

Audio transcript

Water is medicine

Gary Benjamin

My name is Gary Benjamin. My surname is Gary Branchaud. I'm from Red Lake originally and when I married a Band member here in Mille Lacs Lake, I took her last name, Benjamin. When I first went to treatment, Mille Lacs Band gave me an opportunity to get help, go into treatment, and I did. In 2016, November of 2016, I went to Twin Town Treatment Center in St. Paul. I discharged from there December 30th of 2016, came back to Mille Lacs, and resumed my job. I was able to do my job and get my job back.

What I started doing every morning is I would get up and I would go down to the lake here before work and I would stand by the lake and I had a drum. I don't know many songs, but I would try to play the drum and I would just sit and listen to all the sounds, listen to the water, listen to the birds. The serenity of it all just really captivated me and I would start to watch the sunrise every morning and I could actually hear it when it broke upon the horizon. It was almost magical.

I was told at one time that our medicine is strongest before that happens, from the dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn. And that our medicine is real powerful because it's changing. And so every morning when I'd go out there, I'd put out my tobacco and pray and wait for that sunrise and listen to that water because it was so soothing, so comforting. And I would get a picture of the sunrise and I would post it on Facebook with an inspirational quote. And I've been doing that ever since.

I learned long time ago that this lake provided food for our people, the fish and the wild rice. And I learned recently that women are the protectors of the water and that men are protectors of the fire. And we were born in water. In the womb, we're inside of water. And I just thought it's really, really powerful. And people take that for granted, the water part.

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But to go down there and to be able to heal from what I've gone through in my life. I spent 45 years in addiction. And nothing has come close to helping me than being down by that lake and being able to sing songs, being able to put out tobacco and being able just to hear the water and the sounds that come with that water, you know, the birds, and to watch that and watch the sunrise, that's my experience with water. It's such a powerful force.