



96th Annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Queen Zunneh-bah Martin

In the midst of beginning her reign as the new 2017 Inter-Tribal Ceremonial Queen, Zunneh-bah Martin sat down with the *Sun* and discussed her excitement and thoughts as the new Ceremonial queen.

Coming from the town of Tohlokai, N.M., from the Twin Lakes Chapter, and only 20-years-old, Martin has already been making head waves for her tribe as well as for other indigenous people.

Being half Navajo, from the Sleepy Rock Clan, and paternal grandfathers from the Edge Waters Clan, Martin is also Mexican with Aztec/Mayan history, and from the Modoc tribe of Oklahoma.

Named after her great-grandmother “Zunneh-bah,” which means, “Old and Wise Woman Warrior,” Martin has lived on the Navajo reservation her whole life. She is most familiar with her Dineh culture and language. In her third year of college at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado, she recently declared her major in Southwest Studies and with an emphasis in Film Studies and Indigenous Studies.

Sun: First off, congratulations on being crowned the new Ceremonial queen, secondly, I know you’ve been probably asked this a million times ... (Laughing), but how does it feel to be the new Inter-Tribal queen?

Martin: It feels good. I'm still telling people I'm very honored to have this title, to represent not only my indigenous tribes and cultures, but to represent all inter-tribal indigenous cultures that are always present at the ceremonial events every year. I'm the 39th queen and I'm really honored to share the title with the other former queens. I'm really proud of the other contestants who ran as well you know they were all such amazing beautiful women, we formed a sisterhood. I'm really just honored to have this title and excited to share my platform, and to travel and share what I'm doing.

Sun: Awesome...so as they say, what do you want to be when you grow up (laughing).

Martin: (Laughing) you know every time I'm asked that question I already have a whole list ready. There so many things I'm passionate about and I want to do. So, it ranges from being from an animal doctor; from being a culinary artist/chef/baker; to being an advocate. I do advocate work for many different topics like social justice, human rights/indigenous rights and animal rights, environmental justice; I'm a huge advocate for those. There's so much I want to be. I really would love to just travel and come back and help my people.

Sun: Cool! So, what made you decide to run for Ceremonial queen?

Martin: I ran after I graduated from Tohatchi High School in 2015. I did run that following summer when I was just getting ready to head off for my freshmen year of college. So, I thought I'm just going to just run and see what happens; you know I just graduated and then I wanted to see all of our tribes and relatives before I leave off the reservation to college. I did get first runner-up in 2015.

And last year I was busy because I do a lot of things with other organizations ... they had me traveling everywhere. So, I thought let me try it this summer again ... and have fun as well as seeing old friends, relatives, and meet new people.

I love meeting all the people that come to Ceremonial, and it's just a really special time of the year. I thought I would try, and really didn't care if I lose or win. I'm just going to have fun.

Sun: Cool! So your reign is a year and what are your goals within this year?

Martin: My goal is to promote my platform, which is to educate the world about protecting indigenous people and the earth. My goal is to try to share that message to as many cultures – not only the Navajo reservation from where I'm from – not only our surrounding border towns/reservations, but all across the country and all across the world to all indigenous people.

Because it's a huge thing growing up as an indigenous person. Even at college when I left in 2015, I met so many people who didn't know that indigenous people, in particular Native Americans were still alive.

They were like 'you're still here?' They think that we're extinct and we're still alive. We're thriving and we survived genocide, the Long Walk, our forced relocation ... we survived all that.

And we're here and Ceremonial is about celebrating all these tribes – inter-tribal. I really want to spread that message that we're still here and we still need help. Our cultures, our prayers, (and) our identity is all related to Mother Earth and Father Sky. So, by letting people protect our Mother Earth it's also protecting all these other cultures. With us Native Americans in this country we make up 5 percent of the population, there are over 567 tribes and we're all grasping on to what we have left our languages, and our cultures.

My other goal is to bring other tribes from around the world to next year's Ceremonial and particularly the Maori tribe. I will be studying abroad in New Zealand this fall semester, and one of the main tribes out there is the Maori tribe. I met a couple of them when I went to Washington, D.C. for the White House Tribal Nations Conference. I also got to meet them earlier this summer when we had the Navajo Language & Culture Revitalization Conference.

They invited some of the Maori members to speak about how in their schools they're incorporating their own history, language. So now all of their kids, their people now have saved their language and brought it back and revitalized their culture, so I want to hopefully bring them to next year's Ceremonial so they can share their dances, their songs ... because they're really beautiful. Those are some of my goals.

Sun: You being from the Navajo Nation, what problem(s) do you see that you want to help change?

Martin: One problem that I see ... I did attend reservation public schools for elementary, middle school, and high school. Our education system, it doesn't fully support our own people's histories, our own people's language, and our culture.

For example, our history classes we only learn about what's in U.S. textbooks, about what happened after 1492 with the indigenous people in the Americas. That's one thing they don't teach about the people before the colonialism. They don't teach about – pre-colonial times and I see that is something really affecting our people.

Because they start to internalize that (dominant society's history) is not acknowledging our history.

Maybe our history is not legit, maybe our history doesn't matter. I believe that's false, I believe our histories are just as important as the dominant societies. When I tell people I want to work with the education system to incorporate more systems to support, not only learning about my tribe, but all indigenous people in Native America, and also indigenous people from around the world.

That's something I see with all my cultures ... and just all the other tribes that I have met. So, that's one problem I do see that's having a huge impact on us.

Sun: Who is your driving force, your influences of where you're at right now?

Martin: My driving force is my parents, my family, my great-grandma, who is still alive and I'm named after her. She's turning 94 in September. So, she's my main drive, and I've gotten into digital storytelling/filmmaking; that's what I'm passionate about.

You know a lot of social media that we see on television, our mainstream media, even on the news, they don't always tell the truth about us native people. So that's why I'm kind of passionate about filmmaking, to get our voices out there, get our perspectives out there.

We always face stereotypes, we face racism, we face discrimination, so trying to educate people that 'no this isn't our first time wearing regular clothes, we don't scalp people, we don't do all this negative stuff that people think.'

Even with the mascots, I really don't support the Redskins, the Chiefs, because they are dehumanizing and derogatory racial slurs. So, people don't know about this stuff, so I really just want to tell people. Everything that fuels me is my people, my ancestors, my cultures, and all indigenous people because we're all going through the same thing.

Sun: Here's one (question) for you that is fun, when you're not wearing the crown as Ms. Ceremonial, what are the things that you like to do that nobody knows about?

Martin: (Laughing) hmm ... before I had this title I always kept busy advocating. I have gone to Standing Rock twice, when they had the water movement against DAPL (Dakota Access Pipe Line.) I am an ambassador for We R Native.org; I get to travel and teach our communities to be healthy, not only nutritionally, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy. I do attend a lot of events with my parents who are heavily involved in other movements that can better our people.

Sun: Wow, that's pretty cool. Well, I want to thank you for taking the time out to do this interview and again congratulations on your new title and all the best, and keep fighting for us natives Zunneh-bah.

Martin: Thank you and I hope we can all make a difference and do so much for our people and other indigenous people all over the world.

Q&A Exclusive

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Friday, 25 August 2017 02:04

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