NFBV Potomac Chapter Meeting Minutes

November 9, 2022

The meeting was called to order by President Christine Grassman at a little after 7:00 PM.

There were 30 individuals in attendance in person and virtually.

The Minutes and Treasurer’s reports were adopted.

Johns Hopkins Neuroplasticity and Development Lab in Baltimore Maryland directed by Dr. Marina Bedny is seeking participants for research studies of cognition and brain plasticity. They study how the brain adapts in the absence of vision and supports audition, touch, Braille reading and language. Participating in studies involves listening to stories and sounds, feeling Braille or everyday objects, and answering questions about what you hear and feel. Some of the studies involve brain imaging with MRI, while others measure only behavior. To learn more or to complete a screening interview please call 4108709895 or email: plasticity\_lab@jhu.edu.

Researchers Ziqi Chen and Ziwen Wang explained the research and process, and answered questions.

Members who participated in the study shared some insights.

National Native American Heritage Month Panel Discussion:

Panelists included two members of the Dine, (Din-ay), who indicated that Navajo is the English way of referring to their nation, and an Alaskan native from the Tlingit tribe: Warren Yazzie, Kester Tapaha, and August Martin respectively.

Warren and Kester spoke of their clans, introduced themselves with their clan relationships, and expressed that this is a means of determining kinship with other Dine.. They discussed how Halloween costumes that are meant to be native costumes are an insult to the special meaning, sometimes sacred, of that dress, and they are not costumes or caricatures. They discussed that natives are not a monolith and have different languages and cultures, and that people often think they are all gone. They discussed the concept of matriarchal society in their cultures and on the reservations, and discussed how the female elders must be highly respected. They discussed the concept of freedom as an individual as being difficult to understand, because the Dine view freedom within the context of community, of family, and their nation. Kester gave the example of: If I am going to take a new job far away, I just don’t consider whether it is a good move for me. I consider it in the context of my family.

The idea of freedom without responsibility, which seems to be growing worse in the United States, is something they find difficult to understand.

Kester also described that outside the reservation, where he works, he is a blind person who gets about just fine on his own. On the reservation, however, he is treated as someone who needs to be looked after and protected, especially by his mother and grandmother. He described an incident where he and his mother were crossing the street, and she wanted to hold him tightly and guide him, and he had to tell her that he did not need or want this. He said that in his culture, this was not a thing he should have done to his mother, but there came a point where he felt it needed to be done, but such a thing is considered disrespectful and taboo.

He also described how people assume that because native individuals do not want to talk about themselves or give opinions is because they do not necessarily feel obligated to do so, particularly with respect to dealings with non-indigenous people. This also occurs on the reservation, where a white teacher in a native school might not be trusted for four or five years; she must be tested for whether she is interested in sticking around, in getting to know them and truly be accepted as part of the community.

Their was a discussion around the use of labels: The Dine do not have terms for things like “gay,” or “depression” or “straight”. People come to you as they are, and you deal with what they bring and as they manifest, not as some label given by others, or even a label they give themselves because of the idea that they are supposed to have labels. People are not labels.

Warren shared his efforts as Secretary of a group on his reservation who have disabilities to get transportation and other accommodations, and recently had a parade for awareness that was attended by the Vice-President of their council.

The ADA does not apply to the sovereign tribal nations, so there must be efforts to educate within their separate communities.

There is a group on Facebook called Indigenous Blind.

It is a private group for indigenous people.

Wine-Tasting Activity Update:

First Vice-President and Social Activities Chair Deepa Goraya reported that it has not yet been possible to secure a location for a wine-tasting event.

Winter Celebration: Details were shared regarding the holiday celebration dinner at Federico’s Restaurant on December 7 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.