



GREAT SPIRIT

www.greatspiritpdx.com

Great Spirit Newsletter February-March 2026

Issue 41

Knowing your Great Spirit Community – Shanti Cain

By Maryl Smith

Trigger warning to our readers: This story is both faith-filled and raw. It contains references to violence, and to spiritual, emotional, and sexual trauma, and may elicit strong emotions. Please hold yourself in kindness as you read. Pause to self-care or reach out to others if your soul is hurting.

Sitting around the big drum, on most Thursday nights and Sunday Mornings, you will see a fiery lady sporting long braids, and sometimes dragging two young boys in tow. This is Shanti Cain, and if you haven't had a chance to speak with her, you are missing out on her joyful enthusiasm and authenticity. To hear Shanti's story is to marvel at how Creator can walk with us through the most broken and traumatizing pieces of our life, while teaching us how to make a beautiful mosaic art piece out of it.

Shanti is Cherokee and Blackfoot descent on her maternal side. Her father was an East Indian immigrant who came here as a young boy with his mother, when she fled her violent, alcoholic husband who had tried to traffick her. When her dad

was thirty-five, he attended Bible College, where he met and married Shanti's 19-year-old mother. As their family grew, it rapidly became apparent that he had not healed from his own trauma. Increasingly, he began to echo his father's dysfunctions, only this time the alcoholism, control, and violence came wrapped in a pseudo-Christian cloak. Now a preacher, her father ruled with absolute authority over what Shanti describes as "a small, isolated, and high control church-cult".

Shanti was born in Tennessee, the first of three children. Throughout many of her growing up years the family was homeless. They moved from place to place every time her dad lost another job because of his drinking and aggression. Every time they had to move, he would rationalize it by saying that he felt God was calling them to minister somewhere else. Some members of his small congregation moved about the country with them, (continued on page 4)

WORSHIP WITH US

Worship services are held each Sunday at 11:00 am at 3917 NE Shaver ST 97212. Masks are optional. Worship includes smudging, drumming, and Native American prayer.

Services can be viewed on Facebook or on our website

www.greatspiritpdx.com

There is a prayer request form on the front page of the website.

BEAUMONT-WILSHIRE NEIGHBORHOOD STYROFOAM & ELECTRONICS RECYCLING EVENT

At Great Spirit United Methodist Church parking lot at Cesar E. Chavez Blvd and Shaver Street
February 21st from 10am – 1pm.

Bring your Styrofoam, old batteries, and



Opportunities for Connection

- Volunteers Needed for Sunday Potluck, Hospitality, Children and Youth Ministry
- Talking Circle, 7PN Monday evenings with Quacinda. Contact Jody for confirmation.
- Thursday nights – PDX Drum Fam and Beading with Tootsie 6-8pm (Join PDX Drum Fam facebook group {private} to confirm meeting.)
- Pi Nee Waus Elders meetings held on Tuesday 5-7PM. 4610 SE Belmont. Park on nearby streets.
- Portland American Indian Elders meeting at NAYA Elder's Room, first Sunday of the month at 1pm.
- NARA Northwest Elders Lunch meets Mondays at Noon-1:30pm at NARA NW RiverHouse, Clackamas River Rm
- Portland Indigenous Marketplace for schedule of events, see their website www.indigenoussmarketplace.org

electronics to this BWNA-sponsored recycling event.

Fees apply for some items to cover the cost of disposal:

- Styrofoam 45 gallon bags \$10. Less than 45 gallon bags are prorated. Includes Styrofoam #6, Styrofoam picnic/shipping coolers, sheets, clean take-out containers, packing peanuts, and XPS foam insulation.
- Batteries: Lithium batteries (free), small donation required for alkaline and car/motorcycle batteries.
- Electronics: all accepted (even broken holiday lights) (free)

Email Laurie.Webber2011@gmail.com ahead of the event with details about what you intend to drop off so we know how many trucks will be needed!

More information at <https://www.bwnapdx.org/>

MISSION

In December, 19 pounds of clothing were delivered to MainSpring. MainSpring distributes clothing and personal care items to people in need. They also accept non-perishable in-date food. Place your gently used clothing and personal care items in the bin at the entry to the Fellowship Hall.

BOTTLES AND CANS LADY (Helen Iles)

The grand total of bottles and cans turned in by Helen Iles in 2025 was \$4,340. Thanks to everyone that brought containers to church. This amount goes along way to keep the mission of Great Spirit UMC going. A portion of the funds go to our General Fund to help with expenses of heating, etc. and a portion is sent to the Conference to assist with projects like funding disaster recovery.

