

Powwow Tradition By Freddy Gipp

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Powwows, or in other cases, Wacipis, Hedawachis, Bear Dances, Celebrations, Fairs, and other various terms for these social gatherings, are imperative to us as Native Americans and serve as the contemporary lifeline of our culture today.

Powwows are not you and your friend having a picnic at the park or you and your co-workers having a meeting in the conference room. That is not what a powwow is, nor was it ever.

Powwows are big with lots of prize money and powwows are small with tradition and story.

They're in Lawrence at the main gymnasium in the high school, to the bright lights under the Haskell Stadium.

They're in fieldhouses at community colleges in Johnson County, to the rural cornfields by the loway.

They're amongst the mosquitoes in Lake Shawnee and the Delaware River, and along the treelines in a vast prairie by the Potawatomis.

Some tribes up north say that their powwow is the oldest, and some tribes down south will say that theirs is the best, while some tribes out east will reminisce on the days that champions were crowned in Connecticut, with some tribes out west just happy to host outside visitors, performing Bird Dances at their delight.

No one really knows why powwows start on a Friday and end on a Sunday, and no one knows why we need to have a grand entry, where all the dancers parade in at once.

The tradition of powwows is defined by the individual. Every person has their own unique style and you can see it when they dance, and hear it when they sing.

We have seen generational talent, once-in-a-lifetime legends that come from nothing and leave with everything.

Powwows are extraneous, ever-changing and adaptive.

Powwows to me, have been definitive. They gave me an identity, an expression and guidance to where I am now. I am fortunate for my successes and thankful for my failures within powwows, because it has sculpted me into the grass dancer that I am, representing my community, family and tribe.

Powwows are the main component that can bring communities together, both Native and Non-Native alike.

Powwows are vital to the physical, spiritual and mental well-being of many who strive for self-sufficiency through dance and song.

And In the words of Tommy Orange's book titled "There, There":

"We made powwows because we needed a place to be together. Something intertribal, something old, something to make us money, something we could work toward, for our jewelry, our songs, our dances, our drum. We keep powwowing because there aren't very many places where we get to all be together, where we get to see and hear each other."

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