

Audio Transcript, Tama Meskwaki Traditions

DAWN SUZANNE WANATEE, Tama, Meskwaki Traditions

One of the great things about maple syrup is that you—around here, even if you don't know how to make it, you still find that you need it. It's not necessary that everybody knows how to make it, as long as you treat the people well who do know how to make it.

My name is Dawn Suzanne Wanatee. I was born in Iowa City, Iowa, and I live on the Meskwaki Indian Settlement.

I think it was a couple years ago we were in Iowa City at a powwow. While we were there, someone came up and said that they were concerned about the tribe. And we thanked them, but then we asked what is it that they were concerned about. And they said because we were losing our culture. When I asked them to explain further, they said it was their understanding that the last family who made maple syrup on the Settlement had stopped. That's not how I saw it. I let them know that we actually have quite a few people on the Settlement who make syrup.

I pointed out that we're a tribe, and in a tribe you—everybody has got different strengths, and everybody has got different qualities and knowledge that they bring at different times in their life. We still have that knowledge. Plus, we still—it was beyond the knowing how to make it. It was the valuing of that process, and that we still regarded that process of tapping the trees and having maple syrup that the tribe had generated for use—whether it was around the house or in ceremonies.

That was what was important, is that that was still being done. It wasn't the maple syrup itself, or the sheer numbers of people that did it. It's that we were still using it in the

way that we were supposed to be using it, or in ways that traditional ancestors, thousands, have used it.

In our households we have food that we eat that we like, that we prefer. We have—I guess mainstream America calls them comfort foods. And we have certain foods that we like to have around. And it's—we don't just eat them at ceremonies or particular times. We just feel like having them. Just as we have Wheat Chex® in our cabinets, we're just as likely to have dried corn, Indian corn around, or just as likely to have maple syrup.

We'll buy maple syrup at the store. We look for a hundred percent maple syrup. I mean, that's what I was told to do. But the preference is for maple syrup that you get from trees—even if you don't get it, that someone else has taken that initiative to do that. And they have the knowledge to do that. And you usually give something to someone, you know. Maybe not necessarily money, but you give them something to show that you sincerely appreciate that they are doing something that you can't or aren't able to or whatever.

We have a very simple thing that we have that we eat at home, different ceremonies, and it sounds really simple. It's maple syrup and walnuts, except for some reason it's not a lot of it. It just seems to be—exist in this small wooden bowl. Now, you can do it in a different bowl if you don't have any different bowl. But for those of us that are used to eating it, you really have to hunt for your maple syrup and walnut bowl. And it's got to be a certain one. And you'll have—I mean you could have a very small bowl that is passed to a lot of people to take a little bit of syrup and a little bit of walnut and eat it. And that might be the little bit that you get, it's just that. But for some reason, that

walnut bowl holding that maple syrup and those walnuts—that little wooden bowl is what makes it whole.