Joe’s Article: mewizhaa pii dash noongom (long time ago vs today)

This month I would like to touch on some differences between today and long time ago. Sometimes there are questions that we’re afraid to answer either from family or friends. I am not sure if its fear or not wanting to strain the relationship. Correcting someone nowadays has truly become an insult, rather than back in the day it was a way to help the individual and community. When we try and critique our community it is not an attack, but an act of love that we want to see our community be the best it can be. As elders we get a lot of things taken care of like our lawn gets mowed, our lights and heating get paid for, our driveways get plowed, and many others that our elders didn’t have when I was growing up.

I remember when an HHS commissioner and I were sitting at a meeting quite a few years ago. While we were sitting at the meeting someone had asked “what is life like now that you have the casino?” to which he responded “I think it’s a lot better than how we lived a long time ago”, but when they came to me I told them “I think it’s one of the worst things that ever happened to us as a people”. Everyone was in an uproar over my answer to which I had to explain “when I was young a lot of the job’s people worked were seasonal but we were still community. We showed love and compassion for one another, helped out one another, and most important we listened to them no matter if we were mad at them”. Where as compared to today we hate each other, now everything is practically money or hate based. It just seems like the things we did back them were communal, they truly showed care. I remember listening my grandparents visiting with other elders. I would hear them talk about nothing but facts, no rumors or lies told at the table. If someone was not doing well, they were asking sincerely of how they were and things that they could do to help with the little that they had. If things were doing better or good with that person, they were always relieved to hear because that’s a fellow community member. Today in contrast there’s a lot of rumors and things that aren’t true that we talk about with each other. I am unsure if it’s to impress or make conversation with one another.

I was talking to a non-native guy some time ago; he lives close to the rez. He cuts everyone’s grass that lives on his road because he knows some are seasonal residents. He did it because he could and he cares for his neighbors, this was similar to what we did a long time ago. If a household wasn’t able to mow their lawn someone would come and help out and no expecting to get anything back for it because we were a community. Maybe you could give them a meal or blanket, or even just a miigwech would go a long way back then. That also is reflected in our language, the language is non-threatening and we use it to not only communicate but to help one another. You wouldn’t be lectured or talked down to just solely being spoken to by people that care about you. Basically, if people did something they maybe shouldn’t have we let them know in a constructive way that was non-shaming. Perhaps it is again talking about the boarding schools, what did they take away? Maybe they took away how we inherently parent and that we help each other because shaming and punishing isn’t truly who we are as Anishinaabe people.

I think another thing that shows that we have changed is the value of cooking, it’s much easier to go out to eat or grab something at the market but back in the day a home cooked meal that was either brought over somewhere or arriving at someone’s home. That’s where we eat, laugh, talk, help each other. Seeing dishes that were store-bought that are brought to the funerals, feast, or dance halls are something that isn’t us. To follow off of that I see that a lot of the time we aren’t taking care of the things that we are putting into our body because it is so easy for us to go just go to the clinic and get taken care of at no cost to us. Having healthcare and clinics versus eating healthy and using natural remedies that’s how we did it when we were kids.

Overall, I believe that we are trying to keep up with the Jones and that is not who we are as Anishinaabe people. Just because we have money in the community does not mean that we can give up on taking care of each other physically, mentally, and spiritually it just means we should be the best Anishinaabe that we can be. Our ancestors made do with what they had and they lived happier lives than we do nowadays, no matter if they got a check every month or once a year. They had their community that took care of them and they took care of us. Just a thought, I wonder if there is a correlation between the quality of our lives changed when we all spoke Ojibwe to now that we all speak English? What did we lose? Miigwech, mii iw.