

Native American HERITAGE MONTH

*celebrating the diverse cultures, identities,
and heritage of Native people in America*

Community Voice: Herman, Washoe Tribal Member

Hello, my name is Herman and I am a Washoe Tribal Member. My heritage as a Wášiw (Washoe) person is one of the most meaningful things in the world to me. It reminds me that I am a part of something bigger than myself and that I have a greater purpose to serve my peoples and care for my homelands. It reminds me that we are a part of our land and not separate from it. It is also a reminder that while I am of Indigenous or Native American heritage, I am Wášiw first and foremost and I am incredibly proud that while we share similarities with other Indigenous or native American peoples, we are distinct and unique as a people.

One of the biggest sources of pride for me as it relates to my culture is that we were and are an incredibly selfless people. We care for and support one another and are always there to help one another when in need. I am incredibly lucky along with my partner to have brought our first child into the world earlier this year and one of the most beautiful moments was receiving a bíkis (baby basket) from my aunt and cousin to carry my baby. It is a huge honor to be gifted something so beautiful but even more so, the basket was made with love and I know in my heart and mind that every time I wrap my little guy up in his bíkis that he is being cared for not only by those with us but by generations of Washoe people stretching back to the beginning of time.

For me it is important for those outside of our communities to understand that they are walking on our aboriginal lands. That we are a sovereign nation and that although there were multiple attempts to eradicate us, our languages, and our cultures, that we are still here. I think it is incredibly important for those outside of our communities to understand that the history of the United States is fraught with the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples. That our culture, ceremonies, and especially our traditional crafts are not stagnant but still practiced today.

One of the things I would like to see for the future is for those outside of our communities to continue to support Indigenous issues. Not only is it important to support Indigenous peoples as we fight to protect our lands but it is also important for those outside of our communities to support our efforts to revitalize our languages and culture. There is still so much that can be learned from Indigenous communities and if early settlers would have treated Indigenous peoples as people and not as “merciless Indian savages” as stated in the United States Declaration of Independence, we would all live in a much better world today.

