

WISDOM OF THE ELDERS

Beaver: Helping Others Find Joy and Good Health

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The life and work of Beaver Berry, a Choctaw medicine man, is in keeping with the legacy of Clemmont Vontress. Vontress saw great value in the work of indigenous healers (Vontress, 1999). He went so far as to delineate several different types of healers. He saw indigenous healers—medicine people and seers of many sorts—as the original healers of the body, mind and spirit (Vontress, 1991). The information presented here on Beaver is excerpted from an extended interview in

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which he describes his life's work as an American Indian healer (Beaver & Hightower, in press).

Both Beaver and Vontress shared the experience of coping with racial bigotry in the United States: Beaver as an American Indian and Vontress as an African American. Vontress overcame life in the Jim Crow South, and Beaver, life in the cruel Indian boarding school system. They were both psychologically wounded by racial animosity yet both found ways to heal these wounds through embracing cultural pride and the Transcendent. Instead of being embittered by their life experiences, they became known as men of great humility and kindness.

Beaver, like Vontress, saw "culture as the heart and soul of all counseling, rather than something to be considered exotic or specialized" (Epp, 1998). Beaver encouraged American Indians who came to him for help to be proud of their heritage and to reclaim a heritage that had been denigrated by White America as part of a federal system of forced assimilation. White America denigrated the culture, languages and religions of both Africans and Indians. Children in both groups were taught that they were products of inferior peoples. Self-hatred was encouraged. Both Beaver and Vontress knew that this poison must be drawn out for healing to occur.

Beaver modeled his practice on "Walking the Red Road," Vontress by the tenets of Existentialism. Both approaches encouraged authenticity and connection to others. Beaver lived by the high standard Vontress enunciated: "Although you recognize your wounds, you guard against your scars making you so callous that you are unable to feel anymore... As a wounded healer, I am pulled back to the land of my ancestors in search of authenticity, equality, freedom, humanity, and pride" (as quoted in Moodley, 2010.) Vontress encourages us all to allow our pain to stimulate in us the kind of personal growth that leads to joy and personal fulfillment. Beaver lead traditional ceremonies such as the sweat lodge that helped his clients seek balance and ecstatic renewal.

Vontress, like Beaver, felt that the healer must genuinely care about their client as fellow human beings who are also seeking and searching for healing to take place. "Spirituality is our need to search for meaning and connection with others and the transcendent" (Epp, 1998). Beaver admonishes us to be our brother and sister's helper in life. Vontress states that after turning themselves over to higher powers and humbly seeking wholeness, the therapist or medicine person—

whatever the cultural context—“heals the psychological suffering of others... in utilizing their positive energy and charisma” (Epp, 1998). Beaver also encouraged those who came to him to humbly turn “their will and their way over to God as they understood Him.” Beaver was known as a loving and kind person of tremendous humility. I understand that Vontress is seen in a similar way by those who came into contact with him. People who spent even a few hours with Beaver reported being moved to become a better person. He had documented cures of psychological and physical ailments. Beaver was a generous man who never asked for a fee and accepted gladly whatever the patient could afford. He frequently said to those who could not pay him to just “Pray for me” as their contribution.

Beaver Berry was an Oklahoma Choctaw medicine man born in the 1920's. He moved to California after serving as a combat decorated marine in World War II. He later suffered from severe PTSD from battle. After discharge, he became addicted to drugs and alcohol. He led a life of homelessness and law breaking. He decided to go into treatment at a treatment center geared to American Indians, eventually himself becoming a substance abuse counselor after studying at the University of Stockton just outside the San Francisco Bay Area. Below, Beaver provides guidelines for the correct behavior for practitioners and participants in American Indian healing ceremonies. He shares his views about the tenets of Indian religious life and the psychological challenges non-Indians and assimilated Indians experience when they become involved in these ceremonies. He admonished participants to be humble, tolerant, and forgiving. We begin our discussion with Beaver describing his first role model, his medicine man great uncle.

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“My uncle’s name was Sim Collins. They called him a witch doctor. He wasn’t a witch doctor. He was a medicine man. He was very much a spiritual human being. He believed in the Creator as he understood Him. If he had anything and you needed it he would just give it to you. If you needed a place to live he’d say, “Go back there and build you a log cabin.” He wouldn’t charge you anything for it. He tried to help people any way he could. I picked up a lot of values from my great uncle. He made me what I am today.

