

Strawberry Dance– May 30, 2021

We generally hold our Strawberry dance Memorial Day weekend, but it isn't set in stone. The dance date is determined when the "wild" strawberries have ripened, and the women faith keepers (and helpers) have gathered as many as they can. The head faith keeper (Kay Gatzman) then sets the date. 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 and is another form of thanksgiving.

Some of you may wonder "Wild Strawberries" didn't know there was such a thing. Yes, growing up I never thought much about it till I got older. They are easy to overlook because the berries are tiny, about the size of a pencil eraser. They tend to hide close to the ground or in little bundles under the their leaves. Very shy little berries. We noticed them last year at our place, so we kept a look out for them this year and collected a few. I also noticed also they have what I consider to be a little feeler vine that grows along the ground, like it is searching for something.

Once everyone has gathered the speaker is called upon to pray. Then comes 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.

It is a day dance and is usually finished by noon. This is one of my favorites because of the coming together of our people, to see the smiles and hear the laughter of everyone makes a heart feel good. When you dance on that earth in that longhouse, where our ancestors danced before us creates that connection with mother earth and helps ease life's struggles you may have.

Nya-Weh,

Tuh'l-no- sohn-dee

Ceremonial Chief/Chief

Charlie Diebold

Seneca-Cayuga Nation