A Canadian Mohawk First Nations Perspective - Tom Dearhouse

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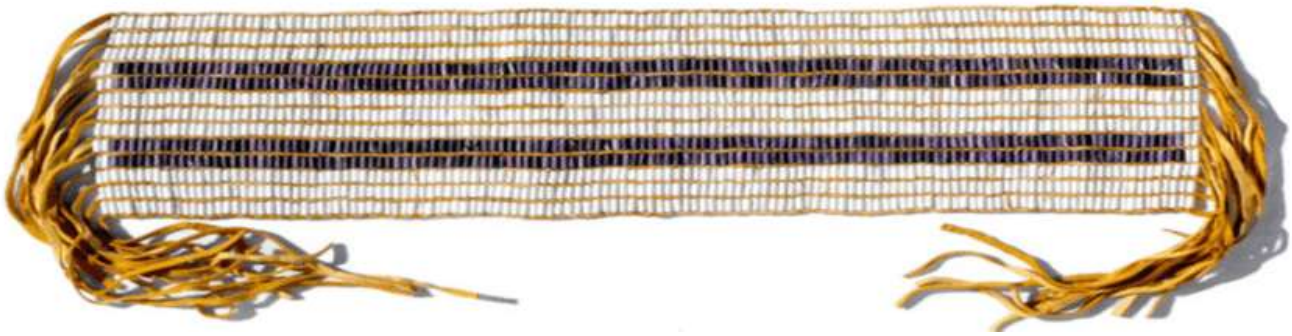

Kaswentha (Two Row Wampum Treaty belt). Source: "The Two Row Wampum Belt: An Akwesasne Tradition of the Vessel and Canoe," by D. Bonaparte, n.d., http://www.wampumchronicles.com/tworowwampumbelt.html

Bozho, dear listeners. I greet you in Potawatomi, the language of my tribe. I am Randy Kritkausky, an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. I am the host of this show, Indigenous Perspectives.

This episode of Indigenous Perspectives originates, not from my tribal homelands, but from N'dakinna, the un-ceded traditional territory of the Abenaki people who for thousands of years were, and still continue to be, stewards of the lands in the State of Vermont, northern United States, and across the border in southern Québec Province *[Canada].*

I begin this show, and will begin future shows, with a territorial acknowledgement, because it is important for us to understand where we come from, both culturally and geographically, and also because this program focuses on understanding our roots in Mother Earth and connections with our ancestors.

Our guest today is Tom Dearhouse, a member of the First Nations people known throughout much of the world as Mohawks. That image and name originate in literature and images of skywalkers navigating narrow steel beams far above city streets. The reality behind these popular images is far more complex. Tom Dearhouse is going to help us to explore a rich cultural

history and its very vibrant current indigenous community. Tom, thanks for being on our show.

Tom Dearhouse: Oh, good afternoon Randy and thanks for the introduction. I guess I'd better come through and better be good in my talk!

Randy: Let us begin very simply by having you explain how your people are called in your language, and the significance of our tribal names. We have listeners from all over this continent and from Europe and for many of them this is a geography and cultural lesson to start.

Tom Dearhouse: OK, I'll do my best. So to the Mohawks of Kahnawake *[pronounced "gawanaga"],* it's an actual reserve located on the St. Lawrence River just south of Montréal, Québec, Canada.

But our traditional territory goes down into upper New York State, around Albany, the capital of New York, and there's actually a Mohawk River that runs east and west from Albany. We call that the Mohawk River and the Mohawk Valley. That was like the original territory of the Mohawk people.

Here's a bit of a language lesson. Kahnawake is a Mohawk word; it means a village by the rapids, and the rapids are the Lachine rapids connecting to the St. Lawrence River. But there was also a Kahnawake along the Mohawk River.

But more specifically to the question - what do we call ourselves? We call ourselves Kanien'kehá:ka - it means People of the Flint; this rock that's very hard that skillful people can shape this flint rock into tools such as spears; it can also be used for fire starters, so People of the Flint.

And the Mohawk people, or Kanien'kehá:ka, are part of a larger confederacy, Iroquois Confederacy, mostly in New York, starting in New York, with Oneidas, Cayugas, Senecas and Onondagas. And later on there was Tuscararas to form Six Nations, but those are the original five.

