**Lee Staples Ceremonies for Our Children**

As Anishinaabe people, we have been given many ceremonies that are meant for our children. Bringing these ceremonies back to our community is critically important. They give our youngsters that feeling of belonging, embracing the spirit of who they are as Anishinaabe and enhancing the feeling of being loved/cared for. By bringing back these ceremonies, violence and gang activity would not be a concern in our community as they are in others.

Four days after birth, a ceremony is held where the baby’s little feet touch the earth for the first time and an offering is made thanking the Manidoog (spirits) for giving the baby that wonderful gift of life. The tobacco, which carries our messages to those powers, allows the baby to be formally introduced and acknowledged in that world.

At birth, when the umbilical cord is cut, a piece of that cord is left behind on the baby’s navel that forms into a scab. When this piece falls off, the parents would place it in a pouch with tobacco.

This memento from the birth of the child would always be kept and remain with the child throughout life.

Within four months of birth, a namesake ceremony, where the baby is given an Anishinaabe name, would be held. I always tell our Anishinaabe people that our English names do not have a meaning in the spiritual world, and that an Anishinaabe name is necessary to better connect us to that world. Each of the parents selects an equal number of individuals for the baby’s namesakes. They are told not to rule out anybody whose name comes to mind as a namesake or the spirit of the child would not be at peace as a result. This ceremony should not be delayed for the same reason, or the baby will act out or cry, asking for it to be done.

Only those individuals in our community who have been given a gift of either a dream, a vision, or another means of contact with one of the powers can give an Indian name. This gift of theirs serves as a guiding force in their lives. It is from what they were shown that the name comes forward for the child. And, in turn, those powers out there enjoy hearing the Anishinaabe name given since its original source came from them. There is much depth to this ceremony where a transfer of spiritual help is made available for the child’s future, which comes from the guardian spirits of the namesakes. Go about our community and listen to the Anishinaabe names already out there. Then in your mind, try to imagine what it was that the name giver was shown in a dream or other contact with that world. I can guarantee that you will be amazed when you totally understand this.

The Anishinaabe name that I carry is Obisan ni gishig, which means “calm or quiet sky.” The four individuals that came to mind as namesakes through my parents were not given the gift to give names and honored that. Therefore the name I carry is the one given to the oldest of my namesakes. He transferred the name and spiritual help that went with it at the time of the ceremony.

As it was meant to be, I had a special relationship with my namesakes, one of very deep respect that went both ways. I could always count on them gifting me with special attention, being very protective of me and giving me a token of their affection whether it be food or money. Children need that extra attention, and certainly that was given to me.

Space will not permit me to cover all the other ceremonies for our children. I also want to talk about the importance of the role modeling – how the old people who raised me reflected their strong attachment to our teachings in their everyday lives. All of these ceremonies and role modeling made it very clear to me that I was a part of our Anishinaabe community, that I belonged and was cared for both on a human and spiritual level. As I journeyed out in life and took the detours that created problems in my life, I always knew I had a place to go for healing and to mend my ways. This is what this upbringing provided for me. Our children of today need that, also.