

Greetings to all tribal members,

It has been awhile since the last newsletter so some of these articles may be coming out of order since I have been trying to provide a writing after we have each ceremony. I have provided a couple others which didn't make the newsletter but are posted on the tribal website should you like to read those. In this article I would like to provide some information on the strawberry dance which was held in May and talk a little bit on Greencorn which the pot hangers have asked I include.

In growing up we relied upon our parents and grandparents to explain the spiritual ways of our people. My desire is to try to add insight to those members which may have forgotten or not had benefit of these teachings. For some of you these writings will be information you may already know. Also please keep in mind each of us were taught by a different teacher so while some specifics may vary the teachings to be learned remain the same.

We just held our Strawberry dance Memorial day and had a very good turnout. For everyone that was able to attend I hope the day was beneficial for you. As one of our ceremonies the Strawberry dance is a tradition for giving "Thanks" to the creator (Son qwa ya tis soot) for the first fruit of the season. It begins with the turtle shell dance or stoos ko wah. During this dance (unlike when we dance during the peach seed game) all the clans dance together as one, with all the men north and south dancing together and all the women north and south dancing together.

After the first dance 2 men are asked to pass out the strawberries. There are 2 what I will call batches of berries. Wild berries and tame berries. The first strawberries passed out are the wild berries picked by the women pot hangers. These strawberries are considered medicine, a berry provided to us by the creator, a symbol of his caring for his people to provide them substance for life. I have been asked on occasion why people pour some onto the ground before they drink. The reason we do this is for our ancestors who have passed on before us. We say a small prayer for our family and to our ancestors, pour a little out onto the earth and then drink the rest. It also symbolizes giving back to the earth some of what we as man have taken from it. The drink is made by mashing the berries and adding water and sugar till it gets to the right consistency and taste.

Following the passing out of the wild berries is another turtle shell dance and the passing out of the remaining tame strawberries. Next is the harvest dance which is a dance sung with a drum and rattles and begins with the men entering the long house from the west on the 4th song. The number 4 symbolizes many things in our culture which I will talk about later.

The next dance to be held will be the Blackberry dance which is held the first full moon in July. This year it falls on July 7th which is a Tuesday and is a night time dance.

Green Corn will soon be here and I have been asked by the pot hangers to remind everyone about a few things. Regarding bets for the peach seed game we encourage anyone who wishes to bet to do so. On Tuesday during Greencorn the pointers will come

through the camps asking for bets. There are 4 men which do this (2 from the northern clans and 2 from the southern clans). If you do not camp you can still place a bet by bringing your item to the longhouse prior to the finishing of the bet matching. If you have never bet before you may wonder what can be bet. Generally articles of clothing are bet, cloth items such as material, aprons, shawls, ribbon shirts and dresses etc are the most common. You should not bet anything with metal in it, money, tobacco or an item which has already been bet previously. So if you have a ribbon shirt or dress they need to be ones that have not been bet before. You might want to get started making them now. It does not need to be off the shelf new but it should be in good shape. Also don't forget what you bet, do not take someone else's bet if you are not sure. It is your responsibility to remember what you bet. If you are on the winning side don't forget to pick up your bets after the game. We have items that have gone unclaimed each year and would like for everyone to receive their winnings. Check with any of the pot hangers or the men pointers if you need to pick up your bet after the game is over and they will direct you.

Next for the women and I remember Mom speaking of this and the women pot hangers as well. Our ceremonies are a time of purity and cleansing of our spirits, bodies and souls. So for the women if it is your time for a monthly cycle you should not be dancing or in the longhouse during the ceremonies or work at preparing any food used during the ceremonies. There are probably several explanations on why but during this time you yourself are being cleansed in preparation for your being able to give the gift of life. To be dancing, shaking shells etc is considered unclean and an insult to do so.

And as a reminder we don't allow recording devices to be used during the ceremonies. This includes voice, pictures or video. We have new people attend each year and I am sure don't mean any harm but just don't realize it. So if you happen to see someone taking pictures etc "politely" ask them not to.

In closing I look forward to seeing everyone at Greencorn and wish your families well.

Seneca-Cayuga words for this month:

Fruit – oo he ott

Me – eek

Hello – scan noh

No more/all gone – tan zee

Language – oo weh noh

How are you – sas scan noh geh

Nya Weh

Toot no son dee

Ceremonial Chief

Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma