

Kids Korner

Drums, Dance Fill The Forest At Honoring Festival

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WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — In the distance, beyond the trees, I could hear the drums.

At first, I thought only of entering the place out of simple curiosity. I mean, how many chances do you get to go to a real Native American ceremony? Certainly there was something of the mysterious and otherworldly about the event.

Before I left, I learned a great deal about a culture and a way of life beyond my world, including things experienced at this Lenape Honoring Festival, that some of us never get to see and understand.

More than 3,000 people came to the Myrick Conservation Center in Pocopson Township, Chester County, to experience the fourth annual festival, held this past weekend. (The Lenape are also known as the Delaware, I learned).

Getting there turned out to be an experience enough, however.

First, my family left late on the hour-long drive. And the Myrick Conservation Center is not clearly marked on any maps — yet resides deep in the Pocopson woods off Rt. 842.

But we found it, eventually. We went by a long path. We found a place to park. Late in the day, many were returning home.

Kids came out of the festival with their families, wearing head-dresses, face paint, and toy bows and arrows. They looked gleeful, so we decided to make it a day (or what was left of it, with the sun waning, the sky becoming more dark and gloomy, and the surroundings taking on an otherworldly feel to them).

The sign into the woodland clearly marked "no horses allowed." It was a people path, strewn with bark mulch, that led deep into the forest.

But throughout this, the almost incessant drumbeat, the sound of age-old Lenape voices, and a sign

at the threshold which read, "Waneeshi," which means, "nice to see you" or "thanks for coming." There was the circle, made ready for dances. There were warrior men with their dance staffs held high, in respect and admiration for the special honoring ceremony for a woman named Bear Heart.

I asked the master of ceremonies, Snow Owl, to point out Bear Heart. "She's the woman in purple," he said.

I watched the stately, dignified way in which Bear Heart moved in the circle, bearing all the regalia, including the headdress, common to her people.

Bear Heart, also known as Anna Bear Heart Edwards, is from Midlothian, Va. I learned the dance is their way of honoring women.

"Where did you get your name?" I asked.

"It was given to me by an Elder," she said. Bear Heart said she received the name when she was 37 years old. She wore her wedding dress from a year ago during the ceremony.

I asked her to explain the meaning of the color. It has significance that is complex, she said. Purple is the combination of two colors, each designating a separate road — the red and the blue. The red road is the road we choose. The blue is the road of the world, the more traveled road, full of things harmful to life, such as greed, envy, a heavy spirit.

Miranda, her daughter, is 14, and is also called "Little Owl." Her name is her "medicine," said her mother, Bear Heart.

"Her medicine?" I asked.
"Each name has a special message and a gift to bring," said Bear Heart. These, she said, are taught at an early age. Dance is learned. Tradition is a vital part of all the learning.

The Elder appointed her daughter

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The "Switch Dance," in which men dance like the women, is performed.

LENAPE HONORING FESTIVAL



My son Kevin with a handmade, wooden, ancient flute-like instrument called a "Quena," pronounced KEN-YA. Kevin said, "It's a Quena, Dad. As In, Can ya play it?"

Smart Stuff WITH TWIG WALKINGSTICK

Blue jay blues
Cardinals are red, swans are white, but — contrary to what your eyes tell you — blue jays aren't really blue. Most colors, including those of clothes, paper, hair and skin, are made up of pigments. A single color is an ingredient in pure white light. (Sunlight is a good example of white light.) A rainbow lets you see the main ingredients in white light — red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Colors such as light blue, pale green or fuchsia are there, too.

The colors you see depends on which colors of white light are absorbed by an object and which colors bounce back to your eyes. Say you are looking at a cardinal. The pigments in its feathers absorb all the colors except red. The red bounces off the feathers and back to your eye.

Blue jeans are that color because they have pigments that absorb all the white light except blue. But blue feathers are just an illusion. Instead of pigments, the feathers have tiny, tiny particles — smaller in diameter than the wavelength of red light — that scatter blue light like a prism.

Because the particles reflect light in all directions, a blue jay looks blue no matter what angle you look at it. But if you hold a single feather between an ultraviolet light and you, the blue disappears — and the feather's true gray pigments show through.

Scientifically yours,
Twig

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