

## Couple honour First Nations culture, each other in traditional ceremony

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Published June 24, 2015 - 7:54pm

Last Updated June 24, 2015 - 8:08pm



Bonny and Shawn Beaupre were married at Kejimikujik park in a traditional aboriginal ceremony.

Bonny Martell and Shawn Beaupre of Hammonds Plains started planning their wedding last Thursday and got married Sunday, working out all of the myriad details necessary to make their day special.

And then it rained on everyone but them.

While the happy couple stood under an umbrella outside a wigwam in Kejimikujik National Park, the small wedding party got wet.

But Martell, a Metis from Arichat, Richmond County, and Beaupre, a Mi'kmaq who grew up in Elmsdale, swear it didn't matter.

"Even though it poured rain, I didn't really notice," said Bonny, who has taken Shawn's last name.

"The beauty of the day shone through the rain anyway. And the spirit of our people was there with us in the wigwam when we signed our marriage certificate. "You could really feel it in the air."

Shawn said he was distracted by his beautiful bride.

"Where the wedding took place, it was kind of sheltered with trees, but when Bonny showed up, I didn't notice any rain," he said.

"At that point, the only thing I cared about was Bonny, and us being married. I saw everyone else standing in the rain, but man, I was just happy."

Although both have only recently begun learning about their traditional cultures, they said it was important to have the wedding in Kejimikujik National Park, which contains sacred aboriginal lands and petroglyphs.

Bonny wore a deer-hide wedding dress on loan from the family of Todd Labrador, a park ranger who also acted as a witness for the couple, and Shawn wore a traditional Mi'kmaq ribbon shirt.

They signed their wedding documents inside a wigwam on a bearskin, and were married on National Aboriginal Day.

Neither grew up in the tradition of their cultures, but both began searching out their roots later in life.

Bonny, a court worker in Halifax, said getting married on June 21 held a special attraction for her and Shawn, but there was another reason they decided to elope rather than to plan out a wedding well in advance.

"Truth be told, I was having a lot of anxiety about planning a big Cape Breton wedding," she said. "It's my first marriage and Shawn's second, and it just seemed too daunting for me."

Shawn, a Canada Post letter carrier, said he wanted to relieve Bonny's stress and the timing just seemed perfect with National Aboriginal Day four days away.

And while it was too rushed for a traditional native ceremony, the wedding party was smudged beforehand and there were enough symbols to make it special, he said.

"As a person who is coming into learning about native traditional ways, it's part of my culture and it's something I'm learning about," said Shawn.

"Even though I couldn't get a native person to do the ceremony, I still wanted to do it as close to tradition as I possibly could."

The couple is planning a larger family event in the fall for Arichat, but now the pressure is off.

And they can look forward to the country celebrating their wedding anniversary every year when National Aboriginal Day rolls around.

"I thought what better day to get married?" said Shawn. "It's very symbolic. It's the summer solstice. It's the day with the most light, although that day, it rained most of the day."

"But it all came together. I believe in the great spirit, or God, or the universe, just helping out sometimes. If it wasn't meant to happen, it wouldn't have happened."