

# **EQUAL JUSTICE**

Through awareness, education and action

### "Tribal Justice"

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# The Tribal Court Environment

Justice Susan Owens Washington State Supreme Court By virtue of practicing law in Clallam County for 25 years, I am admitted to practice in the Makah Tribal Court and the Quileute Tribal Court. It has been my privilege to serve five years as Chief Judge of the Quileute Tribal Court and seven plus years as Chief Judge of the Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribal Court. Al-

though my experience is limited to these three courts, I can comment about other courts due to my contacts with tribal judges statewide.

There are 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State. Fourteen operate their own courts and 11 contract with Northwest Tribal Court System (NICS) based in Edmonds. (see *Equal Justice*, August 1999, for a related article on NICS)

Because all tribes are sovereign entities, each tribal judicial system is different. Some are based on tribal constitutions; some are created by tribal council legislation. Tribal codes cover a broad range of subjects from basic civil and criminal procedure, family law, hunting and fishing regulations, substantive criminal law, housing codes to natural resource protection. Overlaying these areas are tribal common law, custom and tradition, and federal provisions such as the Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA). Often, a copy of the tribal code is available for purchase for a nominal price from the tribal court or council.

Tribal courts have criminal jurisdiction over only tribal members and other Native Americans. Other non-natives are referred to state or federal authorities. The jurisdiction is essentially comparable to misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor jurisdiction in state court. The court's sentencing power is one year in jail and/or \$5,000 fine for the most serious offenses. Some tribal codes do define felony crimes; however, the sentencing authority is limited nonetheless. This is so because on some occasions the United States Attorney will choose not to prosecute those felony crimes and the tribe will elect to commence a prosecution.

The Indian Civil Rights Act guarantees a jury trial, but local tribal practices will dictate a preference for a bench or jury trial. I often encouraged a negotiated resolution because that facilitated a sense of "restorative justice" that I, as judge, was trying to promote. I felt I had more freedom in tribal court to promote an equitable resolution than I did in state court. Tribal courts do not require licensed attorney representation and allow lay

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#### From the Editor Erica S. Chung

Federally recognized American Indian Tribes are sovereign dependent nations within the borders of the United States of America. The relationship between Indian Tribal Courts and the state and federal courts is complicated. Under Superior Court Civil Rule 82.5, Washington State recognizes that Indian Tribal Courts have exclusive jurisdiction in some matters and concurrent jurisdiction with the state courts in other matters. Washington State further recognizes that the superior courts of the state shall recognize, implement and enforce orders of Indian Tribal Courts.

According to Washington State Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, there are twenty-nine federally recognized Indian tribes in Washington State (www.goia.wa.gov/directory/toc.html, 2002). Cowlitz Tribe was federally recognized in January 2002.

In light of our judicial interrelationship with the tribal courts, the Outreach sub-committee responsible for the production and publication of the *Equal Justice* newsletter thought that we would all benefit from learning more about tribal courts and programs.

One of the themes which emerges from the articles is the tribal courts' greater emphasis on cultural tradition and treatment versus incarceration. Not all tribal court programs may be feasible in the state court system. However, with state revenue shortfall predicted, it may be beneficial to learn more about innovative and cost effective programs within our state. At the very least, for those unfamiliar with the tribal court system, this issue may provide a small glimpse into the inner workings of the tribal courts, enhancing our knowledge and understanding.

#### The Tribal Court Environment

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"spokespersons" to be admitted to practice. The Elwha Tribe did provide local attorney public defenders to criminal defendants. In general, the larger tribal courts do provide attorneys in criminal matters.

In the civil arena, tribal courts **do** have jurisdiction over nonnatives doing business with tribes or within tribal boundaries. As such, the jurisdiction of the courts is wide and far-reaching. It

most closely resembles the powers and authorities of superior courts or federal district courts. Again, due to the lack of extensive evidence rules and technical restrictions on authority, I felt I had greater power to resolve disputes in a more creative and mediative manner than possible in state court. I could craft a civil remedy in equity without restriction. Usually the results were very satisfactory to the parties.

