

# Grand Entry: from First Runner Up Chezney Martin

By Chezney Martin

We've all heard at least one story from the Gathering of Nations Powwow; be it from a friend or a family member. It could have been murmured around the dinner table, told from the front seat to the back seat of a car, or even posted on Facebook. And the one thing majority of those stories share is that they never forget to mention how big the powwow is.

So the story I'm going to tell you is about the intensity. But, I'm not talking about the intensity of the competition, or the heat; I'm talking about the emotional intensity.

I was one contestant in a group of 24 intelligent, well-educated and beautiful young women whose hearts were beating for their people. We were given a behind-the-scenes tour of a pageant that many only see the best of, and we were given ample opportunity to take part in grand entry.

Now, no matter how much preparing you do; if you're a first time Gathering of Nations visitor like I was, there is nothing going to stop you from getting caught up in the intensity of grand entry.

You might think "Oh yeah sure, just a bunch of powwow dancers going around in a circle, big deal," but something else goes on in that arena that I've never experienced before.

I am not a powwow dancer and I don't really think Haudenosaunee people have ever been very powwow beyond Smoke Dance; so all I was worried about was smiling and waving like the Madagascar penguins.

But, I was in line behind and in front of my sisters, standing beside elders and surround-



Six Nations Chezney Martin represented at this years Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque New Mexico. Chezney is also a local reporter for the Two Row Times. SUBMITTED PHOTO

ed by people dressed in either dance regalia or traditional regalia. As I looked at them, there was a moment of clarity and then the emotional intensity hit me. When we started walking to the centre of the arena, as dancers from all four directions entered with us, I was trying not to cry.

It wasn't that I was scared or nervous, it was the fact that I realized how important what I was doing was for my people. How important all of us as Miss Indian World Contestants are to our respective nations, tribes and communities. How important it is that we maintain and endure the responsibility that we have to ourselves as indigenous women and to the future for our children.

I bit my tongue the entire time I smiled and waved and when we got to the centre — as more than 2,500 dancers danced with us — I blinked as much as I could to get rid of the tears clouding my vision. Put simply, being a part of grand entry felt like an epiphany and a beautiful sense of purpose at the same time.

And while I was there, some-

one asked me what kind of advice I would want to give a young lady that wants to run for this pageant. I sighed because even though I really hate that my answer is so basic, it's true. I said "be yourself."

Throughout the pageant I stood in front of judges, in front of hundreds of people, in front of my family, and in spite of my heart pounding I said what came freely. And what came freely was always authentic and genuine because I was myself. I may have lost by six points, but I don't need a crown to tell you that being who you are is key.

When you are in front of 3,000 people you feel stripped bare, you feel exposed, you feel like your brain has fled and your body has been left to stand dumbfounded; but break through that with the knowledge that you have a purpose. You are there to represent your people and you are there to shine. So, since you already feel exposed, expose them to the real you.

And heck, I'll tell you right now that what they'll see in the real you, they will like.