I never remember a time of settin' down at a table with just my great aunt and my great uncle, just immediate family being there. There would always be total strangers sitting at that table. We had a long table. Anybody come there, the first thing you did was feed 'em. You didn't ask 'em if they was hungry or if they needed to eat or wanted to eat. My great aunt would supply the meal. Even total strangers were coming there, cuz you know how the word gets around. "If you're hungry, go to uncle Sim's. He's got food. If you need a place to build that log cabin, go to uncle Sim. He's got land; he's got that Indian allotment. He'll give you some land, and you can build a cabin."

My uncle was a very honest man. His handshake was better than a signed contract. The White bankers knew that and would loan him money on a verbal commitment and a handshake. Generous people like my uncle more or less kept the community together. They had respect from a lot of people. Still, regardless of how good you get or how good you are to other people, there will be some people in a community who will dislike you for reasons of their own. You don't always know who it is or their reasons, but you will find those kinds of people in a community, both with the Indians and with the non-Indians. You'll always find negative people. Any community you go into you'll find negative people.

My uncle was around all my childhood. He was running sweats. He was a medicine man. He did Pipe Ceremonies and things like that. I saw him do many things. He used a stone pipe and a wooden pipe, and a pipe made out of a corncob on a long stem. They'd come to him for practically everything. Sometimes a horse would get lost, and they asked my uncle, "Where would be the best place to find that horse?" He'd tell them, and they'd find the horse. Me and my uncle would run wild horses out of mountains and corral them. He'd see one and want to break it. He broke it and put the saddle on it. He would jerk a hair from behind the wild horse's ear and put it in my shirt pocket. He said, "When you get through riding this horse look for this hair in your pocket." I would get on and ride and break that horse, and I'd get off and look for that hair. I could never find that hair. We used to go catch wild horses. My uncle would circle a group of wild horses while spreading medicine on the ground, singing as he rode. Then he would point to the lead horse and show him the direction he wanted him to lead the herd, and they would follow. Very few people who were present could believe what they saw him do. I was amazed. It blew me out.

By the time I was about 15, 16 years old. I thought I was a good rider. The community also thought I was a pretty good rider, and they entered me in the Indian rodeo at Wilburton. My Uncle said, "I am not going to go to the rodeo and watch you, because you can't ride. My medicine helped you break those horses in the past." I did not believe him. However, first horse I rode threw me high as a kite. I came back, and I told my uncle. He said, "How did you do?" I said, "Not too good." He said, "I knew it. I told you, you can't ride." He was good at things like that.

My uncle was a good healer. I had a fight with a White man. The White man shot me in my arm. The doctors said all the muscles were destroyed. The doctors said they couldn't fix it. Doctors said the only thing that arm would be good for was to fill a shirtsleeve. I couldn't use the arm. For a long time I picked it up, moved it around, but I didn't have control over it. My uncle asked me, "You want to stay a cripple the rest of your life?" I said, "No." "Want to do something about it?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Ok, I'll doctor you. I'm going to tell you what you have to do to get using that arm again." He said, "Everyday you take your hand and work your fingers like that. You do that everyday and use the medicine I'm giving you." He said, "Go ahead and do it. It's going to hurt you. Move those fingers now. You got to get where you can move that arm." I kept working with it. It hurt. I kept taking that medicine he had given me. I raised it up. It got to where I could use it. When I went back to the doctors they were amazed, "You're not supposed to have muscles. How'd you do it?" I said, "I don't know. You're the doctor. You tell me." He said, "Those muscles are healing themselves; they're healing back together." I didn't tell them about my uncle. My uncle told me not to. They wouldn't believe it anyway.

My uncle told me one time how he became a medicine man, that he was taken away by *kwanokasha* (small spirits that are said to dwell in forested areas) and taught. Before he came back they taught him all these things. I guess he was a little guy when this happened. He spent most of his life as a medicine man. I grew up attending his sweat ceremonies, since I was a little guy. They felt good. He was real traditional, but I think all his medicine and all his healing, all those other things came directly from the spirits. He told me, "If you ever start the spiritual way, don't use that altar for anything but for helping people. The same altar can be used for good or for bad. If you cross that line to the bad you'll never get back over here to the good."

If you come to him for very specific doctoring he would sit you down and have a ceremony. Most would bring him tobacco. Then they'd sit down and have a ceremony. He knew herbs and medicines. Whatever was wrong with you he would see it within you, and he'd know what herb to give you. He said, "What I know, the little people [kwanokasha] give me."

