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John Medicine Horse Kelly for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on August 7, 2000.
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This study documents thick-description single-source data from the life and experiences of a Native American / Native Canadian language worker. The worker, raised and educated in the United States, was separated from his ancestral village until his thirties. The worker, with a Masters degree in education from Oregon State University, returned to live in his village in Canada in 1993, dedicating his life to assisting with preserving and revitalising his people's language and culture. As such, the socio-psychological parameters of his life from birth until the present provide vital insights into the lives, the problems and the angst typically faced by First Nations language workers. The purpose of this study is twofold.

1. Through the traditional genre of Aboriginal autobiography, the dissertation provides crucial insights and primary-source data regarding First Nations realities. The intent is to encourage further studies of the plight of the few existing First Nations language workers, many of whom leave their work due to becoming overwhelmed and discouraged.
2. The author advocates for the founding of an international Aboriginal Peace Corps, a proposed coalition of First Nations communities, national governments and the private sector. The goal of the Aboriginal Peace Corps would be to put skilled workers into indigenous communities to work alongside community members. In view of the high rate of deaths among elders, the last language speakers in most communities, immediate assistance is urgently needed. While time remains, only through an Aboriginal Peace Corps can communities obtain sufficient expertise in accelerated language learning and in resource technologies to revitalise and perpetuate their languages.

The Returner

A First Nations Autobiographical Study

Understanding the Causes of First Nations Language Decline and Extinction from the Perspective of a First Nations Language Worker

by

John Medicine Horse Kelly

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Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing Education

Redacted for Privacy

Director of School of Education

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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John Medicine Horse Kelly, Author

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Life

is a process
of
careful *editing*

A Special Thank You

to

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patiently and joyfully

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The Returner

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is to provide single-source phenomenological data in support of Aboriginal people raised and university-educated off-reserve (off-reservation) who return to work in First Nations communities. Because the format to a large extent is autobiographical, writing throughout is in the first person.

It is my experience that the attrition rate of many educated Aboriginal individuals who return to work on-reserve is extremely high. When these worker leave, they take with them important skills needed on-reserve to revitalise languages and cultures. In this dissertation I will highlight some of the complex causative factors, or more precisely, the personal socio-psychometric realities, that First Nations

language workers face in their efforts to revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures. I also will suggest new approaches to revitalising First Nations languages and culture.

The heart of my dissertation is qualitative autobiographical narratives of my life and work as an Aboriginal person. A review of the literature indicates that my dissertation likely is unique; apparently no other thick description autobiographical studies exist on the subject of First Nations language and culture workers. One other First Nations dissertation, written by Sidner Larson (1994) formerly of the University of Oregon in Eugene, was partially structured on autobiographical data.

It is hoped that this dissertation's primary-source information will be useful both in the First Nations world and the academic world in countering the loss of highly-educated Aboriginal language and culture workers.

The dissertation is qualitative, yet in some respects structurally similar to quantitative design.

Discussed in Chapter One are the historic and present realities of First Nations colonisation as well

as the rationale for the use of Aboriginal autobiography as a primary-source study.

The instrument in Chapter Two is qualitative First Nations narrative utilising autobiographical phenomenological primary source data. The data are intended to provide firsthand insight into the history, experiences and perspectives of a First Nations language worker, a Haida person whose ancestral village is located on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) of British Columbia. As such, the narratives are intended as multidimensional documents useful in both the First Nations and the Academic worlds. To safeguard the primary-source cultural integrity of the data, I have explicitly refrained from employing footnoting, referencing and academic analysis in these First Nations narratives.

Chapter Three presents an analysis of historic First Nations autobiography, including a retroactive analysis of the phenomenological data presented in the autobiographic narratives of Chapter 2. In the epilogue, Paulo Freire's perspective is explored regarding the destructive effects of colonialism that have been internalised in First Nations cultures. The

impact of colonialism continues to have a serious impact upon essentially all First Nations peoples.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Of the 208 surviving First Nations languages in North America, nearly all are moribund (not transmitted from elders to youth) and only a few are expected to survive beyond the now rapidly-dying generation that contains the last of the fluent speakers (Crawford, 1994; Krauss, 1992; Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1999). Central and South American First Nations are experiencing a similar crisis.

In the United States, more than one-third of the surviving 155 First Nations languages have fewer than 100 speakers. Nearly all are elderly (Census Bureau, U.S. 1993).

A serious problem is that while accelerated language revitalisation methodology is capable of revitalising the languages, First Nations reserves face serious shortages in skilled workers. Consequently comparatively few Aboriginal people on-reserve are trained in advanced language-related methodologies.

A serious complication is that Aboriginal people raised and educated off-reserve often return to face alienation and discouragement in their ancestral villages. Although little data exist, my personal observations indicate that many of these workers once again leave the reserve. The loss of these highly educated individuals results in a loss of expertise in professional, educational and technical skills crucial to revitalising and perpetuating First Nations languages and cultures.

1.3 Methodology: Aboriginal Autobiography as Primary-Source Data

As the autobiographer in this dissertation I am the Aboriginal language worker about whom the narratives in Chapter Two are written. As such, my life experiences prior to and after returning to my Aboriginal village provide important insights into the socio-psychological realities facing First Nations language workers.

My narratives are exclusively written in the traditional First Nations genre that developed in the centuries after 1762 when a Mohegan, Samuel Occom, wrote an account of his life (Brumble, 1988). The genre, further developed over the centuries by Sarah Winnemucca

(1883/1994) and approximately 600 other Aboriginal autobiographers adapts traditional oral presentation to the written format introduced after European contact.

The goals of this dissertation mandated that the First Nations integrity of the narrative chapter would in no way be compromised.

Nevertheless, I am aware that this dissertation necessarily required representing the perspectives of two worldviews: First Nations and academia. My goal is to synergistically provide a high degree of usefulness in both cultures.

I selected autobiographic narrative data as the preferred methodology for two main reasons:

First, very little primary-source data were available regarding the socio-psychometric dimensions of university-educated Aboriginal language workers who have suffered alienation after returning to work in their ancestral villages.

Second, as the autobiographer I am a Haida Aboriginal person raised off-reserve. My career after moving to my ancestral village has been dedicated to assisting with revitalising my own and other First Nations languages and cultures.

Additionally, my First Nations community is among those whose languages are "critically endangered" (Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, 1999). In a community of more than 600 people, fewer than 25 elders speak Haida.

As such, my village in many ways is typical of most other First Nations communities. In the year 2000, community elders estimated that of the 25 elders who speak Haida, only 10 to 15 were in sufficiently good health to share Haida with the younger generations.

In other communities, the situation is far worse. For example, according to Janne Underiner, a linguist working with the Klamath Nation of eastern Oregon, the Klamath number 3,000 people. However, only one fluent speaker remains - and she is 92 years old (Personal Communication, July, 2000).

Because of my background as a First Nations person and because the nature of the inquiry did not fit the positivistic perspective, I determined that First Nations autobiography as a qualitative study would uniquely fit the goals of this dissertation.

For this study, I selected this naturalistic approach to document my experiences and perspectives as

an Aboriginal language worker. My autobiographic narrative provides an intimate perspective on the socio-psychological realities facing First Nations people who have been raised and/or educated at universities off-reserve, returning to live and work in their traditional villages.

As primary-source material, the First Nations autobiographic narratives provide an ensample of the altogether too small percentage of those returners who are dedicated to working with First Nations languages and cultures.

Although nearly all First Nations languages in North America in particular are expected to die with the few remaining fluent elders (Crawford, 1993), my personal experience is that most of these elders strongly desire to revitalise their languages. Because too few skilled workers exist and too little time remains, it is extremely important to counteract the attrition of Aboriginal language workers.

My desire in writing is to support these First Nations workers in the difficulties they experience after moving to First Nations communities. For that reason, I documented in the narratives my life both on

and off Haida Gwaii. To the best of my ability my narratives present in a deeply descriptive autobiographical format my perspective, insights and experiences.

1.4 Research Methodology: Aboriginal Autobiography as a Multi-Cultural Document

The objective driving my dissertation is to create a crosscultural document that will, in these last remaining days, assist First Nations in the Americas with revitalising and perpetuating their languages and cultures:

1.4.1 *The Primary Source Data are Aboriginal*

First Nations should find the autobiography useful in that it is written from the worldview and consciousness of an indigenous person living under the effects of colonialism. As such, the material reflects the values, concepts and ideals preserved by many First Nations despite the coloniser's linguistic and cultural suppression. In light of these pressures, protecting the dissertation's cultural integrity presents a unique challenge. To artificially metamorphose the narrative data into a

more academic format would have, in a manner of speaking, "colonised" the primary-source autobiography, seriously undermining its value to First Nations cultures.

1.4.2 *The Primary Source Data are Academic*

Likewise, "colonising" the narratives would have undermined their value to the academic culture. Researchers should find the data useful in that they are intended for use in inductive methodology, particularly in grounded theory as opposed to qualitative Quasi-Deductive methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser (1969, 1994), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and others, is a tool for the analysis of psychological and social data that do not lend themselves to positivist deductive analysis.

Although the narratives are written in a style consistent with indigenous cultures, I wrote with both the First Nations and academic communities in mind. Both First Nations and academia should benefit from the information regarding problems university-educated

Aboriginal returners often face with socio-psychological adjustment and community acceptance.

As stated previously, it is imperative that these educated workers continue to live and work in their First Nations communities. These returners possess an "insider" understanding of both First Nations and non-First Nations worldviews, values and priorities. Also, their professional skills are of great value in Aboriginal language revitalisation and perpetuation.

1.5 Aboriginal Autobiography: Appropriate for a Single-Source Study

The autobiographical narratives approach is particularly appropriate for at least three reasons:

1.5.1 *Author is a First Nations Language Worker*

A review of the literature indicates that few Aboriginal language workers educated off-reserve have written autobiographical accounts that detail their psychological profiles, personal history, current experiences and perceptions before and after their return to their traditional villages. A First Nations autobiography, written by an Aboriginal person with sufficient academic

background, would be of particular value because the author understands the cultural norms and requirements of both worlds.

1.5.2 A Strong Need Exists for Naturalistic Studies Regarding the Critical Shortfall in First Nations Language Workers

A review of the literature indicates that no substantial naturalistic studies exist regarding the causes of the critical shortfall in First Nations language workers. Autobiographic narrative records primary source data of value to other researchers generating new theories regarding this problem.

1.5.3 *Multicultural Autobiography Useful Both in Academic and First Nations Cultures*

The First Nations narratives refrain from referencing, footnoting and academic analysis. First Nations autobiography developed though 600 writers over the past 250 years beginning with a Mohecan, Samuel Occom, who wrote the first North American Aboriginal autobiography (Brumble 1988).

This long-traditional First Nations format protects the Aboriginal integrity of the data. The

goal is to enhance the value of the autobiography for both traditional First Nations and Academic purposes.

1.6 Aboriginal Autobiography as an Instrument for Qualitative Research

My narratives are presented as data developed and based upon thick description and a naturalistic "insider" approach (Walcott, 1973; Geertz, 1973). As such, I wrote in the first person to provide an unparalleled "insider" perspective.

This insider approach is a key goal of naturalistic qualitative research (Sackman, 1991).

Naturalistic research is based upon the premise that comprehending human issues and realities requires documenting the sum of environmental and personal experiences as well as the psychological profile of the informant (Polit & Hungler, 1997). Quantification, consequently, is problematic. Naturalistic inquiry, a goal of which is to comprehend the "socially-structured" realities of the informant, requires appropriate qualitative methodology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

1.7 Methodological Limitations

The naturalistic research paradigm also provides the methodological limitation for this dissertation. The autobiographic narratives, as primary-source information, are personal and highly subjective. For that reason, I protected the cultural integrity of the First Nations narratives by avoiding interpretation and analysis in those sections: Geertz (1973) wrote:

> In finished anthropological writings, . . . this fact - that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to - is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. . . . Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications. (pp. 5-9)

The questions surrounding "explicating explications" affect all who pursue objectivity. This is true whether researchers choose positivistic or naturalistic methodologies. However, objectivity is not an issue for traditional First Nations methodologies. First Nations epistemology and ontology do not attempt to separate the observer from the observed. In indigenous Aboriginal epistemology value is based upon establishing the validity and reliability of the observer rather than the

"object" that is observed. As such First Nations methodology neither "explicates explications" nor creates secondary "constructions" out of primary constructions.

For that reason, I make no attempt to develop theory or to impose conclusions in the narratives. Academic analysis is limited to Chapter Three in which I will examine the data both in context of other First Nations autobiographers, and in the epilogue, to the writings of Paulo Freire (1970/1993).

My intent here is twofold:

1.7.1 ***Academic Integrity***

My conviction is that the data are least distorted in their pristine state. Insights gained from these phenomenological data as well as data from other sources in the field could provide essential support urgently needed to avert disaster in what are the final hours of many First Nations languages and cultures.

1.7.2 ***First Nations Integrity***

The data will be presented to a multi-cultural audience who exist largely in the academic world. Aboriginal cultural materials do not easily interconnect systemically in the non-Aboriginal academic format. I therefore consider it important to protect the Aboriginal nature of the First Nations autobiographic narratives. Academic analysis of my autobiographic narratives would impose an alien system that in crucial ways would destroy the integrity and usefulness of the phenomenological data. Consequently, quantification and even naturalistic analysis would not be appropriate in the narratives. The primary-source data must be as Aboriginal as possible to have multi-dimensional applications that are eminently useful both in First Nations and in academic contexts.

1.8 **The Observer as Participant**

Clifford Geertz (1973) wrote that human cultural realities and humanistic inquiry require more than simple quantification of data:

> The concept of culture I espouse . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning . . . This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods . . . What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description" (1973, pp. 5-6).

On the one hand, academic quantitative analysis cannot supply the necessary depth of understanding and personal insight that the insider perspective alone can provide. On the other hand, traditional First Nations personal narrative is best interpreted solely in its own cultural context. As such it does not fit the standard academic mould.

1.9 Language and Culture Crisis

A core First Nations concept is that all that exists is interconnected, a viewpoint considered valid in many academic circles as well. If that premise is true, and all human communities exist, then all human communities including First Nations and non-First Nations are interconnected.

This simple syllogistic logic leads to a powerful conclusion: As this dissertation establishes, the

health of First Nations communities depends upon the vitality of their cultures and languages. By the same token, the health of the world community is interconnected with the First Nations communities.

The death of languages and cultures disrupts First Nations communities. If all human communities are interconnected, then every culture has a stake in the revitalisation of First Nations languages and cultures. Likewise, all human communities would benefit if the full power of a multi-community coalition, such as an international Aboriginal Peace Corps, were brought to bear on First Nations language and culture revitalisation.

At this very moment, language-fluent elders are dying. The urgent fact is that without effective assistance on a massive scale, nearly all the First Nations languages in the Americas will be extinct within a generation (Krauss, 1992; McKinley, 2000).

The cost of this cultural disruption in human lives and welfare is immense. For that reason, revitalising First Nations languages and cultures must become a priority for the world community.

Effective assistance does not mean to "throw money at the problem." Money alone will not save First Nations languages and cultures. In this dissertation I propose that effective multi-community assistance must take the form of an international Aboriginal Peace Corps, a coalition in which language and culture experts would work side by side with First Nations community members. An Aboriginal Peace Corps would focus private sector expertise, government resources and First Nations communities in a unified effort to revitalise First Nations languages and cultures.

As discussed later in this chapter, the impending deaths of languages and cultures translates to psychological dysfunction and even death for of many thousands of First Nations people. This is an overwhelming concern. In Canada, the Assembly of First Nations (2000) said that indigenous

> (l)anguages are of utmost significance for First Nations peoples. The survival of these languages is essential to the identity of First Nations as culturally-distinct peoples. Most of the 53 [Canadian] First Nations member languages are on the verge of extinction. Only three First Nations languages are widely used in schools, media, and publications: Cree, Ojibway and Inuit. Thus, First Nations languages are in a state of emergency. Drastic and immediate measures must be taken

> to reverse the accelerating rate of loss for First Nations languages.

The crisis is extreme. In Oregon, as mentioned earlier, of the 3,000 members of the Klamath First Nation only one 92-year-old speaker is alive (Janne Underiner, Linguist, Personal Communication, July, 2000). On the White Bear Indian Reserve in Saskatchewan, the situation very recently became equally extreme. Prior to this revision of my dissertation, I had reported that of the 1,700 Nakoda residents, only three elderly Nakoda speakers were alive. Just yesterday I learned that within the past few weeks, two of those elders had died. The Nakoda also have only one speaker left (Sara McArthur, Band [Tribal] Council member, White Bear First Nations, Personal Communication, June 30 & September 9, 2000).

Ironically, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations said recently:

> We, the Indian people of Saskatchewan, are determined to retain our languages. We are oral people. The spoken word holds the key to our reality. Our Elders are the trustees, teachers, and interpreters of our complex heritage. We are determined to return to the source of our wisdom and to learn anew. We hear the Elder's words and are striving to understand. We are determined to give our children the opportunity to be involved in our unique world views, histories, legends,

> stories, humour, social rules, morality, and ways of seeing and describing our worlds. Our languages teach us these things. We cannot afford to lose them (McKinley, 2000).

