

The Tepees are empty and the bars are full

In places where alcoholism is more of a study than an experience, Indian alcoholism is recognized as a major problem. In 1969 the Indian Health Service appointed a Task Force on Alcoholism which, a year later, concluded that "Alcoholism is one of the most significant health problems facing American Indians and Alaska Natives today." Seven years later, the American Indian Policy Review Commission established by the U.S. Congress found alcoholism and its medical consequences "the most serious and widespread health problem among American Indians today." Three years after that, John R. DeLuca of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism told a national convention of the National Council on Alcoholism: "Alcoholism is epidemic within the American Indian and Native Alaskan communities, with catastrophic effects. The disease of alcoholism is now the leading cause of death."

The incidence of serious alcohol abuse among Indians has been estimated to be at least twice the national average

All three could have been paraphrasing Scarrooyady, an Iroquois sachem, who told Pennsylvania treaty commissioners in 1750: "Your traders now bring us scarce anything but rum and flour. The rum ruins us... Those wicked whiskey sellers, when they have got the Indians in liquor, make them sell the very clothes from their backs!"

In 1832, the sale of alcoholic beverages to Indians was made illegal, an act that was not repealed until the early 1950s, when it became evident that it produced a bootlegging industry little different from that which flourished nationwide during the 1920s and early 1930s. Even today, it is illegal to sell liquor (and, in many cases, beer and wine) on many reservations. This restricted prohibition has given many reservation bordertowns economies based on keeping Indians drunk, and contributed heavily to a high death rate from traffic accidents among Indians.

According to the Indian Health Service, drinking has an

insidious multiplier effect. Not only does it contribute to elevated rates of traffic deaths, but also to the majority of Indian homicides, other assaults, suicides and other mental-health problems. The incidence of serious alcohol abuse among Indians has been estimated by I.H.S. to be "at least twice" the national average. If one in ten adult Americans have serious problems with alcohol, as has been estimated, then at least one in five, and probably more, American Indians have similar problems.

Several studies, most of them involving Plains Indians, report that 80 to 90 per cent of Indian men drink, as do 50 to 60 per cent of Indian boys and 40 per cent of Indian girls are steady drinkers. Drinking among Indian young people has been related directly to the highest suicide rate in the country for any age group.

The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse (1973) found that Indian young people were up to ten times as likely to kill themselves than non-Indians of the same age. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Indians aged 15 to 19, exceeded only by homicide, which is almost always alcohol related. Paradoxically, Indians more than 50 years old are less likely to kill themselves than other Americans.

The same report linked alcohol abuse to low educational achievement, poor health, high rates of unemployment and crime among Indian youth. Nationwide, Indians have, for several years, averaged twelve times the number of arrests per capita, of the general population. Three quarters of these arrests are alcohol related, almost twice the national average. For all Indians, a homicide rate consistently above 200 per 100,000 annually is triple the national average.

Cirrhosis of the liver is the fourth leading cause of death among Indians

In 1973, the General Accounting Office surveyed six Indian Health Services hospitals and found that 60 per cent of the caseload could be directly or indirectly attributed to alcohol use. Cirrhosis of the liver was a frequent cause of hospitalization, a way station to death. The disease usually caused excessive drinking, and



is the fourth leading cause of death among Indians. According to the Indian Health Service, cirrhosis of the liver occurs in American Indians at five times the rate of the general population. The I.H.S. also reports that many child-battering cases are alcohol related.

Very few Indians drink alone as one researcher remarked. If solitary drinking is a definition of alcoholism there are very few Indian alcoholics. Drinking for a vast majority of Indians is a social act.

According to Edward P. Dozier's **Problem Drinking Among American Indians**, a major cause of Indian alcoholism is deprivation and poverty, rejection by whites as inferiors, deterioration of traditional cultures and a generally high level of anxiety that attends day to day reservation life.

Why do Indians drink? Why do Chicanos drink in the barrio, and Blacks in the ghetto, and the Irish under British rule? Booze wipes all that away until the next morning, at least. On the reservation the primary recreation is escape, and the primary escape is alcohol.

Economic poverty among Indians is self-evident. Even without visiting reservations or urban Indian communities, one can find indices of it. Indians rank at the bottom of nearly every economic indicator maintained by the federal government.

According to Dozier, the destruction of traditional culture also may be related to alcohol use among Indians. He found that the Klamaths, who were dispersed by federal government "termination" policies in the early 1950s, had a high rate of arrests for alcohol

related crime, even when compared to the averages for Indians, which are a dozen times those for non-Indians. By contrast, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, who have maintained most of their traditional way of life through 150 years of United States domination have relatively low rates of alcohol related arrests.

