

TRIBAL MEMBER NEWS

Poe, con't from page 1

He found solace in watching planes fly by.

"I wondered 'who's on that plane' and 'where are they going?'"

Despite the breakup, his parents stayed friends and they supported and encouraged him. He found comfort in a tape his grandmother purchased at a garage sale in 1990 – he was 4 years old.

"It was a Jammin' tape and that was it," remembered Poe. "I would spit in my hands and say 'look at me I'm beat boxin'.'"

The deal was sealed when the family acquired a microphone with a stand.

Poe said he was 11 when he wrote his first rap.

This is where mom interjects herself into the interview to say her son is not the stereotypical rapper and he was a good student who loved to read and write. Russell said her son helped her go to school by giving her a hand with her papers and editing her work before she turned it in.

"I always thought he would be an English teacher," said Russell. "When he was little, I read to him every night. When I went back to college in 2001, he helped me with my writing and my grammar."

Mother and son shared a story about Poe giving up his seat to an older person on the bus – he rides the bus everywhere throughout the city and all its destinations as he is without wheels. He looks away with a smile at the memory and mom looks right at me as if to emphasize the point that despite her son's talent for dropping a few creative phrases into his lyrical creations, he is not a gang member nor is he disrespectful to women.

Despite the fact that he is an adult now at age 24, Poe still treats his mother with the type of respect traditional to Native youth and their Elders. This is a trait he sometimes puts on hold now when entered into a battle rap competition, but he knows where his roots are – with his mom.

"He still does not like to cuss in front of me," said Russell. "The number one thing about Greg is respect for all people. Don't get me wrong, he does believe that as long as you are respectful to him, he will respect you. He definitely is not a pushover. He is smart and he will stand up for himself."

It was his attention to detail and love of language that led him to be a good student and a good son, but it was his focused personality that led him to dream of playing basketball for a living.

"I get obsessive," said Poe. "I was going to be in the NBA. I would play for hours. I was going to be a pro."

So how does a city kid with a Native mother remain respectful of his Elders and dreaming of a professional basketball career still thrive in the rough and ready world of rap music?

Dream.

Poe remembers when his friend Reggie, who lived down the street from where he grew up, invited him over to see the studio his dad had created in their garage. He started recording. He learned song structure. He learned choruses.

When Poe started recording in his

friend's garage, his priorities went from ball to rap.

"I started putting more time into rapping," said Poe. "Recording changed my focus for me. It felt good. I listened to all kinds of music, but I focused on my rapping."

Poe joined a group called Lyrical Militia.

"I looked up to these people (local rap artists)," said Poe. "I thought to myself, I could do that. I started recording when I was 14 and I entered my first competition when I was 15."

Poe stops the story short of telling you that he won the competition as the youngest competitor in the event.

"Things happen for a reason," said Poe, sounding wise beyond his years and not at all like a street-savvy wordsmith referred to by his fans and peers as "Illmaculate."

He asked his family not to come to his first competition, "Hip Hop Tonight" at the Crystal Ballroom in Portland in November 2001. The ballroom hosts major musical recording artists like Mos Def, Taking Back Sunday, Bright Eyes and The Hives.

"I told everyone not to come," said Poe. "I had never free-styled (a form a rapping that features the artist free-flowing his lyrics on the spot) and I had only one month leading up to the competition to get ready. I thought to myself 'I'm going to get served' (beaten badly by the other competitors)."

Not only did Poe not get served by the 180 other rappers in attendance, he won. Top Prize: \$1,000.

He thought of his Mom. "I called her and said, 'I won!'"

Mom has been quoted as saying she remembers that call.

"He was screaming," said Russell. "We were just so jazzed. No one thought he could win, including him."

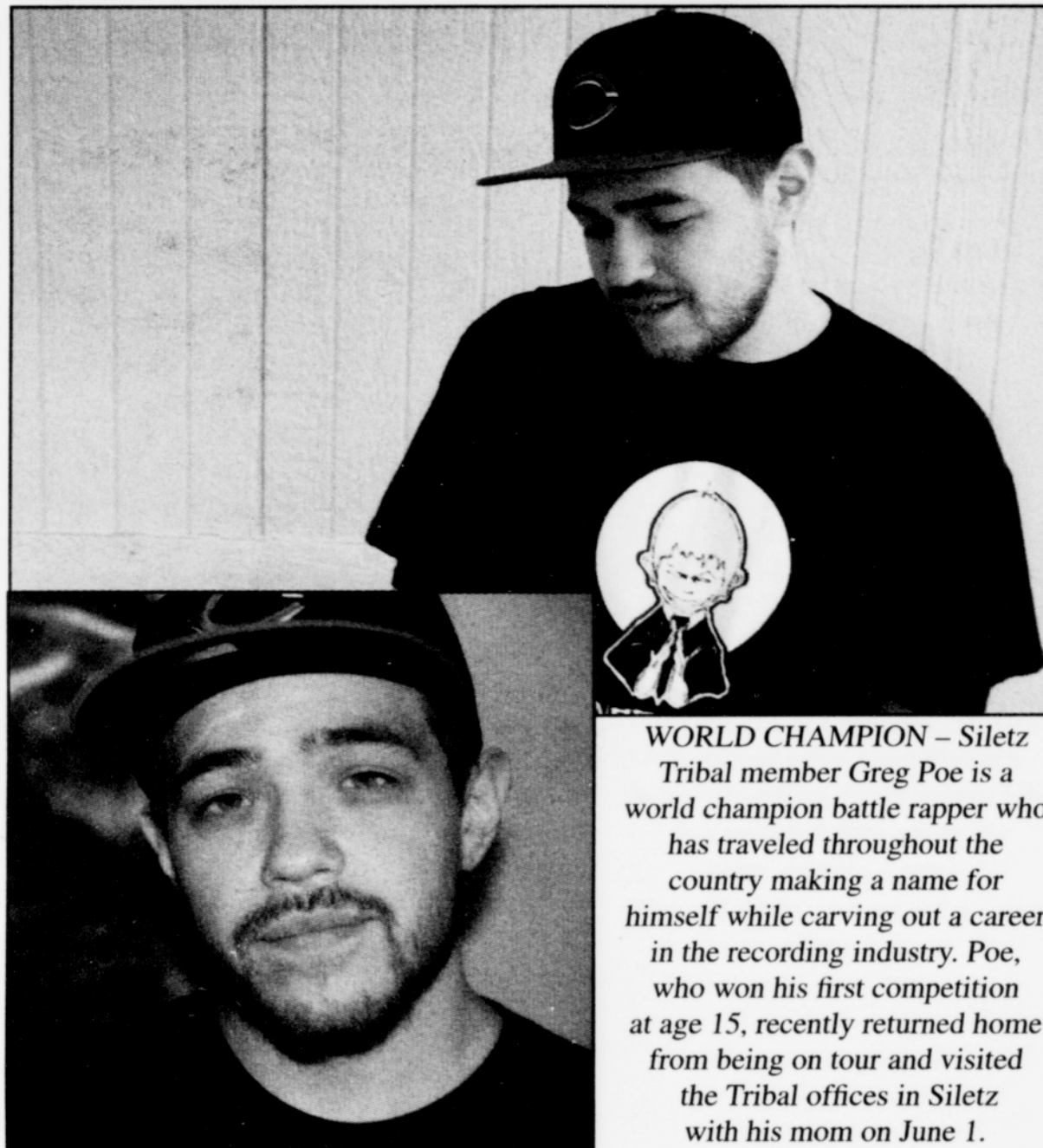
While his musical career was on the rise, his academic career was placed on hold. After attending George Middle School and Roosevelt High School, Poe dropped out.