And, well, there's a word for the traditional territory, and the boundaries are roughly, again: the Mohawk River, if you look on a map that runs from east to west let's say from Albany to Buffalo, and then from Buffalo along the Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River, kind of forms a triangle. And if you go north from

Albany, I think that's Hudson River, Lake George, Lake Champlain and Richeleiu River, kind of a big triangle, all that was called Kanyanka, close to Kahnawake.

That was known as *[our]* traditional territory, and it's significant to note that it crosses the US-Canada border. At the time, there was no boundary, and so I guess, present-day, that's why we say that we don't recognize the boundary. It's there, but we have free access just as in traditional times, we travel up north this far, I guess in summer, in good summer weather for hunting and so on.

Randy: Fantastic explanation. So just one more thing to clarify for listeners. It took me a while to learn the subtleties and the importance of this.

For people south of the US-Canadian border, we often call ourselves Indians, a term that is rarely used, I think in Canada. We more often use the term Native Americans. But in Canada you use a really fantastic term, which is "First Nations". Can you explain the significance of that for your people?

Tom Dearhouse: Yes, I'll try to. And actually in my case, since I was born in the States - and you'll hear more about me talking about myself - I was born in Michigan so I am familiar with the use of tribes, and Native Americans, not so much indigenous - that's more Canada, came later.

But yes, the term First Nations is used for indigenous people because, wherever our villages were we tended to have our governing body. So that's what the First Nations were, prior to Contact *[ie contact with Europeans, after 1492]* . We had our own way of governing ourselves.

We had chiefs and we had clan mothers and there was a system. And when the settlers and visitors came our way and came into contact, that's who they dealt with, the leadership of the First Nations, north of the border and south of the border.

And just I guess the way it worked out in Canada, First Nations, we hear the term indigenous. There's been some debate in the last ten or twenty years about "aboriginal" there was once upon a time an organization, Congress of

Aboriginal People, but I think that's fallen out of use, "aboriginal" that means "away from the original", so that tends not to be used.

But First Nations is fine, Indian is fine, indigenous person is fine, whatever you self-identify with and of course there's going to be people of mixed heritage, which is fine also.

But I know I'm aware, in the States, and even in our sister community Akwesasne, there's a situation where there's three jurisdictions: U.S., that's New York side, and then there's Ontario Side, like Cornwall Island, that's Ontario, and there's a border there, and even borders from Québec to New York. So there's three jurisdictions but it's one Akwesasne Mohawk reserve.

So you can imagine, behind the jurisdictional things, and different terminology. The St Regis Mohawk Tribe *[in the United States],* they call it, Akwesasne. They don't use First Nations so much, but they have Band Councils, kind of like a city council comparable to US towns and municipalities.

So that's also, I'll point out, there's Band Council, which is like an Indian Act system, that's still present day, and there's even a traditional council (if I say band council that would be incorrect) - traditional council system under the Iroquois Confederacy that still exists and still functions, present day.

So that's kind of going on in two streams, *[traditional council]* running parallel to the Band Council.

Randy: You paint a very nice visual image of people and yourself having feet literally in many geographic worlds.

One of the things that excited me most about having you on the show is that you also represent having feet in multiple cultural and spiritual worlds, and in your particular case I'm hoping we can dig a bit into the fact that you are very much involved with the Catholic Church on your reserve, and we'll get a little later into your relationship with a Catholic saint, Kateri Tekakwitha.

But before doing that, why don't you paint sort of in broad brush strokes, as we say, how it is that your people and you can have, and have come to have, feet in these two different religious and spiritual traditions.

Tom Dearhouse: Yeah, as you're asking that question I'm imagining in my mind the Two-Row Wampum, right? The two parallel purple stripes so it's like a foot in each vessel, almost like you're water skiing and if you're not careful you're going to fall in the water, you're going to get dunked. And so maybe that's a way to start out that it is challenging to do that, I'm not sure if – and this is in no way self-promoting myself, but - not many people can do that or find themselves in that position but that's kind of reflecting on my life to this point; that's the way it's turned out for me.

I was raised *[with]* Catholic teaching, leaving home after dropping out of college at age 21, coming back to my father's reserve, and looking to find what's good in the community because I thought there was a whole bunch of things that were good, having read up on Kahnawake – back then, and I can get into the little variations of the name, but thinking about it, it was like, geez, going back to my dad's reserve and there's Mohawk people, this is history, this is my people, and it's Paradise.