Helen will also pick up bottles and cans at your home or business. Give her a call at 503-252-0026.

TALKING CIRCLE WITH QUACINDA

Quacinda (Jodyne) Kolln would like to facilitate a traditional style Talking Circle. If you are interested in participating in a small group at the church, please get in touch with her at 707-815-6064 or qjt283@gmail.com. Jody usually has hot soup along with conversation planned for 7PM on Monday evenings at the church.

Happy Birthday!

FEBRUARY birthdays

- February 6 Nancy Shaughnessy
- February 8 Beverly Towner
- February 14 Janell Collier
- February 22 Bill Potts
- February 28 Mary Ann Wahwassuck

MARCH birthdays

- March 2 Margaret Alby
- March 3 Karrie Young
- March 5 Joaquin Tobar
- March 11 Susan Towner
- March 13 Robert Kolln
- March 16 Ed Edmo
- March 17 Linda Meanus
- March 22 Jay Cacka
- March 25 Marlow Little Boy

To add your name to the Birthday list, please let Helen Stewart know the important date. Anniversaries are important too!

FROM THE SINGLE BOARD

A New Year! 2026! Amazing how time flies! So much to do and fortunately the weather has been very pleasant. Maybe not so good if you are a skier, but...

In January, the Single Board Finance has to submit statistics to show the Conference what is happening at Great Spirit UMC. A Membership Report is also due to be submitted. All this helps to determine the future of Great Spirit UMC.

A Single Board meeting will be scheduled for February or March.

At the October 5th meeting the Single Board unanimously approved a "No Guns" Policy for Great Spirit UMC, or more broadly a "No Weapons" Policy. One sign has been posted but more are necessary to serve as a reminder that this is a place of worship and to ensure that the policy is followed.

The Board, along with Wisdom of the Elders and Mt. Hood Cherokees, met with Zachary Moser to discuss possible projects for his Eagle Scout Project. Zach listened to our suggestions, made some measurements, and will develop a plan.

Great Spirit UMC continues to schedule multiple groups each month for meetings and events. Check out the calendar posted at the main entrance. Also, check out the Opportunities for Connection listed below. Visit the website www.greatspiritpdx.com for Past Sunday Services, Make a Donation, Calendar events and Resources.

Submitted, Helen Stewart

HISTORIAN NEWS

Currently the year 2008 is being showcased on the Historian Table at the back of the Fellowship Hall on Sunday mornings. Construction of the Church Ramp is included in the pictures archived in 2008. Next month a different year will be on display. If you would like to view any previous year of celebration at Great Spirit UMC, place the date on a slip of paper and place it in the box on the table. Helen gathers souvenirs, pictures, and Sunday bulletins to archive into the scrapbooks.

SHANTI CAIN continued from page 1

(Continued from Page 1) creating an insular society whose primary purpose was facilitating the expectations of their leader. Shanti and her siblings were home-schooled, deeply indoctrinated, and their socialization with the surrounding world was tightly controlled. They lived in poverty, and were frequently subjected to her father's alcoholic binges and violent rages. The family quickly became skilled at hyper-vigilance and compliance to survive.

When Shanti was eleven, he simply kicked her mother out. At the time, there was another family in the church that lived with them. Two years later it was discovered that her father had groomed and abused their 14-year-old daughter the entire time. When his predatory behavior was exposed, the two families separated.

Shanti gave a striking illustration of the tension in their home. Once, when her dad was dangerous to be around, her grandmother gathered the children into the car and drove away, leaving their possessions behind so that it would take time for her son to realize they had fled. Shanti vividly recalls three days of sheer terror hiding in immigrant shacks. Every sound, every vehicle that drove by, jarred their nerves as they huddled silently inside, fearful of being found. Eventually, he did find them, and they were forced to return.

Despite an upbringing that deeply distorted the nature of God, Shanti had profound moments of spiritual clarity. She related a particular moment where she suddenly realized that the only thing real in all of the insanity was God. She never let go of that knowing.

During her last two years of High School, Shanti was permitted to enroll in public school. While there, she met other Christians who didn't think or live like her. Her mind began to open to the possibility that she could make different choices than the ones her dad compelled her to live. During the aftermath of 9/11, Shanti formulated a dream,



Shanti Cain

and it continued to grow inside her for years. She wanted to become a Marine, although she knew her father would forbid it. When he found out that she had signed up against his will, he kicked her out of the house.

