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Sam Standing Soldier

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Sam Standing Soldier

Interviewed by Joey Cordle

April 27, 2012

Transcript

Me: Sam, what's your last name?

Same: Standing Soldier

Me: Who's with you today at NAICCO?

Sam: Um, My dad is here.

Me: How large is your family?

Sam: Um.. well I have five brothers and my mom and dad. That's about it.

Me: Do you see your extended family at all?

Sam: Not really. Just.. like once a year.

Me: Ok.

Sam: Because they live in Alaska.

Me: How do you like Alaska?

Sam: In the summer its pretty nice.

Me: I bet that it's pretty cold in the winter?

Sam: Yea, really cold.

Me: Have you been to Alaska both in the summer and in the winter?

Sam: Well in the winter I've been there like.. um.. 'couple years ago so.. um..

Me: Ok

Sam: I can't remember it

Me: Are you currently in school?

Sam: Uhm, yea.

Me: Where do you go to school?

Sam: Salem High school.

Me: How is school going?

Sam: Um, it's going good.

Me: Are you participating in any sports?

Sam: Um yea, a lot of sports actually-

Me: Yea

Sam: I did um football, I started wrestling for like six weeks then um.. I'm in track now and now I'm thinking about doing baseball.

Me: Which sport do you like the most? That's a lot!

Sam: Probably football, yea.

Me: What position do you play?

Sam: Um defensive linebacker. Lineback, yea.

Me: What do you run in track?

Sam: Um distance.

Me: Distance?

Sam: It's my first year.

Me: How do you like track?

Sam: Um, it's alright. It's something to do.

Me: It's a lot of running, isn't it?

Sam: Yea, a lot of running.

Me: Yea, you go to a sport just to run.

Sam: Yea, just to run.

Me: Are you or is your family religious or spiritual in any way?

Sam: Um, yea we are in our old traditional ways.

Me: Ok

Sam: Just this, um, past summer out in um South Dakota we've been go'n to a Sundance for like the past six years.

Me: Ok

Sam: The first three years I was the Firekeeper. That's where I got this from (grabs neckless). It's like, um, a gift to all the Firekeepers for doing that. And, um, just this past summer.. I had a vision in a Sweat that I was Sundancing so-

Me: Uh huh.

Sam: So yea, I'm a Sundancer now. First year Sundancer.

Me: How would you describe uh "Firekeeper"?

Sam: Um, well what you do as a Firekeeper is, uh, you start a fire from like the first day then you gotta keep it alive without going out for the next four days.

Me: Ok. So it's uh, it's uh a pretty important position I imagine.

Sam: Yea.

Me: Is this a tradition that has been passed down to you?

Sam: mhmm.

Me: Ok

Sam: Actually, from all of our family.

Me: I see-

Sam: My whole family, yea.

Me: Who in your family taught you how to be a Firekeeper

Sam: Um, well the first year I just volunteered.

Me: Ok

Sam: Just to help them out.

Me: Alright.

Sam: Then I sorta got stuck in it because they liked me. Im, uh, good worker.

Me: Alright.

Sam: Yea

Me: Well I imagine so if you are doing all those sports.

Sam: Yea (chuckling)

Me: Going back to what you had said about the vision that you had. What was it like?

Sam: Um.. after I had talked about it, everybody was like “yea, he has to Sundance” ‘cause that’s like a major thing to be asked for from the creator.

Me: How is one chosen?

Sam: Um.. well, if you get a vision about it, its like when he chooses you, it’s your time to do it. If there is like uh.. family crisis in the family, it’s sorta like do it for your family and.. you know, sacrifice your.. time to do it.

Me: Ok. Is it someone or something that chooses you?

Sam: Um, I think its like something. I’m not really sure.

Me: Ok. So it’s more of a spiritual experience?

Sam: Yea.

Me: Ok. How do you feel about the portrayal of Native Americans in Western’s and as sports logos?

Sam: Um, I’m.. to me I’m actually sorta ok with that.

Me: Ok.

It doesn’t bother me at all.

Me: Have you seen many films depicting Native Americans?

Sam: Uh, yea I have.

Me: Can you name a few?

Sam: Um.. well, the one movie that I like is a probably.. Smoke Signals.

Me: Smoke Signals?

Sam: Yea-

Me: That's a good one.

Sam: Yea, that's a good movie and um Lakota Woman.

Me: Ok.

Sam: Have you heard about that?

Me: Yea. I have not seen that one but I've heard of it-

Sam: Yea, that talks about uh.. AIM-

Me: Mhmm

Sam: The American Indian Movement in Gordon, Nebraska

Me: Yea. How do you feel about the characters in those movies? Do you feel like they do a good job of representing what it means to be Native American?

Sam: Some of those people are my family.

Me: Oh really?

Sam: Yea

Me: Uh, in.. in both movies?

Sam: Uh, yea. Well not no no no no not Smoke Signals, no.

Me: But in Lakota Woman?

Sam: Yea, Lakota Woman. Yea.

Me: So is it something that like, uh, sometimes when, uh, you're with family you kinda talk about? Or, you know "Oh, (you know) there's my cousin" or?