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Depending on economics and geographical distance, attorney appearances are few in some tribal courts. Accordingly, procedures are designed to facilitate *pro se* practice. I do not think I worked with or for a tribal court that did not provide prompt and inexpensive access to its courts by members and non-members alike. The lack of barriers is commendable.

#### **EQUAL JUSTICE**

Equal Justice is the official publication of the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission whose goal is elimination of racial and ethnic bias, where it exists, from our state courts. The newsletter is a communications and networking tool providing information about programs, projects and issues of concern.

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If you anticipate appearing in a tribal court, call a spokesperson (lists are available through the clerk) or an attorney to consult about proper behavior. Tribal courts are open to the public, so take time to observe before your case. Tribal courts are working, living and breathing arms of their sovereign government, but similar enough to state courts so as not to be foreign or alien forums. You will be welcome there.

This article is intended to be informational and general, not a technical piece. There are two recently published articles that I cite to you if you want more technical information. They are both Washington State Bar Association publications: 1) Reservations of Right: An Introduction to Indian Law by Gabriel S. Galanda in De Novo, Volume XV, Issue VI, Nov./Dec. 2001, a W.S.B.A. publication (www.wsba.org/wyld), and 2) Native Justice: A Look at Tribal Court Jurisdiction in Washington State by Robert J. McCarthy, Washington State Bar News, (www.wsba.org/barnews/1999/08/ mccarthy.htm). Both are short and excellent sources.

Remembering Indigenous Justice: The Healing to Wellness Programs of Lummi Tribal Justice System

Chief Judge Theresa Pouley
Lummi Nation

The Lummi Tribal Court, joining other tribal courts across the nation, is moving toward establishing and institutionalizing an indigenous justice system which focuses on solving the underlying problems bringing a person to court. The movement in non-tribal courts is called "therapeutic jurisprudence." In tribal courts it is simply returning to tribal roots and implementing "indigenous justice." The Lummi Tribal Court calls it "Healing to Wellness Court," which includes an adult and juvenile drug court, a juvenile community panel project, a juvenile justice system overhaul and a community court.

Understanding the current Lummi Tribal Court system requires understanding the key concepts of therapeutic jurisprudence, indigenous justice and traditional western style court systems. The Lummi Tribal Court's western style justice system decides cases recognizable to any Washington State Bar member. The court decides complex legal issues in civil disputes and adjudicates and punishes serious offenders who are a danger to the community. Tribal

court decides complicated personal injury cases, iurisdictional disputes, and contract disputes. interprets tribal laws and the tribal constitution but still decides traffic infractions and fishing infractions. Criminal cases are equally varied. The tribal court can and does hear felony level crimes but can only impose misdemeanor penalties. The Lummi Tribal Court, like many western style tribal courts, have been adjudicating persons guilty of crimes and sentencing them to jail as punishment. But, like its American counterparts, tribal courts have realized that a system of adjudication of guilt and jail has not solved the problems underlying criminal conduct. In fact, the tribal court is faced with the "revolving door" which repeatedly adjudicates drug and alcohol offenders guilty of crimes and sends them to jail. However, in many cases tribal courts can do better.

The central component of the Lummi Tribal Court's evolving judicial system is the philosophy that solving a person's legal problems must include a holistic evaluation of that person's situation. You cannot expect someone to follow court requirements like probation if they are currently abusing drugs and alcohol. You cannot expect parents to care for their children if they are actively using drugs and alcohol. You cannot expect to stop the need for protection orders to prevent domestic violence unless the person is required to stop using violence. However, you can achieve dramatic results if you deal with the underlying problem that brings the person to court.