He could even predict the future and tell the outcome of certain events. Before I went to World War II, I went down to see him. He had a log under a tree. We'd go sit on that log. I don't know what that log had to do with it, but that was his place. He went there to counsel/doctor people. Before I went off to the service in WW II, he took me to the log and he said, "You are going away, going to the war, but you are going to make it back ok... you are going to come back a hero. You ain't going to get killed." A lot of times I thought that old Indian didn't know what he was talking about. I was in some tight spots in the Pacific. I saw people killed around me daily but I did get the Silver Star.

He was the only one in our local community who worked with the spirit helpers. There was another man. He was Choctaw and Black. He healed with herbs. You'll find most medicine people are one way or the other: they either rely on spirits, or they work with herbs. Some can use both. He helped a lot of people, but my uncle always told me, "Look in their eyes, and if they give you a creepy feeling get away from them." Sorcery came through and some of them bewitched the people. My uncle told me about one who was a witch. He stopped those people when they came around.

My uncle was my greatest teacher. He said, "What I'm doing today, the Creator will one day give to you." I haven't got there yet. I know the Creator had to be with him. He was a true medicine man. I can't do the things I seen him do. My uncle died 30 years ago. In the Indian community, some of them really lost it when he died; however, the White community seemed like they were kind of glad. They thought, "Well that old witch is gone." The White folks were really scared of him. He never used his powers against the White community. They just knew what he could do. Most of those old time Choctaws had faith in my uncle. There were a lot of other Choctaws, however, who had adopted White ways. There are still a few traditional Choctaw in Oklahoma, but they don't advertise themselves. You have to hunt them out. They see things the same as I do. When I was young, there was conflict between what we called "progressives" who wanted to

adopt White ways and the “traditionals” who wanted to stick to the old Choctaw ways. You had two factions in the Indian world, the Choctaw world. The progressives and the traditionals. They would argue about what’s traditional and what’s not traditional. How you do things and how you don’t do things. Years and years and years ago when I was young, my great uncle taught me how to run sweats, but I never did put it into practice until after I got to Three Rivers. I knew how, and I knew what the stones meant. I knew the meaning of all these things but, matter of fact, I never anticipated, I never figured, I’d do these things; because I just didn’t like people.

In the beginning, in our treatment program we more or less used Alcoholics Anonymous’ philosophy to stay sober, but we soon realized that we needed more than that. We knew that in order to find sobriety you had to find the Creator. At Three Rivers there was a client. He used to come to me and say, “Beaver, can we have a sweat?” I said, “Yeah.” I knew some sweat leaders. I’d get on the telephone and call ‘em and ask ‘em if they could come run a sweat for the residents at Three Rivers. Whenever I called they would come. At that time, anyone that came to run a sweat for our residents we’d give ‘em a hundred dollars for their effort to come down. They didn’t ask for it. We gave out of the goodness of our heart. We just give it to ‘em to support them. This is the right thing to do. If you can afford it, it’s okay for the sweat leader to accept payment, but it’s not all right, it’s not acceptable, to ask for or demand payment.

Those people that I kept callin’ to come down and run a sweat, finally they was tellin’ me, “You’ve got to do this. Don’t be callin’ all over the country to ask somebody else to come do your dirty work. You do it.” Up until that time, although I really got off into the spiritual way, I wasn’t ready to give up everything. I guess I wasn’t really ready to make that full commitment. You have to go beyond yourself. Leading a sweat is something that most sweat leaders, most of the people I’ve talked to, something they don’t want to do initially. More or less, the Creator has called them to do these things. They’ve tried and they’ve tried to avoid doing ‘em. Eventually they have to break down somewhere inside and make that decision to do it. There’s no other way except to grow with it. If you do these things you can’t not grow. Your belief will get stronger, you’ll get stronger and your spirituality will get stronger. You’ll get more often to the spiritual things than you normally would. The more often you lead sweats your spiritual understanding will increase.

It's not all the time that you see anything. There are certain times that you do, and it depends on where you are at in your head. I mean, not your head but with your being with the Creator. It's mainly up to Him to show you these things. I have experienced the Eagle. I've also experienced the Bear. We was up in Montana. I went to a sweat lodge. We got up there, and the bears had torn the sweat lodge, taken the covers off the sweat lodge. We put it back together, and we were settin' in the sweat lodge, praying' and I had a vision. I seen a bear. They call 'em cinnamon bears. I seen him settin' in there next to the sweat leader, Dan. That bear was just as plain as I am sittin' here.