The idea of Indians treating Indians was hailed as revolutionary

And worst of all, once alcohol abuse becomes entrenched in an Indian community, it tends to compound the environmental problems which may have prompted people to seek escape in it. According to the American Indian Policy Review Commission, the social problems caused by alcohol create an environment from which alcoholism seems the only escape.

Environmental causes are the dominant theme in the medical literature, but they aren't alone. A minority of researchers believe that there may also be physiological causes. A few studies have found that Eskimos and American Indians metabolize alcohol slightly less rapidly than persons of European heritage, and that Indians react physically to smaller amounts of alcohol than non-Indians. Other studies have found little or no differences. Suggestion has been made that over thousands of years, hunting and gathering tribes evolved a feast and famine physiology, in which the body became accustomed to long periods without eating, followed by short periods of eating a great

deal. According to this theory Indians often have lower levels of blood sugar which rises abruptly with the ingestion of alcohol, which is quickly turned to nearly pure sugar in the bloodstream.

Other theories have been advanced; Indians never developed "drinking manners" because they had no contact with alcohol before European settlement; early fur traders, it has been said, served as models for Indians.

More likely, the trappers served less as models than merchants. As the Iroquois sachems complained to United States officials in 1750, Europeans very early got into the habit of trading alcoholic beverages for furs. The trappers themselves often did very little actual trapping, leaving the footwork to Indians who knew the lay of the land, the habits of the beaver, and the best and easiest way to catch them.

Whatever the cause of the drinking, a wave of Indian alcoholism surged westward with military conquest and settlement. By the 1850s the large numbers of non-Indian goldseekers flooding into California brought with them whiskey sellers.

In the late 1960s along with a general thrust of Indian self-determination, native treatment programs began to open. The idea of Indians treating Indians was hailed as revolutionary in some quarters, although the idea is not really new. Since at least the days of the Iroquois spiritual leader, Handsome Lake in the early 19th century, Indian religious figures have opposed the use of alcohol, and achieved moderate success in sobering their followers.

Drinking for a vast number of Indians is a social act

In their own ways, each of the alcohol programs and actions have been aimed at addressing what many Indians believe is not really a problem as much as it is a symptom. Until it is treated in this context, the most serious and most intractable of many problems facing American Indians will continue, as it has since the days of the Indian wars, when booze killed many more Indians than bullets.

This article was written by Bruce Johansen and parts of it reprinted from *Alcoholism* magazine, November 1980.

Tribal Council Minutes

Tribal Council Meeting Resume December 17, 1981

1. Present were Delbert Frank, Sr. Chairman; Mike Clements, Zane Jackson, Bernice Mitchell, Karen Wallulatum and Amos Simtustus.
2. The secretary was instructed to advertise the vacancy on the Recreation Committee; the appointment to Range/Agriculture and Irrigation was postponed to January.

3. SSI program discussed with Bob Jackson.

4. Committee's quarterly reports were presented: Land use Planning Committee
Water Board
Timber Committee

Rudy Clements, Grant Waheneka and Buford Johnson (Land Use Planning Committee) approved to attend meeting with Extention Agent, Corvallis, December 19.
5. Donations to increase budget allowance for Christmas Dinners approved for Agency Longhouse of a total of \$750; Simnasho

Longhouse, \$500 to include the Purchase Orders already issued.

Tribal Council Meeting - Resume

December 22, 1980

1. Present were Delbert Frank, Sr. Chairman; Mike Clements, Zane Jackson, Bernice Mitchell, Karen Wallulatum, Amos Simtustus, Olney Patt Sr.
2. Mr. Cornett announced his retirement date of January 17, 1981.

3. \$200 donation approved for Full Gospel Church Christmas dinner.

4. 4-H Indian Heritage members and families approved for use of old park area across from Community Center on Christmas Eve.

5. Tribal Council and Energy Committee members approved to attend meeting on powerhouse tomorrow in Tigard, December 23.

6. Resolution No 5887 adopted, approving 1981 per capita payments.

Proposed funeral/death benefits resolution discussion postponed to later date.

7. Tribal Council agenda for January approved for publication.

8. Reported the General Council on Kah-Nee-Ta will be February 24, 1981; WSFPI annual report to Council and General Council is scheduled for February 26, 1981

9. Quarterly report of Education Committee (written report also submitted.)