Last year the court piloted a drug court with three tribal participants. Approximately six months later, all three participants are successful. One of the three is successful for both himself and his family because the underlying issue of alcoholism was identified and addressed. Now, an acrimonious child custody dispute was resolved by agreement because both parents – clean and sober for six months – are getting the counseling they need. They now understand that their children's well-being is more important than their personal dispute. Driving issues are being resolved so there are fewer civil infractions from the participant. Subsequent criminal offenses are not being committed. The children are getting much needed counseling and treatment. Last, but certainly not least, the participant faces the many challenges of being sober with a smile and an offer of help to other program participants. The result only occurs because the system is both therapeutic and holistic—the keys to successful implementation of indigenous justice.

Two years ago the court piloted a program for juvenile delinquents that matched youth with a

 $<sup>1\,</sup>$  Comparison of Indigenous, Therapeutic, and Western Justice Systems: Traditional Indigenous Justice is mirrored in the modern Therapeutic Justice Movement.

Indigenous Justice System	American-Western Justice System	Therapeutic Justice System
<ul> <li>Judge as Problem-Solver</li> </ul>	Judge as Decision maker	Judge as Coach
Holistic	Legal Outcome	Therapeutic Outcome
<ul> <li>Builds trust for healing</li> </ul>	Adversarial	• Collaborative
• Law and Justice are part of the whole	Individualistic	Interdependent
<ul> <li>Inclusive of all affected individuals in the process and solving problems</li> </ul>	• Limits participation and is rights based	• Collaborative and interest or needs based
No time limits – effective	• Time-oriented – efficient	• Effective
<ul> <li>Customary sanctions to restore relationships</li> </ul>	• Punitive and backward looking	Forward Looking
<ul> <li>Customary law learned as a way of life</li> </ul>	Written law – claim oriented	People oriented
<ul> <li>Informal – communication is fluid</li> </ul>	• Formal – communication is rehearsed	• Informal
• Comprehensive Problem Solving	Dispute Resolution	Problem Solving

This chart is an adaptation and comparison to similar charts published in "Therapeutic Jurisprudence and the Emergence of Problem-Solving Courts" by David Rottman and Pamela Casey, *National Institute of Justice Journal*, July 1999 and "Indigenous justice systems and tribal society" by Ada Pecos Melton, *Judicature*, November-December 1995

community panel composed of elders in the community. Every first time juvenile offender was required to meet with their elders as part of their diversion contract. The juveniles were also required to be busy. Some youth went to Native Pow Wow's, some to totem carving classes, some to kick-boxing, some to canoe racing, and some to play organized sports. The results were astounding. Involving the court, the elders, and the Community with delinquent children and keeping those children involved in the community and activities outside the community resulted in 82% of the children having no repeat court contact after one year.

These kinds of therapeutic programs work well at Lummi because the underlying court process reflects the indigenous values of the people they serve. The court is becoming responsive to the clients and the community it serves by providing long-term solutions to ongoing problems. The court encourages individual healing and incorporates community values for its other clients, including civil cases involving child

custody matters. It is not uncommon for family elders to appear at a child custody hearing and share their vision of what is in the best interest of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The court may provide a forum for two estranged spouses to sit and resolve the hurt and pain that brings them to court so that everyone, including the court, can see clearly what is in the best interest of the child. The Community Panel meets and greets the children who come before them by letting the child know their family history and that they are important members of the tribal community. Maybe just as important, they let the child know that the community is watching and the community can and will help them.

The approach of Lummi Tribal Court is to use whatever system works — western style justice or indigenous justice. However, the court recognizes that it must be accessible to the population it serves. Equally important, it must reflect the values of the community it serves. With the combination of programs and approaches the Lummi Tribal Healing to Wellness Court is committed to promoting and encouraging the people of the Lummi Community to live healthy and productive lives "for the future of our children in the ways of our ancestors."

#### Differences of Violence Against Women Act within Indian Country Associate Judge Lorintha Warwick

Associate Judge Lorintha Warwick Puyallup Tribal Court

In Indian Country there is significant violence against Indian women. The Department of Justice's most current statistics on criminal offenses reveal that Indian women are victims at 98 per 1,000 compared to 40 per 1,000 for Caucasian women while black women are victims at 56 per 1,000. Additionally Indian men and women are intimate victims of a perpetrator of a different race at a 75% rate and the Indian families are victims at 25%. (Department of Justice statistics 1992-1996).

