

My Entry into

Aboriginal Understanding



**A collection of articles on
Indigenous self-determination
and sovereignty, rights,
resistance, language and culture**

by
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“Solidarity” image by Tania Willard, used with permission

Intro

So this is something I've been meaning to put out there for a while now. It is a collection of reporting and notes from 2000-2003, while I was in the Waterloo area / Grand River region of Southwestern Ontario.

It's a reflection of my entry points into Aboriginal awareness, some key events that left a lasting mark.

It started at an event about Burnt Church, put on by the Waterloo Public Interest Research Group (WPIRG) that I covered for the UW student newspaper, IMPRINT.

Then it was a talk by Ward Churchill (who's since been at the centre of controversy for writing about 'the chickens coming home to roost' in reference to the 9/11 attacks and his subsequent firing from the University of Colorado, followed by a court finding of wrongful dismissal in that case).

Whether you agree with his statement that Native land rights should be the primary issue for all activists, I do think that it is important to acknowledge that we are living on Native land and that this needs to be respected and honoured in some manner.

That was a prime motivation for me to begin taking an Ojibwe language course put on by the local school board, taught by Don Couchie, who would take the bus from Hamilton to Kitchener one night a week to help us learn. Having elder Violet Shawanda come to give a talk on Halloween Eve was a special treat for that class.

The last article here – the Spirit Connections camp – is the only one that I didn't hear about through WPIRG, and it only came to happen when a mention of my participation in the Ojibwe class led to a 'someone-who-knew-someone' connection and next thing you know I was working at the camp that summer.

Hopefully you'll find something(s) in here that stir your interest and get you motivated to find out more and/or do something about it. And as you enter and go deeper, you'll find there's always more depth to explore.

Lobsters not the only ones getting steamed Burnt Church Natives angered over treaty treatment

University of Waterloo Imprint student newspaper: Oct 20, 2000

Two members of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), who had been involved in the conflict at Burnt Church, New Brunswick, visited UW this past week to share their experience and the effect it had on them. David and Nina Bailey-Dick acknowledged that after their experience, they could no longer be completely objective about the situation. "We hope you're not looking for neutrality," they told the audience.

Their visit was coordinated and presented by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel College as a PACS enrichment activity. Most in attendance were PACS students, but they were joined by some other members of the University community.

They provided an overview of the conflict as they saw it, along with a slide show of pictures they had brought back with them.

What lies at the base of the dispute over lobster fishing rights in the bay is a treaty signed by the British Crown and Mi'kmaq peoples in 1752. This nation to nation treaty, inherited by Canada when it became a country in 1867, included in it the Mi'kmaq's right to control their own fishery. The problem now is that the federal government is attempting to regulate all lobster fishing, including that of the natives.

The natives have their own conservation management plan in place for their lobster fishery. This plan has won awards for sustainability from environmental groups and includes a (pink) tag system for lobster traps and a team of trained management officers who are out on the water monitoring the fishing .

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has a tag system it uses to licence the lobster fishery, awarding orange tags to those it allows to fish for lobster. The number of tags it has allotted to the Burnt Church group has declined from 5000 to 2000 to somewhere between 40 and 60, according to Nina Bailey-Dick. She said the conservation of the lobster stocks is not what is really at issue –

the native fishery makes up less than one per cent of the total industry in Atlantic Canada.

Yet, according to Bailey-Dick, the DFO threw a "ludicrous number of people" at the situation in Burnt Church, to the point where some lobster fishers elsewhere were allegedly bringing home two to three times their legal limit, knowing they wouldn't encounter any DFO officers as they were all otherwise occupied at Burnt Church.

Matthew and Nina see the Burnt Church dispute as a symptom of a much deeper, widespread problem of structural violence against the First Peoples of this country. Much of their traditional way of life has been taken away and much of the rights that have been guaranteed them in treaties have been hard to come by, resulting in violent standoffs at different times and in different locales across the country.

The CPT members felt their presence helped deter some DFO officers from violent behaviour. However, that didn't work one time Matthew was out on the water in a native boat. The boat was rammed three times by a DFO cruiser twice its size. Matthew said that the DFO officers were filming the native boat, presumably looking to capture some offense on tape, but that they'd stop filming each time they went to ram the natives' craft. The third ramming cracked the stern of the natives' boat, leading them to flee to shore in fear of sinking.

What Matthew found remarkable about this was, upon the return to shore, he was the focus of the media. Everyone wanted his story of being rammed, while none of the natives who had been aboard were interviewed. Did his white skin make his story more believable? Why did no-one want to hear what the natives had to say?

It was encounters like this, along with other instances of different treatment standards for the natives, that left both Bailey-Dicks re-examining their own prejudices and beliefs. They feel that the most important thing that we can do to start to make things right is to start listening. "To step back, and hear from those who have been ignored for far too long."

Churchill talk brings denial of genocide to light

University of Waterloo Imprint student newspaper, Jan 18 2002

Ward Churchill is involved in the American Indian Movement, has written numerous books and won awards for them, and is a professor of American Indian studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He visited UW on January 16 to deliver a talk and teach us all some things about globalization, and the genocide of native North Americans, among other topics.

In his talk he outlined the internationally-accepted definition of genocide, composed of five genocidal actions. First was the outright killing of members of the targeted group. Second was the implementation of policies that cause severe physical or psychological harm. Third was to attack the conditions that allow the group to maintain their lifestyle. Fourth was the forced prevention of births. Fifth was the forced transfer of children.

