

The Smoki Temperance Lecture

GAIL GARDNER SPEAKS: I don't believe that this lecture is necessary any more. But it's become sort of a tradition with the Smoki people, so we've been giving it since 1930. The reason we gave it in the first place, when we first started Smoki in 1921, why all of us, or most of us, had just come out of the service from World War I. We were a hard-playin', hard-drinkin' bunch of men, and we had a lot of fun, and when we had this first Snake Dance, as you remember, it was to furnish money for the Frontier Days, who was . . . broke then, and we had this one day show and that was the origin of Smoki.

To go back into the history a little bit, we tried to get artificial snakes, and we couldn't get any artificial snakes, but there was a carnival man who'd gone broke in Prescott and he had a cage full of bull snakes, so he said, "Why don't you fellas use live snakes?" Oh, we couldn't do that! Well, we did. And that was what made the Snake Dance and what has made our show.

All right, to have the courage to handle these ferocious big bull snakes, many of these early soldiers thought they needed a little Dutch Courage. The late Sam Ensminger, before the Snake Dance, would set at each man's station a little four-ounce bottle of moonshine. This was in the prohibition days. That moonshine was about a hundred and twenty proof; it tasted like the bottom of

a birdcage, and it'd knock your elbows stiff, or anything else around you that was limber. Well, anyway, these boys would drink this moonshine—remember the show was in the afternoon and the sunshine was hot. Some men didn't drink at all, and some men'd drink two or three of those bottles.

Well, it was disastrous. 'Cause he'd get out here and he would raise heck with our dance. From then on every dance director has had the authority and the power to take any man out of a dance or ceremony if he's been drinking at all. So we have set this rule: that during the day of the Smoki Dance, we do no drinking at all. That goes for beer, too. Now if you fellas think a Smoki Warrior can't get sloshed on beer, why you ought to go to a Smoki initiation sometime. So, the beer is out, and the hard stuff is out, so we do no drinking on the day of the Snake Dance, and we go out and put on the show with the fine precision that it deserves, and after the show, why that's a different story!

After the show, if any of you want to drop down and have a few snorts, why I'll be along to help you. But that is the story, and we still think it's very necessary, because we don't want anybody led off, we don't want our show gummed up, we want the show the way it should be, tops in every department. And that means no alcoholic stimulant any time during the day of the Snake Dance 'till after run out with the snakes in the final show. That, my friends, is the Temperance Lecture.

