

Women of Drummer

Hopin in the New Year Virtual Event Keynote

Not An Employee Anymore

January 7, 2024

Greetings and Happy New Year Women of Drummer! I am so excited to be here today with all of you and grateful to Toni and the crew for creating this event to welcome us into 2024 together. As most of us can't get to all of the regional events, I really appreciate this virtual space for us to gather. I am coming to you from the ranch with Ms Jay and Mel off camera to my right and so excited to see all of your beautiful faces.

It is important for me to begin with a land acknowledgment, to name and contextualize the longstanding history that brought me to reside on this beloved land, as a gesture of respect and reparation toward the Indigenous residents of the colonized land that I now call home.

I am speaking to you from the land of the Miwok and Nisenen people on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, about halfway between what is known today as Sacramento and South Lake Tahoe, California. I acknowledge the profound suffering caused by the theft and colonization of this land, and grieve

the ongoing systematic harm to all of the Indigenous cultures of what we now call North America.

I honor Indigenous people as the ancestral stewards of the land, though they have been rendered nearly invisible and their story continues to be excluded from history. Their land was never ceded, and the original tribal families have yet to recover from the near genocide of their people.

As an occupant of this land, I support all indigenous campaigns to restore tribal sovereignty through federal recognition, so that all indigenous people may thrive in their ancestral homelands. I am grateful for the contemporary communities of Indigenous people, who work to protect the ecosystem of their ancient homes, and care for their tribal members and the preservation of their cultures.

Land Acknowledgements are often seen as performative, and if you only say the words, that's exactly what they are. Doing the work means taking action. Please take the time to learn more about the indigenous people whose land you reside on. There is a website where you can begin by looking up your location: native-land.ca. Other action items can be to invite and compensate Indigenous leaders in the leather community to offer land acknowledgements at your events, or to share your resources to create space on your stages to welcome Indigenous Leather and other marginalized groups to support their visibility and raise their voices. However it may speak to you, please don't just say the words, let's do the work.

I have to start with a little story about my dear brother Toni. We have such similar backgrounds and truly consider each other leather brothers and I am so thankful to share this bond. However, we don't exactly match in all ways.

As most of you know, I get things in my life done early. I run a tight schedule and am very organized and typically take a few months to think about, write, re-write, and complete a keynote speech.

I got the following message on Facebook the evening of December 21st from Toni:

Dear Sir,

(I knew right away I was in trouble. Toni never calls me Sir)

Would you like to do a 15-20 minute keynote for the Hopin in the New Year event?

My brother, I hear your response already.... could you get any closer to the date to ask this?

It's informal, from the heart.... new year, renewal, what WoD means to you.... you could do this in your sleep!

Thank you for your consideration...
your appreciative leather sibling.

If you are keeping up with the math, that was 17 days ago.

What was most funny about that message was that as I read the very first sentence, my mind immediately thought about the gifts in the dining room not yet wrapped, the banquet orders I am trying to get done for south plains before the holiday, the Italian menu yet to be decided, the first set of grandkids arriving in 2 days, the second set arriving a week after that, and Ms Jay arriving 2 days after that. All that and 17 days to write a keynote!

Then I said yes

...and I had a good laugh about Toni predicting exactly how I would react.

So, rather than write a formal keynote on some heavy inspirational topic (you can go to my website for those) I am going to do just what Toni suggested. Welcome all of us together in community into 2024 leading with my heart and speaking to you about why I love Women of Drummer so much!

I am not one to make New Year's resolutions. In my Japanese martial arts practice, it is said that what you do on New Year's Day sets the tone for the rest of the year ahead. For many years, Mel and I used to go to our dojo in New York and train together on New Year's Day to begin our year with our devotion to martial arts. Now, after so many years of teaching and training, we tend to quietly enjoy each other and go for a walk in the mountains with our dogs. The same idea is achieved. Starting our year with the earth beneath our feet, the smell of the pine trees and the mountains in each breath we take, the silence of the forest, the feel

of our hands in each other's grasp and the peacefulness our walk is a lovely way to begin our year together and set the tone for the coming days.

This year happened to be a bit different. We babysat our 2-year-old and 5-year-old grandchildren! It was early to bed, which was no big deal because we always celebrate New York - New Years anyway, and it was filled with joy, love and a quite a bit of chaos.

Rather than focus on short term life changes like New Year's resolutions, I try spend my year reflecting daily on what I like about my life and what I might want to change. For me, this is a process - a way of living, not a quick fix. In doing this work, I came to a realization a while back that will lead to me telling you about why I love being a part of the Women of Drummer movement.

Several years ago, I felt like I was an employee of the leather community. It was around the time I was in title as International slave 2016 and also halfway through our title year, when started producing Northwest Leather Celebration. Between the title year travel and starting to produce a new event, I worked and worked and worked but I was not having a lot of fun. I felt like I was an employee not an active member of the leather community. I was behind the counter cooking and serving the french fries but never getting to enjoy the hot greasy deliciousness on my fingers.