The situation is equally critical elsewhere. According to a 1990 report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal People, 43 of Canada's 53 Native languages are "on the verge of extinction." The remaining ten are described as threatened (McKinley, 2000).

1.10 Aboriginal Living Languages Group

As will be detailed in the narratives, for the past six years my life and my career have been devoted to revitalising First Nations languages and cultures. Toward this goal my wife, Wendy Campbell, and I founded our own company based upon a Peace Corps type of direct community involvement. Our Aboriginal Living Languages Group (ALLanguages Group) is a not-for-profit Canadian organisation devoted to assisting Canadian and U.S. bands/tribes with regenerating their languages and cultures.

The origin of ALLanguages Group was inauspicious. In September 1994, I began working as the First Nations Education Coordinator for the school district that

served the Skidegate Haida Band, my own First Nation. At that time, the only Haida language program on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands south of the Alaskan panhandle) was taught by paraprofessionals at the elementary school level.

Just prior to my arrival, a $50,000 curriculum development grant for the two Haida bands on the Islands had been so poorly utilised that the British Columbia Ministry of Education was threatening to take steps to recover the money.

In February 1995, I met Wendy, a second languages methodology specialist who occasionally travelled to Haida Gwaii to work with paraprofessional Haida language instructors. Wendy was exceptionally gifted in working with languages and with First Nations people. Everyone loved her. As time went by, we became a team with the goal of creating a comprehensive community-based Haida language and culture program.

I had persuaded the Ministry of Education to give Haida Gwaii another chance, but only if we first proved that we had the expertise to properly develop a First Nations language curriculum.

Wendy and I teamed up to meet the challenge. Wendy already was nationally renowned as the author of several language methodology texts and as an innovator in whole language instruction. It was a delight to work with her. Together we produced a Haida core curriculum framework document and a sample language unit.

The Ministry was extremely impressed. On the strength of that submission, we were allowed to submit another grant proposal. We won the grant. Not only that, the old grant was forgiven on the stipulation that Wendy and myself would be the curriculum developers.

Grade 8, our first level, was produced in 1996 and instantly was an overwhelming success. An Aboriginal administrator at the Ministry of Education described our Grade 8 level as "the best language curriculum that ever crossed this desk" (Dickson Taylor, Personal Communication, April 1996).

My school district then instructed Wendy and I to begin developing an articulated Kindergarten - Grade 11 Haida Language and Culture Curriculum (See Appendix B). We also began restructuring and implementing the entire community-wide Haida language and culture program.

In three years we raised more than $500,000 in grants for a variety of innovative projects, including a "Resident Grandparent Program." The program, a first for Haida Gwaii, hired Haida elders to move freely throughout the schools. The elders provided children with counsel and comfort while sharing the Haida language with them.

Our Peace Corps approach, which developed in those days, generated powerful community support. In 1998, 20 of the 30 surviving Haida-fluent elders in my own Skidegate Village, one of the two Haida villages on the Islands, requested us to train them as language immersion teachers. We agreed. The oldest teacher who passed the course was 93 years old. Under our direction, these new immersion teachers and other community members held an intensive 10-day summer immersion.

The immersion ranks as one of the most powerful events of my life. The Haida language immersion in Skidegate became a community-wide celebration. The entire village participated through the language in rebuilding community unity, pride, and health. Elders who had been languishing in the Seniors Centre, suddenly

were infused with new life. Caregivers reported that the elders dressed in finer clothes and that their health dramatically improved.

For the first time in nearly a hundred years, according to the elders, Haida was spoken and sung with laughter, nightly feasting, dancing and a parade through the streets of the village.

At a feast celebrating the conclusion of the immersion, 40 emergent language speakers gave their first Haida speeches in front of more than 400 community members.

Reynold Russ (1998), the village chief of the Massett Haida community to the north, also spoke at the feast. With tears in his eyes, he said in Haida and in English, "Never in my lifetime did I expect to see this. . . . Now I know the Haida language will come back."

Wendy and I directly witnessed the community-rebuilding power of language and culture revitalisation. The system that worked was an Aboriginal Peace Corps styled team of skilled personnel and Haida community members.

In the following two years, the energy and hope of the summer immersion transformed the community. Wendy

and I, working with elders and other community members, developed and implemented a Skidegate Day Care Preschool Language Nest. We also founded the Skidegate Haida Immersion Program (SHIP) a school-supported community adult and youth language instruction revitalisation program. Additionally, we provided further training and support for language programs operated by the Skidegate Band's new Aboriginal Head Start Program.

However, we urgently needed community-based language regeneration and archival resources for use in all school and village programs. Utilising my background in computer technology and professional audio-video recording, we developed unique methods for creating CD based resources. For recording elders, I researched and designed a cost-effect professional-quality portable CD recording system. I also designed a computerised audio editing and CD production system that was directly integrated into the portable recording system.

Our first CD, "Nannu Kil: Skidegate Baby Talk", contained 54 phrases commonly used with infants and children, as well as traditional Haida songs that had

been archived on audio tapes during the last half-century.

The CDs, designed for use on any consumer CD player, were an immediate hit. At only $5 per copy, every Skidegate home wanted one. We produced and distributed hundreds of them. We thought people would use them primarily as a learning resource. They did that, but to out surprise, they went further. People kept playing the CDs all day, every day. The CD was a bigger hit in Skidegate than rock and roll!

A second CD, "Xaayda Kil: Skidegate People Talk", contained traditional music and 126 Haida phrases for everyday use. In tandem, the CDs made it possible to bring the Haida language back into every school, every community program, and every home.

Last year, Canada's Department of Indian Affairs awarded us $135,000 to create an eight-CD set based upon our Kindergarten - Grade 11 Haida Language and Culture Curriculum. Language-fluent elders are involved in scripting Haida and recording the project. The grant includes funding to produce 500 copies at each grade level for distribution to every Skidegate student and home.

Throughout the years, the Ministry of Education has closely watched us. An official said privately that we had transformed Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) from the "black hole of the province" to the "leading edge" of community-based Aboriginal language and culture education (Jeff Smith, Aboriginal Education Coordinator, Personal Communication, May 1997).

Wendy and I strengthened our Peace Corps styled working alliance, officially launching Aboriginal Living Languages Group in August 1999. ALLanguages Group extended its services to Canada and the United States after numerous suggestions that our system was crucially needed elsewhere.

ALLanguages Group does far more than assist with finding the meagre funding available through the government's current granting system. We go directly into the communities, working alongside the people to create successful programs. With our technical assistance, community members create accelerated language learning programs, install CD recording systems, and produce vital language and cultural resources.

ALLanguages Group advocates an international Peace Corps because we know full well that working with communities to revitalise languages and cultures is a formidable challenge; clearly too much for one small organisation. We live by the conviction that ALLanguages Group must continue to set the example.

Therefore we will not allow the challenge to overwhelm us. Despite the fact that nearly every First Nations language in the Americas is on the edge of extinction, the Skidegate language revival and consistently similar experiences with other First Nations has rekindled our hope. More than that, we are absolutely convinced that a Aboriginal Peace Corps that unifies community involvement, private-sector expertise and sufficient support from the government powerfully could revitalise the languages yet alive.

ALLanguages Group's success is why in this dissertation I propose the founding of an international Aboriginal Peace Corps.

1.11 Revitalising and Perpetuating First Nations Languages and Cultures: Harsh Realities

Effective language programs, favourable politics and grants are crucially important. However, over the

past six years I have learned that it is impossible to regenerate Aboriginal languages without working in partnership with the elders and other dedicated people at the community level. This knowledge has been gained through direct and repeated experience.

Every community we have contacted has strongly desired to revitalise its language, but the shortfall in financial resources, elders and professionally trained workers is extreme.

Throughout Canada elders are dying at an alarming rate. In Skidegate alone, in the past three years more than half the fluent elders have died. On Haida Gwaii, three Haida-fluent elders died in just the past three months. Every week, it seems, we hear that another elder in our village or another First Nation nearby has died. This is happening throughout the Americas. Despite the existence of skills and resources for revitalisation, nearly all the languages are dying with them.

This must not be allowed to continue. Our languages are a vital and irreplaceable element in our First Nations cultures. They are also a vital and irreplaceable element in the history and the legacy of

all humanity. With each First Nations language that dies, also dies the heritage of all humanity.

While it seems that this should go without saying, it must be said again: *Only people can save their own languages. Promises, politics and grants cannot do it alone.*

The languages are not dying because of a lack of desire. Over and over again Wendy and I have seen First Nations communities demonstrate powerful motivation to save their languages.

Language programs need financial and political support, but such support usually depends upon government grants. Under the current granting system, to gain the necessary credibility, First Nations language advocates must be skilled communicators both in First Nations and non-First Nations cultural norms. Moreover, they must become experts in their fields: professionally trained, persistent, knowledgeable and talented as grass-roots workers.

The fact that the on-reserve shortfall in skilled workers and technical expertise is so extreme is why an Aboriginal Peace Corps is the only viable option left.

Preserving and regenerating First Nations languages would be challenging even under ideal circumstances. However, social, political and economic realities for all First Nations are far less than ideal. Suicide, deaths from other causes, substance abuse, family dysfunction, economic depression and political conflicts are several times more devastating to First Nations than to non-First Nations societies.

In the United States, suicide, for example, is nearly three times higher among Native Americans ages 15 - 24 than among non-Native young people. The Aboriginal rate is 37.5 deaths per 100,000 as compared to 13.2 deaths per 100,000 for non-Aboriginal youth (May, P.A., 1987; Indian Health Service, 1994, p. 46). The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (1999) said, "American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest suicide rates of all ethnic groups in the United States, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native youth"

In the 1990 National American Indian Adolescent Health Survey, eight First Nations communities were surveyed. Researchers asked 11,666 First Nations students in Grades 7 - 12 if they had ever tried to

commit suicide. 21.8 percent of the girls, and 11.8 percent of the boys reported that they had done so. The rates were highest among girls and boys with a history of friends or family members attempting or completing suicide. They also reported sleep problems, physical or sexual abuse, health problems, alcohol or drug use, poor school performance, emotional problems, involvement with gangs, and accessibility to firearms (Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland & Blum, 1999).

More than this, based upon the 1990 US census, in every major category, death rates for all ages are consistently higher for Aboriginal people than for other ethnic groups (Indian Health Service, U.S. 1994, p.5):

1. tuberculosis - 440 percent greater;
2. alcoholism - 430 percent greater;
3. accidents - 165 percent greater;
4. diabetes mellitus - 154 percent greater;
5. homicide - 50 percent greater;
6. pneumonia and influenza - 46 percent greater;
7. suicide - 43 percent greater.

In Canada, the situation for First Nations is far worse. In British Columbia, for example, three percent of the population are registered as Aboriginal people, yet between 1991 and 1997 they accounted for more than eight percent of the deaths from all causes. Mortalities are 70 percent higher than the overall

provincial rate (British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency 1998, Oct. 4).

The situation is far worse than that of the United States. According to the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency, Dec. 1998). Aboriginal deaths are:

1. tuberculosis - 800 percent greater;
2. alcoholism - 600 percent greater;
3. accidents and violence - 350 percent greater;
4. diabetes mellitus - 200 percent greater;
5. homicide - 450 percent greater;
6. pneumonia and influenza - 200 percent greater;
7. suicide - 300 percent greater.

In addition, deaths from AIDS/HIV were more than double the provincial rate, while deaths from fire or flames was nine time the provincial rate (British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency, 1998, Dec.).

British Columbia mirrors the statistics for Canada as a whole. Life expectancy for Canadian First Nations people is about eight years less than for non-First Nations people (Kimball n.d.):

> The life expectancy for registered Indian men in 1991 was 66 years compared with 74 years for other Canadian men, up from 64 years and 73 years, respectively, in 1986. life expectancy for registered Indian women is generally higher that that of men. Between 1986 and 1991, life expectancy increased from 71 years to 73 years for Registered Indian Women and from 80 years to 81 years for Canadian women in general.

The higher death rates from suicide, alcohol, alcohol-related accidents, drug abuse, violence and diseases are associated with poor sanitation and living conditions (British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency, 1998, Dec.; Kimball, n.d.). Cculthard (1999) directly links these conditions to the colonial era, with its attendant loss of language and culture. Coulthard writes that:

> the self-destructive behavior of Aboriginal people cannot be analyzed primarily in terms of "mental disorders," but must be looked at in the context of historical colonial relations. Canada's Indian Policy . . . suggests that Native people were an inferior, uncivilized group, lacking the moral qualities of the colonizing society. Metis intellectual and activist, Howard Adams (1995), argues that this Eurocentric myth, that Aboriginal people are inferior to the Euro-Canadian society, has been ingrained into Aboriginal consciousness. In Adams' own words:
>
>> Racial stereotypes also play an important role in shaping a Native's consciousness. Subjective feelings, such as inferiority, are an integral part of consciousness, and work together with the objective reality of poverty and deprivation to shape a Native's world view. Society's ideological system determines one's viewpoint and shapes one's consciousness – most often for life (Adams, 1995, p. 37).
>
> This state of consciousness plays an integral role in the development of psycho-biological ailments such as clinical depression and anxiety disorders, developed by Aboriginal people. This has resulted in the self-destructive tendencies, characteristic for

> Aboriginal people living on reserves across Canada, a direct result of Indian policy.

Suicide among youth is a powerful indicator of the social dysfunction associated with lack of self-esteem and self-identity. In Canada as in the United States, suicide rates are highest among young people making the obviously difficult transition into adulthood. Coulthard (1999) writes:

> According to the report submitted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the suicide rate among Aboriginals of all age groups is three times higher than that of non-Aboriginal people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, p. 1). The rate of suicide with regards to Native youth is five to six times higher than non-Native youth (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, p. 11). The situation regarding Native youth is particularly frightening. According to the statistics, 38 percent of all registered Indians in Canada are under the age of fifteen, which means that over the next fifteen years this age group will be passing through the years of greatest risk for suicide (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1995, p. 11). If a remedy is not developed for the suicide problem the figures will rise drastically over the next fifteen years while Aboriginal youth pass through the high risk years of fifteen through twenty-nine (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 16-17).

As alarming as the statistics are they are underestimated. In reality, the suicide crisis is even worse. Coulthard (1999) writes:

> In a study on Aboriginal suicide in British Columbia, the researchers show that an estimated 25 percent of accidental deaths in Native communities are actually unreported suicides (Stephenson, 1995, p. 209). Furthermore, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' report suggest similar discrepancies, suggesting that some self inflicted Aboriginal deaths have been wrongly classified as non-Aboriginal deaths (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1995, p. 17).

Senseless death is a stark and ever-present reality, not an abstraction. For me and for other First Nations people, the statistics are not "numbers"; they are sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and close friends.

Not surprisingly, First Nations suicides are intertwined with the loss of Aboriginal languages and cultures. Coulthard (1999) writes:

> The high suicide rate among Native people is to a large extent due to culture stress. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report (1995) defines culture stress as:
>
> > the loss of confidence by individuals or groups in the ways of understanding life and living (norms, values and beliefs) that were taught to them within their original cultures and the personal or collective distress that may result. (p. 21)
>
> Culture stress among Canadian Aboriginals is the result of colonization and subsequent Indian policies. In studies done on Aboriginal suicide in British Columbia, it was shown that rates were higher when the loss of

> traditional culture and values was felt by individuals or communities (B.C. Institute on Family Violence, 1991, p. 12). Also concluded in this study was that "communities with a low rate of suicide have retained some traditions and have remained in relative isolation from the acculturation process to the larger North American society" (B.C Institute on Family Violence, 1991, p. 12). Furthermore, the Agenda for First Nations and Inuit Mental Health [Medical Services Branch Health and Welfare Canada, 1991] studies found that "many First Nation children have grown up with little or no exposure to traditional values, beliefs and practices. As a result, they feel alienated from their indigenous identity and from the elders in their community" (Medical Services Branch Health and Welfare Canada, 1991, p. 16).

Revitalising languages and cultures, therefore, can literally save lives. But in the midst of social dysfunction and death, it is difficult to find the strength to save languages and cultures. The problem becomes a vicious downward spiral.

No one can know this better than people who, like myself, have lived among their own relatives on-reserve. We are the ones who are hurt and heartbroken when our relatives suffer pain, we are the ones who watch our relatives and friends die month by month, one by one.

1.12 Requirements for a Successful Language Program

Diminishing the "statistics" through revitalising languages and cultures requires a monumental effort. Nevertheless, the act of revitalising a language and culture is a revolutionary act of learning to value who we are. This act is the seed of renewal. Our languages and traditional cultures are inextricably part of knowing ourselves and our true humanity.

The decline of languages and cultures is extreme. We need to bring to bear upon the problem the best human resources available regardless of whether the source is Aboriginal or not. My personal experience has been that a successful language program is most effective that unifies the best methodologies of the non-First Nations world with the best cultural traditions of the First Nations world. Based upon this, a powerful program would encompass at least three broad areas:

1.12.1. *Administration*

Administrators and community coordinators must possess strong program organisational skills, effective grant proposal writing abilities as well as the political expertise and charisma to work

effectively with tribal/band councils, educators, administrators, elders and the general First Nations public.