According to Churchill, Canada adopted a modified definition of this in 1952, not including the second or fifth actions as genocide. In 1986, a change was made to remove the fourth as well. Churchill noted this probably means that the forced prevention of births is currently happening in our country. Even so, the majority of people don't recognize the genocide that has occurred. In an interview he said, "There's an incredible wall of denial about it. It's rather straightforward on the facts ... from that acknowledgment you can begin to work out the ways and means of affecting some constructive resolution to things. You can't undo what has been done, that's obvious, but on the other hand you can alter the outcomes of it."

Churchill also talked of the realization that came to him during the Vietnam war. He was enlisted and told that it was America's duty under international treaty to fight in this war. Yet he came to see that other treaties that the U.S. were signatory to, notably ones with his own people, were being disregarded by the American government. While on duty, he was known as "Chief" and he was his division's pointman patrolling what was called "Indian territory." He described a paper written in 1968 by Jean-Paul Sartre, entitled *On Genocide*, that pointed out the genocidal nature of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Out of this paper came the

equation, "colonialism equals genocide" Also discussed was how the decolonialization movement of North America's indigenous people was an inevitable armed struggle, as one side (the government, in the form of the police and military) is always unabashedly, unrestrictedly armed. In this context, he argued that armed struggle on the other side may be inevitable, and defined what armed struggle means: a "consciousness proposition" that includes the understanding of the necessity for the use of force, and the lending of unconditional support to those involved in the armed struggle.

>> **excerpts from the interview:**

On the anti-globalization movement:

"If you want to understand the process, you've got to go back to the historical disjuncture that marks its origins, and then trace it forward again. In the process of doing that, you begin to understand the nature of what it is that has to be done to actually bring this beast to a halt ..."

"The United States, by having fully a continental block at its disposal, including Canada, is contingent upon the internal colonization, subordination, subjugation, expropriation and all those other words of the indigenous people whose property it is. So if you really want to stop globalization, you gotta stop the United States. If you want to stop the United States, hey -- it's not going to be responsive to moral suasion in such as that -- you're going to have to take the sucker apart, just like any other structure that's offending. And native rights, land rights and other rights, are the key to that."

"So the number one priority for anyone serious about opposing globalization at the present time, is to get their mind arranged in such a way that they understand why they need to do it, and then get busy supporting indigenous liberation struggles right here, not stuff that's happening out there. It's not that the stuff out there is irrelevant or that the people aren't worthy, it's just that from this particular station right here there's not a whole hell of a lot that you can do about or for them, other than make yourself feel good, and that's the game that usually gets played."

"But if you actually want to effect change, you've got to do it right here, incur the heavy lifting and the risk that's entailed in bringing this thing to its knees, and the key to that is native rights. All the rest of the oppression stems from the denial of those rights to native people, every single one."

On the place of indigenous peoples in the world:

"First world -- capitalist, industrialized. Second world -- socialist, industrialized. Third world -- either capitalist or socialist, perhaps not aligned, industrializing. What he forgot to mention was that there's a fourth world out there, and that fourth world is the indigenous world on which all the other three are built."

"Well, the fourth world is weighing in. In 1988, Bernard Nicheman did a global survey of armed conflicts ... he cataloged 125 wars that were ongoing on the planet at the time, and of those, 85 per cent ... were between indigenous peoples and one or more nation states that presumed to have an overarching sovereign authority. It is saying, basically, 'Bullshit - now, you can back off this way or you can back off that way, but basically we're going to assert our right to self-determination like any other peoples are entitled to, as codified in the United Nations charter and innumerable elements of international law, and if you don't like it you're going to have to fight us about it.'"

On the repression of liberation movements in North America, by our governments:

"It's been undertaken ultimately in very much the same manner that it was undertaken under U.S. sponsorship in the third world, with death squads and all that ... available to the various client regimes in the third world being appropriated by the CIA, organized to engage in -- and provided field intelligence, provided equipment and everything else as well -- to engage in selective assassinations of political opponents, and that model is very much an existent reality in North America. It was used against the Black Panther party, it was used against the American Indian Movement. It's been used any of a number of other movements, but those two very prominently ..."

"They [the repressing governments] can get away with anything that people do not make them not get away with. Who's going to stop em? They just killed the people who had the chutzpah to actually stop them, and the repression functioned on the neutralization of key cadres, and partly on the cowardice of the other movements that started coming up with philosophical reasons to distance themselves from those who were being decimated. The Black Panther party would've worked out a whole lot differently if the white left hadn't suddenly found principles of pacifism to be overriding and therefore needing to distance themselves and isolate the Panthers, which is what the feds were trying to do."

"There's so-called white activists that will explain to you the Black Panthers brought it upon themselves. Why? Because they concretely challenged the function of power rather than engage in symbolic ritual protest of it, right? If you want to change it, you got to challenge it, and you gotta do more than challenge it, you actually gotta defeat it in the end."