She traveled to Paris Island, South Carolina to start boot camp, and it seemed her dream was finally coming true. She explains, "Marine Corps was culture shock! But I was already good with being told what to do, and I was being treated well at the same time! As kids we

were traumatized, but in boot camp I'm thinking, this is lovely! I get a hot shower and food every day! I could say 'please', 'thank you', and 'yes sir' all day with a genuine smile. But back in the barracks I watched other soldiers emotionally struggle. They were completely stressed out after being yelled at all day and being worked hard. I was already acclimated to those things." Shanti's sense of pride grew and she thrived. Being a Marine was her only plan, her one dream, and she was living it! Then, one tragic day, it all came crashing down. An ill-fitting piece of issued clothing chafed her, causing a recurrence of childhood eczema. She was shocked when she was called into the office and told she was being medically discharged. Her attempt to reason and beg couldn't change the rules; "Eczema is broken skin that could get infected in the field."

Suddenly, she was cast adrift! There was no plan B, and she couldn't go back to her dad's home. She called her mother, whom she really barely knew, and wasn't sure she could trust. She and her siblings had only been allowed visitation with their mom for one week out of the year. The rest of the year, her dad had successfully brainwashed them to estrange them from their mom; even going so far as saying that, when they were little, their mother

had attempted to kill them several times. Shanti wasn't sure her mom would welcome her.

But her mom didn't hesitate and immediately said, "Come home. Live with us and we will help you go to college." So, in 2007, Shanti came to Oregon to enroll in Mt. Hood Community College's OSU transfer program. She later went on to OSU to complete a Bachelor in Natural Resources and Wildlife Management and Conservation. During this season, Shanti's mom related to her with patience, kindness, and forgiveness. There was absolutely no hatred expressed towards anyone. Her mom was not at all what Shanti's dad had insinuated all those years. She came to see her mom as an incredibly loving person, and her step-dad quickly became the welcoming father she had never known. After trust had grown, Shanti began to hear the other side of the story. Her mother had never tried to kill her, she learned; it was actually her father who had angrily struck a butcher knife through the locked bathroom door, while her mother had huddled on the other side holding Shanti.

Shanti had not been allowed to date while growing up, so she had little experience with how to choose healthy people. Her first husband was nine years older, but he had a stable job and had served a round of duty in Iraq, which appealed to her love for military service. Unbeknownst to her, there was a lot that he was hiding, and she didn't find this out until much later. He had even spent time in jail, and he never told her.

He was struggling with PTSD after his stint in Iraq, and coupled with his growing possessiveness, their life gradually turned into a hellish repeat of her childhood trauma. He drank, and there were frightening explosions when he was angry. She had to continually be tested for STDs because of his choices, and the need for testing triggered old messages; "It's just like my dad said, I'm soiled and dirty." Meanwhile, he was growing more erratic and jealous over her friendships. He tried to isolate her, and the stress began to build. After thirteen years together they had two young sons, Lincoln and Lucus. For six of those years she begged him to get help. He refused to go to counseling, and the few times he did go, he declined to talk.

Eventually, he began to threaten to commit murder/suicide. Shanti clarified, "There were guns in the house, and I later found out he had been smuggling weapons from the military armory. It was a traumatizing mess. It was around that time that our neighbor was found murdered, and her toddler and baby were left in the house with her body until they were discovered. My oldest son was only three at the time. You can't un-ring that warning bell once it's rung. Do you know how at the end of those true crime episodes on TV, there's always closure because the guy goes to jail? Well, it certainly didn't happen that way with my dad, so I was acutely aware that there were other possible endings."

She made an exit plan.

"He was planning to go visit his daughter from his first marriage at Christmas time, so I said, 'Okay, then I'm going to go see my parents.' Just like my grandma had done, I literally only took a diaper bag, the dog, and nothing else, and drove with my two boys to my parents' house. The day that I left, his troubles from the military began."

"I found a temporary seasonal job, and my parents watched the boys while I worked. My uncle and stepdad took turns accompanying me to and from work to keep me safe, while I filed a restraining order. The divorce took two years. In that period, he sexually assaulted me three times, and the Sheriff urged me to file charges. My ex took a plea deal, getting it lowered from sexual assault to harassment, and was only in jail for a week. The entire two years he lied to everyone who would listen that I was being trafficked by his friend, and that I was mentally unstable. He even attempted to convince my counselor to put me into an in-patient mental health facility. Our divorce was finalized in 2021."

After hearing Shanti's story, I was curious about how she had found her way to joy and healing. How did Creator reconnect all of the broken pieces and bring her into relational wholeness? How did she find herself embracing her Indigenous Roots and walking the beauty way?