1.12.2 ***Program Operation***

Language and culture program workers must possess school/community curriculum development skills and/or teaching skills, as well as the ability to work with all community members from elders to youth.

1.12.3 ***Resource Production and Archiving***

The best technology currently available for First Nations languages makes use of relatively inexpensive professional compact disk recording and editing systems. Compact disks, in contrast to audiotapes, possess the audio clarity and dynamic range to accurately reproduce the subtleties inherent in many First Nations languages. More than that, phalocyanine-dye-based gold recordable CDs (those that are gold coloured on the shiny recording side) are archival, with anticipated life expectancies of more than 100 years. The dark blue

recordable CDs must be avoided. Despite their lower price, the unstable cyanine dye formula has a shelf life of about ten years.

Skilled CD recording and production is a true art form. Computer-based CD editing, for example, typically takes one hour of labour to produce one edited minute of finished audio.

The CD media artist must possess more than the ability to adapt to and utilise rapid advances in technology. CD media production mandates the same intelligence, creativity and patience required of other artists.

CD media artists also need proficiency in a broad range of social and technical skills that include the ability to work directly with First Nations elders during language-recording sessions.

These media artists must be able to fully utilise digital technology for producing both contemporary and historic resources. Contemporary language resource production requires proficiency in scripting as well as CD recording, editing and production. Historic resource preservation requires additional skills in digitally enhancing

aging and deteriorating records, tapes and other resources, then archiving them onto gold 100+ year CDs.

Most importantly, the media artist must craft resources of the highest possible quality in order to properly meet the needs of the present as well as to provide for the long-range anticipated needs of the future.

Professional specialists are needed to fill positions in all three categories: administration, program operation and resource production. However, usually locating and funding such specialists is impossible. Unfortunately, almost no Language worker has the luxury of being able to focus on one specialty.

Certainly, specialisation has not been my luxury.

Wendy and I created the first long-term community language and culture curriculum development team on Haida Gwaii. The team was comprised of elders who were largely untrained paraprofessionals. At no time in six years were there more than two certified Haida teachers on the team other than myself. It is of note that one of those certified teachers, a wonderful Haida woman of

high social stature, died prematurely last year from breast cancer.

To make the team's activities possible Wendy and I constantly have had to fulfil all three categories: administration, program operation and resource production and archiving.

The reality is that professionally trained First Nations language workers must be willing to work long hours and to develop a broad range of skills and abilities.

The worker shortfall is so extreme that even in the absence of the ever-present political and social difficulties, one or even two people are not enough to staff a workable program.

Individuals with the degree of dedication and talent to take on such an extreme workload would be rare in any culture. Understandably, these qualities are best fostered in children raised in a positive family environment. But once again, First Nations realities are extremely discouraging.

1.13 Revitalising First Nations Languages: Personal Autonomy as a Prerequisite for First Nations Autonomy

I am both Haida and Jewish, the offspring of two nations, both of which historically have been affected by European and North American assimilation. The First Nations of the Americas share with the Israelis the call to regenerate their languages and to perpetuate their historic cultural destiny. The Jewish culture is in the lead. Israel has recovered incredibly, including its nearly extinct language and its national sovereignty.

However, Israel's accomplishments have practically no parallels in the Americas. Extant among nearly all First Nations are despair, social dysfunction and the constant threat of cultural and linguistic extinction.

Abraham Maslow's (1954/1970) Hierarchy of Needs is poignant here. First Nations collectively cannot scale the hierarchy and self-actualise when their people exist at Maslow's safety and security levels.

What is true for the collective is true in the inverse for the individual. Before the First Nations collectively can regenerate their languages and cultures each language worker individually must first scale Maslow's hierarchy.

The typical language worker faces formidable personal obstacles. Extremely difficult is the individual's rise above the safety and security levels in order to devote both life and career to language revitalisation.

Clearly, without grass-roots language workers who have achieved psychological health and autonomy, all or nearly all Aboriginal languages in the Americas will die.

In the narratives that follow, I will describe one such journey along the road to autonomy and the recovering of First Nations identity. An Aboriginal Peace Corps would create the necessary multi-community coalition to revitalise First Nations languages. But even with that, without individuals at the grassroots level who have recovered autonomy, it would remain impossible for First Nations people to regenerate their languages: a quest universally important for all humanity.

The following narratives are based upon my life experiences. I wish my story were an isolated story, but it is not. Variations on the theme are extant in "Indian Country."

My hope is to engage both the reader's soul and intellect in the narratives, to personally engage their imagination and internal participation. Hopefully this dissertation will counter what Paulo Freire (1970/1993) describes as the "banking" concept of education "in which the scope of action . . . extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits." In the "banking" system, the students:

> do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things that they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart for praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (p. 53).

My First Nations narratives are the core of my dissertation. The intent is to present the information holistically in light of the First Nations worldview that all communities Aboriginal and otherwise are interconnected. Moreover, every community, every being and every thing that exists in the universe is, in fact, intimately intertwined.

The importance to the planet of this consciousness cannot be overestimated: the loss of any of our languages and cultures will be a loss for all humanity. Likewise, the revitalising of any of our languages and cultures will benefit all humanity and ultimately will benefit the entire planet.

To adapt John Donne's poem, the death of any language and any culture diminishes all of humanity: "Ask not for whom the bell tolls," he wrote, "it tolls for thee."

On behalf of First Nations language and culture workers, I therefore invite you, the reader, to personally participate in our struggle to revitalise our indigenous languages and our cultures.

CHAPTER TWO
FIRST NATIONS AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES

2.1 PROLOGUE

The following narratives are an unusual approach to a dissertation. The personal information in these narratives is written in the First Nations literary style and format. The intention is to provide firsthand insight into the history and psyche of a typical First Nations language worker.

I am that language worker. After completing my graduate studies at Oregon State University, I lived and worked for the first time among my own Haida people on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) off the coast of west-central British Columbia. For six years, I was the First Nations Education Coordinator for School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte). My work was focussed upon regenerating the Haida language, which for years was in an advanced state of deterioration.

My primary responsibilities were to create, finance, implement and coordinate school and community-based programs designed to revitalise the Haida language.

The realities of being an Aboriginal person are stark, regardless of whether residence is on- or off-reserve.

To arrive at a point at which I was ready to assist with saving my language, it was necessary for me to overcome a lifetime of personal angst and alienation as an Aboriginal person.

Over the past five years, my wife, Wendy Campbell, and I have raised more than $500,000 for Haida language projects and successfully created school and community programs on Haida Gwaii. Nevertheless, to this day it is exceedingly difficult not to be overcome with discouragement.

Not only Haida, but several hundreds of indigenous languages in the Americas are dangerously close to extinction. Our elders who still speak our languages, the members of our Aboriginal communities who care, and we the workers who support them in their efforts to keep their languages alive, are the only hope left.

A sobering reality is that without the workers, the work will fail.

Please accept the First Nations narratives that follow for what they are intended to be: primary source

data. As I have mentioned elsewhere, it is important that the data be kept pristine, as free as possible from secondary influences. Because primary source colouration is a constant concern, secondary-source discussion and referencing are omitted from the narratives.

To those who read these personal narratives with respectful and enlightened concern for our plight as First Nations people, I say in Haida, Howa sta! (My thanks to you as a highly honourable person.)

2.2 Roots and Beginnings

I was born in 1947 shortly after the end of World War II, the second war to end all wars.

I was no stranger to the realities of genocide.

As a result of the Jewish Diaspora, one grandfather lost numerous relatives during World War II. The other, the Reverend Minister Peter Reginald Kelly, was among the last people to be born in a longhouse, our Haida equivalent of a tipi. He was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from a Canadian college, the first Aboriginal person to be honoured with a doctoral degree

and the first Aboriginal person ever elected as the head of the United Churches of Canada in British Columbia.

However, before Peter Kelly was born already he had lost nearly all of his relatives to the Haida version of the Diaspora, to the smallpox plagues and to the social diseases that prior to 1900 had wiped out more as many as 95 percent of the Haida people.

I was born into both of the Diasporas, the Jewish and the Haida. Currently I am in the process of recovering my Jewish self. With the encouragement of my wife, I am of returning to my Jewish heritage. Prior to meeting my wife, I already had returned from the First Nations Diaspora. I had recovered my connections with my own First Nations community.

This story that follows is about that recovery.

When I was growing up, I never thought of my life as typical of a First Nations person. However, as an adult I soon discovered that my Aboriginal story was far more the norm than the exception.

In 1992, at Oregon State University, a person with little Aboriginal experience once asked me sincerely, "Tell me what it means to be Indian."

I answered with a poem. I would answer the same today, but without anger. At the time of the question, I was still struggling with pain in the aftermath of a similar question I once had asked myself.

Indian

Go talk to the Grandmothers and the Grandfathers;
They'll help you, but I can't.
I still live with anguish
Buried under memories,
Iced, until a numb chill
Distils away thoughts
Of children unfed; relationships shattered.
You go, you talk
To the Grandmothers and the Grandfathers.
Perhaps they'll tell you
What it means to be
Indian.

I want to be done with you,
To go to a secret place
Alone

Among ghosts and other relations.
I want to stay there
'Till the land moves
Beneath me;

'Till I taste the soft, clean scent
Of Mother Earth again.
I want to embrace Her
As my ancestors embraced Her,
Exposed

'To Sea, 'till waves infuse me;
'Till Wind and Sun and Moon turn
to Blood,

And
I Break Through,

Feel joy -- and pain -- again.
When I have done this;
When warm breath returns to me,
Then if you wish to do so still,
Come, tell me what it means
To be

Indian

My path to recovery was long and arduous. My father, a Canadian merchant marine, eventually migrated to the San Francisco Bay Area. He left my mother very early in my life. My mother never recovered from the shock.

With gratitude and respect, I can say that my mother supplied as positive a family environment as a single mother possibly could under otherwise negative circumstances.

She took my brother and me to Los Angeles where we changed neighbourhoods frequently. I seldom lived long enough in one place to gain acceptance and kept mostly to myself.

Always, I was painfully aware that I was different from the white children. Some thought I was Mexican, which I was not. Others thought I was Jewish, which was true. Others knew I was Indian. But mostly what they knew was that I was vulnerable.

When I was twelve I would walk the four miles from school to home. A taunting group of white boys began harassing me incessantly. Sometimes they followed me home from school, calling me names and spitting at me. I tried to ignore them for as long as I could, but one

day I turned to fight my tormenters. I was surrounded and grabbed from behind. While two held me down, the third pummelled me in the face.

Today, when I look in the mirror, I am reminded of the ugliness of racial bias. My nose is still slightly bent to the left.

But oppression comes in forms other than racial. That was another early lesson for me, another memory that still haunts me to this day.

My mother raised my brother and me. It was hard for her to be alone, so she kept trying to get us a father. My mother was very beautiful: slim with dark eyes and long raven-black hair. Sometimes, because we had little money for food, she went out on dates for dinner, bringing the doggie bags home for my brother and me. She came home late once. I was twelve at the time, but I was awake. My brother was two years older than me. He was awake too. From our bedroom we could hear moaning. "No, don't," my mother kept saying. "Please don't."

I was small for my age, but still I grabbed a hunting knife.

"Don't go out there," my brother said. "You could get hurt."

I couldn't believe he said that. He was my older brother and bigger than me. I could have used his help.

The man was on top of my mother, pants around his knees.

"Get off of her, or I'll kill you! I swear I will!"

I meant it; he knew it. Cursing me, he pulled up his pants and left by the front door five feet away. My mother lay curled up on an overstuffed chair. I'll never forget the image. *In her evening dress she looked like a rag doll tossed away by an insensitive child.*

She lay there motionless, except that her body was heaving with her sobbing. I wanted so badly to comfort her, but when I sat by her side, she pulled away. I sensed, even as a twelve-year-old, that it wasn't wise to touch her.

I didn't mention the rape to her the next day or at all for many years. Awhile later, she worked as a legal secretary and eventually married her boss. At first I thought he would be my long-awaited father. But I was

wrong. Unfortunately, he drank a lot, and when he was drunk, he beat my mother.

I protected her again. One night I remember pushing her out of his way. He was so drunk that he kept right on swinging without missing a beat; only I was the target was I.

Growing up like that was interesting but I would hardly call it fun.

When I was a child, I never felt emotionally grounded. Certainly, I never felt safe to move toward my roots; particularly not my racial roots. I avoided seeking my true home, either among Jew or Haida.

On the contrary, I, the future First Nations language worker, became increasingly and subconsciously angrier and more alienated. As a young adult, I found my solace and my brotherhood among outcasts like myself. I joined the Outlaws Motorcycle Club of Oregon.

2.3 The Outlaw Years

Why did Steve have to die? Why did Panama Red have to die? The Outlaws' motto was "Ride hard, live fast, die young." We took it literally.

"If you're one of the Outlaws, don't expect the law to protect you," a Josephine County sheriff's deputy once said. "You guys make your own choices. Now live by 'em."

Die by them was more like it. Besides, Steve and Panama Red didn't have much choice.

I am an Indian, so I rode an Indian motorcycle: a 1946 flathead 74-cubic-inch Chief. I had never known what it meant to go home, to be among my own Haida people. As far as I knew, I had no home to go home to, so I adopted myself into another kind of tribe: The Outlaws.

Outlaw Panama Red's death wasn't like Steve's. Panama Red drowned; Steve's death was a homicide, shot execution-style through the head. The police called it a suicide.

In its own way, Panama Red's death was equally unusual. On a stop during a trip to a lake, Club President Coby said Panama Red had just told him, "Don't expect me to come home with you guys. I won't be coming back."

Next thing, Panama Red drowned. The very same day! It seemed like he knew something we didn't. When it's a

man's time, he goes; and that's that. But how did Panama Red know?

I still have something from Panama Red. He had loaned me a wrench with his name engraved on it. I borrowed it once along the road to fix my ailing Indian motorcycle.

Now the wrench haunts me. If a brother moves on to other things, an Outlaw in good standing can retire with his honour and his colours - his "patch." Both Steve and Panama Red kept their patches and their honour. We buried them with them.

Not many people would understand the connection between Outlaws and displaced Indians, but I did. Like the Haida I never knew, the Outlaw brothers were my people; the only people I had. I gave them my heart and my soul. Only later, when I recovered my own nation, the Haida, I learned that the connections between Outlaws and was were more than skin deep.

I wrote a poem in honour of the Outlaw days; the first days of discovering of what "it means to be an Indian:"

Red and **White Song**

Seventy-four cubic inch 1946 American Indian iron Motorcycle
slicin' through wind quick and slick as black ice on a midnight bridge.

I like smokin' lightnin'.

car pulls up alongside right side goes pop! pop! pop! backfire bullet or rock?
mystery vehicle vanishes thin into long black night while iron Indian and Indian roar
on like . . .

heavy metal thunder

pull up tight at a long stoplight gasoline leakin' like cryin' eye in blind-side Indian
tank me not knowin' my Injun hummin' ready to peel out

racin' with the Wind

fireball flash flares in my face flesh frozen in horror hotter than sudden surprise. . .
ball lightnin' blazin' hot blast livid life liftin' before eyes in hot screamin' orange
beatin' fire with Outlaws patch but no match till wide brimmed man sprays
extinguisher then in jimmyhorse rides into the night like mystery cowboy . . . molten
Indian no time even for thanks, no time for

the feelin' that I'm under

brothers . . . they're the ones who pick you up pick up your iron Indian like so much
sacked sacred charcoal held high on a holy platform exposed naked on its side under
nightsky inside backside dusty dented primered pickup truck headin' home for the
ride down home but not down for the count home where found lethal leakin' pellet-
hole in side of tank lookin' like the new hole sucked in my heart hole holy holy
holy 74 cubic inch 1946 iron Indian dead Indian charcoal tires and burnt wires
blackened blistered paint gone now and I cry out like my tiger-eyed Indian tank cried
'cause we were:

born to be Wild.

brothers only family feelin' I got left livin' Outlaws brothers out laws lovin' livin' anytime leapin' up to face the In-laws long black-barrelled and red and white light law say you ain't got the right to exist Outlaws but I got brothers Outlaws brothers to help me resurrect my iron Indian I've got Outlaws brothers and soon my heavy metal thunderin' Indian motha ready to fire right back up on our own law our own right to exist law yes! I got Outlaws brothers who *know*

I like smokin' lightnin'

street Outlaws threatenin' rumblin' like storm riders we're ready to ride brothers sidewalk wannabe outlaws ready to hide when we pass proud and strong like

heavy metal thunder

blueblack cut-off denim red and white letters overunder oily greased lightnin' red-eyed and white frightnin' skull we're roarin' out of town while on our backs red eyed grinnin' handmade skull named Moe watchin' for us all watchin' on our backs while we watch the fronts lookin' for red and white In-laws but we're Outlaws feelin' no pain and fearin' no blame open 'em up and we're

racin' with the Wind and the feelin' that I'm under hey Babe I wanna make it happen take the world in a love embrace fire all of our guns at once and:

we're blown into space

...

like a true nature's child
we were born, borne to
be wild we can climb so
high
never gonna die ...

epitaph. .Steve. .died. .Outlaws brother shot through the head. suicide. .that's what they said. .Outlaws officially dead. .that other white and red said. .gleefully said. .suicide. .don't know why. .our Steve really died. .maybe that other. .red and white. .lied. .lied bout how he was laid. .bleedin'. .red and white. .head skewered like a sieve. .but still Outlaws Steve he had brothers. Outlaws brothers had Steve even dead. .Outlaws brothers. .not any others. .Outlaws brothers. .when he died. .buried his colours with his heart inside. .brothers. .left a full beer can at his graveside not empty but dead and gone. .Steve. . the end of an Outlaws'. . .

