

Thomas Ryan RedCorn – designer/photographer/filmmaker

Ryan RedCorn is a member of the Osage Nation, making his home on the Osage Reservation in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Growing up, he was fortunate enough to be surrounded by photographers, designers, musicians, actors and story tellers throughout his childhood youth.

After 140 pound Kansas 6A Wrestling Regional 3rd place finish, his obsession with sports receded. Ryan closed an uninspiring scholastic career in the suburbs of Kansas City where he over-performed his high school guidance counselor's ACT expectations by ten points. After a year at a local Junior College, Ryan leveraged his newly minted ACT score for admission to the University of Kansas to study Visual Communications with an emphasis in graphic design. Uninterested in underwater basket weaving, Ryan quickly found himself in graduate level sociology and political science courses that were interesting but did his GPA no favors. This proved disastrous for admission into his major requirements but the exploration into critical analysis and discussion proved to be extremely valuable when applied to the visual communications fields.

Ryan simultaneously excelled and failed classes due to a combination of teachers, interest level, family deaths, Native student leadership organization responsibilities, a wannabe music career, internships, employment and extended conversations with Native faculty whose classes Ryan never sat in. One of those faculty, who Ryan claims to be intellectually descended from was Dr. Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche/Kiowa) who stated "No undergraduate student that I know of in our discipline of Native/Indigenous education has integrated research methods of decolonization with culturally responsive pedagogy like Ryan RedCorn. Accordingly, the entire faculty in our Indigenous Nations Studies program have offered much praise...and consider him to be an important contribution to a critical analysis of place-based, practiced-based research of Indigenous peoples." Ryan couldn't have said it better himself. And he didn't. Cornel did.

After seeking a four year degree for five and half years, Ryan finally graduated from KU with a BFA in Visual Communications, but not before serving two terms as First Nations Student Association co-president, landing an internship with House of Blues, and receiving the Big XII Conference Native American Graduate Student of the Year Award. Ryan must have been really amazing, or someone made a mistake because he was only an undergraduate at the time.

In 2004, three months after graduating, Bachelors of Fine Arts RedCorn had not found gainful employment. He seemed content to continue life as a carpenter until one day while repairing a hail damaged roof atop a house he thought he could never afford, it occurred to him, he didn't need to wait to design for someone. He could design for himself. And thus was born Demockratees.com, a satirical high-octane American made political t-shirt company. Within a few months Ryan's designs were everywhere from MTV, Urban Outfitters, to Vogue Magazine, riding high on the political vitriol present in the in American populace during the Bush years.

Demockratees raised Ryan's profile to the public and in social justice circles where he twice won 3rd place (again) at the Native American Rights Fund Art Show. One of these chance

encounters lead him to a man named Sterlin Harjo (Creek/Seminole). He made films and stuff and Ryan and Sterlin bonded over a shared love for Ani DiFranco.

By this time Ryan had co-founded Buffalo Nickel Creative with Joseph BrownThunder (Hochunk/Oglala), an advertising agency that served almost every major Native non-profit in the country, named Buffalo Nickel Creative. Buffalo Nickel and Ryan had wrapped up several awards, including Pawhuska Chamber of Commerce Businessman of the year (2008), American Indian Chamber of Commerce Oklahoma Business of the Year (2009). Early that year Ryan did the branding for the Smithsonian for President Barack Obama's historic Inauguration day. Ryan was excited to witness the inauguration and be surrounded by people of great power. For his efforts Ryan had been given 5th floor balcony access with full view of the Washington Mall where he was surrounded by people he already knew.

With his business earnings Ryan purchased a camera. This resulted in Ryan and Sterlin making a video called "Smiling Indians," which landed Ryan on NPR's "All Things Considered" with Melissa Block. Much of what Ryan said never made it on the air. This video aired in the United States Senate when Ryan was invited to testify on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. He almost cried talking about his new born daughter and the jurisdictional hole that could potentially not protect her under the Violence Against Women Act, but he didn't because Ryan does not show weakness.

Through Sterlin and other mutual friends, Ryan met Dallas Goldtooth (Dakota/Diné), Migizi Pensoneau (Ponca/Ojibwe) and Bobby Wilson (Dakota). They used a set of keys to gain unauthorized access to a youth center and decided to shoot a parody of the Twilight series where Ryan stood shirtless a good clip above his previous 140 pound form, for the laughs and pleasures of the internet industrial complex. The video was an instant success, and the first Indigenous internet comedy group was born that day, known from then on as 1491s.

The 1491s and Ryan soon found themselves in very unexpected places. Returning to perform at the Smithsonian 2012 Presidential Inaugural Ball where Ryan was all "been there done that," only to wake up the next morning and see his and other 1491s half-naked bodies in the Washington Post. Soon after the 1491s found themselves on the Daily Show with John Stewart, and commissioned play-writes by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

About this time Ryan woke up and realized he now had three kids, was married, and owned a house. So despite not having to write any papers in college, he thought it would be a good idea to pursue a career in writing. With a desire to stay close to home, Ryan has applied to the low residency MFA in screenwriting program at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. He thinks writing is fun.