After relying on his superior intellect and scoring too high on high school placement tests (bringing scrutiny from administrators), the family made the difficult decision to allow Greg to pursue a career that would lead him to become the best in the world. Mom insists he will someday return to the classroom for a General Education Degree.

Leaving high school behind halfway through his senior year to become rap royalty is a tradeoff the family was willing to make because it made the most sense for Poe, who was having a hard time being challenged by the conventional mainstream school system.

Ironically, it was the decision to leave school that would place him on the fast track to becoming one of the best rap artists in the world.

In 2004, Poe entered the Scribble Jam in Cincinnati, Ohio, by winning an entry in a preliminary weeding-out competition that narrows down the competitors who actually make the main event. He had to



Photos by Brent Merrill

WORLD CHAMPION – Siletz Tribal member Greg Poe is a world champion battle rapper who has traveled throughout the country making a name for himself while carving out a career in the recording industry. Poe, who won his first competition at age 15, recently returned home from being on tour and visited the Tribal offices in Siletz with his mom on June 1.

RESPECTFUL BATTLE RAPPER – Greg Poe and his mom Tamra Russell are very close. She supports him as he makes his way in the world as a recording artist and he supports her by being respectful and remaining close to her despite his travels. Tamra's mom was Tribal Elder Bernadine Washington. Greg lives in the St. Johns area of Portland and mom lives with husband Eric and works at the Native American Youth Association office in Portland.

quit his job at an aluminum plant, where he was working 10-hour days six days a week to save money for his first album, in order to go to Cincinnati.

The competition, with a regular attendance of 8,000 people, is an annual two-on-two event that draws break dancers, turntablists and battle rappers from all around the world that Poe described as "a crazy experience."

Crazy or not, Poe and his battle partner, California MC Peter Morris – who is also known as The Saurus – defeated the reigning world champions to win the whole event.

"It was surreal," said Poe, showing off his vocabulary. "I had watched the DVDs of these people (fellow rappers in the competition) for years. I didn't think we had a chance."

Scribble Jam, one of the most prestigious rap competitions in the country, is hosted by Kevin Beacham, who was quoted in *Willamette Week* as saying that Poe has world-class talent.

"Most guys have a couple of strengths and a bunch of weaknesses," said Beacham. "(Poe) has flow, content, charisma, presence, intelligence and wit. He's lacking nothing."

Rap music superstar Eminem competed in the Scribble Jam competition in 1997 but lost to Chicago MC Juice. The battle between Eminem and Juice is widely recognized as one of the greatest freestyle battle rap competitions of all time. Media coverage of that battle helped launch the battle rap genre into the main-

stream of the music industry.

Poe/Illmaculate had a different outcome in his Scribble debut by defeating well-known rap artist Mac Lethal. Lethal was a past winner of the Scribble competition, which has become known as the World Series of Battle Rap. Poe became the youngest winner at 17 in the history of the Scribble Jam festival.

Ironically, the fact that he had to quit his job at a metal extrusion plant in order to compete was not lost on the other rappers and helped to grow his legendary status as a battle rap icon.

Poe then pulled off the rare double-double of rap when he won the World Rap Championship in 2006 and then again in 2007. Poe and Morris won the two-on-two events in 2006 and 2007 as well.

"I'm a perfectionist," said Poe. "Battling was the pedestal."

At the time of this interview, Poe was working on a new album and he couldn't hide his excitement under the lid of his low-brimmed ball cap.

"I'm trying to captivate," he said frankly. "Music has been the passion all through it."

A career has been born.

Siletz Tribal member Greg Poe is breaking stereotypes and gaining momentum and fame.

Truth is, he is not just a rapper. He is not just an Indian. He is not just a white rapper in a world of color. He is all of these things and more and now he is recognized as one of the best battle rappers in the world.