Red and White Song.

Brothers. The Outlaws were all I had. I was born a Haida Indian, but I didn't want to be reminded of that. My mother lost her pride in my Haida side and I lost the same along with her when my dad took off quicker than Indian summer.

She was so hurt. She tried to raise me like a white man. It might have worked, too, but my build and my appearance kept getting in the way. Even in Los Angeles, kids wouldn't let me get away with that. Some thought I looked Mexican; a fact of life for many Haida brought up that far south of Haida Gwaii.

Looking Mexican was a lot like being Indian or Jewish, both were unpopular traits in the Los Angeles neighbourhoods in which I grew up.

My mother wouldn't put up with my non-white look either, it turned out. My mother loved me. But I have a feeling I reminded her of my father. She loved him so very much when he was with her. She hated him equally, so very much, after he left.

A woman gave me her dead husband's cowboy hat once when I was about 20. It fit, which was a shock. I could never wear a hat before. Hats for me had to be

extra large; almost a size 10. It wasn't until later in life that I learned that this, also, was a Haida trait.

Perhaps my mother remembered that when I showed off my hat. That cowboy hat fit and I was so happy. But I wasn't a cowboy.

"God, you look like an Indian," she said.

I always understood her pain and mine. I am certain that was one reason I joined the Outlaws Motorcycle Club. I could race freely without thinking about my race.

At first I rode a motorcycle I built myself, a 650 cc Triumph Bonneville shoehorned into a 250cc Harley Davidson Sprint frame. The homebuilt Harley-Triumph was light and fast. It kept me happy for a while, at least until a late-night car crossed into my lane on a curve near Takilma, Oregon, driving me off the road and into a ditch.

The insurance company settled for $750 in damages to my bike and for my pain and suffering. I took every cent and an old shotgun to trade for my Indian motorcycle. For some reason hidden deeply inside, I had to have that Indian. Perhaps I longed to be close to an

Indian, any kind of an Indian that felt good instead of bad. The old iron Indian was going to be the best Indian I had ever known before.

I got to ride that Indian; love that Indian; have pride in that Indian. It was the best bike in the club, my blue 1946 74 cubic inch flathead Indian Chief was, at least in my opinion.

By biker standards, the Outlaws were a hard-core but honourable group. Snake Dolan, one of the early members of the Hells Angels, founded the club in San Antonio, Texas.

Papa Snake loved the Hells Angels and his red and white colours, but in the middle 1960's he grew discouraged with a turn of events. In those days, bikers attracted both the fear and the fancy of Americans. War-toughened military veterans had formed the Angels chapter in Bernardino, California. By the middle 60s they became movie stars.

The California-based Angels had gained a reputation and Hollywood was nearby. Soon Angels wearing Angel colours were in movies such as Hell's Angels on Wheels, Hell's Angels '69 and others.

Angel President Sonny Barger wanted more money, so he incorporated the Hell's Angel insignia. Hollywood had to pay dearly to use the "patch;" usually more than it cost to hire the actor who wore it.

Snake had enough. He and other members believed the original camaraderie and war-veteran spirit was disappearing. He kept his love for the original Hells Angels. Nevertheless, Snake left for San Antonio, taking his red and white patch with him. He started a club based upon the old Hells Angels ideals. The club was called the Outlaws.

In respect for the old days, the Outlaw patch was red and white in honour of the Hells Angels. A characteristic skull was the centrepiece. The black, white and red skull, affectionately named Moe after one of the first Outlaws who died, was hand cut and hand painted. To this day, the red-and-white Outlaws continue to make each centrepiece by hand.

The San Antonio club was hard biting and tough, an amalgamation of cowboy culture and war-hardened Texas-based veterans of Korea and Vietnam.

Other clubs quickly learned not to challenge the Outlaws. For one, the Texas Banditos were a large club,

but not nearly as tough. Taking future Oregon Chapter President "Coby" and a handful of others along with him, Snake made a point of demonstrating that fact.

Vastly outnumbered, the Outlaws walked into a Bandito club meeting and declared it to be an Outlaw meeting. No one dared challenge them. The Banditos never confronted the Outlaws again, despite the fact that the order of the day was to pull a Bandito patch on sight.

Coby moved to Oregon and started the chapter into which I was initiated.

Coby, small in stature but hard as iron, had a way with words.

"There's twenty of them, but only two of us!" a member might be heard saying.

"Don't worry, Bro." would be the reply. "Twenty of them and two of us? We've got 'em outnumbered."

Coby often put his philosophy to the test and just as often, he proved it. Coby's Oregon Outlaws survived only because he hand selected its members for courage, daring and the ability to work together under pressure. "Prez Coby" had a particular way about him in regard to

Outlaws behaviour. The Outlaws called it "showing class."

The Oregon Outlaws always maintained its Texas-born ideals. Unlike some other clubs, Outlaws members usually held jobs and many raised families. Few Outlaws used hard drugs and most earned or bartered for everything they owned. But when it came to confrontation, Outlaws tolerated no encroachment upon territory or honour. In a world of tough bikers, hard riding and hard living, the Outlaws lived as they saw fit.

The Hells Angels saw that too and respected it. In 1972, the Angels approached Papa Snake. They invited the Outlaws back into the Angel fold, offering to trade patch for patch with no "prospecting", or initiation, required.

Snake firmly but respectfully refused. The Outlaws would remain as they were: Outlaws in the old Hells Angels tradition.

I eventually retired from the Outlaws with my patch and my honour. A variety of reasons caused me to move on. The most powerful reason also was my most difficult memory: a rape.

A group of bikers, none of whom were the original Outlaws, were partying in a Grants Pass home. One young lady found herself in a bedroom with a biker. Soon a line formed at the door.

A biker invited me to be next. A rage began building up inside me. I walked into the room and shut the door behind me. *The girl, lying in foetal position on the bed, looked so very much like a rag doll tossed away by an insensitive child.*

She lay there motionless, except that her body was heaving with deep sobs. I wanted so badly to comfort her, but I sensed, even as I stood there, that it wasn't wise to touch her.

I stood by the bed and said softly, "Don't worry, I won't touch you. You're safe."

Another biker called to me from behind the closed door, "Hey Bro, what's taking you so long?"

Something exploded inside me. "This is over!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. "This is over, nobody touches her!"

No one dared challenge me.

Not too long after that, I announced my retirement. When an Outlaws member has ridden with courage and honour, in the Texas tradition he can retire with his colours. I hung my patch in the closet. I moved on.

In my quest for brothers, I rode an iron Indian and lived in that subculture with my whole heart. But at the time I didn't understand the real nature of the search that was compelling me onward.

Not until years later did I come to understand that I could grow beyond riding an iron Indian; that being a flesh and blood Indian could be as good a reality as riding the iron one had been.

I had grown up completely isolated from my own Haida people; thinking I was the only Indian who grew up on the path that I walked. I thought I was the exception to the rule. I wasn't. I learned years later that the story of my personal Diaspora was, for many First Nations people, the rule and not the exception.

2.4 Higher Education

In 1975, I was on welfare with a wife and two children. I felt there might be more to life than the Outlaws, so I bought a Canon EF, one of the first

automatic professional-quality 35mm cameras. It had to be automatic because at the time I didn't really know how to use it. I took the camera and walked into a newspaper office in Grants Pass, Oregon. Thanks to the tutelage of Ken Francis, an irascible news editor, over the next five years I learned professional news photography. I built a business selling photos to the paper, to the wire services and to magazines.

I was good at news photography, in five years publishing more than 3,000 photographs and winning a few major news contests along the way. By 1980 I realised that to go any further in journalism meant that I had to get a college education.

I enrolled in Rogue Community College at Grants Pass, Oregon. I soon learned that to succeed in the college world, I had to learn a few things more.

Fortunately, my most important lesson came almost right away in my first college quarter. I was not willing to risk standing out in a crowd, so I asked no questions and took no chances, a trait that I later learned was very Indian. I was hanging around the back of David Fuller's science class getting my usual low grades when Professor Fuller confronted me.

"Why didn't you pass that test?" he asked.

"Didn't know the answers," I replied.

"Why didn't you ask me for help before the test?"

"'Cause, you're too busy; got lots of other students to look after."

"Not true," he said. "Why do you think they hired me?"

"To teach?"

"Yeah, that's right. To teach. So you know what that means? I and every other teacher have no right to turn you down if you ask questions. So ask."

I put him to the test, coming in after class nearly every day just to ask questions. Dr. Fuller was good for his word. My next test was an A-plus.

I liked that very well.

I liked it so much that I applied Dr. Fuller's rule to every other class that quarter. By the end of the first quarter, I had earned the first 4.0 GPA of my life! I couldn't believe it! Me? I got straight A's!

I did it again in the second quarter and again in the third. It became an obsession: I had to prove something to myself: that Indians didn't have to be losers. I kept it up all the way through junior

college, all the way through what is now Southern Oregon State University, all the way through my years at Oregon State University, and all the way through my doctoral studies.

You'd think that a perfect 4.0 would be enough to raise my self-esteem. But it didn't. Something still felt very wrong inside.

My path to Haida Gwaii, to becoming a "returner," had a way to go yet.

2.5 Among Ghosts and Other Relations

In the fall of 1982 I transferred from Rogue Community College to what is now Southern Oregon State University in Ashland.

At about the same time, Medford television station KTVL hired me as a news videographer. While I continued my studies at the college I concurrently upgraded my abilities as a television reporter. Eventually I worked as a reporter, a producer, an assignment editor and a news anchor. My work duties occupied between 40 and 50 hours per week. At the same time I maintained a college course load that varied between 15 and 21 academic hours.

Robert Casebeer, my Literature professor, soon became my mentor.

Professor Casebeer has a special talent for bringing like-minded people together, so he introduced me to Thomas Doty, who as "Coyote Old Man," makes a living telling local First Nations stories to youth and adults.

Tom is Shasta and Takelman, but he never makes a public proclamation out of it. My friend wholeheartedly is in love with the local First Nations stories. Tom says a human being can never relate to the Earth without experiencing the ancient stories. The stories, he says, come from the soul of humanity and from the land itself.

Professor Casebeer, Tom and I used to meet every Saturday at a truck stop café near Talent, Oregon. From both Tom and the professor I gained a deep respect for First Nations oral traditions; something of which I had never before been aware.

Deep within myself I began to sense a longing to awaken my roots, to experience what it meant to be an Indian. I did not know what to do, so I began to seek the answer to that question, not among the living but among the dead.

I was drawn upward, to the top of a place called Lower Table Rock, a horseshoe-shaped flat-topped rim of an extinct shield volcano that rose about 400 feet above the valley floor ten miles west of the city of Medford. A couple of miles to the east of Lower Table Rock is the Upper Table Rock, a second shield volcano with a far wider rim and smaller caldera for a bowl.

The Table Rocks are the heart of Takelma Indian Myth-Time, a place that this nearly extinct tribe considers as most sacred ground. The Takelma call the Lower Table Rock Didankh, meaning "Rock Above."

The Table Rocks are the embodiment of their cultural hero, Dal Dal, meaning "Dragonfly." Dal Dal, so the story goes, was once a single being who travelled up the Rogue River from the coast 100 miles west. Dal Dal was seeking to save humanity from two giants who had been ripping people limb from limb and tossing their bodies into the river (Sapir, 1909/1990).

Along the way, Dal Dal shot an arrow at a passing meadowlark. Piercing its beak, the arrow fell back onto Dal Dal's head, splitting him in two: the "elder" and the "younger" Dal Dal.

Elder and Younger Dal Dal continued up the Rogue River, meeting and defeating the giants who, tossed high into the sky, became the evening and the morning stars.

Elder and Younger Dal Dal were transformed into two flat-topped mountains: the Upper and Lower Table Rocks.

Dal Dal was a dragonfly, so the top of Lower Table Rock high above the valley is even shaped like a dragonfly, bulging slightly at the western tail, narrowing to a miles-long twenty-foot-wide sliver around the circumference, then widening out to a mile-wide flat basalt plain at the eastern head.

I was drawn there for indescribable reasons. I sensed something up there. Whatever it was kept on bring me back. The feeling was strongest after dark, so I began wandering night after night, seeking answers among the cold hard rocks.

Tom understood my quest, although I seldom spoke of my past. Then Professor Casebeer again exercised his special people-talent and introduced me to a Cow Creek (Upland Takelma) spiritual man, Chuck Jackson.

Chuck understood right away what was drawing me to Table Rock. He said he had been drawn there himself many times over the years. For the Cow Creek Indians

who lived in the blue mountains to the north, Table Rock was a spiritual centre, just as it was to the Lowland Takelma.

One of my earliest memories of Chuck was a springtime trip we took to Gold Rey Dam, a spot on the raging Rogue River just below Table Rock.

All the Takelman-speaking First Nations, the Cow Creeks, the Lowland Takelma, and the Latgawa from the east toward snow-tipped Mt. McLoughlin, used to gather at that spot each Spring to celebrate the return of the salmon.

"We honoured the salmon because they returned to their home for us to assure the survival of the people," Chuck said.

When Chuck said the word "salmon", I realised he was looking directly at me. I felt uneasy. Chuck seemed to sense my feelings. He diverted his gaze toward the high rim of the Table Rock.

"What are you looking for up there?" he inquired. "What do you want from me?"

"I want to know the truth about myself;" I replied, "the truth. I want to know only what is true, not what

I think is true. I want to learn what would be true even if I didn't exist."

Chuck was quiet for awhile, answering me nothing, but from that moment, he took me in.

Chuck began training me in all aspects of the spirit walk. He taught me as his grandmother, Susan Nanta, a Cow Creek medicine woman of past and great repute, had taught him.

On Table Rock I felt the presence of the Takelma. They were dead; I was dwelling among ghosts. I wanted to know every possible fact about the people of Didankh, meaning in Takelman, "The Rock Above." Before meeting Chuck, I already had begun studying every book available about the Takelma Indians.

The Takelma entered my waking and my dreams. In one dream, an old man with white hair had said to me, "Be careful what you do up there. Not every spirit you encounter will tell you the truth. Truth is something you must discover for yourself."

I felt a deep-seated need to connect with that white-haired Takelma man and with the other ancestors in any way that I could.

In 1906, linguist Edward Sapir wrote his doctoral dissertation about the Takelma (1909/1990). The book was authoritative. In it, I learned the Takelman stories and poetry. My friend Tom Doty also told those stories. Living in the land of these stories, deep in my heart I began to understand why the stories were so important.

More than that, because Sapir was a linguist, many of the stories were written in interlinear form. The Takelman words were written directly underneath the English. I soon discovered that the Takelman language was intimately connected with the stories; that English alone was wholly inadequate to describe the stories' subtleties and their connections with the land.

I fell in love with the Takelman language. It was ancient and extremely complex, a perfect means of expressing the relationship between the people and the land.

I also studied the Takelman language because no living speakers existed. At night on Table Rock, while I walked among the ghosts of Takelma ancestors, I spoke Takelman. The language seemed totally at home.

Chuck knew some Lowland Takelman as well, because his own Cow Creek language was a dialect of the Takelman linguistic stock.

Between Chuck and Sapir I learned that language was the soul of the Takelma; that even the syntax contained concepts, realities and a worldview that could be experienced in no other way.

After a while I was able to understand Sapir's written Takelman sufficiently well to translate into English some of the Takelma poetry Sapir (1909/1990) had recorded.

Even the metre recorded the Takelma worldview. The poetry both in metre and content focussed on multiples of fives, the sacred number to the Takelma (Sapir, 1909/1990).

From Sapir I learned more about Chuck's spiritual heritage. The discipline in which he was training me was the S'omomloholxas way (Sapir 1909/1990).

According to Sapir (1909/1990), the Takelman culture was ancient. From the north and east, their territory extended along the Rogue River from the head waters on the slopes of Crater Lake and into the

mountains west of Grant Pass. To the east, their territory extended nearly to the California border.

Their language was unique: a linguistic isolate that was a tonal language reminiscent of Asian cultures. Takelman culture also was unique. Unlike other First Nations, the Takelma had two branches of medicine people: the S'omomloholxas and the Goyo.

The S'omomloholxas were the more powerful of the two. The Goyo would either heal or harm depending on the spirits and upon who was paying them, but the S'omomloholxas used their powers only for good. They were in Sapir's words, "kindly dispositioned toward their fellow men," (Sapir 1909/1990). The S'omomloholxas also had the power to render the spirits of the Goyo powerless if the Goyo brought harm to other people.

