**Amik Ojibwe Names Are Spiritual Names**

Ojibwe names are much more complicated and harder to receive than English names.  They are more meaningful, and different from when we pick a name for our children based on our favorite uncle, favorite actor or actress, or a name we saw in a book.  Our names are spiritual names that we are given.

The tradition of giving Ojibwe names began a long time ago.  When a child is born, the parents know that he or she has to be named right away.  So they would choose a name giver to provide their child with his or her Ojibwe name.  Not everyone is able to be a name giver.  Certain people are chosen to give names by a vision, a dream they had while fasting, or by a significant event in their life.  For example, a person may have a dream or vision while fasting.  In that dream, an animal or spirit may appear and talk to him or her in Ojibwe, telling him or her to remember its name and to use it when it is time to give a name to a child.

After the parents have chosen a name giver, they also choose a couple of representatives to attend the name-giving feast for their child.  These representatives will be the child’s “we-ehs,” and are like godparents.

At the feast, everyone sits in a certain place, with the name giver at the head of the table.  Then, the parents hand their child to the name giver and say, “We are giving you our child to give him or her an Ojibwe name.”

The name giver then thanks the parents for honoring him, and accepts a gift of tobacco that is traditionally given to him to do the name-giving ceremony.  Then, the name giver talks about how and where he got the authority to give this name he is giving.  He talks about the dream, vision or event that provided the name so that the people will know he’s being honest.  The name giver must do this in the Ojibwe language.

Then, the name giver names and kisses the baby, and passes him or her to the first we-eh.  That person kisses and welcomes the baby, and calls him or her by his or her Ojibwe name.  At this time, the name giver asks if any of the we-ehs would like to give the baby another name.  If the representatives would like to give the baby another name, they must do so at that time.  When that is complete, there is a feast in honor of the baby’s new name.

A we-eh’s role, which is lifelong, is to advise, watch over, and protect the child.  A person may always go to any of his or her we-ehs, and they will make time to listen to his or her problems and will sometimes offer advice.  Also, a we-eh always has the right to approach his or her namesake’s parents if he or she feels they are neglecting or mistreating the child.  When parents give tobacco to their child’s we-eh, it gives the we-eh permission to confront them in this kind of situation.

Another part of the we-eh’s job is to brag and stick up for his or her namesakes at all times. The job of the we-eh’s spouse is to tease or provoke the child.  This teaches the child a lesson, and everything Ojibwe people do is a teaching or a lesson.  To share a humorous example, my we-eh’s wife would tease and chase me as a child, and say she wanted to marry me.  My we-eh would tell her to leave me alone.  I dreaded going to see them because of her teasing, but I still wanted to see my we-eh.

It was not until I got much older that I realized she was trying to teach me about the strong bond between my we-eh and me.  She wanted to show me that I could go to my we-eh for help and he would protect me.  She actually did like me – it was just part of the teaching.