"Well, I had to reach out and connect', she explained. "It's the only way to keep anchored and

not go inside. I spent time with horses and with archery; things that didn't have to do with being a victim. Animals have always been my connection to a source of strength and love, and they kept me safe. I lost my health insurance with the divorce, so I turned to horses for my therapy. I got a job in veterinary medicine, and worked there for ten years. All of my jobs are a healing place! I also own a small business called Creature Teachers, and it's been going for eleven years now. I take reptiles into the classroom and do birthday parties. Last year, I began to work as a Medical and Enrichment Caregiver for medically fragile children. Everything in life can either break us, or bring us needed wisdom to heal. We can use that same healing to protect, care for and bring joy to others."

"Spiritual growth is something that is always evolving. I've seen it done so wrong, but I've also seen it done well. I pick the scriptures that I choose to hang onto; the ones that help me preserve my ability to have relationship with Creator, with creatures, and with People. I've seen people take a scripture and weaponize it. God is Love, so I center on the scriptures that center on that Love. Two years after my divorce, I married Michael, my current husband. It's so different now. He is steady and kind and my boys love him. We feel safe, and I have two wonderful step children, Alexx and Aiden, who have been added to my family circle. Love really is worth the process to get there. I'm even friends with my step-kid's mothers, and we share great co-parenting support."

"Meanwhile, my dad died from the complications of a stroke, because he never stopped drinking and didn't believe in going to a doctor. We never reconciled, and I thought that was that. But then Creator sent a friend, who talks to the ancestors. She didn't know my story, but she said that my dad wanted to send me a message and let me know he was really sorry because, in this life, he didn't have the mental clarity to love me like he should have. When he crossed over, he saw reality, and it changed his whole understanding. I believe that God gives us family and ancestors to guide and help us. Sometimes you might have to go seven generations back to find someone who can

guide and help you. I may not know who all my ancestors are, but they know me, and they have struggled too. They have wisdom, and they are all here trying to help me. Now I'm trying to teach my children. If they are having a bad day and struggling, they know they can come to me and ask to smudge, because it's a part of who they are now. What I always felt to be true, is true. That's the closest thing to closure you can get."

"Reclaiming my connections to my Indigenesness has been a big part of my spiritual healing. When I was young, during the early years of my first marriage while I was attending Mt. Hood Community College, I met Karrie Young. She messaged me and said, 'Hey, you should come to church.' The first time I came was on Mother's Day of 2021. We had just bought a house in Mt Angel, so the church was an hour away. It took me a couple of months before I returned, and Karrie just said, 'I get that, everyone has seasons.' But I liked it so much, I decided not to hunt for a closer church. It takes time to find a safe place, and here everyone was real. I didn't have to show up as someone else to come here. It's not about tithing and it's not a big production. It's not about how you dress or anything beyond just growing spiritually, sharing, and being in community. In 2023, I started coming to PDX Drum Fam on Thursday nights too. I'm so hungry, and I ask a lot of questions. I'm learning the drum songs and how to follow along, with Kenny and Buffalo giving point.

Karrie got me involved in other native gatherings: Mt Hood Chako-kum-tux culture club, NAYA and more. I've helped with the OSU longhouse, the Salmon House and I met Ed and Carol Edmo. It's been good to reclaim my own culture, by listening and immersing myself in community.

By learning my culture and gaining knowledge, I'm experiencing growth and what it means to be an Indigenous person today. We've all had to modernize, and adapt, and inter-tribally accept everyone into the larger indigenous body. This has been so helpful to my healing, and helpful for my boys in their own journey of discovering who they are. It's always been there inside of me, and now it

OUR CORE VALUES

LOVE – Love is the way.

CONNECTION – All of creation is connected by Spirit. That spark of the Divine connects with all humanity and the rest of creation.

SPIRITUALITY – Without cultivation of the spiritual life, we become unbalanced. Active participation in the development of one's spirituality is critical for a whole life. We believe this happens best in community.

TRADITION – Those who have gone on before us leave legacies of the old ways and wisdom with those who become elders. We encourage, value, and listen to them, so our tradition(s) may continue to help shape and guide us, informing who we are and what we will become.

We seek to become and embody these values every single day.

all makes sense.

I went and danced at the New Year Powwow with my kids for the first time this year. My kids asked if they can have regalia and dance, so I'm going to put energy into that and help them. There are so many men in the church who are ready to help them. It's relevant and a part of them. It's a way for them to be connected and whole too."

We closed our conversation with the question, "What would you advise other folks who are recovering from trauma in their lives?"

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Shanti didn't hesitate, "Your abuse does not define you. People will always disappoint you but God won't. It's possible to get through grief and arrive on the other side. Never stop asking questions. If you don't know how to do something or get past something, someone out there knows how to help. Don't ever stop asking for help. Someone is going to be able to teach you something that will help you get where you want to be."

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