Chuck had never heard about Sapir or about his book, yet he described S'omomloholxas perfectly.

"John," he once asked, "Do you know why I put that question to you years ago about what you wanted to learn on Table Rock?"

"No, Chuck. Why did you ask me?"

"Well, if you had given me any other answer, I would never have taken you in. Truth is the source of the real power. It is closest to the Creator. Every other power is far and away the lesser. You wanted truth, so I taught you the spirit walk."

Chuck's guidance in the spirit walk also explained something Sapir didn't talk about. Sapir had mentioned the dichotomy between the S'omomloholxas and the Goyo, but he never gave the reason why they were so different. Chuck knew the difference. For one thing, the two groups trained differently.

Chuck said that in the beginning he used to train anyone who asked him, but soon he learned to be selective. He said that his grandmother had taught him that two ways existed to obtain power through the spirit walks. One way was to go into the woods and seek the powers. Whatever power would come was received without question.

The other way, the way of his grandmother's medicine group was different, Chuck said. She trained initiates to be selective on the spirit walk; to test the spirits, receiving only the ones who were beneficial and who loved truth.

"Those powers are the strongest," Chuck said, "because they originate with the source of everything that exists."

One day Chuck asked me if I had sensed the dark ones while I was on Table Rock. I said that I had. I then described an experience that he said he knew very well.

"What did you do with that one: the one that was darker than the darkness?" Chuck asked.

"I didn't know what to do, but I didn't receive it," I replied.

"You did well, John. That one was death. Death is to be respected; all things are to be respected. But death is not a power our medicine people would ever receive. The powers attached to death could use you for harm and that is not our way," Chuck said.

"My grandmother and others like her would never bring harm. The powers attached to life are far greater. Those are the only ones you should receive because they come from a far higher place."

I understood at that moment why Sapir said the more powerful group were called the S'omomloholxas. The word means "their power comes from 'S'om," from the high mountains (Sapir, 1909/1990).

Through that lesson and later from others I learned why First Nations languages must be kept alive. Intertwined in the languages is the First Nations' entire way of relating to the universe. Language is the very centre of their cultural being.

I had come a long way toward recovering my identity as a First Nations person, but the time of living among "ghosts and other relations" was coming to an end. Soon I would find myself among the living; living and working with the Ogallala Lakota (Sioux) of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Didankh, Lower Table Rock, had taught me a lot and I would never forget him. After my last trip up to the top, I wrote the narrative in the next section.

2.6 On the Wing of the Dragonfly: September 1986

Late autumn and there's a chill in the air. Chill or not I've worked up a sweat so halfway up Didankh's[1], southern slope I stop to rest. Looking back my eyes follow the path - a bare trace of an Indian trail etched between river and cliff. I gaze long into the distance down to the river and beyond. My heart is heavy. I'm leaving soon - maybe for good. I pause listening to summer's last cricket chirping uncertainly in the brush. My legs ache a bit and my feet throb slightly. I can feel my heartbeat even in my toes. Or is it something else I feel, something larger? An Earthbeat perhaps? Not beyond the realm of possibility though not many would believe me. A few years back I wouldn't have believed it myself but things have changed for me. I feel things now - experience things - things I never knew existed. Table Rock to put it mildly is a different kind of place and I've been here so long and so often that now I'm different too. Sometimes when I stand on the sheer edge, on the wing of the Dragonfly high over the river, I melt into wind. I dissolve; I become mist. I rise and my blood bursting its bonds

[1] Didankh: One of the Takelman words for Lower Table Rock, meaning "Rock Above."

mingles with Earth and Rock, coming to flow in other veins as well. Right now of course the pulse I feel is mine - I know that - yet at the same time I sense somehow that I'm part of Something that is so much more than me.

For a long time I rest, gazing across the water to the other side of the river, knowing that as I look back that way I am looking back toward the place where Coyote once went: to that place where I too will go after awhile. From where I stand Lower Table Rock towers above the Rogue and the distant rush of the river echoing between basin and cliff surrounds me and becomes a song, the singing of a million voices, a million generations all at once - grandmothers and grandfathers, parents and children, nation upon nation, all telling the old tales: those stories that first began circling in the wind from the day when Haps Kemnas[1], Children Maker, earned his name.

The rain, a chill autumn rain, had let up this morning so I decided to climb to a rendezvous - a seasonal photograph of the trees that gather near the base of the cliffs. A harvest feast those trees are,

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[1] Haps Kemnas: Takelman word for God, meaning Children Maker.

some with black trunks, some with white, and leaves all red, yellow, and green under a blue[1] autumn sky. But more than that, the stark contrast alone makes it worth going back up there. The woods crowd close blanketing the gentler talus slopes, but then suddenly, with a mighty thrust, the cliffs explode straight up through the trees. Seen from where I'm headed the effect is awesome. The autumn colours fold upward like a brilliant quilt wrapping itself around the feet of some spectacular stone formations. The Rock Family, the old people called them - three towering basalt monoliths which the Takelma say are a man, woman, and child guarding the southeastern entrance to the bowl. When I came here last autumn I missed the portrait - ran out of film. Could be a problem today as well - sun low in the sky - but I've made up my mind that the picture won't get away from me this year even if I have to brace my camera on a rock and take a time exposure.

Lining my path, an ancient trail leading to the vanished Takelma village of Gwenpoonk, the sheltering trees above my head fill the air with whisperings.

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[1] Lakota sacred colours; foreshadows author's emerging connection with that First Nation.

Mysterious voices rise like spirits in the wind, dissolving from time to time into the ever-present rush of the river. As I pause gazing back to the other side of the river my thoughts turn back as well - back across the circling seasons of my own time in this place. Here at Didankh, Haps Kemnas taught me secrets. In spring I learned his specialty - birth - the kind that happens only once and the kind that spirals round and round time and time again. Then came summer, which in turn taught me how to live with power and vigor. But autumn - the season I face again - taught me something more important still. Autumn taught me how to wear my finest colours: how to die with beauty and dignity and honour. But most of all and perhaps the hardest lesson of all, autumn this time around will have to teach me something new, for I must learn to leave this place without leaving it at all.

With that in mind I turn away from the river and facing north start back up the high path on what might be my last trip up this way. When I first set out today. I told myself I wanted to catch a picture. But deep inside whether darkness catches me or not I feel compelled to join that Rock Family, to scale those

cliffs one final time - to stand on the high edge - a point in the circle's center, a point from which I can see not only the vast expanse of the bowl but far beyond the bowl, beyond even the river. Perhaps even beyond the setting of the Sun.

As I turn upward the Earth beneath my feet is supple and soft as flesh, giving slightly with each step. This morning's misty rain brought the woods in close and damp blending together things living, dead and dying: a unique smell - strangely and freshly purified by the circling of wind and fog.

"Scree! Scree!" Piercing cries from above and behind me! Turning quickly, my spirit soars with Yolam[1]. Yolam, crying from afar sees me, as I, hugging Didankh's curves above the river's shore, stand transfixed. The young eagle hovers for a long moment then folding his wings close to his white and golden body Yolam is a streak of lightning striking at the river. Just as suddenly Yolam feathers out barely above the surface and circling clockwise slowly drifts downstream - toward the setting Sun, eyes scanning the banks between Table Rock on his right and on his left - the other side of the river.

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[1] Yolam: Takelman word for eagle.

My years here have taught me much, things I have no idea how I learned, things that grew like the oak grows imperceptibly yet growing just the same. And I like the oak am different now; different than those nights long ago when climbing ancient trails shrouded in darkness and mist I cried like someone looking for the lost - only I was the one who was lost. I remember those frigid nights, times when the morning Sun rising over Wilamkha's snowy peak far to the east found me perched high on the plateau of the Dragonfly's[1] wing. I was looking then to know whom I am - to know the meaningful and the real: to know at long last why I or anyone else exists.

Years have passed since then and by some unknown means where once was only barren ground something very much alive now stands. I have learned - this Rock has taught me - that I am here because I am here; that is all and that is enough. In fact it is more than enough - I am satisfied and glad.

The trail to this place has been long and hard. Years ago as I circled upward in the night stumbling and slipping in the mud I thought Didankh was ignoring me.

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[1] The top of Lower Table Rock is shaped a miles-long dragonfly bent into a half circle..

But today, looking back I can see that the best answer to some questions might be no answer at all; that perhaps some questions sent circling into the icy wind at night should like the wind follow the destiny of wind. It is enough I have learned. In the end it is enough.

Didankh at night is a hard teacher, teaching me on foreboding trails glowing faintly in moonlight and fog to move forward even when threatening night voices rise vaguely in the mist and dark, forcing me to call upon unused senses, forcing me to pull from deep within an inner power to survive. Didankh, my brother, as hard as you've been you've been a good friend. The ones who pay you heed are strong.

Thinking about those nights I pause near the high end of an ancient stone wall - a wall built from talus stones so carefully fitted together that its age is betrayed only by yellow lichen and the thick green moss carpeting sections under the trees. The wall, between four and five feet high, is a rambling mystery - just one of Dal Dal's[1] many mysteries - one that stretches for a mile from the middle of the bowl upward through brush

[1] Dal Dal: Takelman word meaning "Dragonfly;" the name for the Upper and Lower Table Rocks.

and rock to the sheer cliffs just south of the Rock Family.

The light is fading quickly now. Wedging my camera between two rocks on the top of the wall I set the time exposure. 'Click, whirr! I get the picture. The portrait will be exactly what 1 want. I'm sure of that, for I know the light here. And I know the darkness too.

Looking up to the very top of the Rock Family's mother suddenly I spot a tiny silhouette, one starkly set against the backdrop of a quickly dulling sky. I stare intently trying to make some sense out of what I see. In the half-light it looks like, yes - distinctly like Yolam - but I can't tell for sure. The silhouette might be flesh or stone. Strange, though, if he is a stone silhouette I've never seen that tiny shape from this place before. As I stare, eyes narrowed, night chill nips at my heels. Meanwhile deep within my beating heart I feel a stirring - a final urge to:

Climb . . .

And winter came. Mother Earth, tiring of summer, unfolds her icy shroud of mist and crawls inside herself to sleep the long sleep - waiting for the path to circle around as it has always come around to the place where

it began. Meanwhile a lone eagle perching on a rock so high sends a final penetrating cry echoing in the distant hills and dark and rising on a whisper of wings, circles upward to inquire of the wind and moon - as the seasons apparently unheeding circle on and on and on:

As they have always circled on.

Time Was

I have learned much this way,
wandering upon flat-topped mountains,
feet shod with green grass,
waiting for First-Snow
to come brush my hair white
as fading summer light
sinks into moonless shadow
on a chill Takelma night;
long fog-wrapped nights
teeming with tiny Lights,
                Insights
my city eyes cannot see;
waiting
        until Long-Sleep passes by
and springing flowers, shedding
                colours
come dancing before
                summer's soar
On Yolam[1] wings of Fire.
I have learned much that way,
standing high
on Table Rocks of stone
body torn by Sun
and loved by Cloud and Moon.

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[1] Yolam: Takelman word meaning "eagle."

2.7 The Inipi (Sweat Lodge)

At Professor Casebeer's suggestion, I took a summer class in 1983: Evolution of Consciousness taught by Dr. Richard Lyons. Professor Lyons had asked a personal friend of his, Wallace Black Elk, to teach us about Lakota Sioux consciousness. The class was based upon the Inipi Ceremony, the sweat lodge, so we students built one and held a ceremony.

I had no idea what was in store for me. The class took me beyond the land of the ghosts that I had experienced at Table Rock. It was the final episode in restoring my living Native consciousness.

Jennifer, to whom I was married for 12 years, was born in the wild-west town of Deadwood located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the most sacred land of the Lakota. We were scheduled to go to visit her parents there shortly after the class was over. I mentioned to Wallace what a coincidence that was. Poignantly, and in slightly broken English, he asked me what "coincidence" meant. Wallace in his own Lakota language knew no word for the concept.

I had an incredible experience in the Black Hills in the early morning darkness that summer, one too

sacred to write about. Wallace had taught me well. What appeared to be coincidence in English was, in Lakota, not coincidence at all.

I returned that fall for classes at Southern Oregon State College. I could hardly contain my enthusiasm. I wrote a poem and a story that celebrated my progress toward my First Nations roots. The story follows in the next section:

2.8 The Ceremony (Grants Pass Peak)

Sooner or Later

Paha Sapa Song
blue morning Dawn
Day Star
and Yellow Sky Fire
Sing quietly
under the Edge
of the World.
    Then. . . .
                Suddenly
the Sky yawns
                upward.
Mighty Anpa Wi
            s t r e t c h e s
fiery wings, grazing
Earth's hoop,
hills and trees
explode
in flames, while
slumbering
Night Mists, caught off
guard, scatter
like grey quail
before
the blinding song
of the Thunderbird.
Then Flash! Grandfather's
Fire! Burns!
outward like fingers
playing
the Highest rocky Peaks
            like Keys,
while softly, Southwind
                Sings
the Symphony
        of Earth
                and Sky
  strung Black,
Red and Yellow; White
Blue and Green

Paha Sapa Dawn!
Explode
in me! Sooner or later
Anpa Wi
penetrates. Everything.
Sooner
or later: From highest
peak to
darkest wanderings
of the heart;
Grandfather's Fire!
Pierces! me.
                Everywhere . . .
Sooner . . .
        . . . or later . . .

Notes:

Paha Sapa = Black Hills of South Dakota: Lakota (Sioux) holy land

Anpa Wi = Day Star; Sun

Bouncing along this narrow rutted backstretch of a road that spirals like a laced bootstrap up Grants Pass Peak is faster than feet but gut-wrenching death on the liver. I'm sure a helicopter could do it better. But I haven't got a helicopter. Just my old car. Wrote a few poems when I was in the Black Hills; about a hundred to be exact. They keep coming back to me in bits and pieces today. Between ruts and bumps so to speak. Grants Pass, Oregon. Black Hills, South Dakota. There's two thousand miles of country between me and that place. Two thousand miles of history too, not to mention at least 200 hundred years of Euro-American awareness - or the lack of it.

Didn't used to think much about distance - miles, years, or the kind of consciousness you pick up on mountain back roads. At least not until last summer. That's when I met Wallace Black Elk: full-time Lakota medicine man with a full-time sideline. Kind of a special sideline: something some people are just now beginning to understand.

The Black Hills weren't where I first met Wallace although that's where you'd expect to find a Lakota medicine man. No, I ran into this remarkable Sioux last

June in Ashland, Oregon. A couple thousand miles from South Dakota and a month before my wife and I were due to visit her folks in Rapid City. Rapid City, coincidentally, is located right on the fringe of that Plains Indian Holy Ground - the Black Hills.

Whether you find Wallace Black Elk in the Black Hills or in Ashland or at his home in Denver makes just about no difference at all. Wallace you see is a special kind of a Lakota Wicasa Wakan (man-holy): the grandson of the original Black Elk who happens to be the moving force behind Black Elk Speaks, a Native American classic. Grandfather Black Elk having passed his spiritual mantle to Wallace, Southern Oregon State College invited Grandson Black Elk to come and teach a summer class on Lakota theology.

Now Lakota theology is not like white theology. No way. For one thing, the church is different. Wallace says his church is as big as the sky and the congregation just as big. Takes in all living things, he says. By the way, as far as Wallace is concerned "all living things" covers a lot of territory. Literally. Even includes rocks. Rock people he calls them. Inyan Oyate. Truth is there isn't anything or

anyone that isn't a member of Wallace's church - whether it knows it or not.

That's food for thought.

I'm finally rounding the last turn up here on the mountain. The road breaks over the ridge and suddenly I'm running along a rock knife-edge high above the world. To the left green wilderness stretches out as far as the eye can see. On the right, below me, the city of Grants Pass fills the Rogue Valley; a vast reservoir of hissing humanity. Hard to get away from the noise of the city, even up here. A dog barks down below. Must be somewhere close to the base of the mountain. Its bark is a little louder than the city that from here resembles the sound of rushing steam.

Out of the car and walking now. Headed toward my destination still a ways above. It's possible to drive all the way up to the peak - if your car can take it. But I started parking below right after my first trip to the top. Not that I felt anything weird about that first time. I didn't. Unlike later trips I didn't feel anything at all. The road was really tough on my car; rough enough to shy away from ever doing it again.

Permanently. Naturally on my second trip I walked. And that's when I felt It. I've been walking up ever since.

I don't know what It is up there. Won't even venture a guess. I think I'd rather leave that to the theologians - although I'm not sure that for all their high-sounding doctrines they really know either. All I know is that I like it at the top. And whatever It might be; seems to be something up there that doesn't love a car.

Hiking up the final stretch my thoughts drift back to Wallace and his church. He had taught us students - unlikely professor - that just because the whole world is part of his church doesn't number us among the faithful. That's the first lesson, Wallace says. In order to qualify for that honour we've got to learn the doctrine by heart. Funny thing, though. You'd think more people would have it down. Wallace's entire liturgy is only one word long - only ONE word: RESPECT.

Hard word to learn, I guess.