I seen a lotta things at the sweat lodge at Three Rivers Indian Lodge. It has a blue flame in it. Not everybody has seen that. One time our secretary came out and taken a picture of that sweat lodge. She took a picture from the door in the sweat lodge. When she had got her picture back and it was developed, that blue flame showed up in the picture. When that flame comes into that sweat lodge, if there's anybody sick in there at that particular time, they will be healed. We had healin' in there when that flame was present, but we didn't call a healin' sweat. It just happened. The way that come about is: people brought me certain things to make a smoking mixture, and I was sittin' down outside prayin' and I was mixin' my tobacco. I wasn't watching what I was putting in there. I was just lettin' Grandfather guide my hands. When I got the tobacco all fixed up, I went and burned some of it. A blue flame came out, and that kinda scared me. I said, "I'll use this in the sweat lodge tonight." That night I put some on the stones, and that blue flame came out, and everybody that was in there seen that blue flame. From that day on when that blue flame is in that sweat lodge, somebody's gonna get healed. You don't know who it will be. It might be you, it might be someone else. The Creator knows who it will be. That flame is His way of lettin' you know that He is there and He has touched somebody.

This lady, she didn't have no knee cap. In her drunken days she had a car wreck, and her kneecap got busted up. They had to take it out. She fell, and when she went to the doctor, they told her she probably had to go through that operation again and put some ligaments back together because it was tore loose. She's askin' me about it, and I says, "Tonight when we go in there and pray in the sweat lodge, you sit in there by the doorway, and you pray to the Creator." When I was talkin' to her she said, "Oh Beaver, look at that eagle! Right up there by that treetop!" I'm lookin'. I couldn't see no eagle, but I

could hear it. You know how they sound. They cry out. I heard that, and it flew away. She saw it make that circle around her, and then it flew away. She said, “The eagle’s gone.” I told her, “That eagle was for you to see, not for me. The Creator sent that eagle to you. He’s gonna heal you tonight.” That night we went into the sweat lodge. She sat there and prayed to the Creator. When she went back to the hospital the doctors was amazed. They said they X-rayed where they thought they were gonna have to go in and put them ligaments back together, but the problem was takin’ care of itself. They was growin’ back together! They said, “We never seen that before.” She didn’t elaborate on what was happenin’, because they was kind of leery of us Indians anyway. We had a lot of healin’ goin’ on down there. They would never have believed her if she did tell them what happened.

I’ve seen a lot of healin’ goin’ on in that sweat lodge. I’ve watched it, and I’ve seen it done. I know it’s real. I seen a woman get healed of cancer. When she went back to have her testing done it come back negative. They was tellin’ her she had to have an operation. When she went back to get her checkup and her testing, they couldn’t find no trace of cancer.”

A Testimonial from a Mother Who Asked Beaver for Help

Kitty Chapman (Chuckchansi), Personal Remembrance

Beaver has always been a gentle and kind person, one of the most humble servants of Grandfather. I thank Grandfather for sending him into my life and the lives of my children. Beaver took me into my first sweat. I am now in recovery from drug addiction for 8 years. He also took my 8-year-old daughter (at the time) in for a healing sweat. She did not hear well, and after being told her tonsils would have to be removed and tubes put in her ears, I called Beaver to talk with him. He said to bring her up for a healing sweat that next weekend. I did, and in the third round of the sweat her little ears popped and drained after all the prayers and sacred songs. I took her back to the doctor on Monday morning; the doctor told me she did not need the tubes after all. Knowing Grandfather and the faith and trust I had in Him and Beaver I knew that was what he would say. Now Beaver would be the first to say, “I am not a healer, Grandfather is.” I know in my heart that if Creator had not brought me to Beaver, my life would not be what it is today. He showed me there is so much more to life than drugs, and he also showed me that forgiveness and love are the things that are of God.

“Another Indian counselor at Three Rivers Lodge once objected to my helping a boy from the Tulee reservation. He was thinking they should have taken care of it at Tulee. I knew the boy’s daddy, and his daddy knew me. He asked me if I would do it, and I told him I would. We brought him down to Three Rivers, and we went in and run a sweat for him. A healin’ sweat. This other Indian counselor got real upset with it. He said I was takin’ time away from the alcoholics, but I wasn’t doin’ that. We invited anybody who wanted to go into that healin’ sweat to come in. The counselor also had a thing that we should have got permission first from the boy’s tribe. He threatened to fight me on the spot to stop the ceremony, and I told him, “Okay, but you already lost.” I had been a prizefighter as a marine in my youth. Luckily it didn’t come to blows.