On some Indian Reservations Indian women clients underutilize advocates because they lack phone access and also because cultural differences discourage participation.

Some problems are that not all Indian Tribes have enacted Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) laws, the domestic violence advocate may be hampered in her advocacy and an advocate may have to file a notice of appearance to represent the victim of domestic violence.

Jurisdictional questions may arise when a domestic violence dispute involves at least one non-Indian. A case in point: a married couple, the woman is Native American and her husband is not, resides on a reservation on her individual allotted land. A domestic violence incident occurs and the tribal police arrive. The tribal police cannot arrest the non-native. The U.S. Supreme Court, in Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe, 435 U.S. 191, 98 S.Ct. 1011 (1978), ruled that tribes lack criminal jurisdiction over non-natives. In most, if not all tribal domestic violence cases, assault or battery is an element of the case. It may be left to either the state or federal prosecutor to file charges.

A major difference in VAWA cases flow involves the police and courts. In the Washington State system, when a temporary order of protection or order of protection is entered it is entered by the Superior court clerk and enforced by all law enforcement. Conversely, on an Indian reservation the tribal police are prohibited from entering a temporary order of protection or order of protection on the Washington State ACCESS computer data system by a ruling of the Attorney General of Washington State, citing liability concerns. It is of interest that the State of Oregon grants access to their state computer to their Indian tribes and offer full access without caveats.

The denial of access to the electronic filing of tribal orders of protection does not entirely strike a blow to tribal orders of protection; however, often times mainstream law enforcement do not consider tribal court orders valid or existing if it is not entered on the AC-CESS. Full faith and credit can be and is afforded to tribal court orders when the tribal court orders meet review standards as to legality and legitimacy if the tribal court has jurisdiction over the parties and matter under the law of the tribe and when notice is provided to the other party and his/her due process rights are protected (United States Code section 2265 (b)). Application of the full faith and credit by mainstream law enforcement appears to be uneven as reported by conference attendees of the North West Tribal Court Judges Conferences on full faith and credit currently underway.

Promising Practices of VAWA in Indian Country and Washington State

1. Snohomish County Agreement with Tulalip and Stillaguamish Tribes. This protection agreement of the Snohomish courts and the Tulalip and Stillaguamish Tribes is a model agreement, which all other tribes and jurisdictions can look to as a viable model to ensure protection of Indian women and their families outside tribal jurisdiction. This model could offer protection to Indian women on reservation especially those who live

on trust land. The non-Indian perpetrator could be turned over to mainstream law enforcement who would check the ACCESS computer and find the non-Indian violator in violation of a protection order if the non-Indian is on trust land.

- 2. A working relationship between the Yakama Tribe and Yakima County is being developed. The Yakima County has begun dialogue with the Yakama Tribal Courts on orders of protection. This is the first opportunity afforded both jurisdictions and it appears to be an opportunity seized by both parties. The North West Judges Association provided a meeting opportunity to both parties in June and communication was established.
- 3. State wide conference on full faith and credit hosted by North West Tribal Court Judges. This fall Indian tribes and state courts will again have an opportunity to continue building working relationships and negotiating or finalizing agreements on foreign orders of protection.

Please contact Elizabeth Fry, Executive Director of Northwest Tribal Court Judges Association (efry@televar.com), for details of the statewide conference as barriers and promising practices on orders of protection within Indian Country will be shared at this state conference.