Wallace's church is big. In fact it's so big that he teaches the two-legged congregation how to build little chapels right inside his big church. His little chapels are for big purposes though so Wallace taught us

how to make one. We built it out of the same materials the big church is made of - fresh out of the woods and fields. In fact when we were finished our little chapel ended up looking like a miniature of Wallace's big church - with its lanky willow poles bent over into kind of a dome shape like the sky; the solid brown Earth under our feet. In the old days, Wallace says, the plains Indians used to cover their chapels with buffalo hides. Wallace, heretic that he is, allowed us to use blankets and black plastic. Besides, buffalo hides seem to be a bit scarce lately - especially in these parts.

Below this willow and plastic dome, in the centre of the floor we dug a pit. Around this the pit we spread sweet-smelling sage upon which all of us would be sitting during the ceremony. As we worked, Wallace told us sage is holy - a plant for purifying creatures on the Earth. But the pit in the centre was a kind of fearsome place. That's where later on we would pile the Inyan Oyate who when heated red-hot would take part with us in the sweat ceremony. Above us threaded around the frame of the dome were prayers strung out in little tobacco-filled cloth packets coloured black, red, yellow, white, blue, and green - like the colours of all people; like

the colours of Earth and Sky. Wallace says tobacco is holy to the spirit people. I guess a lot of things are - if they're used the right way. Wallace prefers Camels himself.

Our little chapel had only one door facing the east. Other sweat lodges have two doors: east and west. But the most important door as far as this life is concerned is that eastern door toward the rising Sun. Wallace says that's the door through which we enter the big church when we're tiny. He taught us that we should never come inside the little chapel or the big church either without praying that one word liturgy - RESPECT. In the Lakota tongue that translates roughly as: "Mitak-oyas-in," meaning, "All my Relations."

Late afternoon. I've reached my destination near the top of the mountain. A little clearing fringed by trees on three sides drops nearly straight down 3,000 feet to the valley floor. In the blue-haze distance at the far edge of the valley coastal mountains fringe the rim of the world under the searing arc of the western sky. A cool easterly breeze is circling. Refreshed after the sweaty hot climb, I sit and enjoy it. Sun, low in the west, seems in a hurry to finish the day.

I watch it sinking, a red-orange blaze slipping quickly behind a yellow-brown mill-smoke sky.

For some reason whenever I come up here my thoughts drift inevitably toward where I came from, where I am, where I am going - and toward what, if anything, life might mean. Strange how each thought up here feels like a prayer. A prayer heard, incidentally, by Something that obviously doesn't love a car. The Sun sinks in a pool of liquid fire. I sit silently.

Trials. My life has been a trial. Much too much to think about. But I'm sure It knows. All . . . I sense It does. The cool fresh breeze scented by pine and sweet grass seems to circle right through me. Cool sweet breeze.

The door to the east finally is opened. Thank God. Surrounded by a circle of hot sweaty bodies as exhausted as my own I don't know if I can take anymore - the heat, the absolutely unbearable heat. The whole circle inside that lodge feels like liquid fire. As the door is lifted a cool sweet breeze drifts around the circle. Never in my life have I felt anything so totally welcome. After the scalding heat of the sweat-circle, it feels like that breeze blows right through me like at

that instant I had melted into wind, melted into the circle of my fellow two-legged travellers taking part in the sweat. All becomes One in the blowing of that cold, fresh, life-giving breeze.

But it's a short rest; too short. The door closes again and among circled prayers Sacred Water is ladled onto red, anxious, glowing Rock People waiting in the centre pit. An explosive, searing sound below us - the hiss of rushing steam - spirals up filling the blackness. No space to breathe. Only sacred prayers exhaled, lung-scalding steam inhaled. Sweat. Body answers choking heat with a kind of liquid purification. Bodies melt again not in a cool breeze but in rivers of sweat. Suddenly in the inky darkness a tiny blue spark circles around the lodge settling a moment before each darkened face. We can feel that spark. Feel it; not in space but in our minds. It just hangs there peering at us. Wallace sees it too and he tells us not to be alarmed. Its scanning souls, he says - reading thoughts - looking for worthy hearts. Trial by fire, Wallace says. Trial by fire, like life; like the world in the bigger church outside the door. And the fire is

watching all of us in the sweat lodge. And It knows. It knows All . . .

High on the mountain the cool breeze keeps pace with my thoughts in the darkness. City lights below me look like a hundred thousand sparks peering upward. Above, a hundred thousand stars peer downward. It's been a hot, hot day today - a trial of a day - and the cool sweet breeze seems like life and breath from Heaven.

Remembering back to Wallace, I close my eyes and pray. Praying for that fresh pure breeze to sweep through the core of my being once again; through every pore of my body - to blow my mind and body clear.

My thoughts haven't always been clear. Not by a long shot. My father's absence; my mother's rape. Outlaws, war and protests, meaningless anger in a meaningless world. Four years of living in the squalor of Milwaukee's north side; a Haida Indian in the Black ghetto. Some Blacks hate Whites. I'm Indian. At least that one time my race made life a little more tolerable. Still, life's been a trial and during that trial I fought so hard against so many unbearable things. Sometimes I didn't think I could take any more.

Then I moved here to Oregon. Had an urge to move on. Looking for something I guess. Hard to know what you're looking for when you don't even know what or who you're running from. Roots, I guess. Roots torn up - if not by yourself by life itself. Maybe even now there's still a little fear of putting roots down again; of getting ripped up again. Strange, but it seems like a lot of pain came from people I loved the most.

Learned to love the woods and mountains in those days. No pain there; just the opposite. Coming up to places like this is sort of like being pulled from the fire. Besides, there's Something up here. Something. Watching. A Consciousness, maybe, peering out like a million blue sparks; like eyes reading souls from the ends of every pine needle. From every needle, from every blade of grass, from every star, something Is - looking for worthy thoughts. But It feels so calm. Not like war. It feels so good. And so High.

Stretched out on the cool green grass, I felt so light and free. Never knew how good cool could feel until I stumbled out of that lodge. I had made it all the way through the purification ceremony. Couple of guys left too soon. Can't blame them at all. You have

to go through a sweat ceremony before you blame the guys that opt out early. Go though the fire to the end and I guarantee you'll be a little more understanding; and a whole lot more compassionate. Another thing I felt. Clean. Clear through clean. Never felt so pure in my whole life. And brothers? You've never had brothers until you've sweated together. Something like finding brothers in Hell. Or in war. We're not One until our sweat runs together. 'Till we become a single stream. All that I know is that for the first time in my whole life being Indian felt right. I felt like me; I felt like part of a circle in which everyone was different and everyone was the same.

Lots of wars in this world. Lots of sweat. Too bad so many sweat alone.

Here, on this mountaintop maybe some would call it solitude. But I'm not alone. Not by a long shot. Fact is I've never had so much company in all my life. You can't know what I mean until you've talked with the trees; with every pine needle. 'Till you've called on each and every star by name.

I talked with Wallace after the sweat. Trees, stars, Wallace - for some reason they all feel different

and yet they all feel the same. Kindred spirits I guess.

"Quite a coincidence, Wallace; you coming here now," I said. "I mean, giving us this class and all. I feel like something's going on. Something churning around inside me. Real close. Like someone's telling me something but I can't quite make out the language. Can't understand what I'm saying to me."

"We all speak the same language - all living things," he answered, pointing to his heart. "Here, inside. Same language, but quiet like a mouse - like a whisper."

"Paha Sapa is a Sacred place to Lakotas. Spent much time there. Vision pit, once. Arms and feet tied together. Like this! Spirits lifted me up inside the pit, turned me over. Many, many trials come before understanding."

"I'm going to Paha Sapa, to the Black Hills, next month, Wallace. Wife's folks live in Rapid City. That's quite a coincidence, eh?"

Now, Wallace doesn't speak English too well. He's a Lakota and that's his first language. Speaks other languages besides Lakota too, or so I hear - languages

of the birds and the trees and the deer. Languages spoken from the heart. In fact, Wallace speaks the native tongues of practically every nation in his church - two legged, four legged, six- and eight-legged, winged nations, nations that swim, green nations and rock nations to name a few.

It's because he's so multilingual, bear in mind, that Wallace doesn't answer questions like most other folks do. Talks in circles - big, big circles. And that's how he answered my question too. Wallace went on and on and on for maybe an hour-and-a-half. We took a tour of the world during that time. He told me about vision quests, his childhood call to be a medicine man and his recent appearance before the World Court in Europe on behalf of American Indian independence.

For a long time it seemed like he had forgotten my question. But he hadn't. He just figured the best way to go was via the circumpolar route. Eventually we came back to the Black Hills. This time he asked the question.

"You goin' to the Black Hills, huh? So what do you mean; 'coincidence'?"

"Well, I mean the sweat here, and then that. See, I know what the Black Hills means to you. My wife and I were planning to go there before we even heard about your class. That's why I mentioned coincidence."

Kind of a distant look came into the old man's eyes: sort of a cross between faraway and puzzled. After a few moments he answered.

"Coincidence? Tell me, what. . .coincidence. . . mean?"

Like I said, Wallace doesn't speak English very well.

But then I thought about it. In the light of the old man's words, I began to see that some things might not rightly be called coincidence. I'm sure accidents happen or at least some things happen that could be called coincidental. But then again, maybe not. I think I'm beginning to place my faith in something other than accidents. Now I know that goes against the trend. If the world's really just a big accident then maybe I should believe in accidents. It's just that I'm not so sure anymore. About accidents, I mean.

God! It's beautiful up here on the mountain. I think if it weren't for those city lights down there the

darkness up here would take on a new dimension. So many electric lights. I wonder why people in the city fear the dark so much. They spend millions and millions on little lights to turn their darkness into artificial day. I wonder if that says anything about their hearts? I wonder too what dark was like up here before they lit up that valley. Stars peering down through the night. The moon above.

Come to think of it I don't think real darkness has ever hit this place. I guess maybe darkness - like other things - is relative. Maybe it depends on how sensitive people are toward light. Funny thing but maybe when light's too bright, people can't really see like they used to. Makes me think about the days when people up here could see by starlight. Had to be that way before those city lights came. I wonder too about that other little light we saw back in the sweat lodge. Are there lights like that up here too? Maybe there is. Maybe city lights drown them out.

I remember something else now too. In the Black Hills after I spoke with Wallace, I believe I met his Grandfather. No, not the original Black Elk. Wallace has another Grandfather and if you're quiet Wallace says

you might get to meet him. Quiet: like midnight. When I felt him, for some reason he felt like my Grandfather, too.

It's super quiet in the Black Hills at night. Not a dead kind of quiet - but a living hush punctuated now and again by the night-song of a bird, the melody of which echoes back and forth through the darkened hills. It's a Black Hills kind of quiet. The kind of quiet that's been drawing people to the Paha Sapa for thousands of years - perhaps for many of the same reasons. And dark? It's dark in the hills at night like I've seldom seen - pitch black; except for the blue-grey of the stars.

I remember one Paha Sapa night. I couldn't stay in the cabin. Too many thoughts racing around in my brain. Hot, oppressive thoughts in the dark. Troubled night, lots of dreams: visitations wrestling between the unreality of the cabin and the reality of the Hills. Somehow, I managed to stumble my way to up a ridge circling way above the cabin. I could see the entire eastern sky from there. Vaguely and dimly at first a glimmer of blue-yellow light spread like thin smooth oil over the eastern sky. Darkness turned its back and the

morning stars sparkling like jewels flung out on frost blue velvet winked out one by one. I thought back, remembering the dark in the lodge - that hot, sweaty, unbearable dark. And I prayed. Prayed for light to come. Wakan-ta-nka. Let the Light come!

A Paha Sapa presence came. A Black Hills nearness. Indescribable, something that I wouldn't describe if I could. Something felt. Not talked about. Grandfather. Wakan-ta-nka. Let the Light come.

And It came

Grants Pass Peak. Electric sparks of the city peering up. Stars answer back in different kind. Meanwhile, far away, the noise of the city circles up with the breeze. Sounds like the hiss of rushing steam. Far away, very far away, a dog barks, a cow lows. I remember and I pray: Wakan-ta-nka! Let the Light come!

Let It come deeply.

Paha Sapa Dawn!
Explode
in me! Sooner or later
Anpa Wi
penetrates. Everything.
Sooner
or later: From highest
Peak to
dark wanderings
of the heart;
Grandfather's Fire '
Pierces! me.
Everywhere . . .
Sooner . . .
. . . or later . . .

2.9 The Lakota

In 1986, three years after I met Wallace Black Elk, Jennifer and I moved to Rapid City, right in the centre of the Black Hills Wallace held so dear.

I was hired to cover Lakota (Sioux) Indian affairs for the Rapid City Journal. As I worked among the Lakota, I experienced firsthand the realities of Lakota life on and off the reservation. Those experiences caused me to think once again about my own childhood.

Wallace had taught me that all things in the universe were alive and connected together. I realised he was right. Although I was mostly alone as a child, I discovered my life had been connected in many ways with the Lakota.

In short, I found common ground both in the beauty and the agony of *the People* we call "Aboriginal."

During those years I began to think deeply about who we are as First Nations, as well as the degree to which our identity is codified in the cultures and languages we are in danger of losing.

I never forgot the time as a child that my racial tormentors broke my nose after I turned to confront them. The Lakota are warriors and from them I learned a

new lesson: that Indians do not have to be losers. With truth as a weapon, First Nations people can successfully defend their right to exist.

Honeywell Incorporated, a major US manufacturer of thermostats and weapons of war, intended to build a munitions test facility in a Southern Black Hills canyon sacred to the Lakota. The Lakota called it Wakinyan Wambli Canyon, Thunder Eagle Canyon. The non-Aboriginals from the nearby town of Hot Springs called it Hell's Canyon. Both were right, from their own cultural perspective. For the Lakota, the canyon was destined to be the home of the Thunder Beings and of Eagles. For the residents of Hot Springs, the Honeywell controversy would turn out to be a lot closer to Hell.

The Lakota strongly objected to Honeywell's plans to blow up the canyon. In a one-year span, I wrote 52 stories, unearthing lie after lie and convoluted conspiracy after conspiracy between federal, state and local governments and Honeywell. The planned test facility would have destroyed the canyon and deprived the Lakota of ceremonial rights guaranteed under the Native American Religious Freedom Act of 1979.

The Lakota fought hard and so did I. I fought hard as well to continue publishing the facts. As a reporter I was honour-bound to maintain objectivity to my best ability. Journalism's ethic required that I be emotionally uninvolved. Nevertheless the struggle that I witnessed and the Lakota passion to protect their rights affected me powerfully.

During the course of my other duties an Ogallala tribal judge, Robert Grey Eagle, invited me to join him in his sweat lodge ceremonies. His uncle, Charlie Fast Horse, later did the same.

The heat and the prayers rekindled my spirit. I joined Robert every weekend, driving the 120 miles from Rapid City to his home on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

I also sought and found a place for secret prayer and spirit walks. It was high in the rocks cliffs of Mato Paha, Bear Butte, near Sturgis, South Dakota. Mato Paha means Bear Mountain. It is a high plains landmark, from a distance looking like a bear sleeping on its side. Mato Paha is the most sacred place in the universe for the Lakota, the Cheyenne, the Mandan and others.

One of the "others" who sensed the sacredness of Mato Paha, then and forever was me. Hundreds of prayers and spirit walks there fused in me the traditions of Takelma S'omomloholxas and Lakota wicasa wakan, or holy men. For the first time, the dead - the "ghosts and other relations" at Table Rock - joined the living traditions of the Lakota. At Mato Paha, over many bright days and dark nights, I embraced life as an Indian. I would never be the same again.

Charlie Fast Horse lived closer to me in Rapid City, so I joined him in the Inipi or sweat ceremony as well. Charlie was a particular kind of wicasa wakan. Charlie during a vision quest had dreamed of lightning. In the tradition of the Heyoka, The dream meant that he had to take the vow of a Contrary, a most difficult calling among medicine men. It meant that Charlie would have to live in ways that were opposite to others. When he said the sweat lodge was lila osni (very cold, pronounced "leela oh-shni"), it was lila okata (extremely hot, pronounced "leela oh-kahta"). When I met Charlie he wasn't doing things backwards, but he was still a contrary. When his counsel in words seemed most severe, in truth its power was the most gentle. When

his words seemed gentle and full of humour, Charlie was indeed the most severe.

Charlie was a contrary in other ways as well. When other Lakotas lived on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Charlie chose deliberately to live in Rapid City many miles away from the reservation. He said the Lakota owned the place, city and all, because it was treaty land. He and his Pomo Indian wife Hazel opened Prairie Edge, a workshop and gallery for First Nations artisans. Charlie could have opened the shop anywhere, but again he chose "treaty land," his land: Rapid City nestled in the cradle of the Black Hills.

Charlie had no tolerance for mixing alcohol and spirituality, an uncompromising stand for which he suffered criticism even from other Lakotas. I appreciated Charlie's stand. He taught me to be strong, to believe in myself in the face of adversity and to keep a high standard as a First Nations person. Above all, Charlie by example and spirit taught me to live without compromising the truth.

But one question remained to be answered. I had no idea at first what so forcefully had driven me away from

my First Nations roots then with equal power compelled me to find those very roots I had rejected.

