



## Obituary

**Died:** Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Some thoughts about Alan "Chauncey" Beaverhead

For all of his life, Alan "Chauncey" Beaverhead stood at the heart of tribal culture and tribal life on the Flathead Reservation. Raised with his brother Gene by their great-grandparents, Pete and Josephine Beaverhead, they were the most recent children to be raised to complete fluency in the Salish language. They were steeped in the culture and community of the Ql'ispé? (upper Kalispel or Pend d'Oreille) people who for thousands of years have been the guardians and caretakers of the Mission Mountains, Mission Valley, Flathead Lake and surrounding areas. For centuries, they have been centered around Snyel'mn Mq'??moq'??s (Place-Where-You-Surround-Something Mountains — Mission Range). Many Ql'ispé? families have been based in the area from the branches of Nm?la? Sew?lk'??s (Raven's Waters — Crow Creek) to K'??nc?me?p (Waters of the Narrow Opening — Post Creek), where the Beaverhead home was located, and where Chauncey resided until his passing.

## Service Summary

- Service details not available -

As Lucy Vanderburg recently remembered, Pete was so proud of his great-grandsons, and related how he gave them names rooted in their powerful cultural and spiritual community: Pete named Gene Ipi?q Sq?ey?mi? (White Eagle), and he named Alan "Chauncey" Il'mx'??sq?ey?mi? (Chief Eagle). When Pete died in 1975, Chauncey was 13 years old, and Gene was 12.

True to his name, Chauncey was in many respects like a person from long ago in his cultural knowledge, his perspective on life, and in his presence, even though he was also very engaged and informed about contemporary issues, politics, culture, technology — and humor. Few things were funnier than Chauncey cracking a joke about white supremacy (despite its deadly serious nature) or looking up at someone and dryly remarking, "Thank you, Captain Obvious." Chauncey also told hilarious (and hair-raising) stories of his crazier younger days, of coming-to in unexpected places and even of cars catching on fire. We were all grateful that he survived those many escapades.

In 1981, Chauncey was first hired to work at the Se?lis?-Ql?ispe? Culture Committee (then called the Flathead Culture Committee) by Clarence Woodcock. He later left the Culture Committee, but then was hired back in 1993 as a cultural aide, and continued working for the Committee until his passing. He served in many capacities: translator, data entry technician, interviewer, cultural site monitor, coordinator of work under the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), gatherer of traditional foods and medicines, instructor in cultural arts, and the many other duties that are called for in working for the Committee. He helped the Committee sort through issues, often drawing upon his deep well of cultural knowledge to bring to the discussion a forgotten and important piece of cultural information, or simply a perspective on the issue that others had not considered.

But beyond those tasks, Chauncey on his own practiced the cultural ways that have been handed down for countless generations and centuries. He loved to go into the mountains in the summertime to gather berries and all the other traditional plants, and kept the Committee apprised of how far along different plants were and whether they were ready for harvest or how abundant they were in a given year. He cared deeply about the lands and waters, the plants and animals, and advocated in his own way for their protection for the generations yet to come. Chauncey loved stickgame, as well as more modern forms of gambling, and traveled often to tournaments and casinos.

Down to his bones, Chauncey held the old cultural ethic of people helping each other when they are able to do so. He always responded when tribal people asked him to come into the big room at the Longhouse during a wake or funeral and help with prayers and hymns. In his later years, he often served as a prayer leader, a steady, frequent presence at wakes, funerals, and memorials not only among the Ql?ispe? and Salish people, but also in the Kootenai community, where he had many friends and relations, and in other communities, including the Kalispel and the Yakama (Chauncey's father was Yakama). If Chauncey had any money to spare, he was quick to lend a few dollars to someone in need. He would give a ride to whoever asked. He lived uncompromisingly by tribalism and tribal culture, and sometimes viewed with a fierce and critical eye those who reduced those things to token symbolism or superficiality, or did not abide by some of the old cultural laws.

Perhaps our most lasting memory of Chauncey is of him

sitting in his office, dimly lit only by the light coming through the window, surrounded by stacks of old Char-Koosta newspapers, the walls and windowsill adorned by a few of his favorite images or dried plants, and the cassette tape-deck on his desk playing one of the old recordings of his great-grandfather — Pete Beaverhead, speaking in the Salish language, telling stories that only Chauncey and a few others today could understand at the deepest levels. But Chauncey's long continuous presence at the Longhouse served the cause to which he dedicated his life: respect for Se?lis?-Ql?ispe? culture and language, and its continuance and revitalization for the generations to come.