The National Tribal Judicial Center
Associate Justice Mitch Wright
Inter-Tribal Court of Appeals, Nevada

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Unlike any other identifiable ethnic group, Native Americans have their own body of federal law dedicated to the recognition of their status as separate sovereigns within the four corners of the United States. While seemingly contradictory in our system of justice, which strives for the homogeneity of all people before the law, 25 U.S.C., and the other legal codifications of "Indian Law" not only acknowledge the uniqueness of tribes, but also codify the human rights inherent to the indigenous people of America from its inception. While a full discussion of why the law should protect Indian autonomy and why the Indian population of the United States should not be forced to assimilate into the mainstream economic, political and social structure and abandon their own cultural traditions and customs exceeds the scope of this writing, the fact remains that for nearly four centuries the laws of discovery and conquest in our America have recognized the protections afforded to indigenous peoples everywhere around the globe.

In response to the ever-increasing need for true justice for all people, The National Tribal Judicial Center was created at The National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. The National Tribal Judicial Center maintains seven courses for tribal court judges, which focus on educating tribal state and federal court judges in cross-jurisdictional issues and skills development to affect a well-considered approach to multicultural justice between sovereigns. The United States Supreme Court visit by Justices Sandra Day O'Conner and Stephen Breyer in July 2001 and their participation in a course for tribal appellate justices was a continuing step in the process of meaningful cross-jurisdictional communication and education.

Many of the courses offered by the NTJC were designed with the input of organizations with expertise in the tribal judicial field. Among those organizations that have contributed to the curriculum are The National American Indian Court Judges Association, The National Association of Tribal Court Personnel and The National Indian Gaming Commission. The seven courses offered by NTJC address the often-unique needs of tribal judiciaries. As listed below they run in scope from the basics of tribal court development to the complicated area of legal reasoning and writing.

- Essential Skills for Tribal Court Judges
- Court Management for Judges and Court Administrators
- Logic and Opinion Writing for Tribal Court Judges
- Essential Skills for Tribal Appellate Court Judges
- Court Development for Alaska Tribal Courts
- Essential Skills for Alaska Tribal Court Judges
- Essential Skills for Tribal Gaming Commissioners

Because of these focused course offerings, The National Tribal Judicial Center is truly a contribution to justice not just in Indian Country, but in integrating justice systems everywhere tribes co-exist with other jurisdictions.

#### Jack Fiander

Jack Fiander was the first Yakama tribal member to become an attorney and one of four Native American lawyers in the state of Washington in 1982.

PROFILE

While attending the University of Washington for his undergraduate studies, Mr. Fiander found enjoyment in learning and was drawn to the law by John and Walter Echoheart, brothers who practiced traditional Indian ways. Mr. Fiander received his juris doctorate from the University of Washington School of Law.

Mr. Fiander views the practice of law as a form of community service and as a form of religion. He established his private practice as two separate legal entities: Sacred Ground Legal Services, a non profit organization which assists tribal members with group issues, and Towtnuk, a private practice. The reward of having done a job well and knowing he has helped persons through a difficult time is Jack's greatest reward.

Mr. Fiander practices in all courts, at times representing tribal members with issues affecting hunting and fishing rights and other times assisting someone with an individual issue. Mr. Fiander has also served as a tribal council member and has been a major proponent of eliminating the sale of liquor within the borders of the reservation.

**Betty Nason** 

Ms. Betty Nason, one of 10 children, was raised by her grandparents, Edwin and Frances Smiscon, on the Yakama Indian Reservation until their passing while Ms. Nason was still in high school. With the aid of her high school counselor and teacher, she was able to graduate from White Swan high school during her difficult period, financially and emotionally.

PROFILE

Ms. Nason's interest in the law began when she trained for certification as a paralegal and then worked in a public defenders office. Although tribal members could practice before the tribal courts without being a licensed attorney, Ms. Nason wanted to bridge the gap between tribal courts and the state courts by becoming a state licensed practitioner.

While Ms. Nason was getting her bachelors degree from Heritage College, a private, newly incorporated institution, which stressed education for the underrepresented population in a county with high poverty rates, and a law degree from Gonzaga, Ms. Nason was raising her four children.

After law school, Ms. Nason worked for the Colville Tribe where she remained until Jack Fiander convinced her to return to the Yakama Nation to work as one of the attorneys in the newly created tribal legal counsel office. Over the years, Ms. Nason founded a mock trial program in elementary schools of the cities of Harrah, White Swan, and Wapato.