But then finding out there's still issues if you dig a little deeper, issues of political struggles and language struggles, and geez, what's this thing with Indian residential schools? And there's people that were really angry at the Church, angry at the priests, and lot of past hurts that surfaced every now and then.

And language struggles, and relationship troubles, not just with the English but relationship troubles with the French population where we're actually kind of surrounded – not that it's a bad thing –we're surrounded. Montreal is a big Canadian metropolitan city, I'm not sure of the population, I guess three million plus, and here we are 20 minutes away, but a small reserve, 10 miles by 10 miles roughly, population 8,000, 9,000 including those off reserve.

But it [*Kahnawake Reserve]* is close to the big city, but on the other side of the river. It's country, there's a little bit of bush, the water's there. So now it's a seaway, it's not the same as in the past, but there's still culture and language that's a big practice - and taking over a lot.

Just to plug, maybe, Kahnawake's approach, we've taken over a lot of things and really pushed our jurisdiction to take over our own house, take over the school system and education.

We have a Band Council *[the form legally recognized by the Canadian government]* but we also have traditional councils and traditional leadership.

We have our own hospital, police force, ambulance service, fire fighting department, and social services, this is where I'm working full time as a traditional support counselor. And we've had the presence of the Catholic Church, it was the Jesuits, long history of a Jesuit presence since the founding of Kahnawake, back to the late 1600s, past to 1640, 1680, and the present location of the village is like 1708, I believe. Jesuits and the mission church were here, Mission of St. Francis Xavier.

Once upon a time Kahnawake was known down south in New York State as "there's a place up there, it's called the village of the praying Indians", praying meaning prayerful, religious. The influence of the Black Robes, the Jesuits missionaries to teach; Jesuits have a long history of being a teaching order, and they brought the Bible, the gospel, ways of learning about the higher power that they called God, and Jesus and the Holy Family. So that's still present, and that's why it's interesting historically, for people who are interested in history, that the mission is here, there's a museum that's here and I'll give like a preview.

There's our saint, St. Kateri Tekakwitha. She came from the Mohawk Valley in an effort to kind of practice her religion and for her safety, she was sent up north, so she came up heading north by Lake George, Lake Champlain, with a band of her family. *[She was]* entrusted to the Jesuit missionaries who were a little farther downriver from present day Kahnawake, at a place called LaPrairie, and there's mention of that in the Jesuit relations.

The missionaries kept a lot of documents and journals, writing letters back to France about New France and their missionary work. And so there's mention of *[Jean de]* Brébeuf and *[Charles]* Lallemont and Huronia, the village among the Hurons, and St. Marie - this is near midland Ontario - and how they had to move up to Québec, Lauretteville. Little bit of history there, but I'm kind of side-tracking.

So modern context, the Catholic religion still exists, and the mission has a missionary priest, not Jesuits any more. There's maybe dwindling attendance and so in the 80s I guess there was kind of like a resurgence of all things cultural.

The name Kahnawake reverted to the old, the original language, Before it was a Dutch, kind of just a phonetic spelling "Cog-no- wag-a". If I spell it out you'll see, it resembles Kahnawake which is a Mohawk word. Caughnawaja, "cognawaga", that's how the Dutch pronounced it, but it's actually Kahnawage, that means village by the rapids.

And so in our community, we have, for lack of a better word, there's church people, Catholics, and traditional people and in my case I can attend – I have attended - both. I attend the mass, *[I'm a]* little bit of a choir singer in the language, Mohawk choir, and also attending ceremonies through the longhouse, Ganesesne.

"Ganesesne" is the Mohawk word for a longhouse, which back in the day was the center of – well, in practical terms it was a house where the families lived, several families, your relatives, a long house. As the family grew sometimes you just added another addition to this longhouse and that's the way it was.

But present day Longhouses are - goes back to Iroquois confederacy villages and towns, that's the center, the location for ceremonies, and gathering places and meeting places. And ceremonies take place throughout the year, there's like a cycle of ceremonies that the Mohawk people and others, our brothers and sisters, practice also. Whew. So there's a lot there.

Randy – That was a fabulous history lesson in what is a very complex, multi-century-long evolution, and I love the way you deal with it very matter of

factly. I have academic colleagues, Native Americans, including some of my own relatives, who carry I guess I would have to say a chip on their shoulder when it comes to even mentioning the word Black Robes. So when I encountered your reserve, and Kateri Tekakwitha, whom we'll discuss more after the break, I have to say my eyes were opened to the fact that historians, who are typically not Native American, in many ways are very disrespectful and dismissive of the kind of interplay and cross-cultural influences that native people had on Catholics and Catholics had on native people. I want to explore that a little bit more with you after our break, because I think it's a totally fascinating story.

