

Independent Perspective #1879 with Ashley Henhawk

Native American Heritage Month

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:06 Speaker 1

Our guest today is Ashley Henhawk, New York Connects.

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outreach specialist for the Seneca Nation.

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And I'm your host, Ernie Churchwell.

00:00:15 Speaker 1

Welcome to the program, Ashley.

00:00:17 Speaker 2

Hi, thanks for having me.

00:00:19 Speaker 1

It's our pleasure.

00:00:20 Speaker 1

You're here because you're our expert on Native American Heritage Month.

00:00:25 Speaker 1

We've got some things that we would like to ask you about it.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

Western New York has deep native roots.

00:00:31 Speaker 1

Could you share a little about where you're from and what growing up in your community was like?

00:00:36 Speaker 2

So, I grew up on the Cattaraugus

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reservation.

00:00:42 Speaker 2

So that's in between the Irving Silver Creek area and Gowanda area of like the Southtowns of Western New York.

00:00:52 Speaker 2

So, I grew up on a little community called, it's called Indian Hill in English, but in Seneca, it's Kehondi, which means that it's across the creek.

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So, we were like a little bit

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isolated in a way, but not really.

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And so, I spent a lot of time playing outside when I was a kid.

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I'm a millennial kid, so I spend a lot of time outside in the woods and hanging out with my cousins.

00:01:25 Speaker 2

And I spent a lot of time,

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I was either playing outside, or I was visiting family members because we all live so close.

00:01:36 Speaker 1

What does your culture mean to you personally?

00:01:40 Speaker 2

Personally, when, growing up, it was just, it was something that I knew.

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I knew that I was Seneca.

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I knew I was Turtle Clan and things like that.

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But as I've gotten older and I've learned more of our history, and I've been able to

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understand more like what we went through as a people.

00:02:02 Speaker 2

So, I actually hold my culture very dear to me now.

00:02:06 Speaker 1

Okay, so I guess that's what your culture means to you personally then.

00:02:10 Speaker 1

How has your identity as a native person shaped your life in Western New York?

00:02:15 Speaker 2

Well, Western New York is like one of the few main places that the Seneca people lived.

00:02:23 Speaker 2

Like we've had longhouses on this land for thousands of years.

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So it's, Western New York feels like home.

00:02:31 Speaker 1

Are there some local Native American stories or pieces of your heritage that you think people would find interesting?

00:02:39 Speaker 2

I think that a lot of people enjoy seeing the outfit.

00:02:46 Speaker 2

And when you see like dance shows and things like that, it's I like to inform people that is considered regalia and it is not a costume.

00:02:57 Speaker 1

How do you see the balance between preserving your culture, your heritage and navigating present day culture?

00:03:03 Speaker 2

It can be.

00:03:04 Speaker 2

It is a very different pace compared to like our hurry up and go and, you know, go to work every day and things like that is a very different.

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I guess traditionally it's very different.

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So sometimes it feels like I'm walking on 2 paths.

00:03:23 Speaker 1

How can non-native people be better neighbors and allies?

00:03:26 Speaker 2

Learning a lot of our history, even like local history, a lot of history about the Buffalo Creek Treaty, the Kinzua Dam,

00:03:37 Speaker 2

the Thomas Indian schools, even like learning about history, about Letchworth State Park, like it helps you, it helps you get a broader perspective.

00:03:46 Speaker 1

What do you think that younger generations are doing differently, perhaps better?

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I love seeing a lot of outward pride from a lot of younger people that I'm seeing, a lot of younger men growing out their hair and

00:04:04 Speaker 2

a lot of people learning how to dance and learning their culture.

00:04:09 Speaker 2

It's, it's really beautiful to see.

00:04:11 Speaker 1

If you could share one message or teaching with our listeners about Native life today, what would it be?

00:04:16 Speaker 2

It's that we're here and we're still here and we're going to be here and we're all just people all living together.

00:04:25 Speaker 1

I'm sure people will have questions about Native American Heritage Month.

00:04:29 Speaker 1

How can they reach you?

00:04:31 Speaker 2

If they want to reach me, we could use my e-mail, which is ahenhawk@wnyil.org.

00:04:40 Speaker 1

Very fine.

00:04:41 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for being with us, Ashley.

00:04:43 Speaker 2

Yep, thanks for having me.

00:04:45 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:50 Speaker 1

Our guest today was Ashley Henhawk, New York Connects Outreach Specialist for the Seneca Nation, and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.