

## Warrior Interrupted: Tribal Member Brad Leno Reflects On Tragedy

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a trip to the store, (Leno and some friends prevailed on a woman in town to buy them a few cases of beer. "We watched her kids while she bought the beer," said Leno.) The trip involved backing into a street side mail box ("I got mad and got out. It had bent the box over a little. Nothing happened to the car but I was still mad. I popped open the trunk and took a beer.")

He ended up at his other sister's house (Tribal member Brianna) that night with his long time friend and neighbor, Evan (Rue) Baller, then 19, and Matthew Castellon, then 18, a boy who had been close friends with Brad's younger brother, Tribal member Brett, then 16.

The boys played "drinking games on the evening of July 14 and the early morning hours of July 15.

Telling the story from a table at Grover Cottage at MacLaren, Leno was in the company of another Grand Ronde Tribal member, Willard (Wid) Thompson, who was Treatment Manager for kids with substance abuse problems at MacLaren.

Like Leno, Thompson comes from a logging family in rural Oregon, but Thompson grew to resent the drinking traditions of loggers he grew up with and his anger flashed as he described it. "I'd seen the lifestyle of drinking on the way home every night from logging... All they want to do is fight and drink."

Thompson interrupted Leno at this point in the story. "When you drank, did you get physical?" he asked.

"No," said Leno, "not unless I was trying to keep someone else from fighting."

"You're a peacemaker?"

"Generally, at parties, yeah," said Leno.

"What was different this night?" asked Thompson.

"It was a bunch of guys, I guess," Leno said.

"Rue started saying he wanted to go to a different party," said Leno, on with the story.

The next effort to get moving again came at nearly five in the morning. By that time, Leno said he had consumed "24 to 26" beers. "I generally only drink 12-13, but that night it appeared to me that everyone was out to get me drunk," said Leno.

There was a push and pull to get going again, to change the scenery, to find a party and soon three intoxicated boys were on the road again. Only two would finish the night.

"There's all these little things," said Wid Thompson as Brad told the story. He referred to the drugs and alcohol, the power and size of a car in the hands of a youth who had been drinking, Leno's temper, which flared when he hit the mailbox, the big brother and little brother relationships among the boys and the inevitable role that peer pressure plays in the hearts and minds of so many at really every age.

"Probably all you need to do is light the fuse because the bomb was already there," said Thompson.

On the other hand, how many times does the same setup in every community across America result in no excitement, unfulfilled danger, and no trouble when the night comes to an end?

"I had to get gas at Seaway on the way back," said Leno. "I was thinking I should go home or I should go back to my sisters' place." Instead, he recalled, "We turned up Fort Hill Road because there was a party up that way."

I was going through the mill at 15-20 mph," he said. "Matt and Rue were telling me to speed up. As soon as I got to the end of the mill, I landed on the gas." He remembers the Hyundai Sonata reaching 95 mph. The country road has some short straightaways, and some sharp curves. The posted speed limit varies from 20-30 mph.

"We were basically going sideways on every corner," said Leno.

Sitting in the passenger seat was Evan Rue Baller. When Leno was in sixth grade, his older friend and

neighbor had had a birthday party where liquor was available, Leno said, and he remembered drinking "a quarter of a half gallon of vodka and part of a 40-ounce beer." Maybe that was a turning point, he thought.

What makes recognizing such relationships so difficult is that the leader, the older or more experienced member often plays dual roles, providing positive feedback, status and protection as well as poor judgment. In short, the quality of the relationship is similar to the role that teachers and advisors play.

"It's basically the same behavior," said Gary Lawhead, MacLaren's superintendent, "but grooming is for selfish purposes and mentoring is for a selfless purpose."

What makes interceding in such relationships so difficult is that the bonds, both among individuals and within a community, for adults as well as children, stretch way beyond any particular activity, and the whole fabric, good and bad, appears threatened when a part is threatened.

As Rita Baller, Rue's mother, said, "We were neighbors with the Lenos for 11 years."

A perfect example of the dual nature of this fabric is the story that many people told about Castellon's funeral. On one hand, a giant turnout testified to the popular place, even the esteem that Castellon held in the community. He was often seen to stand up for younger kids being bullied. But at the same funeral, some of these same friends invited Brad Leno to party with them afterwards. (In describing it, Leno lacked words to express the frustration he felt at the request).

Even today, said Rita Baller, kids are still leaving packs of cigarettes and joints as a memorial at the makeshift shrine set up for Castellon at the accident scene.

Sitting in the back seat of the Sonata, behind Leno, was Matthew Castellon, a boy whose mother, Tribal member Marilyn Porter, described him as one who "wanted to make people laugh. He would do whatever to make people laugh." And, "He had a real anger problem. It wouldn't take much to set his fuse." And, "he didn't want to do his (school) work but when he did his work, it was good." And, "He wanted to be a logger. (Logger) Leroy (Scott) made a

friends home." And finally, "He was my affection giver, my protector. He was my world."

Castellon also had shown a real affinity for and ability with younger kids, according to Wendy Scott, who with her husband, Leroy, and Tribal kids



Photo by Ron Karten

**Been There** — Grand Ronde Tribal member

Willard (Wid) Thompson was Leno's drug and alcohol Treatment Manager at Grover Cottage, where the boys focus on substance abuse. He also grew up in a rural, logging community.

Shawna and Daniel, made a second home for Castellon in those days. The Scott children were not even teens yet, but Castellon fit in like another member of the family. "I can't remember a single time asking him to baby sit that he said, 'No,' said Scott. "It was like he was one of (Daniel's) own brothers. They were very close."

"Matt once said he didn't think he could be killed in a car accident," said Wendy Scott. "Like I tell my kids, they don't have any idea how easy it is to be killed out there. This is a crazy world."

"(But Castellon) really had a lot of confidence in Brad's driving ability," added Scott. "The way he talked."

When Leno turned up Fort Hill Road that early morning, Castellon, traveling with his seat belt on in what otherwise ought to have been one of the safest seats in the car, had a mile and a half to live, which at the speeds Leno would be driving, amounted

to about a minute.

Back in the car on that night, "Rue got scared," Leno recalled.

"Matteo told him, 'You know he can handle it.'"

"I thought I was a good driver," said Leno. "I slowed down. Well, I know I hit the pole at 76 miles per hour."

"I remember coming to this one corner. I slowed even more because it looked sharp. That's all I remember. That corner in the road was two corners before the wreck."

When the car hit the pole, the force was nearly full on Castellon. The force was so great that it cut the car in half, front from back.

"I remember waking up staring down the road thinking I ran through a fence, or hit a mailbox," said Leno. "I remember Rue telling me we've got to get out of the car."

Leno punched out the window that was left to him, and crawled from the driver's seat. Leno and



**Support Group** — The Leno family: from left: Brett, Brandy, Isaiah (Brianna's son), Lonnie, Tammy, Brianna, Lyana (better known as Nana: Brianna's daughter) and in the foreground, the family dogs.

Photo by Ron Karten

big impression on him." And, "Matthew liked basketball. That was one of his big loves." And, "He was really into his smile. He was so proud of his teeth and his smile. And the way he dressed. He always had to look just so." And, "I didn't know he had such friends." At the funeral, she said, "When everybody came, it filled up the main auditorium, the side auditorium, the yard and part way down the block." And, "I never knew. He never brought

Baller emerged from the front half of the car with injuries so minor that you might not otherwise realize what had happened. Leno described a cut on his head from wrestling around in his sister's living room earlier in the night as about the same as the cut he received on his chin in the accident. Baller had slight burns on his face from the air bag, according to Leno.

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