I talked to a lot of people about that one later. Even the director told me that the other counselor didn’t have no business saying that about that Indian man and his kid. About a year later I seen that man and his boy. The boy was out dancing at a powwow, and he was okay. He was close to dying before we prayed for him. Him and his daddy shook hands with me. It was worth all the B.S. I went through to pray for that boy.

It doesn’t make no difference who comes to me for help. Anybody that needs help, needs help. I don’t care what their tribe is or even if they’re Indian. You help people, regardless, whether they’re Indian or not. People are people. Human bein’s are human bein’s. I was told that. I don’t understand these people that will not help a person that’s not Indian. I just don’t understand that.

You can also use the Gourd Clan Society to help people. Now here is what I was told about how the Gourd Clans came into existence. This tribe they were going through a hard winter, and they ran out of food. This chief picked his most reliable warriors, and said, “You go find food for the people.” They journeyed about two weeks and couldn’t find nothing. In the morning they heard this strange unfamiliar singing and crept up the top of this hill and looked down in the valley. They seen a Red Wolf dancing around a drum, and this Wolf Spirit was singing gourd songs. The spirit motioned them to come over. When they came up he told them, “I’m going to teach you these songs and teach you the gourd dance. This is the way to the Creator.” He said, “We are the Creator’s helpers.” He said, “When you go back, you learn these songs, learn the gourd dance, and you teach these ways

to your people. Whenever they are in need, tell them to do these songs and this dance, and their needs will be supplied.

Everybody gives credit to the Kiowas for bringing the gourd dance out to the open in modern times. It is debatable as to which tribe had the gourd dance first. It was suppressed a lot of years by the government, because they thought it was the way of the devil. They thought we were on the warpath. Something like with the Ghost Dance. It really was meant to be a spiritual thing, we were making contact with God and seeking a greater understanding.

Let me tell you how a Gourd Clan Society is *supposed* to be. You can be a warrior, but that does not qualify you to be a gourd dancer. You have to be well respected in the community, help other people, give of yourself; then you have earned the right to be a gourd dancer. Just because you are a veteran, that does not qualify you to gourd dance. You have to earn that right by showing a better way of living. You do good for the community as a whole. When you become a society member it makes you stronger with the Creator. It does not qualify you to be a medicine man, it does not say that you going to be a pipe carrier, it just helps you become a better human being. If you are already good it helps you to get in better touch with the Creator. The Gourd Society gives anything that the community might need. If you're sick you can request the Gourd Clan to come and have a ceremony for you. All you need to do is ask.

Our Gourd Clan Society often does Sun Rise Ceremonies for the community. The Sun Rise Ceremony is where we pray for you, sweat for you, especially if you are unable to do the sweat yourself. We'd do this for you. We dance the four directions for you. The Sun Rise Ceremony takes place usually at the change of the seasons. We pray for any problem that you have. We come and pray for you. We help you with your problems, to solve those problems. The real heart and guts of the society to me is walking the spiritual path. For me myself I see it in this light. When I am gourd dancing, when I'm at a ceremony, we're all basically human beings and we have the same feelings as other human beings. It's not I'm better than you or you're better than me, we are all equal. The basic thing is getting our lives squared with "the Man Upstairs." To me that's the heart and guts and main emphasis.

The structure is all geared around family. In some Gourd Societies you see little guys out there learning their spiritual way and to identify with "the Man Upstairs." The warrior's main function is to be

a provider who protects the old and young people, and women—really, everybody in the community. The true warrior does the right thing, at the right time for the right purpose. He serves the Creator. The Gourd Society to me is a unit of people that's working, thriving together for the good of the *whole community*.

The role of the warrior is often misunderstood. A true warrior is a protector and provider. Somebody that does good things for the community as a whole. Someone who got a good heart that maybe sees this grandma lady out here and gets her wood. He'll go over and help her. If she needs food, he'll share the food he's got with her. He does good things in the community to help the people as a whole. A warrior is a person that would give himself totally, and will give his life to protect the people. He shares all that he's got. A warrior is the last one to take for himself. He is always concerned for the weakest ones: our kids, the elderly, someone in trouble, and those who can't do for themselves.

We don't look at him as somebody who killed somebody else. We look at it as a person who is well respected in his community, has done things for the Indian people, he worked for the betterment of the Indian people. He doesn't feel he's better than they are. He treats people on an equal basis. In our Gourd Society, we'd ask someone who wants to join, "What have you done for the Indian community? Can you bring us something from your community that qualifies you to join?"

