

A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE

TWO spirits, two STORIES

Traditionally, the third gender found in many North American indigenous groups played important roles in their communities. Below are two accounts from key members in the Two Spirit community.

RANDY BURNS

I was born in Reno, Nevada in 1955 to full blood Northern Paiute parents. In high school I was selected to spend the summer at the University of Nevada in a program for low-income students. Eventually I transferred to San Francisco State University.

Before moving to the Bay Area, I had never seen so many queer Native Americans in one place. I felt safe here. And in 1975 I co-founded Gay American Indians (GAI). GAI provided an environment for queer Native Americans to socialize and share our rich history.

As I look back on my life,

I realize we must truly embrace and celebrate cultural diversity. Sharing our knowledge with the younger generation helps them pick up that tribal warrior shield and move our community forward.

Randy T. Burns

Co-founder of Gay American Indians

RUTH VILLASENOR

Being Chiricahua Apache and Mexican and identifying as Two Spirit, self-acceptance has been a long journey, one that included not only coming out of the closet but also reclaiming a culture. Growing up in the 70's, people either romanticized or stereotyped Native Americans. It was also hard to fit in the categories of gay or straight. But 12 years ago, all that changed. Learning that many Native American Tribes before colonization accepted multiple genders gave me my first taste of Pride. I became involved with the Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits and helped my community remember our history.

My partner of 12 years and I are one of the 18,000 legally married same-sex couples in California. Others were not so lucky. Reacting to Prop. 8, I became the Native American Outreach Director for Marriage Equality USA and produced a documentary.

"Traditional Indigenous Values" reflects on the historical acceptance of two spirit people, the effects of colonization, and Prop. 8. The screening debut will take place on June 12 at the Brava Theater in San Francisco.

Ruth Villaseñor

Documentary Film Producer



Ruth Villaseñor and Diane Pfile.