

Tears spill as trauma victims heal

The wounded spirits of Native people who have suffered from years of oppression and systematic genocide display symptoms similar to those of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For some, healing with traditional ceremonies proves to be the most effective treatment.

By Shannon Keaveny
Spilyay Tymoo

The thick smoke of burning sage clouded the room. A woman held a candle over a weeping young man. The sweet smell of steaming rose water slowly crept from the kitchen into the room.

Later participants soaked a cloth and washed their faces and hands with the soothing rose tea.

Rose water, sage smoke, and burning candles all serve as cleansing and clarifying agents for the wounded soul, said Charlotte Herkshan, counselor at the Warm Springs Counseling Center.

Lots of tears were shed at last week's all-day "Releasing the Tears Gathering" at He-He Longhouse.

The emotional gathering attracted over 60 people, many tribal members, and focused



Dr. Tom Ball, a Klamath tribal member, speaks at He-He Longhouse about trauma specific to Native Americans and the merits of traditional healing.

on reclaiming Native American cultural identity to help heal the cultural wounds resulting from systematic genocide and years of oppression.

"Western medicine doesn't work on Indian people. We need to use our ceremonies for treatment. We have everything we need to take care of ourselves but we're looking outside for the cure," said Dr. Tom Ball, a Klamath tribal

member and keynote speaker at the event.

Ball compared depression in Native American communities as similar to the Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) many war veterans suffer.

"Seventy-five percent of our people suffer from clinical diagnosis of PTSD," he said of Native Americans as a whole.

But something is different with the Indian version of PTSD, he added. Success rates with mainstream PTSD treatments are lower for Native Americans.

Ball referred to the words of a medicine man from Montana as the reason Indian PTSD is different.

"The medicine man said it's not a depression, it's a wounded spirit," explained Ball.

And a wounded spirit can only be healed with Indian ways, he said.

While all Native Americans have endured similar fates in the United States, each tribe and individual has endured unique traumas associated with that fate, Ball explained.

Each tribe needs to address their people's traumas with their own traditional tools, he suggested.

The Native American spirit was wounded in a variety of ways, said Ball.

According to a handout at the gathering, 60 million Native Americans died from disease since the arrival of Columbus.

In 1492, when Columbus arrived, 20 to 30 million Native Americans lived in North America. Indian lands covered 2 billion acres.

By 1890 the Native American population had been reduced to 237,000 people and Indian lands to 140 million acres.

Today lands entrusted to

tribes amount to only 50 million acres.

"That's genocide," said Ball.

Some other examples contributing to Native American trauma are disease, starvation, war, treaties, sexual abuse, relocation, termination of tribal identity, forced religion, boarding schools, and foster care.

"Most Indian people have been through these things," said Ball.

"Historical traumas are carried on from generation to generation unless they are dealt with," he added, "One way to stop the cycle is through ceremony."

Results from this type of trauma, if not properly addressed, can be crime, suicide, physical and mental abuse of loved ones, addiction, and other social ailments.

Unresolved trauma effects Native communities in negative ways.

On the Warm Springs Reservation car accidents are the number one cause of death with 72 percent of them alcohol related, according to a mortality study.

Suicide in Warm Springs is also the fourth leading cause of death.

Many others just struggle to survive day to day, explained Ball.

Their house may become messy and they struggle to get out of bed.

"Some might just zone out in front of the television all day as a distraction," explained

Herkshan.

The healing process was facilitated when individuals at the gathering broke into small groups.

Participants in each group discussed prevalent traumas in their lives.

Elders spoke of the trauma of being torn from their families and sent to boarding schools and how disease killed their friends and family. Others spoke of suicide in their families.

Some shared their tearful stories over the microphone.

Ball explained that facing the hurt, feeling the tears and then picking up the tears was the path to healing.

Both community and individual involvement is important to heal, said Ball.

"We need to take care of each other," said Ball. The gathering served as an example of community support and facing the hurt.

Incorporating traditional healing methods into counseling for Native Americans is a growing movement.

Losing that part of Indian culture is part of our oppression, said Louie Pitt, a speaker at the gathering from Warm Springs governmental affairs.

Let's look to the elders for answers, he said.

"I like to say, 'You can teach a new dog, old tricks,' not 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks,'" mused Pitt about valuing the knowledge of community elders.

Senior Banquet celebrates high numbers

This year the Warm Springs community graduates nearly 70 students from high school and higher education.

By Shannon Keaveny
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Last week's annual Senior Banquet at the Agency Longhouse offered a show of community support for the high number of Warm Springs tribal member graduates. The banquet featured dinner, entertainment, speakers and awards.

The number of graduates in higher education, and high school, and those completing G.E.D. requirements holds steady for Warm Springs tribal members as the demand for education in the local workforce rises.

