

The summer of '76 and I was a hippie wannabee staying at a Christian commune outside Kenora. A friend, Hans, who spent the previous summer in Bloodvein River, a northern Manitoba Ojibway community, arrived for the weekend and said there was a Pow Wow on in town so we went. The MC started with a joke about three elders in a canoe. Waves were up and they were scared. First one says, we should pray. Second, I am not sure how. Third says, I've been to church repeat after me, "Under the B, 5...".

As we stood next to a tier of semi-empty bleachers watching a display of ceremonial dancing a young, maybe 3 or 4 year old, aboriginal boy snuck along a row toward us. I saw him, gave a furtive glance, then pretended to ignore him. As he got close, he ran up and slid his hand along the underside of my chin to feel my somewhat burgeoning beard. I turned to him and he bolted back to his parents. We all laughed. I asked Hans what the deal was. He said facial hair wasn't that common on the reserve. I looked over at the family and they were still smiling.