Tom Dearhouse: Sure.

Segment 2

Randy: So, welcome back, our guest today is Tom Dearhouse. We've been discussing the very complex and rich cultural heritage of the people who live at Kahnawake in what is now - on the map - Québec province. Tom, I'd like to dig a little deeper into your reserve's relationship to Kateri Tekakwitha and your relationship professionally as director of an interpretive center about her. Why don't you try to explain to listeners why she's so fascinating and so important to indigenous people?

Tom Dearhouse: OK, so during the break I had a chance to catch my breath and take a sip of water, so we can go again, I'll go again.

I'll start off this way, by saying when I was a young boy in Detroit, Michigan I was aware of a magazine, called Kateri Magazine, it had a red cover and it came out every now and then. This was a little magazine; it wasn't a full size book – I don't even know the measurements - but it was laying around my house and I would look at it and read it. And there was pictures about Saint Kateri, excuse me, it was about an Indian girl named Kateri who had this title of Blessed. And then I got to know a bit about where she came from and where she passed away where she died was in Canada, and there was a village of Caughnawaja or Kahnawake.

And there was a church associated and we got to know that this was her territory; she'd been around these parts. The reason why I bring that up:

My grandmother, my father's mother, had a devotion to Kateri. *[My grandmother]* was a Mohawk speaker, knew the language, and she traveled often to the reserve, *[to]* Canada and back to Detroit – they'd gone there when she was young to find work and employment, and so you could say our home base was Detroit Michigan. But for summer vacations often we would come back for a week or two, in the summertime, to Kahnawake, and we stayed with family, which is a beautiful place, right along the St Lawrence River. We watched the ships go by, the Great Lakes freighters, and some interesting other ships, and sometimes submarines. I remember there was a few warships, and even the Britannia passed once at that time.

But anyway, so that was my first contact with Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk girl. And to recapture, or to tell, her story:

Her parents lived in the Mohawk Valley around Fonda, New York. (They have Mohawk names too, associated with them, but around Fonda, New York.) And had contact with missionaries and in those times, around the 1600s, 1666, 1640s, when she was born there was also sickness, so I think it was a smallpox epidemic - jeez I don't want to say epidemic because that brings back memories of present-day, but that's truth, that's the reality - there was illness in the village and a lot of her family members, a lot of people passed away from the illness.

And Kateri herself was scarred, with the smallpox, and her eyesight was very poor, rather sickly, and she wanted to – she seemed attracted to what the priests were saying, the Jesuits were saying. But there was disagreement among family members and some actually wanted to kind of keep her away from the priests and just concentrate, but she had these ideas and her own personality, and other family members in support of Kateri said we're going to send her - for her protection and in her best interests - send her with the priests up north, because we know there's a village up north, happens to be Canada, a village of praying Indians, she's going to be well taken care of by

priests, and there were some family members *[already there]* and of course, people will take care of a young child.

I'm not sure what age, but she was young, seven or eight, and sent up north and eventually made her way to one of the missionary villages - the village of Kahnawake where Mohawks were, And the missionaries were present. *[That was in the location of]* present-day LaPrairie, which was a few miles down the river. That was the custom, when one area gets used up for resources, maybe it's not so good for planting, they moved the village to another location, and I guess Indian people in general, our ancestors, were really good at identifying places with good water, good soil for planting and so on. So, even present-day, location, location, location, very important for villages, and raising a village and raising a child.

And with the Jesuits' influence, a mission was established in present-day Kahnawake, a small church, 1708, that developed like many Québec towns. Once there's a church there, that's considered the hub of the village, the hub of the municipality, and so it was the same with Kahnawake present-day.

A little chapel was erected, it grew, there was like officers' barracks because we wanted to protect the Indians, the French did, so there's actually a fort wall that people can see, that still stands, and a rectory, officers' quarters - but now it's office space, and that's the location of the Kateri Center.

There's a larger church, goes back to 1825, of note there's special artist drawings on the ceiling of the church. Those listeners who are musically inclined or know about the history of church music and organ music, there's an organ in the church, in the choir loft that was built by the Casavant Brothers, and they did a lot of organs in the surrounding areas.