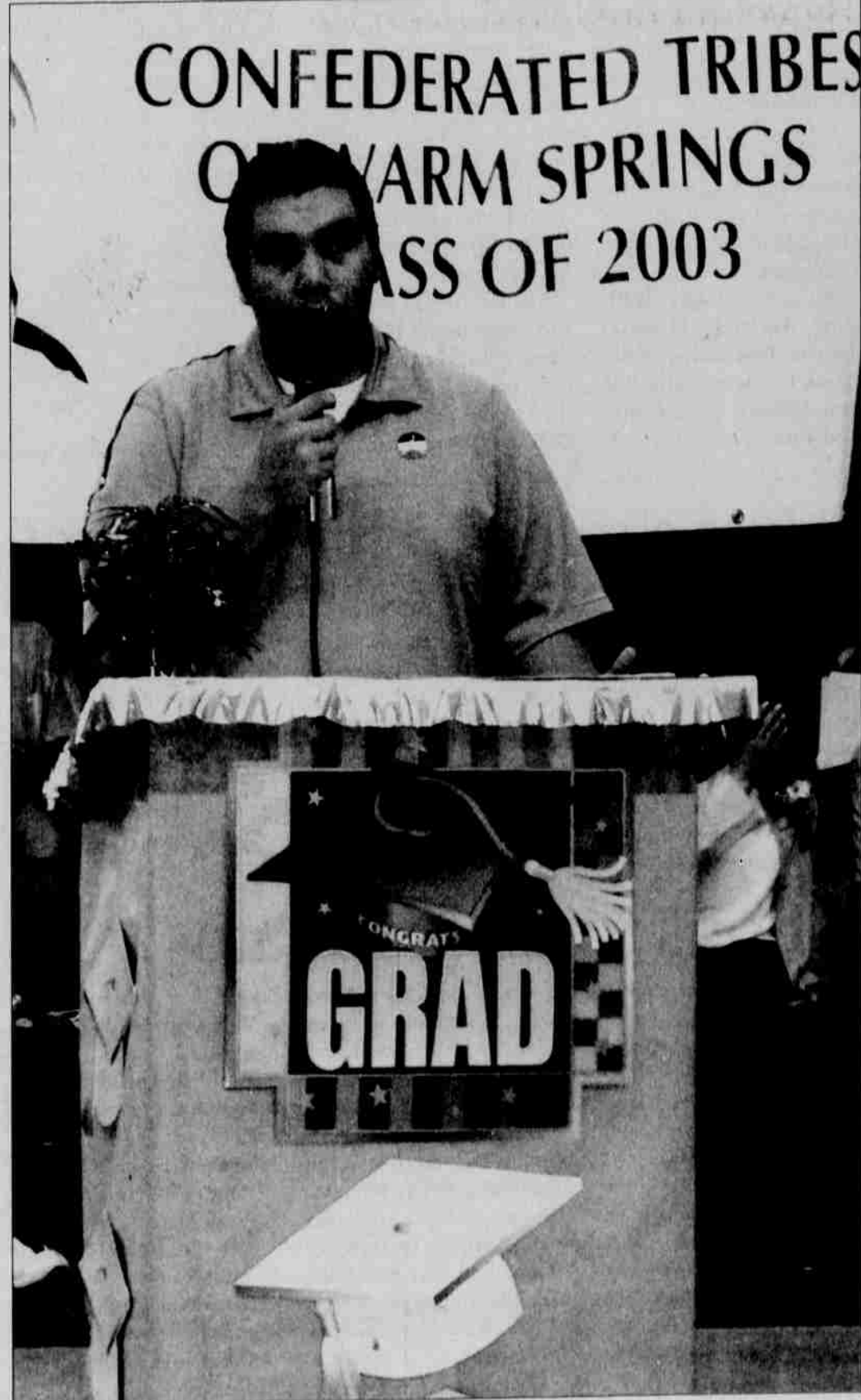
"There is a growing need for education for most specific jobs here on the reservation," says Lorraine Hintsala, of the Warm Springs Education Department, about growing interest in education among tribal members.

"I think most tribal members will return to the reservation when they are done with school," Hintsala said.

The total number of graduates from Warm Springs that received high school diplomas, G.E.D.s, vocational education certificates, baccalaureate degrees, and graduate degrees was nearly 70 for 2003.

The number of graduates has been relatively stable since 2001.

For 2003 Heather Schut



LEFT: Arthur Mitchell, a Madras High honor roll student for 2003, speaks at the Senior Banquet about tribal programs that have helped him prepare for college. ABOVE: Heather Schut, who received a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Washington, encouraged students to continue their education while they are young. Schut was the only tribal member to receive a master's this year.

Fuentes, who received her degree from prestigious Stanford University in California.

Warm Springs Madras High honor roll student for 2003, Arthur Mitchell, spoke to the attendees about tribal programs that helped encourage him in his high school years.

"Visiting different college campuses around the state help prepare me for what college will be like," said Mitchell.

But, he said, positive encouragement from friends and family was his biggest motivator.

Tribal attorney Cindy Starke, the keynote speaker for the banquet and of Cherokee descent, assured students that graduation was not "an end but a beginning."

She offered practical advice like always being a good person, keeping an open heart, and always being loyal to your friends, family, and community. Starke said education offers a sense of empowerment.

Schut gave a short speech encouraging students to finish their education while they are young.

"I did it with kids and it was hard," she explained.

Graduates received Pendleton book bags, a gift bag, a coffee mug, and a pen from the Confederated Tribes.

Jim Manion, general manager of Warm Springs Power Enterprises, Tribal Council Vice Chairman Ron Suppah, and Paiute Chief Joseph Moses shook the hands of graduates and offered words of encouragement.

Foster Kalama provided entertainment with his flute. A traditional longhouse dinner and cake were served before the banquet.

was the only person to receive a graduate degree.

But Hintsala estimates next year there could be as many

as five tribal members receiving graduate degrees and that the number of graduate students could be on the rise.

She says an additional three students will be receiving baccalaureate degrees after completing summer school this

year. Five students with undergraduate degrees were honored at the banquet, including Molly