

To Walk In Beauty



by Ellen Spirit Seeker Fisher

What does beauty mean to you? A fair face and figure? Nice words and demeanor? What does it mean to "walk in beauty"? Native American women wrestle with this concept in their lives as their attention is drawn to many things that profess to be beautiful, or contain images of "beautiful" women – actresses, models, advertising, TV, movies, games, internet, music and videos – all these and more influence women today. Not only women but men, too, are influenced by these images of beauty that mass media bombards us with, if we pay attention... Lately there have been many images of skinny white women dressed in a mock-up of native regalia to the point of mixing tiny little buckskin bikinis with a Sioux war bonnet and spiked, fringed boots.

Then there's that word "hot" which has become interchangeable with "beauty" in describing a desirable woman. Not long ago a contest was held through a website called "World's Hottest Native." The female winner was a bleached blonde with enhanced breasts and lots of makeup. She did wear native dress and her skin was dark, but she appeared more European than Native American.

I have seen plenty of Native women, of all ages, at powwows and other Indian events in traditional regalia or street clothes, dolled up to the max. I mean full faces of makeup, stylish clothes and flashy accessories. It is plain we have a desire to be attractive in the mainstream manner; a desire that has evolved with time and Western/Eurocentric influence.

What, traditionally, made an Indian woman beautiful? How did we as women view our own sexuality and attractiveness? I think it is a Native thing and feminine energy and looks were an added bonus. Maybe it was a woman's area of knowledge or skillfulness with crafts or her green thumb that made her the desire of many?

In 1911 Charles Alexandar Eastman wrote a surprisingly poetic and lyrical definition of the duty to family a native woman bears:

"Her attitude and secret meditations must be such as to instill into the receptive soul of the unborn child the love of the "Great Mystery" and a sense of brotherhood with all creation. Silence and isolation are the rule of life for the expectant mother. She wanders prayerful in the stillness of great woods, or on the bosom of the un-trodden prairie, and to her poetic mind the immanent birth of her child prefigures the

advent of a master-man -- a hero, or the mother of heroes -- a thought conceived in the virgin breast of primeval nature, and dreamed out in a hush that is only broken by the sighing of the pine tree or the thrilling orchestra of a distant waterfall.

And when the day of days in her life dawns the ordeal is best met alone where all nature says to her spirit: " 'Tis love! 'tis love! the fulfilling of life!" When a sacred voice comes to her out of the silence, and a pair of eyes open upon her in the wilderness, she knows with joy that she has borne well her part in the great song of creation!

Presently she returns to the camp, carrying the mysterious, the holy, the dearest bundle! She feels the endearing warmth of it and hears its soft breathing. It is still a part of herself, since both are nourished by the same mouthful, and no look of a lover could be sweeter than its deep, trusting gaze.

She continues her spiritual teaching, at first silently -- a mere pointing of the index finger to nature; then in whispered songs, bird-like, at morning and evening. To her and to the child the birds are real people, who live very close to the "Great Mystery"; the murmuring trees breathe His presence; the falling waters chant His praise.

If the child should chance to be fretful, the mother raises her hand. "Hush! hush!" she cautions it tenderly, "the spirits may be disturbed!" She bids it be still and listen to the silver voice of the aspen, or the clashing cymbals of the birch; and at night she points to the heavenly, blazed trail, through nature's galaxy of splendor to nature's God. Silence, love, reverence, -- this is the trinity of first lessons; and to these she later adds generosity, courage, and chastity.

In the old days, our mothers were single-eyed to the trust imposed upon them; and as a noted chief of our people was wont to say: "Men may slay one another, but they can never overcome the woman, for in the quietude of her lap lies the child! You may destroy him once and again, but he issues as often from that same gentle lap -- a gift of the Great Good to the race, in which man is only an accomplice.

This wild mother has not only the experience of her mother and grandmother, and the accepted rules of her people for a guide, but she humbly seeks to learn a lesson from ants, bees, spiders, beavers, and badgers. She studies the family life of the birds, so exquisite in its emotional intensity and its patient devotion, until she seems to feel the universal mother-heart beating in her own breast. In due time the child takes of his own accord the attitude of prayer, and speaks reverently of the Powers. He thinks that he is a blood brother to all living creatures, and the storm wind is to him a messenger of the "Great Mystery." *The Soul of the Indian Eastman, Charles Alexander (1911)*

So, to walk in beauty, in a historical sense meant a connection to all things and an understanding of our connection to all things. We walk with the knowledge of that connection in everything we say and do. We listen to nature – birds, beasts, water, wind – and honor her in our lives.

Let Me Walk In Beauty:

"O Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty and let my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears grow sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people. Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength not to be greater than my brother or sister but to fight my greatest enemy, myself. Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes so when life fades as the fading sunset my spirit may come to you without shame. Great Spirit of love, come to me with the power of the North. Make me courageous when the cold winds of life fall upon me.

Spirit who comes out of the East, come to me with the power of the rising sun. Let there be light in my word. Let there be light on the path that I walk. Great Spirit of creation, send me the warm and soothing winds from the South. Comfort me and caress me when I am tired and cold. Great life-giving Spirit, I face the West, the direction of the sundown. Let me remember every day that the moment will come when my sun will go down. Never let me forget that I must fade into you Help me to be thankful for the gift of the earth and never to walk hurtfully on the world. Bless to love what comes from mother earth and teach me how to love your gifts. Great Spirit of the heavens, lift me up to you that my heart may worship you and come to you in glory."



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