The answer I sought came from another Lakota wicasa wakan: Grandpa Pete Catches.

At that time, Grandpa Pete was in his eighties, wiry and extremely strong. He was extraordinary; the last Lakota medicine man who knew all 404 medicine plants and their uses.

Grandpa Pete was Robert Grey Eagle's adopted grandfather. Robert introduced us during one of Grandpa Pete's Sundance ceremonies. The Sundance involved four days of dancing and fasting in the heat of the Pine Ridge prairie. On the last day, the male participants would be pierced with an eagle claw four times in the chest. Through each pair of wounds a wooden dowel would be inserted. The dancers would be tied by the dowels to a specially selected "tree of life" set in the middle of the dance circle. At the conclusion of the dance, the men would pull backward until the dowels broke through the flesh.

It was an arduous ordeal. Robert was pledged to complete 13 Sundances. When he introduced me to Grandpa Pete, Robert was about to dance for the twelfth time.

Robert and Grandpa Pete taught me that the Sundance was extremely sacred. The participants were not suffering for themselves. During the dance, they were always to pray for others. Often they would pray for a relative's healing, for world peace, or for the healing of the nations.

Robert was quick to draw the analogy between the ancient Sundance and the suffering of Jesus Christ.

"Jesus chose to suffer for others; we do the same," Robert said. "I think Jesus would have made a good Indian."

Grandpa Pete lived in an old travel trailer just off the main road to Pine Ridge Village. A few months after the Sundance, I was driving past and saw the old medicine man unloading firewood logs in four-foot lengths off the back of an ancient flatbed truck.

It was midday and very hot. I stopped and helped. The elderly man tossed the logs like they were twigs. When we were done, we sat and talked on the edge of the truck bed.

It was to be one of the most important conversations of my life.

A raven flew by, calling to us from a cottonwood.

"That's one of your birds, that raven!" he remarked. "I know it because I spent some time with Indian people from your part of the world. The salmon[1] are your people, too."

I didn't quite know what to say. I hadn't thought much about my "part of the world" for a while. Robert had formally adopted me as his brother. After that, I was, in fact, quite comfortable being a Lakota.

For a long time, I was lost in my thoughts. Grandpa Pete was watching me. He paused, as though listening to me. I said nothing. Grandpa Pete kept on watching me; listening.

Minutes had passed since Grandpa Pete mentioned the word "salmon". When I realised the medicine man was looking directly at me, I felt uneasy. Grandpa Pete seemed to sense my feelings. He directed his gaze purposefully across the parched yellow prairie.

Even as he gazed, I could feel him listening to my silence.

When he went on talking, his tone was as though I had been speaking, too.

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[1] Author's Note: The reference here to salmon is a unifying literary device. Pete Catches spoke to me about the raven then, and the salmon on another occasion. The timing of Grandpa Pete's statement is the only case in the dissertation where an event or sequence of events has in any way been changed.

"Too much pollution; the two leggeds are poisoning the entire world. You know, the way things are going," he said with a sweep of his hand, "the nations of all living beings are going to die soon. I know it, and every one of them knows it, too."

I focussed on what the old man was saying.

"Then why, Grandpa Pete, do they keep on having babies if they know they're all going to die soon? Why not spare the babies and the pain? Why don't they just quit?"

"Because, Takaju (grandson); just because. They keep on going because it is their nature."

That one statement changed my life. Many times afterward when the advanced decline of First Nations languages has left me discouraged, I remember Grandpa Pete's words. Sometimes the criticism, the gossip and even the slander from a few among my own people are severe, but I don't quit. I remember Grandpa Pete's words and I understand.

I am not working so hard because I have any inkling that First Nations languages will be saved. I keep working because I believe in what I am doing; I keep working because I have finally found my nature.

I am at peace because I know that whether or not I succeed is in larger hands than my own.

Grandpa Pete's words set me free. His words affected me in another way as well. The wall over my desk at the Rapid City Journal used to be bare. After Grandpa Pete spoke with me about the raven, I searched everywhere for a raven from my part of the world. I found a print done by a Northwest First Nations artist of a raven with the sun in its beak.

I hung the picture on the wall above my computer terminal. That raven spoke to me constantly as I wrote story after story.

The raven is part of a myth well known among Northwest First Nations. According to the story, the world was cast into darkness when an old man stole the sun. Raven, seeing the people desperately trying to gather food in the darkness, disguised himself as a human baby and entered the womb of the old man's wife.

After the raven was born, the man loved him as his only son. One day the raven asked if he could play with the box in which the sun was kept. The man at first refused, so the raven threw a tantrum until he relented.

The raven took the sun in his beak and flew up through the smoke hole of the house, making him very, very black. Soaring upward, he placed the sun in its home high in the sky. All the people rejoiced because the raven had brought back the light.

The raven by every means available to him had lived according to his nature. He had brought the sun to the people so that they could survive.

I looked at that picture whenever I got discouraged. The picture reminded me of Grandpa Pete's words. I had learned that, like the raven, it was my nature to seek the hidden light and to bring it to the people. After that, I never again questioned whether the truth in my stories would prevail.

More than that, unknowingly I had made my final connection. I was content up until then to live as an adopted Lakota. But from the moment Grandpa Pete Catches spoke his words about my raven and my nature I became proud to be Haida. At long last, in my heart, at least, I had come home.

The struggle between Honeywell and the Lakota continued. My stories had an impact worldwide. Good

Morning America, Italian television and even the Soviet Union's Radio Moscow joined in the fight.

But it was the elders, not just my stories, that had the final impact. A group of Lakota elders, the Grey Eagle Society, set up and maintained a sweat lodge on the site. One day the elders en masse made the dangerous trip into the remote canyon. They came rolling deep over ruts and steep slopes in four-wheel-drive vehicles and an old school bus. After the old people left, Honeywell, the Fall River Sheriff's Department and the U.S. Forest Service tore down the sweat lodge.

The American public and the international community were outraged. Soon after, my sources inside Honeywell reported that the company was losing both credibility and international sales.

My sources also told me that Honeywell's CEO was scheduled to meet secretly with state and national government officials. I wrote the story.

Immediately after that Honeywell announced that it was withdrawing from the canyon. Credibility, negative publicity and money had eaten away at Honeywell's bottom

line. When all was said and done, it Honeywell's bottom line that counted.

In my final news story I wrote the truth as I had come to experience it. I said that it had been the elders more than anyone else, Lakota or otherwise, who had saved the canyon. The Grey Eagle Society and their sweat lodge had won Wakinyan Wambli Canyon back on the battleground of public opinion.

That lesson from the elders has guided me to this day. Among nearly all First Nations the entire hope of saving the languages resides in the elders. I have learned this one point very well: never underestimate the power of indigenous elders.

Goliath, in the form of Honeywell, the State of South Dakota, the Fall River County Sheriff's Department, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Army had been beaten by a humble and beautiful bunch of spiritual oldsters.

With perseverance, unity and a common purpose, they had won. In the months that followed the State of South Dakota leased the lands to an Oregon-based organisation devoted to saving wildlife. Now in the place of U.S. Army war games and tanks with uranium-tipped armour

piercing shells, wild horses once again run free. And the Lakota elders and the Lakota ceremonies continue there as free as the horses, as they have for many thousands of years.

The Honeywell saga was the first time I had experienced a victory that celebrated the power of First Nations elders. Equally important, it was the very first time I had experienced who I truly was as a Haida person. Through Robert Grey Eagle, Charlie Fast Horse and Grandpa Pete Catches, I had experienced the power of living according to my nature.

Also, for the first time since I was a child, being an Aboriginal person didn't get my nose broken.

But even in the victory harsh realities surfaced.

One reality I found in a Rapid City bar. It is difficult to celebrate First Nations' power when you suffer the anguish of coaxing an under-aged intoxicated Aboriginal girl away from a non-Native predator.

The girl was no more than 15 years old, very drunk and totally confused. She told me her family lived on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, but she was fearful of going home. I took her to a friend's house. After talking long into the night, eventually I convinced her

to go home. I won by telling her the truth as I had come to know it: I said I was her brother and she had nothing to fear. I promised to drive her the 150 miles to her home, then I gave her a safe place to sleep for the night.

Early in the morning, I looked for her. She was gone.

I never found out where she went but I heard she went back to the bar. I never knew her, but her story was the rule, not the exception, for far too many First Nations children. Life for many Aboriginal people, small children to elders, was like that. That was the way it was; that was the way it had always been - beginning 500 years ago.

According to the statistics, alcoholism to some degree affects all First Nations people. In some areas as many as 70 percent of First Nations people are hard-core alcoholics. Consequently, a very high percentage of First Nations children are born with foetal alcohol syndrome.

A Rapid City police sergeant told me that in the old days officers used to toss drunken Indians into

dumpsters rather than burden the jail system for the night.

How can First Nations regenerate their languages when their people live under those circumstances? This question is starkly real.

Over the years, I have learned that First Nations languages a very real key to recovery. In the languages are the healing of the First Nations. In the languages are our identity and our self-esteem. The languages teach us the difference between the sacred and the profane. They teach us honour and that it is our responsibility to respect all things. The languages awaken us to our nature to care for our relatives; they awaken us to the reality that the Earth itself is our relative.

The languages light the way through the generations to the very source of our beings. For those of us who struggle with our self-doubts and pain, our languages are like unopened time capsules. In our languages are the themes and messages from our own ancestors to our people; messages meant for other First Nations and for empathetic non-indigenous people as well.

Mato Paha was where the Creator: Haps Kemnas (Takelman), Wakantanka (Lakota), Salana (Haida), first connected me with the power of a living First Nation. Before that, Table Rock was where I first encountered the intimate connection between language, heritage and healing. Whether wandering late at night on that hard rock plateau communing with "ghosts and other relations", or talking with Pete Catches on an old flatbed truck, the First Nations languages and spirits have connected me with the ancestors and with my own quest for healing.

I wrote a poem about indigenous languages back then. Like a personal time capsule, it helps me to keep my perspective as I struggle to do my part in revitalising First Nations languages:

The Knowing

Native Language is a conspiracy:
Code words scrawled
On dog-eared matchbooks
Spirited between First Nations;
Slipped past generations.

Native Language is a conspiracy.
Watchful trepidations
Under cover of moonlight;
Stealthy whisperings:
"We are The People, YES!"

2.10 The Homecoming

I will always honour the Lakota people, including my brother Robert Grey Eagle.

I was beginning to feel very much at home among the Lakota. I would have been content to live there for the rest of my life, were it not for one thing.

Robert said it best one day, "Don't get too comfortable here, my brother. You're a Lakota by adoption, but by blood you're a Haida. You've got to go home."

I knew in my heart he was right.

Vancouver, University of British Columbia: From the trees, the ravens sang to me softly in the darkness. It was about 3 a.m., and I was shivering in the December cold outside a Haida longhouse built behind the Museum of Anthropology. I had no idea that ravens could croon like that. Suddenly I realised that in all my life I had missed this most basic of Haida facts: I had never experienced ravens before.

In the darkness across the field, the white lights of the Grouse Mountain ski slopes shone like a too-bright constellation beneath a sliver-thin waning moon. The longhouse behind me seem more real, far more real

than Grouse Mountain and the Vancouver city lights flickering beneath its' slopes like caricatures of cast-down stars.

In the reflected city lights I reached out and I touched a carved human face on the tall totem pole towering over what in the old days would have been the longhouse door.

As I touched the face I felt it warming underneath my hand. I cried. The ravens in the trees answered my sobs so softly. I knew I was coming home. A lifetime was coming home with me.

Through the cracks between the vertical wallboards pungent cedar fragrance wafted from inside the longhouse. An indistinct memory tugged at my soul, cedar floating in from some deeply-buried ancestral past. Only hours before at a rest stop near Bellingham the same smell of cedar filled the cool, misty darkness. Even then something inside me told me I was nearly home.

To the right, inside the museum, ancient totem poles kept watch, trapped behind huge glass windows. In the cold and brittle night, suddenly I experienced the power of contrast: The very-real Haida longhouse, the warming human face on the housepole and the ravens, the

totems peering out from inside their huge glass prison, the lights and the dull roar of Vancouver, all these merged with my tears into a graphic study in the surreal.

It was 1988. I had driven day and night from South Dakota to be there. I had come looking for my home.

My brother said I had to do this, so I did. My work at the Rapid City Journal provided the opportunity. I was the only reporter who routinely wrote 90 column-inches a day, enough to fill an entire page. I had accumulated a lot of overtime. I had no reason not to take off on my own. My marriage with Jennifer recently had ended in divorce, in part because her parents didn't like my association with the Sioux.

With my brother's admonition in mind, I took two weeks off and headed west. In the wee hours I arrived in Vancouver: the gateway to the remote corners of British Columbia and to my ancestral home on Haida Gwaii, the Queen Charlotte Islands.

I had never been to Vancouver before and I didn't know a living soul. But something inside the Haida longhouse seemed to know me very well. Instinctively I knew them, too. They were my relatives.

My face wet with tears, I offered my relatives my heart, if only I could live and work among my people.

Less than two days later, they answered me.

I visited by chance an art gallery on Granville Island in the heart of Vancouver. I told Leona, the owner, that I was Haida but had never been home.

Leona gave me an eagle feather and sent me to see the great Haida artist, Bill Reid. Inside Bill's Granville Island studio an immense ten-foot high white plaster canoe was filled with mythic Haida beings frozen in the midst of intense struggle. A huge chief sat in the midst. Like a true high-born Haida, he ignored the struggle of lesser beings, choosing instead to keep the vision of where he thought the canoe was going.

Bill told me that the struggle was how it was with Haida people: all of them in the same canoe. The miracle was, he said, that the canoe was moving forward at all. It was taking them somewhere, all those fighting creatures in the same boat, even if no one knew where the canoe really would end up.

Bill told me the plaster mould was to be cast in bronze as the Jade Canoe. The sculpture was Bill's masterpiece, an embodiment of his wry wit and his

personal experience with the First Nation he loved so dearly. The Jade Canoe's final home would be at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC. A second casting would be placed at Vancouver International Airport, exactly where Bill would have wanted it: not in a glassed-in prison like the "protected" totems, but right in the middle of the causeway where the people are; where children climb on cast bronze wings and skip between the oars.

Tragically, Parkinson's disease had taken a grievous toll on Bill, who found it increasingly difficult to carve. Even that didn't stop him. The best First Nations artists in the world were carving under Bill's exacting tutelage to complete the Jade Canoe. The carving is theirs, but the message of the First Nations struggle uniquely is Bill Reid.

Bill made no secret of that. He showed me a traditional Haida spruce root hat that was destined to shade the bronze head of the chieftain who sat with noble calm in the centre of the canoe. On the hat, every single wisp of a strand of hundreds of spruce roots had been carved to perfection.

"Look at that incredible detail," Bill said with pride. "I could never have done that. It took a woman's hand."

Because of Parkinson's disease, Bill's indomitable greatness had channelled itself from what he could carve himself into what he could inspire in others. At that moment I understood Skidegate Haida artist Bill Reid.

Bill had truly lived according to his nature. After the Jade Canoe was finished, thousands have stood transfixed, admiring from the outside the Haida canoe's magnificence and its' technical perfection. Few have looked beneath the form; few have understood the message of the struggle on the inside.

"Bill, if I go home, will my people accept me?" I asked.

"Yes. You'll be a real hit. Everyone will want to be related to you, just like they wanted to be related to me," he said. "Then they'll try to make you part of their own little clique."

Deep sadness furrowed his brow.

"I hope it doesn't work," he said.

I have always remembered his answer; now, in retrospect, I understand his pain.

My coming home was first realised when I cried that bitter winter night outside the longhouse behind the museum. Bill's coming home was very similar to mine, as his outcome also was similar to mine. The warming face on the longhouse pole that brought me to tears that cold night was Bill's own work. He, Tony Hunt and other artists had crafted every detail of the longhouse behind the university museum.

Bill was totally dedicated to his people. When he learned why I had come to Vancouver he became an instant friend. Bill had undertaken the very same journey many years ago.

Over the years his unique talents had earned him the title of a living Canadian treasure.

Bill invited me one night to dinner with the Catholic Bishop of France. He said wryly that having another Haida along when he ate with Catholics would be very useful. The event was unforgettable. Bill was as entirely at home with dignitaries as he was with ordinary people.

He introduced me to the Bishop as a "Haida on his way home".

The Bishop wished me well. He said he would keep me in his prayers.

While I was in Vancouver I visited Bill at his studio every day. His severe physical difficulties made it impossible for him to drive so I took him to his home on Point Grey Road.

Bill Reid, like Grandpa Pete Catches, was about to change my life.

"I don't understand why it's so important for me to go home, Bill. Sometimes I wonder why the urge is so compelling."

"Maybe you're like the salmon," he replied. "They probably don't know what's driving them any more than you do."

When Bill said the word "salmon" I realised he was looking directly at me. I felt uneasy. Bill seemed to sense my feelings. He directed his gaze out the car window.

"I understand the analogy, Bill, but I'm not sure I like it," I said. "The salmon go home to die. Is that what I'm about to do: go home to die?"

Bill was quiet for a while, answering me nothing. When he spoke it was with sadness.

