

"Being Indian is...."

By Reuben Snake,
Omaha, NE, 1970

Being Indian is.....

Having over 700,000 brothers and sisters!

Being Indian is.....

Feeling Grey Wolf, Thunder Chief, Smoke Walker are more beautiful names than Smith, Jones, Brown, or Johnson.

Being Indian is.....

Watching John Wayne whip 50 of your kind with a single pistol shot and a rusty pocket knife on the late show.

Being Indian is.....

Having at least a dozen missionaries from 12 different faiths trying to save your heathen soul every year.

Being Indian is.....

Fighting with the U.S. Army to save your country from the evils of communism and against the U.S. Army on your reservation to keep the Corps of Engineers from stealing all of your land.

Being Indian is.....

Owning land and not being able to rent, lease, sell or even farm it yourself without BIA approval.

Being Indian is.....

Having every third person you meet tell you about his great grandmother who was a real Cherokee princess.

Being Indian is.....

Having 9 out of 10 people tell you how great they believe Jim Thorpe, Squanto, Tonto, and Little Beaver are.

Being Indian is.....

Belonging to a particular tribe that is the best of the 30 or more that still exist.

Being Indian is.....

Being broke all summer because you try to make every Pow-Wow around.

Being Indian is.....

Having the greatest grandparents in the world.

ng Indian is.....

"Graduating" from the reservation school and not being able to read an 8th grade English book from your white urban friend's school.

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Being Indian is....

Loving "frybread" and corn soup.

Being Indian is....

Having at least one alcoholic relative put the touch on you once a day.

Being Indian is....

Having high salaried BIA, PHS, OEO, HEW, and DOL white-collar bureaucrats tell you how much money is being spent on Indians these days.

Being Indian is....

Having your teenage child come home from school and ask you about "the strange beliefs" of Indians that her/his teacher mentioned in school today.

Being Indian is....

Waiting (impatiently) for the new Tecumsch, Osceola, Crazy Horse, and Geronimo to appear.

Being Indian is....

Living on borrowed time after your 44th birthday.

Being Indian is....

Having your all-Indian school team playing against 7 men on the basketball court, 15 men on the football field, and 12 men on the baseball diamond.

Being Indian is....

Listening to all the middle class Tontos and Uncle Tomahawks tell you we must do things the "American Way."

Being Indian is....

Watching your daughter give away her only pair of overshoes to her friend because she only has to walk six blocks to school and her friend lives in the country.

Being Indian is....

Having white do-gooders continue to do for you instead of with you.

Being Indian is....

Never making quick evaluations of people, but reserving judgement until their actions show what kind of people they really are.

Being Indian is....

Feeding anyone and everyone who comes to your door hungry, with whatever you have.

Being Indian is....

Feeling the stares of all the "whiteys" in any public place you walk into.

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Being Indian is.....

Having your non-Indian spouse dancing in full regalia at your tribal Pow-Wow.

Being Indian is.....

Not laughing at your children when they mispronounce words in your tribal tongue.

Being Indian is.....

Never drinking alone.

Being Indian is.....

Knowing the Great Spirit.

Being Indian is.....

Having a Christian missionary tell you it is wrong to believe in more than one Divine Being, then listen to him tell you about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. Patrick, St. Christopher, St. Francis, etc., etc.

Being Indian is.....

Paying 15 to 20 bucks a piece for eagle tail feathers.

Being Indian is.....

Knowing the so-called "Peyote Cult" is probably a better way of worshipping the Great Spirit than any other Christian way or denomination.

Being Indian is.....

Trading your surplus commodities to a local farmer (who used them for hog feed) in exchange for fresh eggs, butter, milk, etc.

Being Indian is.....

Respecting your elders who have earned it.

Being Indian is.....

Masking your emotions in times of stress.

Being Indian is.....

Never giving up the struggle for survival.

Being Indian is.....

Meeting at least two dozen anthropologists before you are 21.

Being Indian is.....

Having the option of joining at least three dozen Indian unity organizations.

Being Indian is.....

Calling your kinsmen "apples" for selling out their Indianess for the white man's values. Red on the outside, white on the inside.

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Being Indian is.....

Not rioting in the streets, but occupying godforsaken places like Alcatraz, Mount Rushmore, the New York-Canadian bridge, etc.

Being Indian is.....

Cutting off your cast after two weeks because it is in the way and isn't needed anyway.

Being Indian is.....

Having your friends and relatives accuse you of being a traitor if you earn more than \$6,000 a year, wear a tie and white shirt, drive a car less than three years old, and have a three bedroom home.

Being Indian is.....

Having heard your grandparents, parents, and yourself say, "When we get our land claims payment," then suddenly realize you are hearing your children use the phrase also.

Being Indian is....

Sad.

Being Indian is.....

Tough.

Being Indian is.....

Hard.

Being Indian is.....

To cry.

Being Indian is.....

To laugh.

Being Indian is.....

Great.

Being Indian is....

Beautiful.

Being Indian is.....

Forever!