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#### U.S. Supreme Court Justices Visit Chief Judge Mary L. Pearson Spokane Tribal Court

On July 18 and 19, 2001, in a historic and unprecedented event, United States Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Stephen Breyer visited the Spokane Tribal Court as part of the First Annual Cross-cultural Exchange of Judicial ideas.

The Spokane Tribal Court's intent was to expose Supreme Court Justices to a traditional form of dispute settlement, Talking Circle. However, neither judge was comfortable with conducting it with media coverage. So, we opted for a "peek" into our Strong Heart Youth (Drug) Court. Grant monies had allowed the Tribe to hire a probation officer and a treatment provider for an adult and youth drug courts. In two years of operation we have graduated fifteen people from the adult program and discharged four. The recidivism rate at the time of the Justices' visit was zero. We now have an 80% success rate. The Strong Heart Youth Drug Court was initiated March 1, 2001 and has 12 clients.

Working with the youth and their families is extremely rewarding and we are finding that the treatment modality that includes all of the services necessary for a successful treatment probation, including a therapeutic court, to be very successful. The justices were allowed to watch the Strong Heart Team staff one case and review the entire group of clients and their parents. At the end of the demonstration, which was an actual court scene, they were taken next door to Judge Pascal who explained the Talking Circle and how it is used to resolve disputes that do not demand criminal action.

We think that the justices learned that tribal courts are viable and effective, that tribes are capable of managing their own affairs, and, in fact, are better able to manage their affairs than either the state or federal government. We know that getting to know us as human beings with families, hope, and dreams like the rest of America helps to set aside those misunderstandings that have existed in the past. We don't expect major changes, but hope that the dialogue continues to foster greater understanding among jurists.

#### RESOURCES

The term "Indians" or "Native Americans" refers to Eskimos, Aleuets and North Americans who inhabited North America before the arrival of Europeans. An Indian tribe is comprised of Indians of the same or similar race united in a community under one leadership or government. The term "tribe" is sometimes used interchangeably with "nation" or "sub-tribe." The term may vary from statute to statute.

Federal law recognizes sovereign authority in Indian Tribes to govern themselves. This is an authority which in some respects is greater than that of the states. Indian tribes are subordinate and dependent nations protected by the doctrine of sovereign immunity. Numerous federal statutes address Indian rights and governance such as the Indian Reorganization Act and the Indian Civil Rights Act (also known as the Indian Bill of Rights). 28 United States Code section 1360 also deals with state civil actions in which Indians are a party.

Federal laws addressing Indians include: United States Constitution Article I and the Fourteenth Amendment; 25 U.S.C. - Indians; 28 U.S.C. Section 1362 - Federal Court Jurisdiction over Civil

Actions brought by Indians: 18 U.S.C. Section 1152 - Tribal Court Jurisdiction; 42 U.S.C. Chapter 22

- Indian Hospitals and Health facilities; 25 C.F.R. - Indians

Resources regarding Indians (non exhaustive):

- Code Talk, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (http:// www.codetalk.fed.us/CodeTalk.html)
- Indian Health Service, United States Department of Health and Human Services (http://www.ihs.gov)
- Bureau of Indian Affairs, United States Department of the Interior (http://www.doi.gov/bureaus.html)
- Office of Native American Programs, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (http://www.codetalk.fed.us/HUD\_ONAP.html)
- Native American Law Center, University of Washington School of Law (http://www.law.washington.edu/IndianLaw/)
- Governor's Office Of Indian Affairs, Washington State (http://www.goia.wa.gov/)
- National Tribal Justice Resource Center (http:// www.tribalresourcecenter.org/)
- Native Web News Digest (http:// nativelaw.nativeweb.org/newsdigest/)
- Tribal Court Clearinghouse The Tribal Law & Policy Institute (http://www.tribal-institute.org/)
- Native American Rights Fund (http:// www.narf.org/)

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