In Québec, if you ever travel a bit, you'll think it's really holy ground*, [the towns are]* called Saint after Saint, there's a Saint Remi, there's a Saint Isidore, there's a St. Constans, all around Eastern Townships all the way to the border.

And anyone from Vermont or New York coming up they're like "hey there, they're really holy here in Quebec because there's all the religious names of

the towns." But that speaks to the Church's influence and the Jesuit influences.

Just to add the French had a system, the seigneurie system, there was like a governor in charge, and it was connected with the Church so I think it was Louis XIV that had this seigneurie system. So Kahnawake was included in the Seigneurie of Sault Saint-Louis, the rapids of St. Louis, because Lachine rapids are just north of us. You go down to the river and you drive across the Lachine rapids. Boats can't pass very easily. There's people who did shoot the rapids to transport things down to Montréal. Montréal is just a short ride from the Lachine rapids.

Randy - That's the historical context. After the break I want to come back and talk about how Kateri became a saint.

But I just want to make one footnote. That is, when we talk about the Black Robes, they in many ways were incredibly protective; they were not exploitive of the indigenous people, they learned the language, they partook in the rituals. And I know in the case of your reserve they fought, the Black Robes fought, to keep alcohol off the reserve. They didn't want the fur traders to come and negotiate with drunken Indians. There's a very wonderful and very complex history here, which I tried to tell in my book.

I want to set the record straight about this being a mutually respectful relationship at various periods. Other times, yes, there was conflict. But in Kateri's time it was very much a power balance, and mutual respect.

We'll come back to that topic after our brief break.

Segment 3

Randy: So our guest today is Tom Dearhouse, from Kahnawake, and he's talking about the incredibly rich and complex history surrounding his now-current homeland, and particularly one wonderful young woman, Kateri Tekakwitha, who became a Catholic while still holding on to some, in fact one could argue, many aspects of her indigenous spirituality. As I was reporting to Tom during the break, the one story that just knocked me off my feet when I

heard it, is the habit of this young woman going into the forest and hanging little wooden crosses on the trees, as if to say not only is the chapel my church, but so is the forest. So, with that in mind, Tom can you kind of jump off of that and explain a little more about Kateri and her spiritual life?

Tom Dearhouse: Yeah, I heard that story and read that story at a young age that she used to go into the forest, walk and make little crosses.

And you know that's kind of in line with the idea of our *[Mohawk]* original instructions, there's two of them, Thanksgiving Address, and connected with that is protecting Mother Earth , so feeling connected with the natural world, she practiced that.

And that's - everyone has an expression of that - why do we like going outdoors? Because all those things are still carrying on the responsibilities from when the world was new. And Kateri somehow knew that.

Combined with the stories she heard from the Jesuits about, once upon a time there was a person named Jesus and he had a mother, and his father was considered God and this was a holy family. But Jesus walked on the earth just like her, and had messages of, basically, peace, treat each other kindly, have compassion, love and understanding. And that, kind of, Kateri just took that on, and in a way she was kind of an outsider, thinking back. Because she was kind of contradicting the customs of the most of Mohawk people, that at a young age you're going to find a suitor, find a husband, get married, have children, going to build a nation. Live this way in the village and you do all these things that a woman, a wife, would do, tend to the gardens, tend to the children, whereas the men would go hunting and fishing and be protectors and providers.

So I guess there's a connection from how she lived her life – I don't know, maybe your listeners know this, but her devotion and interest in self-sacrifice and taking care of others, thinking of others. She wanted to kind of form a group of women who would eventually become nuns. I think this was a long-time goal. Ashort-term goal, she wanted this, to sacrifice, to take care of the older people in her village. She would bring them firewood, the children

would be taken care of, with little gifts. Sharing the stories that she heard and just treating everybody with love and compassion.

And I'll backtrack a bit to say when her family, certain members of her family sent her up north, they sent with her a letter or message to the priest, to say, "Take care of this young girl; she's a treasure". So even at a young age they recognized there's something about her, treat her well, she's going to be formed, she's going through a formation, a training, that's unlike the others and she's not like other Indians.

So that's why she was granted a baptism, she actually took a vow of chastity which was contrary to *[traditional Mohawk customs]* - how can you correctly do that? who's going to provide for you? a woman on her own won't survive, you need a man –to kind of provide.