Whoever needs help, Indian or not, we made a commitment to the Creator that we would do these things: help human beings to find Him through goodness and kindness. If that White man down there, or that Mexican there, or whoever might need help came to me and said, "We need your help," I am obligated to do what I can for that human being. I made a commitment to the Creator. Before we get our gourd blankets we build a fire inside the teepee: that's our altar. We make a commitment directly to the Creator that we are going to do these spiritual things and try to walk in a good way and help all people the best way we know how. Red, Black, Yellow, and White people and any mixture of people. We are all human beings first. The Black Wolf Gourd Clan Society went to a D.Q. University Gourd Dance to help Dennis Banks when they were trying to extradite him, and send him back to prison. We did a gourd dance for him. We asked the Creator to give him strength and help him get through this problem. We asked that he get help, that he get strength. Things worked out for him.

We pray for people with physical problems and psychological problems. We pray for people with sickness. This lady we prayed for had cancer. The next time she went to the doctor, he couldn't find no trace of cancer. A lady we prayed for with claustrophobia, the next time we heard from her she was up in Oregon running sweats. This one person we prayed for he had some kind of infection, eating on his side. It was big and round. It was eating the skin away. It was like a big old sore. It was getting bigger and bigger and bigger. The doctors told him they probably had to operate on him and cut all of it out. Our medicine was at the lodge, and I asked if we could have a ceremony for this guy and all agreed. We had that ceremony for him, and whatever was eating at him started clearing up.

These are the type of things we've done over the years. I seen lots of things. I've seen what the Creator has done for people. I've seen good results from all these things. People get well; they get healed; they get their financial situation straightened out; some people come to us who are having problems with marriage, and years later we find out they are still together.

When I was asked to help with putting the Gourd Clan Society in, I knew I needed that extra push, that extra pump, so to speak, to achieve that spiritual part of me that needed fulfillin.' It scared me at first, I said, "I gotta think about this for a while." There was some things I wanted to do. I knew if I become a spiritual human bein' I couldn't do them things anymore.

I knew if I wanted to stay sober I had to have that extra spiritual push. I'm talking about Indian values. Indian spirituality.

To the people who wanted to come into Three Rivers Indian Lodge, I told them it's very simple. I just tell 'em straight out, "We got a sweat lodge. We got a Hogan. We got a gourd dance. We got a powwow. We're Indian orientated. We cook Indian. We sleep Indian. We eat Indian. Everything about us is Indian. We are Indians, only we're different tribes. Whenever you come into our program, you gotta be willing to accept our Indian ways, our Indian strengths, and our Indian B.S.—we just Indians. If you can accept it, great! Maybe we can help you. If you can't accept it, don't even try it cuz it won't work for you. Look for another program."

A Testimonial from One of Beaver's Students

Sherry Atkins (Apache), Personal Remembrance

I first met Beaver in 1983 at a sweat ceremony. I was desperate in my desire to strengthen myself, and to find a way to better myself for my children's sake. Beaver, or "grandpa Beav" as we call him, at that time was a counselor at White Cloud, in Oakland. He also ran sweat ceremonies at Three Rivers Lodge. He was a traditional war dancer and member of a local powwow committee.

Beaver was always going somewhere to help someone. He was a very kind and gentle man, raveling with words of wisdom, always patient and soft-spoken. He treated everyone well, no matter how they might act. He would say, "If an individual is having a hard time or being negative, pray for them; always say a good word, and when you speak, keep it simple, and be willing to walk the path Creator puts in front of you." As I see it, this was Beaver's philosophy of life. Beaver has been an inspiration to me to this day. Just watching him and listening to him has been a great support for my family.

I have seen Beaver put his teachings about patience into action. I remember one time we were at a sweat and these guys showed up. There were four of them sitting in a van drinking alcohol before the ceremony. Beaver was setting the fire, but he knew what those guys were doing. He never said anything to them. So I said, "Beaver, those guys have alcohol over there. Don't you think we should put them off the grounds?" They were a rough looking bunch too; they had white power tattoos, shaved heads, Nazi symbols on their van, skin, and clothes. To me they didn't seem very friendly. Beaver reminded me, "The sweat lodge is where people come to get well, a place of healing."

