



She Who Descended

August 19, 2024



Maritza Barley (Kwatsáan/Cocopah) was crowned as the 2024-25 Ms. UCLA Pow Wow Princess. (Photo by Cierra Breeze)

Ms. UCLA Pow Wow Princess, 2024-2025

By Jeanne Ferris

It has been an exciting summer for Ms. Maritza Barley, who lives on the Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe reservation, which borders the states of Arizona, California, as well as Baja California, Mexico.

This past May, six days before her 30th birthday, Ms. Barley was crowned Ms. UCLA Pow Wow Princess, achieving two milestones in one month.

On her father's side, she is Kwatsáan and Cocopah. Her mother is Mexican American.

Kwatsáan translates to *Those Who Descended*.

She proudly holds this title that symbolizes leadership, cultural preservation, and community service until 2025.

Her achievement exemplifies inspiration and pride for the entire Native American community.

In its 39th year, the annual UCLA Pow Wow is a testament to maintaining the Native community spirit and presence on campus.

It serves as a platform for cultural exchange, celebration, and the preservation of traditional practices on the unceded Gabrieleño/Tongva ancestral land.

The UCLA Pow Wow is an entirely student—and volunteer-run community effort that brings everyone together, regardless of their background.

It's a free and public event held over two days in alliance with the American Indian Students Association, fostering a sense of unity and inclusivity. Over 1,000 people attended the event.

The pageant, a symbol of inclusivity, welcomes any enrolled Tribal member attending a community college or a four-year university in the U.S.

It's a platform that celebrates diversity and acceptance.

Ms. Cheyenne Faulkner, who has Lumbee and Shoshone Bannock Tribal lineage and is a recent UCLA graduate, served as Pow Wow Coordinator for the last three years.

"I am really proud of the pow-wow and the pageant; it's my baby. After inheriting the job, it wasn't easy resurrecting it from COVID, but I improved specific details and put my stamp on the events with the help of others like the Sycuan pageant.

The American Indian Alumni created these UCLA events to highlight higher education and cultural opportunities for young women in Los Angeles and those living on the reservations."



Contestants in the 2024-25 Ms. UCLA Pow Wow pageant. (Photo by Cierra Breeze)

What were the criteria for pageant entry?

When friends told me about it on Facebook, I thought—I can do that since I am attending community college and an enrolled Tribal member. I also had to submit two recommendation letters and an entry letter. Potential contestants need to be under the age of 30.

Preparing for the pageant, I received help from the women of my family and tribes, such as my Aunt Markia Barley and my older sister Maricela Barley, Seamstress Susan Koteen, who guided me in making my regalia, and the late Shirley Kelly, who guided me in making my beadwork.

What inspired you to study nursing?

I often get asked about the fact that I am studying at my age, but higher learning is valuable and always possible.

During COVID, my grandma passed away. Not from Covid but from cancer.

We did have a ceremony for her passing and we do not have burials; we still partake in traditional cremations.

Covid did have an effect on our traditional ways of mourning but we still were able to send her home traditionally.

I want to help people with health care in my community by offering skilled nursing at IHS or a similar facility.

What did you submit as your talent?

I wanted to honor my father and grandfather, who taught me the traditional game of peon. I created my game pieces using traditional materials and demonstrated the game using an audio and visual presentation, which the judges liked.

During my preparation, I got approval for the songs I would sing in my demonstration and made sure [that] explaining the complex game of peon was accurate through my aunt, my grandfather, and my father.

[The following explanation respectfully borrowed with gratitude from the Morongo Band of Mission Indians -Thunder and Lightning Pow Wow September 27-29, 2024]

Peon is a guessing game with deep cultural significance. It is traditionally played during the annual mourning ceremonies, connecting new generations to their rich Native American heritage.

Today, the game can be played at any Indian gathering or fiesta.

Four-member opposing teams of either men or women play.

Similar to “hand games,” each player has two peon bones (one black and one white) made from coyote or deer leg bones.

A band of rawhide is strapped in the middle of the stick, which is slipped over the player’s wrist.

Traditional peon songs are sung by the players and backers.

Players hold a blanket with their teeth to prevent the opposing team from seeing where one player hides the peons.

Then, the player folds his hands, and the opposing team can begin guessing the location of the black-and-white peons.

The referee distributes the winning game sticks.

Demanding both wit and skill, the winning team must capture 15 game sticks to claim victory.

This is a game of concentration, strategy, and planning. One game can last a few hours or be extended until early morning.

Peon is a guessing game in which two teams face each other and take turns hiding behind a blanket.

The hiding team conceals their black-and-white game pieces, often made of coyote or rabbit bones, and the other team must guess how the pieces are hidden.

Counting sticks are used to keep track of the score.

What does your title demand of you?

Attending the pageant was mandatory. Since my family couldn't participate, I was alone in Los Angeles. Fortunately, I had been there before, so I knew my way around.

As Ms. UCLA Pow Wow, I choose which community events in California to attend. My travel is self-funded, and I receive my award at the end of my reign.

What do you hope to achieve in your reign?

I think it's important to maintain your Native identity, and I want to be a positive role model for the younger generation. I am so happy to be here in the present!

Being one voice in my classes can be challenging, and when we have group discussions regarding issues in the Native community, [non-Natives don't understand] why there are still issues.

There is more sensitivity to Native representation in class, which is a positive outcome of these discussions.

I hope that these conversations will lead to a better understanding and empathy towards the issues faced by the Native community.

With the recent crowning of Ms. Ashley Callingbull of the Enoch Cree Nation as Miss Canada Universe, her representation and Ms. UCLA Pow Wow creates an international and national platform for Indigenous communities to follow confidently and make positive changes for future generations. All hail!