On how the September 11 attacks relate to the policies of the American government, and more:

"The message is this: you've got to learn if you're going to push people around, eventually somebody's going to push back. And if you don't want to get pushed in the way that it happened on September 11th, if you don't want to get pushed in the ways that could constitute the other foot falling, the biochemical warfare and stuff like that, then you're going to have to do what's necessary to get your government on a legal leash, and make them do the one thing that will cause that sort of thing to stop. And that was put by a Georgia State law professor rather well on the radio about four days after that: 'if you want this to stop, then stop killing their babies.' It's real simple stuff ... this is simple cause and effect. You kill people's children and eventually to try to get you to stop, they'll start killing yours."

"You go in Northern Manitoba, 70 per cent of all the native children up there by the time they're ten years of age are sucking gasoline to try to eradicate their consciousness lock stock and barrel permanently for the rest of their lives. Now what the fuck could be

happening that would make ten year old children, not just one of them but most of them, try to block out their consciousness lock stock and barrel forever?"

"Must be something wrong with native culture, right? They'd would've been doing this four thousand years ago if they'd only had gasoline, right? Wrong. But that's the kind of stuff you get in corporate media analysis -- they sit down and 'what's wrong with the Indians?' I wonder? Let's run your kids through residential schools for a couple of generations and see how they are. Pretend we can't understand simple cause and effect. Let's pretend we can't, socially speaking, after a university education, figure out how to tie our shoes without an instruction kit."

On how the September 11 attacks might help people face up to the realities of the world:

"Maybe you have to make them feel a little bit of the pain, 'cause a lot of them are detached -- too goddamn fat and comfortable. You're probably not going to do it with a prayer vigil, you're probably not going to do it with another folk song, you're probably not going to do it with a talk like we're going to have tonight, you're probably not going to do it like Noam Chomsky writing 88 books on the subject, all of which are very useful in a limited sort of way. Since those are the ways that are probably not going to get it done, how is it that you would get it done? Well, I think the question got answered on September 11. It's been answered by some other people but never quite that spectacularly, and maybe that's just the beginning ..."

"But why is it worse to get a 2000-pound bomb dropped on top of your house after you actually do something that inflicts damage on the people who are doing it to you, than it is to just sit there and let the 2000-pound bomb drop on your house? Cause the bomb's dropping either way."

"That's a quirk in the so called philosophical posture of non-violence in North America, is that somehow if you sit there and say prayers and sing songs and hold signs and don't go beyond that, that somehow or other being non-violent. No, what you're contesting is violence and that violence continues unless you

make it stop. And if you don't make it stop with your song, you're not non-violent, you're just acquiescing the violence, okay? Now you're part of it. Hell, even Gandhi said that. Gandhi recommended weapons training. Yeah, yeah. A lot of people don't want to know that. See, this denial thing is not only on the conservative side of things. There's a lot of progressive denial and there's a whole progressive exceptionalism too."

"I'm tired of hearing about people professing solidarity with guerrilla movements out there. Oh yeah, but being horrified if anything happens here. How exactly is that solidarity within? And why are those rules appropriate there but not here, aside from your overweening desire to stay safe. I can appreciate safety, but call it what it is. It's a self-indulgence, not a virtue ..."

"You don't, if you're going to make this stop, go to court to get it done you fly planes into buildings. Just need more planes, more buildings hit, that's all. And that's actually not a blood-thirsty statement. See, I think Americans are so unused to feeling pain that it would take a lot less quantitative pain to make them stop than they're inflicting everyday that they're not challenged in that way. I mean, my god, Iraq's a country of 18 million people, which gives you, what, three million people below the age of eight or ten, something like that. 565,000 of them as of 1995 had died needlessly as a result of the sanctions. And the ones who were still alive were suffering acute malnutrition and various ... yeah, you're destroying an entire generation."

On the role of the media:

"There are arguments to be made about the media, but ultimately the media is not responsible for what it is that goes on. The media functions so efficiently in some respects because they're telling the preponderance of the population exactly what they want to hear: that they're superior, they're noble, they're good, they're innocent, they're all these things which are self-evidently false."

"And telling them different, explaining to them it's different, the way Noam [Chomsky] has done so well his entire life, has no effect at all on them. Actually, he's not telling them anything to the contrary. He's excusing them for it, with the argument on the media, and

that they're victims of the media and they don't know what they're doing. They goddamn well do know what they're doing."

On North America's education system:

"We don't have an education system anywhere in North America that I've encountered other than in some localized community endeavors; you have a virtually seamless system of indoctrination. Indoctrination is the antithesis of education. Public system of education is a euphemism for a system of mass indoctrination. You're not taught how to think, you're told what to think. Education -- you end up knowing how to think; indoctrination -- you end up knowing what you're supposed to think, and usually not much else."

"I have students ... from all strata, including some of the supposedly best and brightest, whose main response to a question in class is to regurgitate the sound bite they picked up from Dan Rather on the NBC news...it's all pre-packed, before you even get a question formulated you get the answer presented to you in sound bite form. The whole structure, the whole system, the whole everything about that is designed to preclude you even forming an ability to think; you have no experience in thinking. You have experience in regurgitating, and it's Pavlovian, stimulus-response: you regurgitate the sound bites in the right sequence you get rewarded; you don't, you don't."

Violet Shawanda **a keeper of the Ojibwa language**

Ontario Indymedia (online): Oct 31, 2002

She started by telling us that the voice of the land and the water is in our anishnaabe, the living language.

Her name means, the yellow in the sky just before sunrise. Anishnaabek means, the good beings.

Listening is a gift and it is done in three ways: with the ears, with the eyes, and with the heart. All of creation will sing inside of you when you listen with the heart.

