Enrollments

To Joe and many others this is a very concerning subject. To many it feels like an elephant in the room, yet a majority of people aren’t interested in hearing about the subject. Joe sees his newly born grandchild and wonders “what about their kids?”, will they be able to be enrolled? He talks about blood quantum and the change over time in his own family. It is heartbreaking that this is not the first time, nor the last time an elder in the family has to wonder about their future generations. “In a few years from now, will there be any Indians here? Does anyone really care?” These are just some of the questions Joe ponders. Blood quantum will affect our band members for generations to come, no matter if you lower it, abolish it, or keep it the same.

Our relatives that remain un-enrolled are Indian to us, but not to the bureaucracy. Who determines their quantum? Something about this just doesn’t seem right; knowing “full-blooded” Indians have children that are only considered half to tribal government. According to Joe when mothers had children in previous generations, they would ask the mother who the father was, they would respond “why do you need to know?”. They needed to know the person’s name to send the hospital bill to. However, during this time most Indians were unemployed with little to no money to pay a hospital bill. Thus, the mother of the children didn’t always place the name of the father on their birth certificate. This affected the blood quantum of the child, which has created problems down the line for many families.

Joe has met countless Indians in his life that do not qualify for services solely because their blood quantum denies them enrollment. Joe sees this as a modern-day genocide against his people, but not just his people his family and friends. The federal government has been trying to exterminate us for generations. From smallpox blankets that were “accidentally given” to natives. To boarding schools, “where the motto was kill the Indian, save the man”. Then came the self-determination and relocation acts that moved natives to urban areas to create tax paying citizens and remove them from their tribal nations. And currently one of the largest exterminators: alcohol. The way that the natives were treated, as second-class citizens or less. This would drive anyone to drown their sorrows with booze. All of these have attempted to eliminate or exterminate native people. Yet we as Anishinaabe people are still here, after decades of attempts to get rid of us. Joe believes that the government has one trick left up their sleeves, that is blood quantum. Blood quantum continuously decreases with each generation unless you marry within the same band to a person with the same or higher blood quantum. This is eliminating our people from being able to enroll, eventually we will run ourselves out.

What does it mean to be Indian? Having to address this is crucial for our people now and in the future. Joe sees very little to no movement in regards to this. “Maybe there is movement, but does anyone care?” it only seems to affect people when their kids, grandkids, or great grandkids are denied. A problem for the few that will affect the many. How do we tell the Ceremonial Drum that this descendant isn’t Ojibwe, and thus doesn’t belong on the drum. “What would Manidoo say?” Joe poses this question to people. We will never know what they truly say or what their concerns are. Because they take care of us, a critical question to ask is what happens when there isn’t anyone to take care of Manidoo anymore?

Years ago, when scholarships were taken away from the descendants it was shown that our children, our people were not a priority by a few in a position to make that call. It took the change of an elected official to make it right so that we can take care of our people. Why don’t we enroll them? “Are we denying people and refusing to change things for monetary reasons? The more people, the less we get? Should that matter?” Joe asks as a concerned Band member. He feels strongly that there needs to be reasoning behind why things are and aren’t done in regards to quantum.

The chiefs a long time ago were able to think of what our people needed and it has helped us prosper. Joe calls for elected officials to take action, be like those chiefs of old and take a stand that will protect our people for generations to come. Otherwise, what good are those rights and lands that our ancestors fought for? Joe calls to have things taken care of for those that aren’t here yet, those not enrolled, those that come from our people, yet aren’t given the rights fought for by their ancestors. “Who’s going to be singing our songs? Running our ceremonies? Dancing at pow-wows?” Joe feels like it’s a question that a majority of Band members refuse to answer, creating more problems by doing nothing. Everything that the federal government has brought forth has been conquered by Band members, all but one blood quantum. Joe is a firm believer that this has to be dealt with now instead of waiting for someone else to. Someone is going to have to be the “bad guy” and proposes changing the way we see our people. Joe asks “I'm full blooded, does that make me more Indian than someone less than full?”