So that went against the grain but just the fact alone of love for everybody, love for her own people, that's what attracted a lot of interest. That's why the Church recognized her to have a category on the way to sainthood, on the way to canonization. Starts with Venerable, that your name is associated with Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha*, [and]* the documentation to go along with that she lived a holy life.

When you're on your way to sainthood and you reach the Blessed level there's documentation, there's miracles that have to be documented and attributed to you, the person in question, to become a saint. So there's that documentation. I'll go over briefly Kateri's death.

Remember I said she was scarred for life and not the prettiest, with her skin, but when she passed, a short time after it was documented by a missionary that her skin became clear. So there was something there, and I guess that story spread, other people told the Jesuit priests, the Jesuit missionaries.

And that's where the oral tradition comes in. She had this devotion, she took care of other people, she was all into self-sacrifice that she followed the teachings of the church, and she was told not to do so much sacrifice, it was hurting her health, but nonetheless she did that. And she passed away around the Easter season, which is kind of significant also.

She had a goal to gather like-minded people who wanted to maybe serve their own community and to serve the church as it existed back then.

So over the years there was a devotion to Kateri, to know her story, to actually pray for her canonization once she had reached Blessed status. I think that was 19- don't quote me on this one but this was around 1980 or 1984 – I think it was 1980,when there's a contingent of Mohawk people. There was also another ceremony for that, in Rome, so I think people traveled in 1980 to Rome to see Kateri declared Blessed. So that's one final step before sainthood, which occurred finally in 2012. And I was fortunate enough to be there in Rome in October 2012 for her canonization, along with several others.

Randy: This is all beautifully summarized in the Interpretive Center and I really feel like I should do an advertisement. Anyone visiting the Montreal area really should drive south across the bridge and visit the Interpretive Center.

Kateri's tomb is there, and a shrine, it's a deeply deeply emotional and spiritual place and there's a marvelous museum, and you have a wonderful guide, my good friend Gabriel Berberian, who will take you on a tour and explain all of this history. And I really can't imagine visiting Canada and not digging in to this particular chapter in Canadian history when the Black Robes and the First Nations people met.

I live across the lake and I can literally see your shrine from my balcony. And between the two is the Fur Museum which is the other side of Canadian history. So anyone planning on visiting Montréal -

Tom – As you're saying that, I'm struck by, it really is a hidden gem, so we can talk about this maybe in the next segment.

Randy – We'll do that, we'll take a break and then we'll come back and we'll talk a little bit more about why people should visit, and what your reserve has to teach us today.

Segment 4

Randy: So Tom, again I can hardly find words to thank you enough for this rich history that you are conveying to us in a very clear and lucid form. I want to wrap up quickly on the matter of Kateri, and just have you talk maybe for like literally a minute, if you can do that, about what the Interpretive Center offers to visitors, from your perspective.

Tom Dearhouse: Wow, time flies while you're having fun, and I am having fun. So our Interpretive Center is new, and another thing that strikes me, just like Kateri's life was very modest, she went about her business, helping the elders, helping the kids, helping everybody. The shrine is not so big, it's not flamboyant, it's not out there, it's a modest shrine but still has devotion to people. The Kateri Center itself puts out a magazine largely by the work of Gabriel, who you mentioned, we work closely together to put this out three times a year. Telling Kateri's story, and we're also open to hearing how meaningful Kateri is, the present day. And if you read the recent magazine, you'll see how a native guy, around Buffalo felt compelled to construct a little drum ring, a drum and wood, about Kateri's life. So it goes to show Kateri's still having an impact, present day, amongst people.

Randy: It's really a deeply moving place to visit, as I said, I really don't think a visit to Montreal area is complete without visiting the shrine. You're right, it's not commercialized, it's not overwhelming; it's not crowds or busloads of people like at Lourdes or something. It's a very intimate experience with very welcoming people.

I wanted to talk on that very theme, not far from the shine and the interpretive center is a location on a nice island on the edge of the *[St. Lawrence]* river, where you hold a pow-wow when Covid isn't around. Can you talk briefly about that and what it's meant to the community:?

Tom Dearhouse: Oh yes, that location is an island, called Kateri Tekakwitha island, or Kateri Island, it's accessible by a little bridge. Most of it is man-made actually, when the seaway was built and it passed through our community, the landfill underneath was made to create an island.

The seaway dates from 1959 and the *[annual]* pow-wow that you refer to, that was started in 1991 right after our Indian Summer, or Oka Crisis of 1990.