Sam: Yea, just standing in the background.

Me: So it's a big deal for you guys? Like-

Sam: Uh, Yea.

Me: I see. So do.. how many times would you say you've seen Lakota Woman?

Sam: Probably like.. five times. I lost the tape. It's old.

Me: Ok.

Sam: Yea.

Me: Well it's a.. it's a pretty big deal being in a.. a movie-

Sam: Yea, it is-

Me: So uh. Have you seen Disney movies portraying Native Americans such as in Pocahontas?

Sam: Um, yea. I've seen Pocahontas back in grade school.

Me: How did you feel about the movie? Did you like the movie? Or?

Sam: No, I didn't like it.

Me: You didn't like it? Why didn't you like it?

Sam: 'Cause some of those are all lies.

Me: I see. In what ways would you say that it lies?

Sam: Well they said, um, the pilgrims invited the Indians but they didn't invite 'em.

Me: Ok

Sam: They invited themselves in.

Me: Yea

Sam: So that's kind of a lie. Like a white lie.

NOTE: Sam had likely intended to say that the Indians (as the people that were here first - not the pilgrims) had been incorrectly portrayed.

Me: So you felt pretty strong about the movie back then?

Sam: Well, back then no. But, since they told me about it I kind of.. I didn't like it watching it no more

Me: Who is “they”? Who talked to you?

Sam: Um.. I forget his name but.. um.. I was at his house, like his friend’s house and.. he was talking about it with the kids and some adults and.. that some of those were lies.

Me: Ok

Sam: Just’a make stuff up.

Me: Ok. So this.. this person was an adult then? Maybe someone’s parent that you know?

Sam: Yea. Like an elder I think.

Me: Ok, an elder. How does being Native American make you feel?

Sam: Um.. being Native American is like a.. it’s like a great honor

Me: do you feel as though you are well connected to the native American community

Sam: Yea

Me: So do you feel like you are pretty well connected with uh.. uh, this Indian community.

Sam: Um, yea.

Me: Ok. I imagine that it is a great honor to partake in these traditional ways and to learn them?

Sam: Yea, it is. If you get chosen to do it then that’s like a great honor.

Me: Alright, well it was nice talking with you Sam! I’m.. I definitely learned a few things and uh.. it was my pleasure!

Commentary and Response

As an oral narrative, let this interview be but a brief moment in the history of the first Americans. There is much to be said of the people that were here before you and I. Yet, this history that we know is a false truth. The tale told for time eternal has been that of the conquerer - not that of the “vanquished.” More accurately, history has been “his story”. Rarely has the voice of Americans native to this land been heard or heeded. Instead, the picture painted has been done so by the Euro-American “White Man.” Thus, it is the aim of this project to give agency to this voice - the voices of American Indians.

While this project began with idealistic expectations (on my part), these hopes and desires were a dart that fell short of its mark. I attribute these shortcomings not to the narrator but to myself. Upon reviewing the two part recording of my conversation with James, it became apparent that I led the exchange more than I had wished or intended. What began as a move on my part to make the interviewee feel more comfortable instead had the reverse affect. By

interjecting frequently, it is my belief that I inhibited certain responses and explanations. Though perhaps the assertion that my interjections were the root of this issue is a bit off mark. Rather, I believe that it was the lack of constructive, response oriented remarks that hindered this piece. If timely, more purposeful remarks had been made, I'm sure that they would have elicited a more fruitful exchange. Nonetheless, there are a few important themes to be garnered from my conversation with James.

An underlying theme throughout my conversation with James was the sense of community that he projected. This notion was most discernible in our talks about his spirituality. For James, the role of "Firekeeper" seemed to be one way to establish - in his life - a continuity between the past and present through the "old traditional ways" within his Native American community. Initially a volunteer, James became a Firekeeper during his first three years at the Sundance in South Dakota. The position of Firekeeper was not only an honor for James, but a position that had been held by the rest of his family too. It seems then that, in James's life, spirituality serves to strengthen both communal and familial ties within and between generations. In addition, by partaking in traditional rituals, one's role in the community becomes more clearly defined. Furthermore, one's ritual role is socially significant. For instance, James experienced an especially important event this past summer while at a sweat in which the Creator bestowed upon him a vision. In response, the community agreed that he must become a Sundancer. As a result, James is in his first year as a Sundancer. This sense of community has pervaded into other aspects of James life - sports being one.

Outside of his role as a Sundancer, James leads an active lifestyle full of sports. Among the his favorite sports is football. While athletics transcend people and culture, sports do bring with them a structure and status which is possibly analogous to that experienced by James through his involvement in the "old traditional ways" of his native spirituality. Therefore, as for most, participating in athletics is a facet in one's life that brings with it an added sense of community. Unfortunately, my lack of expertise as an interviewer shown through on this topic as I lingered on another sport - track - that James seemed to favor quite a bit less than football. This was another re-occurring theme (on my part) throughout the interview. Due in part to nervousness, I tended to linger on subjects that I was most familiar with instead of stimulating talk towards areas that James seemed more enthusiastic about. In hindsight, it was my own anxiety - not James's - that hindered the formation of a natural ebb and flow to our oral exchange.