Two of those guys went into the lodge. When Beaver asked them to introduce themselves, they said nothing. He asked them if they had ever sweated before. They still wouldn't answer. Finally, Beaver said to them, "This is going to be a very hot sweat, and for this special ceremony I don't want anyone to break the circle by leaving." The door to the sweat was still open, and one of the newcomers looked over at grandpa and said, "It can't get too hot in here for me. I know I can take it, and if this is about race, and you don't want me in here because I'm White, then just say so." Then he proceeded to smack his own chest with his fist. Beaver told the doorman to close the flap.

On the first round those guys started to moan and move around a little. By the second round they started crying. Then one guy started hysterically

yelling, "Tell them your name, Tommy! Just tell them your name!" Then they said, "We're taking medication! It's the kind of medicine that you can die if your body temperature gets too high!" When the door opened on the third round, one guy was lying faced down crying. The other was sitting cross-legged rocking back and forth also crying (This was the one with the smart-mouth). Their tattoos were all sweated off. They said, "Grandpa, please let us out! We are going to die in here!" Grandpa Beaver looked at them for a long time and said, "I can't think of a better place to die than the sweat lodge."

When the sweat was over, those guys took off running so fast they left their shoes behind! Their friends in the van had already left, so those guys kept on running all the way to the main road! About three years later, the one guy named Tommy came back. He looked entirely different; also, his attitude was much improved. Tommy told us two of his friends from that sweat were now dead, the other one was on death row, and that he had spent two years in prison. Tommy also shared that during his time in prison he thought about and remembered a lot about his experience in the ceremony. He said he believed he had found something very special and it had changed his life for the better.

"I pray for people when they come to me and say, "I need a prayer. I need to be here and for you to pray for me." I will do that. If somebody calls me and says, "Beaver I need you to bring the pipe to pray for me, I need prayer," I don't hesitate, I go. I don't think how I'm going to get there, I start praying cuz I already promised that person I'd be there, even if they are hundreds of miles away.

Let me tell you how I started carrying the sacred pipe. That started years ago. There is a secret medicine society. They started sending me lots of things. They sent them to a person in Sacramento, and he would bring them down to me. He would say, "I bring this to you to help the people." I was getting these things.

I seldom go to Native American Church, but one night I got an urge. "I got to go to that church. I got to go." I went, and it was about midnight, during the water break, when this man who had been giving me things said, "There is something I got to do. This pipe was sent to me by a medicine person to give to a person here." I'm thinking, "Somebody is going to get a pipe." This guy got up and walked and got in front of me and said, "Stand up." I stood up. He says, "The medicine society sent me this pipe to give to you to help the people. These are

the instructions that were given to me to give to you. You can turn this pipe down three times or you can accept it. Once you accept this pipe that's for life. You walk with this pipe and help the people. Don't worry about where they call you to and tell you they need this pipe. Don't worry about how you going to get there, or anything else about it. You just start walking and telling the Creator you're dependent on Him. He will make sure you get there. That's all you have to know and all you have to do. Everything you pray about make sure that it comes from the Creator and that He's giving you the answers and giving you directions." Then he said, "If you ever turn around, or lose interest, or do wrong things with this pipe, make sure you take this pipe to a high mountain or high hill and face it to the East and bury it."

I got those types of calls that man spoke of, and I went trusting the Creator to provide and He always has done so. I've done exactly what was told to me to do. I created my own ceremonies from things I seen my great uncle do. I also have songs from others. Sundance songs, peyote songs, wolf songs, etc. I do this out of respect to those spirits. For example, this woman had a tree right by her house. She told us, "You can have this tree for wood for your sweat lodge, if you don't let it fall on my house." I said, "Ok, it won't fall on your house." When my friend started sawing it down, I could have sworn it was going to fall into her house. I prayed to the Creator and said, "Please don't let this lady's house get destroyed." That's when a song came to me. For some unknown reason I walked over and laid my hands on that tree. I sung the song, and that tree fell away from the house. I had never heard the song before, never knew it before. This is what is called "catching a song."

When we got back from the trip we were out back cleaning up. I started to sing that song and one of the guys said, "Beaver I didn't know you knew how to sing peyote songs." I said, "I can't. I don't know one." He said, "You've been singing one." I said, "Was that a peyote song?" He said, "Yup." I explained to him how it come to me. I try to do everything intertribal, because I want to respect all types. In the cities, if you go only one way you're going to run some people off... they won't even show up, but if you stay intertribal, then they feel comfortable about coming. I caught a lot of flak. They'd say, "It should be Sioux or Navajo, or Choctaw." There are a lot of different kinds of Indian people around here. We have to do this spiritually for all the people.

