are interested like at the Diversity Festival.

Even when I went to Mankato Pow-wow which is held the third full weekend in September, but I think we went on the 17th, some people at the pow-wow are what I would say fascinated. This year was the 34th Annual Traditional Wacipi "Honoring the 38 Dakota".

Some history, the Wacipi meaning "they dance," began in 1972 through Dakota spiritual leader Amos Owen from Prairie Island Indian Community, and Mankato leaders Bud Lawrence and Jim Buckley. The Pow wow takes place at Dakota Wokiksuye Makoce (Land of Memories Park). It is at the confluence of the Minnesota and Blue Earth Rivers that this park was dedicated to the Dakota people and will remain a permanent site to the Wacipi.

The pow wow begins with Grand Entry, this is when all dancers enter the arena, but men are first then women then children. An eagle staff is brought in through Grand Entry first and the Wacipi has one consisting of thirty-eight eagle feathers made by Glynn Crooks (Dakota, and Tribal Chairman of Shakopee) in 1979. Each one of the feathers commemorates one of the thirty-eight Dakota executed in Mankato on December 26, 1862. However it also commemorates those veterans who have served in times of

conflict. Usually after all the dancers have entered the arena a flag song is sung, along with a veteran's one and the invocation.

A pow wow is a great place to see Indian people in their regalia and watch them dance. There are three main categories for men, and that is the Men's traditional (there is Northern and Southern, and you can tell by their regalia), Men's Grass, and Men's Fancy Feather Dance. There is also a Crow Style of Men's traditional (one of my favorites!). For the women there is Women's traditional (there is also Northern and Southern), and Women's Jingle Dress, and Women's Fancy Shawl Dance. When dancing all dancers dance in the arena which is usually a circle, and dance clockwise, except for Men's Traditional typically dance counter clockwise. This is because men usually dance this way because they are what I think of as symbolically protecting the women and children like they did in "the old days".

There is usually a memorial dinner in honor of the original Mankato Mdewakanton Association board members: Amos and Ione Owen, Amos and Rose Crooks, Edith and Norman Crooks, Wallace and Gertrude Wells, Ed Jefferson and Barbara Owen-Jefferson, and Noah and Blanche White. Noah and Blanche White are my grandparents, and we make it a custom of going down there every year.

There is also plenty of good tasting food like fry bread or Indian tacos. There is also good soup like wild rice, hominy, and corn soup. There are two kinds of fry bread; one is made from yeast and the other baking soda. There were also plenty of arts and crafts vendors usually from all over the world. They typically sell homemade crafts like jewelry, dream catchers, ribbon shirts, and sometimes different regalia. Some sell books, shirts, cds, and videos, or even sage and sweet grass.

People from the town or just other Indian people traveling the pow wow circuit go to Mankato pow wow. There were a good number of people who were not Indian present and were really embracing our culture. I always feel good when other people come to pow wow's because it shows them our culture and dances, and they know that we are still here and thriving. I don't mind when people ask me questions because my sister, my daughter and I all dance, and they are just curious. Both my sister and I both dance Women's Traditional, while my daughter dances both Women's Jingle and Fancy Shawl. It makes me feel good that people are interested, and really care about our culture enough to drive how every many miles to see a pow wow.