Life is unity, the oneness of all things.

She talked of the history of the anishnaabek people, and also of totems.

Anishnaabeg values are sharing, caring, politeness, smiling, humour and exchanging jokes, giving gifts to visitors, working cooperatively, not letting things go to waste.

Eli Taylor says how the language embodies a value system of how to relate.

It is hard to admit one's language and culture is dying, but we need to talk about it. There are 53 native aboriginal languages in Canada, there used to be hundreds. Of the 53, 42 are endangered, 8 are critical, and there are 3 strong ones: cree, ojibway, and inuktituk.

The Canadian government needs to actively redo what it has done in suppressing native language and culture. Assimilation policies came in the form of government, church and residential schools.

In anishnaabe there is power and sacredness of words. All people are considered equal. The language and culture cannot be separated.

Basil Johnston says language is the key for ideas and aspirations.

It reflects freedom, generosity, sharing, admiration for resourcefulness, talent, imagination, respect for mystery, and spirituality -> gzhe-mnidoo, which represents the great mystery.

The seven grandfathers (something like the ten commandments):

wisdom -> to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom

love -> to know love is to know peace

respect -> to know all of creation is to have respect

bravery -> is to face the foe with integrity

honesty -> in facing a situation is to be brave

humility -> is to know yourself as a sacred part of creation

truth -> is to know all of these things

Important aspects of life: mother earth, water, children, elders, music, dancing, fine dress (hairdos, tattoos, i.e. for powwow). The people are skilled at craft-making, storytelling, as orators, healers, also geologists, botanists, climatologists, scientists with artistic flair

There are around 27 different communities under Ojibwe, with 9 major dialects. All respect all dialects.

Violet's is central ojibwe, manitoulin island dialect. They are known as the vowel-deleters, having weak vowels.

It is sacred to be a keeper of the language, the Creator gave language.

There are three mothers: natural mother, mother earth, and tiknaagan. Tiknaagan is for babies, it holds them with their arms not free, so they cannot be distracted. They observe, listen, and hardly cry. Why don't non-natives use this for their babies? it is better than cribs

In the first two years, the baby hears the language, learns the commands first, learns to listen carefully. Teachings occur at mealtimes.

It is a happy language, know when to laugh and when not. Only use words when needed, don't always need to say miigwech, respect is for granted, don't need to verbalize. Non-verbal

communication is through shrugging shoulders, pointing with chin, hand movements. The listener is usually addressed by name, so it is important to learn names, it is a very good example of politeness, it puts the listener and speaker on an equal level.

It is a very descriptive language, and truthful. Don't like to say "I don't know", use "maybe". When speaker wasn't there, insert word to show uncertainty.

Verbs are very important because a people of action. Over 6000 verbs, estimated 80 per cent of language, followed by adverbs then nouns.

No gender of nouns, but divided by animacy, whether they are animate, living, sacred (includes the peace pipe, drum) or inanimate, non-living.

Sky world names are sacred (animate). 90 per cent of words are geared towards nature / environment.

There is responsibility to learn names of neighbouring animals, birds, fish, insects, plants, trees, ...

Great care is taken in naming fish, food comes mainly from lakes, rivers. Whitefish name means, caribou of the waters. Very descriptive geographic names. Kinship is used possessively, and is divided into parallel (father's brother, family; mother's sister, family) and cross (mother's brother, family; father's sister, family).

The names of months indicate seasonal activity. October is the falling leaves moon.

Body parts are sacred, never spoken of in derogatory way. Need possessor. Some animate (for procreation, including knee, elbow) and some are inanimate.

Need listening skills to hear different sounds, tones, pitches. It is imperative to have correct pronunciation, no slurring.

It is a healthy language, it opens up all your sinuses. It is easy, can say a full sentence without needing breath.

Drop sound at end of sentence.

There is one word (23 letters) to say "let's all stand together"

Running is good for lungs, good for public speaking. Red Jacket, a famous orator, would go and speak above the roar of the falls.

A commitment to learn language, a way to soul search. Immersion could be a further stepping stone.

Place names are very important, but many have been lost. It would be very good if all the names with 'squaw' in them were changed to what they should be, squaw is a derogatory term that has been widely used by non-natives, it means woman who sleeps around. Also, the government must not translate native place names into english and french.

Some place names are oshawa (yellow earth), nipissing (small body of water), muskoka (red earth), mississauga (outlet, opening of water), petawawa (a 115-year old woman), adikota (place of caribou), niagra falls (thunders of water, great falling water -> a sacred place), ontario (great sparkling water), seneca (people of the stone), madewaska (mouth of river where grass is), potawata (fire keepers), chicago (place of skunk), winnipeg (muddy water), michigan (wolverine), mississippi (great big river)

LOVE SONG - ZAAGIDWIN NGAMWIN

Yaa haa ho
Yaa hi dee ho
Yaa hi dee hi yo
Way hi yo way hi yo
Way hi dee hi dee hi yo
Way hi yo way hi yo

Yaa hi dee hi yo
Way hi yo way hi yo
Way hi dee hi dee hi yo
Way hi yo way hi yo

[total 8 rounds - double beat drum dance] ... enjoy – mnendaagzig

In the Spirit of Understanding

James Bartelman at Aboriginal Awareness conference

Ontario Indymedia (online): Mar 1, 2002

[for more info on the Aboriginal Awareness conference, contact Sparrow Rose, Co-chair, SUNDANCe (Shared Universities Native Development and Navigation Committee) (519) 884-0710 x4370]

Today was the Aboriginal Awareness conference at Wilfrid Laurier University, organized by the Shared Universities Native Development and Navigation Committee (SUNDANCe), entitled In the Spirit of Understanding.