We thought there was one way - here's a couple of things I guess – a two-fold purpose *[for the Pow-Wow]*– one was to show pride in ourselves, to celebrate that Mohawk people are still here. But there's also a sharing aspect, to share knowledge, to share a little bit of history: that we're not warriors, we're not people who are breaking the law and not *[putting up]* barricades, although that happened, we do protest, but I stress just like there can be a warrior side there's also a flip side, that of being peacemakers, and striving for peace. Just like a pancake, warrior side, *[but]* not all the time, we've had to turn that off. The people I talk to and the people I hang around with want peace, these principles of having a good mind and taking care of each other, and especially this is highlighted in these pandemic measures. All this pandemic time, where we're following the directives of the overall task force in the community, in line with the larger Québec province directives, this is composed of our own people who are directors of community protection, peacekeepers, fire and ambulance, our hospital director is a non-native. We're all gathering to keep everybody safe, so fortunately the numbers are down. I think it's only probably 16 or less, over this whole time; for a long time it was just four active cases *[of Covid-19],* and everybody recovered.

I hope it's going to be the same way, so yes, we're going into the future still carrying on doing the best that we can, and the Church, and Kateri and people's prayers I'm sure are a part of that.

Randy: One of the lessons that I've learned from reading what's been done on the reserve during this Covid time is comparing what happened in the rest of the world, whether it's the United States or Sweden, where Covid has just destroyed the populations of elderly who are put in these homes and then subject to the care of underpaid over worked people. That's not what we as Native Americans do, we don't outsource care for our elders; they're knowledge keepers. Can you explain a little bit about how that lies behind the strategy of locking down early at Kahnawake?

Tom Dearhouse– Yeah, I guess that goes to a long-time tradition or custom of taking care of our own. We know our people, we know kind of what works and what doesn't work, and with a little bit of explanation these measures are accepted.

And we're fortunate in how we structure ourselves and govern ourselves, that we can in a sense close down the community, restrict the visitors, and make it known that this is why we're doing it. But if you do contravene, well then you're likely to be stopped by our police force who are called the peacekeepers, very much into community policing, and you'll be fined.

The facts are known that we're not open for business. We have businesses, gift shops, smoke shops, restaurants, but they're not open to non-locals. Not that we're racists, no, it's for our own protection, and it's only for a little while. We want the cases to stay down.

We're watching Québec, and Canada, and even the States, how they're doing, and we're able to do that. In our community of 8,000 or 9,000, we're keeping the numbers low, and all these measures are in place for our own benefit.

Randy: I want to pick up just briefly on your mention of the police as peacekeepers. I just love it when I see the cars and when I see the, quote, police, identify themselves as such *[as Peacekeepers].*

As I write my book and as you mentioned in connection with your pow-wow, it isn't advocating and broadcasting the notion of Mohawk warriors, it's Mohawks being peace-makers. And *[when]* I attended the pow- wow my first time on your reserve. I did so with a bit of trepidation.

Very often here in the United States, it really is about the presence of the army and the warriors. And I noticed and it really brought tears to my eyes, that every single one of the veterans who marched in the Grand Entry had NATO or UN badges on their jackets along with their regimental identification.

They had all been peacekeepers, they had all laid their lives on the line not for the glory of the country but to maintain peace. And I just thought this was an incredibly powerful message. I remember walking up and shaking the hands

and hugging some of these people, I'd been waiting to meet people. Your Pow-Wow was an awakening for me.

Tom Dearhouse: I think our time might be running down, but two points I want to make. Historically, the Mohawk were the first to accept the Great Law of Peace from the Peacemaker, back in the day, pre-Contact, before 1400s, they say. And the second one is that Kahnawake has I believe the highest percentage of people going into the armed forces. And I know it's high Marine Corps veterans and US forces, so I'm struck by that, because there's that, I guess, warrior attitude, mentality, and they're quick to volunteer and they're quick to serve, but then they come back and – yeah.

Randy: I think we'll have to wrap it now. But I'd love to have you on again sometime. You're a wonderful spokesperson for the Mohawk and you have so many important tales to tell. We have to tell our stories over and over to make our point.

Tom Dearhouse: Thanks a lot Randy, Yeah, I'd be willing to do that, I'm open to that.

Randy – Migwetch, be well.

Tom Dearhouse: Migwetch, be well. Be well for everybody.

For audio:

http://www.ecologia.org/news/3.MohawkJan2021.mp3

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