



PowWow

Ink Free # 2

July, 2024



A happy tear meandering down my face, a soft tug on my heart, my mouth gaga open watching children scramble for given away food, an old veteran nearly crying over a photograph, and color mixed with spirit pride and self-worth. These be just a few things we enjoyed during the Apache Gold Inter-tribal Pow Wow 2024, March 2 & 3 in San Carlos, Arizona.

Our fourth year attending the celebration, my daughter and I journeyed the two-hour up from Tucson early enough to scout out the always stunning spring wildflowers, many painting Perido Masa on the San Carlos Apache reservation. Buying a pass grants photographers and gawkers access to unbelievable fields, hills, lava flows, and mesas with Mexican Poppies, Owls Clover, Brittlebush, and more glorious wildflowers. Something about the basalt flows that lush up the display. We are a week or two early for 2024

The arena doors open at 10 am. A five-dollar bill cash is preferred, and we are in a large covered rodeo-type arena complete with vendors, grandstands, and food trucks hosting a few people starting to enter, register, and prepare. Following asking for permission to photograph and how to give any good ones to the tribe, we strolled around searching for good vantage points, attempting to avoid any of the windows beaming in too much light. This year, our boundaries include being on the arena floor, not inside the dance areas or drum circles.



Between 10 am and the 1 pm Grand entry, dancers, families, and spectators nearly filled the entire arena one group at a time. Courtesy, protocol, and personal respect guide us in not photographing a dancer or their regalia without their permission. It is okay when on the dance floor, but

not up close. Note that the headdresses, embroidered dresses, feathers, buckskin shirts, and shawls are not costumes. No one is dressing up to be something else; these regalia are handmade by each dancer based on their backgrounds, spirit, and deep inner feelings. After I complimented her on her stunning buckskin dress, one woman said she is working on a new one for several years and can not finish it yet as it is not yet hers. These are not costumes. These people know who they are and are comfortable being themselves. What an honor to talk with people being themselves.



The grandstands, any available space in the arena, and everywhere else are dancers putting the regalia together, getting their hair braided, applying paints and personal touches. The elders oversee the native in earning the right to have the feather and the Game and Fish sanction of an

endangered species. These are carefully removed from handmade boxes and readied, often paired with bells or shakers to keep time with the Pluse of the Earth drums. There should be at least 12 drum circles with 8 to 12 drummers, keeping perfect time beat-out rhythms that vibrate throughout the event. All the songs are distinct yet profoundly similar, amplifying the sounds and pluses of the earth. These, too, are personal. One visiting drum circle, all the way from British Columbia, changed out the drum to be the one tone that spoke their feelings.



Taking a short break to relocate to a fresh perspective, a man taps me on the shoulder, gives me an honest hug, and says, "You're the man who took my photo last year!! My family is so happy; I need to thank you". I stagger back, took a closer look, and recalled us asking if we could take a photo. Wrinkles cover his high cheek bones, smiling the classic face of a wise, happy elder. He carries a bit more weight than when he wore the army uniform he still adorns, one two as happy and a mouth full of smiles. We talked a bit, and I listened to how proud he was to have a photo of him, complete with veterans' clothes, metals, and pride—it also brought a tear to my eye. The native people have immense pride in military service, and their records prove it. This gentleman explained this: we, the native people, are obligated to take care and protect the land, while others feel it is a right to own it. He was exceptionally proud to have something to pass along to his heirs.



These PowWow events, check out powwow.com for details and upcoming events, are competitions too. By almost 4 in the afternoon, the individual dances start. Rather than 1000 dancing, these specific dances begin with the Golden Age, and children under ten have fewer dances. It's a lot easier to photograph a single dancer. In the Golden Age Jingle dress competition, there were only four contestants. One woman danced as if she were the drum. Captivating, yet the dancer who grasped the respect of all, a woman with her cane, barely advancing, the jingles swaying with rhythm. Halfway through the dance, another dancer walked in front of her, dipped her head in respect, and placed a large money bill on the ground in front of her. We all would if we knew how. Offering respect and helping the family is absolutely precious. I took pictures of the drums' timing and did not stop or realize what I was doing until the drums stopped.



The contests include drum circles, Fancy, and fancy shall dances, Chicken Grass, buckskin, Cloth, Jingle, Gourd, bird, smoke, and others. Both men and women: all proud,

We could not return for the evening or Sunday events. Each year I attend, I learn more about myself, the values others hold, and the beauty and honesty that guide these special cultures.

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Pondering along in old age without fear, excepting only what I can do
Enjoying every minute of it!