I just managed to leave my house in time to walk over to Laurier on a beautiful winter (but feeling like spring) day.

The keynote speaker was Ontario Lieutenant Governor James Bartelman. He is a member of Mnjikaning First Nation, and the province's first aboriginal lieutenant governor.

He talked of the problems that have existed – how he was maybe the only aboriginal student at Western when he was there in the early 60s, how aboriginal people couldn't vote back then, how his grandfather lived his whole life not being able to vote or buy beer, how a previous Lieutenant Governor (Sir Francis Bondhead, who he called 'Bonehead') had wanted to move all aboriginal people in Southern Ontario to Manitoulin Island – but he focused more on the tremendous social revolution that has taken place in one generation, that has seen a cultural renaissance occur for aboriginal peoples in Canada.

He talked of how there are tens of thousands of aboriginal university graduates in this country, how there's a highly successful Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network, how there's an Aboriginal Achievement Foundation that showcases people who've made it in a white man's world, examples who've proven that possible while still keeping with their aboriginal roots.

In his position as an international ambassador, he'd seen other places where things are/were very bad. In Columbia, he saw aboriginal people being hunted for sport with impunity. In South

Africa, he saw aboriginal people who took their clothes off and acted out previous generations ways of living for busloads of tourists who had stereotypes they wanted to see, and when the buses left the people would get dressed again and return to their regular lives. In Australia, he told of how up until 1960 any child born to an aboriginal mother and non-aboriginal father was taken away from their parents, never to see them again, and raised to be servants in a white person's world where they didn't fit in and weren't given any foundation in their cultural heritage.

But in Canada there is a message of hope and success. There are some 20,000 aboriginal-owned businesses. By 2006, there will be over 90,000 aboriginal people in the workforce.

He stressed that all elements of aboriginal society must be included in any initiatives: women, youth, elders, disabled, the 50 per cent of the aboriginal population that lives in urban centres. He stressed how it is important for the aboriginal community to be inclusive, to break down barriers, and to build bridges.

He stressed that non-native people should go beyond stereotypes and realize the vast diversity of aboriginal experiences in Canada. He cited different examples: people who live in the north, speak no English, and can have a tough time when they come to cities; people living in Southwestern Ontario reserves with standards of living similar to their non-native neighbours; people living in cities, some of whom have fallen between the cracks and have a hard time finding housing; the Metis people with mixed heritage; the 100,000 or so children of aboriginal mothers, like him, who were denied their native status up until 1985 due to a sexist government policy.

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There were then two sets of workshops. I attended the ones led by Shannon Thunderbird and Barbara Waterfall. Both were held in a large open room with chairs forming a large circle. Both women strolled around the middle of the room, drum in hand, and talked: Thunderbird mainly went counterclockwise while Waterfall mainly went clockwise. Both ended in song, with everyone standing, holding hands in a large circle. Both mentioned George Bush and the insanity we have to deal with in our world these days.

Thunderbird's main message was to do what you're good at, and be celebrated for it - don't be damned for it. If you cannot find the peace within your soul, you are of no use to anyone around you, so make yourself a top priority, do what it takes to get it together and take care of your own needs.

Waterfall told much of her personal story about how drumming had helped her heal and find her true voice after coming from a dysfunctional family, and trying to walk both the red and white paths as a Metis woman. The healing power of song was evident in those she shared with us.

In between the two sessions I spoke with a woman who educates youth and adults on the art of making mystery (aka friendship) bracelets, as well as dream catchers. She told me the secrets of the numbers of the single rim dream catcher, that has 13 points on it, and 7 levels to the centre. Moons are important to dream catchers, especially for women, and there are 28 days in a moon. 13 times 28 is 364, the number of days in a year - there are 13 moons in a year. 7 times 13 is 91, when you divide 362 by 91 you get 4, the four elements or directions or medicines. The dream catcher itself is the shape of a circle, a 0. The only number not included in what's been mentioned is 5, a sacred number, the number of fingers you have on each hand, which you use to make the dream catcher. 5 is also the number of toes on each foot. Where you walk is sacred. 5 is the special number. (3 is also special, and of course 4 is too). She received this message in a dream; it can be amazing what dreams will tell you. Her adopted mother used to not understand and be afraid when she'd walk and talk in her sleep, at the age of 10, speaking her grandmother's language which she was never taught but knew what every word meant.

## **Shannon Thunderbird** **"Manage the Mind ... Lead with the Heart"**

*Ontario Indymedia (online): Mar 7, 2002*

This workshop was focused mainly on how to live life, on how to quiet the inner chatter of the mind, and to lead from the heart.

The basic message was, do what you are good at. Be celebrated for doing what you are good at, don't be damned for it.

Thunderbird brought a mix of humour and wisdom to the assembled group.

She talked about how she adapts and adopts things she likes and makes them hers.

Also, she talked of how we have a busy mind these days, to get all our daily things done.

She labeled it 'soul speak', the practical behaviour of living from the heart in a crazy world. It is crazy, being just north of the border of a country run by Bush.

