**Lee Staples Winter Legends Start with Snowfall**

I remember when I was a child, I could hardly wait until the first snow fell because that meant the telling of legends could start.

Our legends are traditionally told only during the winter. I think this is because a lot of our people were busy in the summer. When I was young, we were told that if the legends were told in the summer – out of season – we’d end up with a frog in our bed.

I was raised by my uncle and aunt, who I refer to as my mom and dad. I was four months old when they took me in as their child. When it started snowing, right away I would ask my mom to tell me these legends. They would be told after dark. She would always tell me, “Please try to stay awake because these characters that I’m talking about are powerful Manidoog (spirits).” She said by listening to the legends, you could acquire some power or gift from the spirits she was talking about. So she would get upset with me if I fell asleep.

There was a lot of respect shown toward those legends. She would start telling them maybe in November, about the first or second weekend when we’d usually have our first snowfall. And she’d tell them practically every night during November and December.

There were a lot of teachings in those legends. A lot of the legends relate to our belief system and our relationship with the animals. And many of those legends dealt with respect. They taught that we should respect the animals and other creatures in this world.

Then in January or so, she’d say, “Out of respect for these legends, now I’m going to send them back.” She needed to send the characters in the legends back where they came from. So she’d say, “I’m going to repeat these legends I told you earlier.” And she’d retell them in January, February and March.

Some of the legends I remember. I have told some of them in the winter time.

Our Anishinaabe songs were also taught to me as a child.  In the winter, my dad would bring out a small drum. He loved to sing in the evenings, and he had a wide variety of songs that he would sing each night. I learned to recognize a lot of those songs. He would sing some of the songs that we use in our ceremonial dances. He would sing love songs or what they called sweetheart songs. He would sing moccasin game songs.

Above all, what these people gave me is the knowledge of the language. That’s all that was spoken at home. Along with that, they showed the importance that they placed on our teachings – the gifts to us as a people from the Creator. My mom would spend many hours sewing blankets to be offered to those powers we rely on as a people. The many blankets she sewed were utilized as offerings at our ceremonial dances or at the Mide Lodge. Along with that, she would take great care in cooking the best for these ceremonies. There were countless ways they showed me the respect we need to show to that which we were given as a people.

This is what some of our Anishinaabe children are missing today. A lot of the parents today choose to believe the lies that we were told:  that the teachings we were given had no value. When you are in attendance at a ceremonial dance, take a moment and feel what is there when the drum is sounded. The sound of that drum embraces your Anishinaabe spirit. The very same thing happens when you are able to speak and understand the language. Hearing and understanding these legends in the language nurtures your Anishinaabe spirit. The songs do that, also. All of what we have been given soothes our Anishinaabe spirit. If each and every one of us chooses to bring those ways back, we can only bring peace and harmony to ourselves individually, as families, and as communities.