I remembered back when I was producing International Ms Leather, International Ms Bootblack weekend, that I was given a bucket of lube at the staff meeting as

an award because I was the only one that had already fucked before we even had our first onsite meeting. I wondered, what happened to this person!!??

I thought a lot about this and decided that it was not what I wanted. I missed the raunchy dirty leather dyke that I once was and I needed to come out and play again.

I don't think I am unique in this. I see many leaders in our community who like me have been doing this for 20, 30, or more years who aren't as active anymore. Who show up to teach or give a speech but have lost the hunger for what originally brought them to leather.

So, I made a promise to myself that while I enjoy being a leader in the leather community, I thrive on presenting classes, giving speeches and producing community space – I would not be JUST that. I would be an active participant again, play again, fuck again, and dust off that filthy hungry leatherdyke that I once was.

And so, I have.

Fast forward to Women of Drummer 2021. Toni and I have been friends for many years, but for whatever reason, I don't know why, I missed the memo to get my ass to Women of Drummer, until that year. I was healing from the most difficult and profoundly painful time of my life when I came to Women of Drummer that September and it was transformational for me.

We hear that word a lot. Transformational.

I looked it up in the dictionary and found that transformational means: a complete change in somebody or something, especially a positive change. For me, it certainly was that.

Transformative: able to cause change

Women of Drummer is a group that is able and does cause positive change in the leather community. More than an event, it truly is a movement. It opened space for me to feel free, it helped me to heal, to be open, to feel like I was among my people. I have not experienced the feeling I have at Women of Drummer at any other event I've attended, and I've been to a few.

But before I talk about my experience at Women of Drummer 2021, I have to start with the day before. I had been speaking with Ms Jay for a number of months prior and the flirting was intense. She and her partner Lu invited me to visit them in a cabin near Ramblewood the day before Women of Drummer.

I said yes.

As I was driving to this cabin in I-don't-know-where Pennsylvania, enjoying the beautiful rural scenery and passing post-harvest withering corn field after corn field, after corn field I thought to myself "this is either going to be a porn flick or a horror movie." When I arrived and met them both for the first time, there was an

immediate connection. I cooked us all a beautiful Italian dinner and we fucked all night. I assure you, it was a porn flick.

The next morning, I dragged my weary ass, coffee in hand, out the door early and back to the airport an hour away because I had committed to pick people up prior to the porn flick invite, so back to BWI I went. I was tired, excited, and quite happy as I laughed at myself pulling an all nighter like I was 29, not 59.

When I first arrived at Women of Drummer, I loved the feeling of heart and what seemed like a casual gathering of deeply connected people. I immediately jumped on a golf cart and helped out even though I wasn't volunteering. It just felt like the thing to do in the environment and that is part of the magic, I think. I truly enjoyed myself loading luggage and driving people to their cabins.

There was something else. When I looked around, I felt like I was with my people. I didn't even know some of them, but I knew they were my people. The warmth of the energy was palpable. I felt so welcome and so at home just being me. It felt like an unspoken word that people just let me play, fuck, eat, watch, hang out, and not work. Nobody asked me about South Plains. I felt like just another leatherdyke having a great time and not an event producer – not a leather community employee.

The magic continued at the opening ceremonies as I watched Ms Jay and Judy Tallwing offer an Indigenous ceremony around the fire welcoming all of us to the land and to the community space that we would share for the coming days.

The food was great, the cabins eh, not what we are there for, the entertainment in a barn was incredible, the discussions inspiring, and my favorite part - drinking coffee on the front porch of the big house in the morning with Toni, Fidget, Wish, and Annie while listening to the masturbation circle.

And then... last September, it happened again. I felt all the same greatness I had experienced in 2021. I had hoped the first year was not like new relationship energy and it would still be there in year two, and it was.

During the weekend, Toni needed somebody to fill in for the fire circle story time and asked Nyna Kaiser and me to do it. Though we know of each other for decades we did not know each other well but of course we jumped in, in response to the ask. This was yet another example of the Women of Drummer magic. We sat with each other, supported each other, and told stories together as if we had been best friends for years. By the end of the evening, I felt a connection to Nyna that opened because of Women of Drummer, because of the energy we all bring and because of the connections formed in that circle of stories.

Women of Drummer is absolutely more than an event. It is a movement that creates change in our community to be our authentic selves, to be raunchy when we want to, to be sexy when we want to, to sit on a bench at beautiful Ramblewood and share conversation with each other, or to suddenly be as competitive as I was when I was played Division I sports in college to find more silly little painted rocks scattered throughout the camp than anyone else!

Thank you from my heart to Toni, Fidget and all of you that created Women of Drummer and brought us into your vision, your event, and your movement.

OUR MOVEMENT.

I so happy to be here with all of you today. Thank you for listening to my thoughts and I can't wait to be with you again in person at the regionals and of course at Ramblewood next September.

I wish all of us a 2024 filled with love, joy, patience, compassion, solidarity and if you are into it...lots of great sex!

Thank you.