As a native educator, she described what she does as casting a light on a forgotten people. She calls us all cousins, those she doesn't know intimately, and brothers or sisters, those who she does know closely.

Much of her illustrations of how things can be different from how they are now, was to describe how things were in times past. In this way, we could take for ourselves the knowledge that was not specific to that situation, and apply it to our lives today.

She talked of how traditionally women would decide what to do, and how the men would then do it. She gave an example of warring, when the women would decide when it was time, and they would say to Crazy Horse, "It's time, you can do it now" but they wouldn't tell him how to do it, they would leave the how up to him, that was his area of genius.

She talked about how there's this balance, where people in a society have different roles, that they're good at, and how everyone doing what they do best is in the best interests of the society.

She described the buffalo hunt. First, it is the role of the spirit doctor (not the Asian name 'shaman', she says she hopes no one

still believes in the Bering Strait theory, none of the elders' stories talks of coming over the Bering Strait) .. it is the role of the spirit doctor to go into transcendental state, to see it is time. Then it is the turn of the buffalo caller (also a spirit doctor), who prays and calls the buffalo to come to the hunters. The buffalo (tatanka) spirits are happy to offer themselves to the hunters if they will take only what they need, use everything, and waste nothing - if they will honour the buffalo. Calling the buffalo will lead to hearing a rumble on the horizon.

Then it is the warriors turn to prepare, by going to their special places: at 3-4 in the morning, when the world is silent, it is the time to pray. A new warrior to the hunt would ride with an uncle, and would be permitted to take a small buffalo on his first hunt. After the buffalo have been killed, it would then be the woman's time to cut up and prepare the buffalo.

There was no greater honour than to be in service to one's people, there were no positions that were more important than others, everyone was valued, everyone was celebrated.

She talked about raising children, how that is the most important work we can have, and how bringing up children is a societal thing and not left to individual parents. A child could go to any person and ask a question, and they'd be helped to understand by whoever it was.

Children were raised gently. There was no shame-based way of bringing up kids, there was no judging. There was no saying, "That's crazy!" or "That's stupid!" or "Why did you do that?"-type scolding. However, nowadays we do this without even thinking.

She gave an example from her childhood, when she was swimming out far in the water, after being asked to stay near to the shore. When she returned, her mother (?or another elder?) said to her, "let me tell you a story."

[when an elder says those words, the world stops and you listen - Thunderbird said we should all go and listen to stories our grandparents can tell us]

The story was of two children who went swimming out farther than their mother had asked. Their mother was worried as she worked on the beach, and the Great Spirit saw this, and turned the two children to loons, and that is why you always hear the mournful cry of the loons, because they have gone too far from the shore and are calling for their mother and to find their way back.

The point of the story was that things can be taught in a non-shame based way, that allows for the learner to save face. Thunderbird said she never swam out far again after hearing that story.

There is no word for discipline, nor for religion, according to Thunderbird, as these are unnatural barriers between the two-leggeds (us) and the all.

Shame-based living gets us nowhere.

She told us the story of creation. First, the Great Mystery created the four living beings: fire, air, water, earth.

Four is a special number, many things come in fours - see how there are four stages of creation.

Next, the plant world was created, and a lot of time was spent in this area. The plant world only needed the four elements to live off of.

Next were animals and fish and birds. A lot of time was spent here too, and they were only dependent on what came before them, the four beings and the world of plants.

Last were the four colours of people, red, yellow, black and white. The Great Spirit was tired when it got to creating people, and they are dependent on all other creation in order to survive. We need everything, we're the weakest in the chain. However, we were given will and hope, to make up for our weakness.

She asked people in the room what they were good at, what thing

they could do for our society. Answers were singing, long-distance running, carpentry, dancing, cooking, talking, and economics. She said there was no comparing of activities, to see which is better or more important or whatever, they are all important and helpful for our society to thrive.

Traditionally, women have created stories, and then it has been up to men to tell them. Again, it is all about balance.

There are the two circles of the community, the inner circle and the outer circle. The inner circle belongs to the women.

The past is what we know, what we're comfortable with. In between the past and the future is the present.

It is in the present that we're accountable. Accountable for what we think, what we say, where we go, what we do, who we do it with, why we do it.

Shame based living gets us nowhere.

Do what you're good at, be celebrated for it, don't be damned for it.

If you cannot find the peace within your soul, you are of no good to anyone around you. It is up to you to make sure that you do what is required to take care of yourself, to find that inner peace, and to get it together.

She talked about how especially for mothers it is hard to put themselves first, when the messages they hear are to look after their kids, to look after their family. But she said that it is most important to look after themselves first, in order to be able to do the rest.

When you're doing what you do, you don't need to be validated for doing it, once your gift has been validated. We don't need to have people telling us what a good job we're doing. The greatest compliment from an elder is to be told to continue to do what you're doing. Elders traditionally don't say a lot, and when they speak their words are carefully chosen.

## **Herb Joseph of Six Nations On Native history, lifestyle, and activism**

*Ontario Indymedia (online): Mar 14, 2002*

Herb Joseph of the Six Nations spoke about native history and lifestyle.

Two women, one his niece, drummed and sang to open and end the session, they also brought around the sweet grass for people to smudge. The explanation was that smudging is to only allow good things to enter – you smudge your heart, your face and eyes, your ears. Later at times during the talk, more sweetgrass was burned.