The proper way to conduct a pipe ceremony is to sit down and you really try to get to that “Man Up There.” Then it all comes to you. You don’t know how it will be, you really don’t. You can’t say it’s going to be this way or it’s going to be that way. You trust that “Man Upstairs” and somehow it comes together. It’s like you know what you’re doing, but you don’t. You’re just doing it.

I’ve used the pipe for a lot of things. Mostly to help the people find their way and help themselves. I’ve even prayed for people that were missing. Sometimes before the ceremony was over there would be a call, or few days later they would show up or find out where the missing persons were at. I prayed for a woman whose husband caught a plane and went all the way down to Florida. He called her three days after the ceremony to tell her where he was.

Our whole Indian culture is based on giving, being a servant to others. My great uncle, a medicine man, was a very giving type of person. He always told me, “This don’t belong to us. It belongs to God. He let us use it for a period of time. It belongs to the Creator.” Some of our modern day Indians, they like a name and title. It seems like they forget who they are and what they are and who they’re supposed to help. I see that a lot. A lot of times the non-traditional Indians if you give ‘em a title, or start looking up to ‘em as a good helper, they also use it in the wrong way. Their ego gets in their way. They think, “I’m somebody in the Indian community.” The Indian people are thinking, “They’re nobody in this community.” I seen that happen to a lot of Indian people. They become a pipe carrier, and our community starts looking up to him as a spiritual leader, and then they get the big head. Pretty soon they’re doing things, and they’re causing a lot of divisive, bad feelings in the community. It just makes for a bad situation. With the Indian people you’ve gotta be very careful, or they’ll leave you sittin’ high and dry. You’ve got to be the humble servant of the people, or else, what good are you?

If you become a ceremonial leader, be honest about your shortcomings. People are people and they’re gonna look for your flaws. Once they find ‘em they gonna rip you to shreds if you pretend to be perfect. We all have flaws, but when you catch ‘em make sure that you’re up front with ‘em and say, “Hey, I’m not a perfect human bein’.” If you tell people you’re a perfect human being, they’re gonna sit there and study you until they know you real good. They’re gonna find something wrong and tear you apart. You gotta admit ‘em. Be honest about it. I have also used the pipe to protect the people from evil.

There was this wicked guy. I would call him a witch. He was harming the people. He was interfering with their spirituality. I was called and asked if I'd bring the pipe and pray for the community. I went there and prayed for the community. While I was sitting there he come to visit with me, and he invited me over to his house. I walked into his place, and he had an altar like the one I got, only he used it in a negative way. He could point at certain things like glasses, and they would break or explode. He moved objects around. He asked me, "Can your God do that?" I told him, "He can do a lot more than that." I got a creepy feeling when I was over there. I got up and walked out, and I prayed as I walked out. I told him, "I'll pray for you." Then I went on out. I stopped and prayed for him. I knew he had power, but it was the wrong type of power.

I prayed to the Creator and asked Him to turn this man to good ways if possible, however in 3 days he was dead. I asked God to put a lock around him to keep him from interfering with these people. God didn't turn him around, just got him out of the way. That was His choice.

You can use the pipe alone to heal. There was a time I prayed for this young kid who had a wreck on a motorcycle, and doctors asked his mother—they had him on life support—"Can you sign these papers so we can take him off life support?" She said, "No." Even the priest told her to do it. "There is no way this kid will be right even if he does come off and live. He won't know what's happening. He won't even know you." She said, "I've asked this medicine man to pray for him." The priest asked her, "What did you pay?" "I didn't pay," she told him. He didn't believe her. I came and prayed for this boy that night. I knew that he was going to be alright, and he was. The people I was standing with said, "It's done. He is going to be alright." I knew it, something told me.

In everyday life—the way I was taught and the way I was raised—everything you do, when you're making a garment for someone, when women are making a garment for their kids, they're in prayer. When you're cooking for your family, you're in prayer. When you're dancing, you're in prayer. In the powwow arena, when you're dancin' that circle, that's the circle of life. You pray for all the generations.

I know the soul exists independently of the body. I've been up there lookin' down on my body. After we die, our spirits go to a place that's a lot better than this one. I don't think a person really dies

outright. When you have crossed over, you leave what you have done in this life and what you have taught people. It goes on and on and on and on and on and on and on. Whatever is good about us stays. Whatever good we might be able to teach another human bein' just stays. It keeps going."

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