There are between 220,000 and 500,000 aboriginal people in Canada, depending on who you count.

He talked of the power the Canadian government claims over aboriginal people in this country (to define nations/people, to assign a status number and card, to impose restrictions on where native rights are allowed, to withhold money, to close reserves, to pass racist legislation like the current First Nations Governance Act), but also of the ability of the people to reclaim their inherent rights, to fight back against the government's actions of stripping people of who they are and of not letting them become who they are.

There are existing rights that can be exercised by saying no when things are wrong, not remaining quiet, and actively interfering when things are not right. And there are ways to read between the lines in the often subtle methods of propaganda and mind control used on us all today, that was tried and tested first on aboriginal people. Native peoples are often at the forefront of changes to how the government acts towards people; it was a while back when native Canadians were required to do workfare to receive government money, and only lately that the provincial government has enacted that legislation.

It is important that we all work together, collectively, different aboriginal peoples working together, and aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples working together. It was noted that something

that is often not mentioned is how the support of non-native people has been very important in the struggle for native rights and way of life.

We have to realize that the government, through repressing and taking away native culture, has been committing the soft manner of genocide, not as blatant as shooting or gassing, but equally as effective in killing a culture.

We were told a story of how in Northern Ontario, a boy had his tongue burnt out for speaking his native language instead of English.

In the past, aboriginal people were not allowed off the reserve without a ticket. These tickets gave the time it was permitted for the person to be off the reserve. One woman going to Caledonia for groceries received a day pass, good until dusk. It was getting on evening and the people were worried, because she wasn't back yet and it was almost dusk. Her son went up the hill and was able to see her, a couple miles off. But it was getting on dusk, she dropped her groceries and started to run. there was a group of a few mounted police, following her. She didn't make it in time, and she was raped dead 100 or 200 metres from the start of the reserve, with the people watching from the reserve land, knowing what would happen to them if they were to accede to the police's calls to come across the border line, off the reserve land.

Herb Joseph said that aboriginal people don't see people as people of colour, but instead as people of spirit, and spirit has no colour.

He also said that sometimes it might seem like we'll never win, but that there is a choice between how you're going to go, one is on your haunches begging and pleading for what you deserve, the other on your feet doing all you can to fight back and make your rights real. And by standing up, you can spread more seeds that will take root and carry on the cause, even after you fall.

## **Wolverine visits UW**

### **Native elder, youth talk of defending their land in B.C.**

*University of Waterloo Imprint student newspaper: Nov 29, 2002*

How many times do you get to hear a speaker talk about being chased by a Canadian armoured personnel carrier, coming within four feet of being crushed and then shooting out the hydraulics with an AK-47 to take away the steering?

A few dozen UW students recently took advantage of the opportunity when William "Wolverine" Ignace and Nicole Manuel spoke in Waterloo on Tuesday, November 19. They're from Secwepemc Nation near Kamloops B.C. and are raising awareness of the fight to protect their homeland from being further destroyed in the illegal expansion of the Sun Peaks ski resort. They said neither the provincial nor federal governments will enforce the laws that protect the Native peoples' land rights.

The dispute was at the centre of the 1995 Gustafson Lake standoff, when over 400 RCMP and Canadian army personnel employed land mines, concussion grenades and thousands of rounds of ammunition to stop the native people's attempts to defend their land. It was during that time that the 63-year old Wolverine found himself in combat with the Canadian army and he spent the next five years in jail for his participation.

But the two had much more to talk about. Twenty-five-year-old Manuel spoke of the leadership she and others have received from their elders, including Wolverine. Although his formal education only went to grade seven, he has done legal research into the Native peoples' land rights and represented himself in the courts, right up to the top court in the country. He pointed to the key 1995 dismissal of their case by the Supreme Court that didn't rule on the legal points that Wolverine contends stand firmly in favour of the Secwepemc people.

He says that the Secwepemc should have their dispute with the Canadian government heard by a third-party adjudicator, because that is the only way to avoid the conflict-of-interest that any Canadian court or judge has in hearing the case. He stated that First Nations are allies with the Queen, not subjects to her.

In his research, he's found that "there's only six times in North American history that the Native people's title and rights have been discussed in law" and they show the right to third-party adjudication. He listed them as 1704, the Mohegan people versus Connecticut; the appeal of that case in 1740; the Royal Proclamation of 1763; the conclusion of the Mohegan case in 1773; the Duty of Disallowance in 1875 and the 1982 Constitution.

According to Wolverine, Canada is a corrupt country -- the politicians, lawyers, judges, media -- "right from the bottom up. This is the reason why we'll never get a fair ruling, not in this country. We've never had justice since Confederation; we're still waiting."

However, there is one legal avenue left: preventing an agreement between Canada and the United States on softwood lumber. "We can destroy the economy of Canada. Maybe that's what it takes for people to realize what is wrong with this country.

"Because they never dealt with the land issue, all the resources that are removed off of our territories, it's all stolen goods." He said that Canada challenged this all the way to the WTO in Geneva, but lost.

Wolverine said he has two goals: justice and coexistence. The tour he and Manuel are doing now is criss-crossing Eastern Canada; after visiting Concordia, students there picketed two Montreal travel agencies, convincing them to cancel tours to Sun Peaks. Waterloo students at the talk were discussing doing a similar thing here.

## **Spirit Connections summer camp Aboriginal philosophy of education for children**

*Tansi newspaper, Oct 2003*

What would you expect from a summer camp based on traditional Aboriginal philosophy? What form would it take and what values would be at its core?

Spirit Connections is a camp on a farm outside of Guelph that puts kids – a maximum of 20 per week, ages 7 to 12 – in touch with their full selves, in a way that they may seldom experience anywhere else. The majority of them are not Native and the purpose is not to convert them to Native culture, but to build a connection between what they experience at the camp and their own background. The Ojibwa couple who run the camp are Jan Sherman and Sandy Benson.

The camp could be called 'do what you feel' camp. No child is ever made to do anything they don't want to do, reflecting the individualistic principle of self-directed learning. Discipline is based on acknowledging and honouring the children's emotional and spiritual energies.

Honesty, respect and dignity are the foundation of learning. When youth feel understood and accepted as an integral part of their learning environment, each with a valuable contribution to make, the conditions are in place for positive growth.

Creativity is fostered as a key part of learning. To begin every morning, there is open time for arts, crafts or games. The formal start to the day follows, with a greeting circle in the tipi. Everyone smudges and then a feather is passed around for prayers. There is drumming, singing and storytelling. A similar circle brings every day to a close.

The circles are a place where the kids learn Native customs and values through explanation, example and participation. Outside, they also learn and play different traditional Native games and dances.

Sherman works as a literacy educator the rest of the year and is a

traditional Native storyteller. The campers can get completely caught up in her stories: some lie back on the blankets and close their eyes, while others stare, mesmerized. She explains to them how traditionally stories were only told in the winter, when there was the time to spare, and describes how she had laid down tobacco and prayed, listening with her heart to know if it was okay for her to tell them year-round.

Benson drives kids to school as a bus driver and is a traditional Native dancer and self-taught artist. The campers are impressed when he brings in his dancing outfit and they learn things like how the mirrors on it help reflect the negative energies that are sometimes sent towards him when he dances at a pow wow. He might also bring in some of his drawings and explain his creative process.

The kids engage in different art activities, often with introductory exercises to develop a theme. There are drawing, painting, necklace beading, arrow making, and other activities. They also make masks and costumes for the end-of-week play.

The play is a cumulative and collaborative effort. The group comes up with the play's theme(s) and they each choose their individual roles. The oldest campers then come up with a detailed script for everyone to perform to their parents at the end of the week.

It is evident on the last day how much the kids have enjoyed their time at Spirit Connections. Reactions vary; some are excited and proud to tour their parents around, while others may cry their eyes out at the prospect of it all being over.

Every day of the camp there is learning that validates both individual uniqueness and overall unity. The kids learn about "all our relations": how spirits, ancestors, future generations, animals, plants, trees, insects, stones, the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, water, and fire are all a part of the circle of life, and how we are all no more or less important than any other living beings.

The children exude a certain glow during their time at camp – the 'Spirit Connections glow', as one parent put it. The camp environment is positive for all, but especially for those children who

feel out of place in their schools or amongst their regular peer group. It is a place that equally offers healing and nourishment of each child's individuality.

The camp is based in a large open area barn. There are also a tipi, an open field, a frog pond, an above ground swimming pool, and even badminton and basketball nets, with time everyday for activities at each.

Seven years ago, Sherman and Benson started the camp out of their own home with only five kids per week.

The next year they ran both summer and March break sessions out of a rented school building, with ten campers per week. A prayer was then answered, in the form of the present day site. Demand for spaces in the camp's three weeks of operation each summer is such that a waiting list exists by April.

The camp's concept could be used as a model to inspire other ventures elsewhere, providing more youth with exposure to Aboriginal education and a connection to the true spirit of learning – honouring self and being in harmony with others.

## Outro

So all this was kind of an introduction for me to the issues and culture of the Aboriginal people of this land on which I / we are living. Hopefully it served to raise your awareness as well.

I am glad that there is a range of things included in here, from history of what has happened, to culture and philosophy, to militant activism. I think it's important to make the connections between those things and not to isolate or separate them.

I mentioned in the Intro that I found out about these events etc mainly through WPIRG, the Waterloo Public Interest Research Group. It points out the importance of being connected to the local community – whether it be through activist, cultural or personal connections, there's a lot to be said for the communication networks that allow people to connect with what is going on, to be able to learn, develop relations, and help out. \*\*Note: the websites on the back cover are great starting places to get connected, but I'm sure there are other ways you can find, wherever you are.

This was all from a while back; currently I'm involved with a grassroots / community activist group in Ottawa, the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa (IPSMO). We work to educate ourselves and others, and to offer support to Aboriginal communities in their diverse struggles for justice.

And as part of IPSMO, I've also become involved in helping to organize Indigenous Sovereignty Week in Ottawa. ISW is a week of events in late October organized in cities and communities across Canada, initiated by the Defenders of the Land network.

Defenders of the Land came about through a gathering of Aboriginal activists and allies in Winnipeg in October of 2008. It is the beginning of a collective effort to work for Indigenous Sovereignty and defense of Mother Earth on this part of Turtle Island (the Aboriginal name for the continent otherwise known as 'North America'). It is an exciting development, one that promises to end the isolation between geographically-separate communities of activists and to build a strong, united movement of support and action.

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