The time had come for Bill Reid to raise me above Abraham Maslow's safety and survival levels.

"You just don't understand, do you, about this urge of yours to go home?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're just thinking about your own survival. You've got to go home. Don't you understand that? What I'm talking about is the survival of the people."

I remembered Chuck Jackson at Gold Rey Dam. Finally, from that moment on, I understood what both of them were saying.

Unknown to me, learning how to walk with the spirits on Table Rock at night had not been for my own quest. Going home was not for my own quest either. My quest was a journey to take my place among my own relatives. Night-walking On Table Rock, living among the Lakota, then later on Haida Gwaii, I needed to give myself to my people, to join my fate with theirs. I needed not just to receive, but also to contribute what I had been, what I had learned from mistakes, what I had accomplished; to become part of what my people and I were becoming.

A year later I visited Bill at his home in Vancouver. Although Parkinson's disease had nearly destroyed his ability to work with his hands, as we talked, Bill charcoal-sketched my portrait, his hands moved, but only with great effort. Rough as the drawing was, I treasure that portrait to this day.

Ten years later on Haida Gwaii I would be among the paddlers in a monumental 55-foot Haida canoe, the Lootas. Bill and his apprentices crafted the canoe in the traditional manner - except for the chain saws. The Lootas was hollowed and steam-formed from a single giant cedar log then hand polished, carved and painted with mythic Haida creatures.

Under the watchful eye of the world press, in that canoe we took Bill's ashes to his final resting place among his own ancestors in the long-abandoned Haida village of Tanu.

On the Lootas, the carved and painted mythic creatures were not fighting among themselves.

At long last Bill Reid, too, had gone home.

2.11 The Teacher

I left the Rapid City Journal late in 1989 to take a job as an English teacher in the coastal town of Newport, Oregon. By 1993 I also completed my Masters degree under the mentorship of Dr. Jodi Engel at Oregon State University across the coastal mountains from Newport.

The Rapid City Journal had been good to me, but the journalistic ethic of the Fifth Estate required a cold objectivity: a reporter must remain aloof from his sources.

At first that was more than acceptable. In a real way, the realities with which I had grown up seemed to necessitate emotional distance. I had learned my lessons well. I was a reporter, and I knew distancing. Most part of my life I had avoided personal issues that might intensify my emotional trauma. The only difference was that with the Journal, I was paid for it.

But, in South Dakota the Honeywell experience had broken through my "objective" exterior. The humanity of the drama was too real; the humanity was too much part of me. My insular state was challenged; I was deeply shaken.

Journalism began to feel foreign to me. With the guidance of Chuck Jackson, Grandpa Pete Catches, my adopted brother Robert Grey Eagle, Charlie Fast Horse, and another medicine man, Cheyenne River Sioux Sydney Keith, finally I was nearly ready to go home. For the first time since early childhood, I could deeply feel joy, and pain, again.

Most importantly, finally I was on the verge of embracing life fully as a Haida man.

I became a teacher because the profession, unlike journalism, required absolute involvement in the growth and welfare of human beings. In my case I chose the tender yet defiant students in Grades 7 through 10.

It was time for me to face my own identity was well, and my job offered an excellent opportunity. I asked my principal if I could teach my grade levels' literature components in what would hopefully be an unforgettable way. The students would focus on Native American authors as taught by a Native American teacher: myself.

My principal agreed, on the stipulation that my courses meet all academic requirements including the state-mandated learning outcomes.

Between the influences of Table Rock and South Dakota, I was coming to live by my nature. The classes were highly successful but were growing unmanageably large. Somehow I couldn't bring myself to turn students away and soon was handling class sizes of up to 35 students or more, significantly larger than those of my fellow teachers.

One guidance counsellor reported that for the first time in his 14-year career he had to create a student waiting list to take a class.

My heart went out to all my students. Newport was a poor town by American standards. Many of my students came from dysfunctional families. This reminded me so very much of my own childhood. I learned that for many students a teacher could come to fill the role of the only real parent that they had. I embraced teaching as one of the most important professions on Earth.

By my third year Newport experienced an influx of migrant Mexican students, many of whom could not speak English. Some were from Mexican First Nations, a few of whom spoke neither Spanish nor English, only their indigenous languages.

I took as many as I possibly could and would have taken them all if I could. They seemed so lost and so vulnerable. They were "me" in so very many ways.

My wonderful friend and partner was fellow teacher Yolanda Gearin, a Peruvian native. Yolanda helped me late into every night, marking and translating papers written in the only language common to many of those students: Spanish.

Despite pressure from some teachers and administrators, I staunchly resisted sending my Spanish and First Nations language speakers outside of the classroom to learn English. With the help a teacher's assistant who could speak Spanish, I offered in the same classroom English for English speakers and English immersion for Spanish speakers.

I had a particular dislike for racism and prejudice. My classes reflected this priority. My basic rule was that the classroom was to be a safe haven for all. All actions, words and ideas were to reflect mutual respect and consideration.

Students became teachers at every opportunity. I found myself working as one among them: sometimes I was the teacher; at other times I was the student.

Every term, the Spanish speakers would begin by taking seats on one side of the classroom; the English speakers took the other. Gradually, I subverted even that segregation. I arranged for students to earn liberal "extra credit" for helping students on the "other" side of the room. English speakers helped Spanish speakers with their English, Spanish speakers taught English speakers how to talk in Spanish.

The Native American literature sections were the Mexican and First Nationsstudents' most powerful opportunity to teach. I took advantage of the reality that most of the Spanish speakers were Mestiso, a mixture of Spanish and Native. The Mestiso students helped English speakers to experience their First Nations cultures, and to grapple with the immensely personal realities surrounding racism and prejudice.

By the end of each term the two sides of the classroom had blended on their own accord. Spanish speakers and English speakers had come together. I experienced a deeply personal satisfaction that in itself contributed to my growing sense wholeness.

My Oregon State University mentor, Dr. Engel, greatly encouraged me. One day she pointed me toward a goal that would change my life again.

"John," she said, "Have you considered how many students you affect in a day?"

"About 180," I replied.

"Consider how many lives you would affect if you earned your graduate degrees. Think of the doors that would open to you," Dr. Engel said. "Each life you touch would in turn touch hundreds of others."

From that moment onward, I determined I would move my career toward that goal. I had undergone incredible healing. I wanted to share that healing with others; to affect as many people in a positive way as I possibly could.

During my years at OSU, I was active in the university's Native American Longhouse. I had gained a great deal of insight into First Nations issues during my Rapid City Journal years covering Indian affairs on Pine Ridge. At OSU, I soon gained a reputation as an Indian activist. I was sought after as a public speaker on First Nations issues. I fought hard for Aboriginal

issues during those years. I knew First Nations facts and statistics backward and forward.

But something still seemed out of balance. Looking back, I know now that what I had experienced in South Dakota had awakened a deep-seated angst that had begun in my childhood. The more I had learned about historical wrongs, the more that angst had settled into a low-keyed, continuous anger. As time went on I recognised the emotion for the anger that it was, but the anger seemed justified, so I convinced myself that it was a power like any other power. I believed that justifiable anger could be used for good purposes. Now, after seeing the effects of anger upon my own Haida people, I no longer hold that belief.

What I didn't know was the degree to which my anger had salted my life and attitudes. For example, I wrote the following report in fall 1993 for one of Dr. Engel's classes. At the time it seemed as though I had written it in an objective format, that I had entirely purged the document of my anger; but I was unaware of the power of anger to blind us to ourselves.

Later, in my years on Haida Gwaii I observed the self-destructive effects of our anger against the "white

man." It is not that our anger is without cause. On the contrary, colonialism, genocide and racism have wronged us in so many ways.

The truth is that our anger is the legacy of racism and is eating us alive. Planted deep within our own consciousness, anger turned inward blinds us to the way we treat each other; it destroys our unity. Turned outward, anger causes us to stereotype "white people." This cuts us off from enlightened individuals who truly are our friends. It also cuts us off from less-enlightened individuals who through our example could come to understand the truth.

I can see how very blind I was to my own anger in a report I wrote in 1993. The report is fascinating to me today. On the one hand, it contains the core of my educational philosophy. On the other hand, the anger of which today I am so aware, at that time I was blind. The report follows in the next section.

2.12 Reverse Assimilation: Unmelting the Melting Pot

The Great American Melting Pot: the blending of many nations into one. Once considered a cultural cornerstone, in recent years the paradigm has shifted,

quietly yet powerfully toward a new ethic: multiculturalism, an ideal in which society respects and protects the rights of every culture to exist and prosper amidst a colourful mosaic of divergent, yet nationally convergent, groups.

In this emerging ethic, ethnic identity joins American individualism as a protected ideal. The cause of this shift is simple. The melting pot did not work. Among emigrants and aboriginals alike the melting pot undermined cultural rootedness, replacing it with nothing, while at the same time doing little or nothing to eliminate racial prejudice.

Worse, the melting pot was imposed forcibly upon First Nations peoples. Indian children were removed from their homes and families and placed in government or private boarding schools. Once confined, their languages, traditions and religions were systematically, even brutally stripped away; white education supplanting Native methodologies that in some cases were 10,000 years old.

In truth, time and experience has made it clear that people, unlike copper or iron, do not melt under heat and pressure. They burn.

This ordeal by fire was called "Indian Education." In contrast, perhaps it would have been better called "Indian Un-Education."

"If we were caught talking Indian, we stood by that pipe - it was a (frozen) propane pipe - and, boy, they put our lips right on that pipe," said Bernice Mitchell of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. "My lips have been burned off many times from that Indian school" (Oregon Indians, 1993).

That was in 1927, a half-century after Chemawa Indian School opened in Salem, Oregon with the express purpose of replacing traditional "Indian Education" with the American version of the same. In 1973, Kingfisher, an alumnus of a Catholic boarding school in the 1950's, remembered, "If I spoke one word of Lakota (Sioux), they'd lock me in a wooden box for hours."

Kingfisher said the box was tiny, just big enough to crouch in the foetal position. Holes drilled in the box supplied him with air (personal communication, 1973).

Other First Nations peoples, graduates of Chemawa and other schools, have similar memories that include basement beatings with rubber hoses in administrative

efforts to eradicate aboriginal cultures (Oregon Indians, 1993), creating out of children "white adults with brown skin" (Legacy: Land, Power and the First Nations, 1990).

Little doubt existed that government policy into recent years specifically had been prejudiced against the First Nations. From the beginning the buck began in very high places. In 1883, Secretary of State Henry M. Teller wrote:

> Civilization and savagery cannot dwell together; the Indian cannot maintain himself in a savage or semi-civilized state in competition with his white neighbor, and he must adopt the white man's ways or be swept away by the vices of savage life, intensified by contact with civilization (Teller, 1883).

Four years earlier U.S. Indian Commissioner Ezra Hayt took what appeared, on the surface at least, to be a more positive position. He said Native American children were "as bright and teachable as average white children of the same ages" (Hayt, 1879). But the message was the same: devalue First Nations ideals and destroy First Nations rights to perpetuate their ancient cultures; accomplish this by making it impossible for Natives to educate their children in their traditions and lifeways.

This prejudice against the First Nations was based on the mistaken idea that aboriginal Americans belonged to primitive and dying cultures. However, proponents of this policy underestimated both the vitality and durability of the First Nations; cultures that had survived famines, floods, wars and an ice age for perhaps 30,000 years - or longer - in North America.

But the dying-culture paradigm persisted, lasting almost a century before culminating in the federal termination policies in the 1950's that declared entire nations to be non-entities.

The belief among government officials and educators that aboriginals could be reprogrammed ran high during the Benjamin Harrison presidency. In 1890 Office of Indian Affairs Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan wrote:

> The Indians, after one generation of them have been properly trained, will very readily assimilate with our people, attend the common schools, and will not require any special oversight which is not given by the General Government to other classes of citizens Morgan, 1890a).

This same Morgan in his 1890 Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was a little less tactful. He called for the destruction of "barbarous habits by the substitution of civilized manners," the "displacement of

heathenish superstition by the inculcation of moral principles,' and "awakening of sluggish minds to intellectual activity" (Morgan, 1890b).

This labelling of First Nations as "primitive," "stone-age" and "savage" saturated government, religion and academia: the three entities most involved in Native education. Unfortunately, based on this blind prejudice Native children were ripped from stable educational systems that had existed for thousands of years prior to the coming of Europeans.

The result was catastrophic. Brutal boarding school tactics bent on reprogramming aboriginal minds instead alienated entire generations, not only from the American system, but from their own cultures as well. Terry Cross of the Northwest Indian Child Welfare Association said:

> When you have generations of children growing up in institutions, that natural process, where you learn to parent from your parents, is interrupted. Boarding schools taught our people how to be abusive, how to be cold and institutional; certainly did not pass along ways of nurturing and caring. About half of all Indian people alive today were either reared in boarding schools themselves, or are children of people reared in boarding schools. And that impact on our families has been tremendous (Oregon Indians, 1993).

Warm Springs elder Verbena Green, a former Chemawa student, said boarding-school educational policies played a key role in the severe cultural disruption that today plagues First Nation communities:

> If I was not a strong person in culture, if my people were very weak, probably I would have turned out to be an alcoholic, or I would have turned out to be frustrated and probably turned to drugs and everything else that everyone else does . . . . You find very few of us who have lived this culture the way we have; there isn't enough of us to go around to teach everyone (Oregon Indians, 1993).

As early as 1904 some government officials attempted to stop American education from committing what in the extreme could be called cultural genocide.

Recognizing the human need for cultural continuity, U.S. Indian Office commissioner Francis E. Leupp urged his agency to reverse its assimilationist policies. Leupp said the government was morally bound to permit First Nations peoples to preserve both their cultures and their personal self-esteem.

"Was ever a worse wrong perpetrated upon a weaker by a stronger race?" he asked. "If so, history has failed to record it" (Leupp, 1904).

In 1969, after nearly a century of concentrated efforts to educate and eradicate, U.S. Senator Edward

Kennedy declared Indian education to be a "failure of major proportions" (Congress, Senate, U.S., 1969). In 1989, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that more than one out of three, or 35 percent of First Nation students would drop out of school, the highest of any ethnic group in America (Bowker, 1992; Dehyle, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Reyhner, 1992; National Center for Education Statistics, 1989). In some localities the Native dropout rate runs as high as 52 percent, and in extreme cases, 90 percent (Swisher & Hoisch, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Latham, 1985). This dropout rate, at the lowest, is more than twice the national average (Reyhner, 1992).

Tragically, this extreme cultural alienation shows up in other ways as well. In Canada, for example:

> The suicide rate for Indian people under the age of 25 is the highest of any racial group in the world. In some Native communities, it is 15 times the Canadian average. . . . Accidents and violence account for 32 percent of all Native deaths, compared with eight percent in the general population (Drums, 1991).

On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, combined alcohol abuse among teens and adults approaches 90 percent - and seriously affects 100 percent - of the

born and unborn Ogallala Lakota population (The Rapid City Journal, 1988).

The lesson is clear. Heat and pressure are not working. Assimilation is not working. Human beings do not melt, as mentioned earlier, they burn; and melting, after all, is a form of destruction. Enlightened education, in contrast, is a positive process, not negative; certainly it is constructive, not destructive. Cultural reconstruction, human affirmation and intercultural respect require more thought and are harder to accomplish; but - for all concerned - they are far easier to live with.

Moreover, taking seriously the aboriginal systemics that American Indian un-education sought to destroy likely would produce a new paradigm. Far from being savage, ancient First Nation educational practices are effective tools for cultural transmission. Not only that but they also parallel principles advocated in the most advanced American curricular designs.

First Nations educational methods share much in common even though differences in curricular content exist due to culture and environment.

First, children are educated by intimate elders, primarily relatives, producing an ideal student-teacher ratio.

In pre-Canadian Haida culture, for example, off the coast of British Columbia, boys left their parents' home and moved in with a maternal uncle. The uncle then became teacher and mentor, instructing young men in all matters relating to life, responsibility and culture.

To this day, despite adaptation to Canadian society, the Haida uncle-as-teacher relationship continues. Haida girls, likewise, continue to receive instruction from close female relatives. Aboriginal education, therefore, as in the Haida example is based on a one-on-one or small group relationship with teachers.

Second, First Nations education, particularly in the middle school years, is hands on. Students learn first hand through examples set by competent elders. Education is by doing and living, competency based and completely integrated into daily life. For example, among First Nations in the plains, girls learned by helping to process buffalo kills. Boys took part in hunting activities, graduating from level to level as

they demonstrated proficiency. Lesson plans, as in enlightened American practice, were based on performance objectives.

Essentially, therefore, First Nations education does not separate learning from life. Education is one-on-one. Children prepare alongside elders for ceremonies and complex dances. Winter storytelling is aimed specifically at teaching cultural norms and values. In this system students have instant access to feedback, reinforcement and learning-outcome modification. Student alienation, a common malady in American schools today, is unlikely because children learn directly from loved ones in mutual respect and trust. This especially is crucial during middle school ages, the transition period between child and adult.

In stark contrast to this was the boarding school era. Children were uprooted from their families. Once confined, institutionalised abuse added psychological and physical repression that cut children off from language, traditions, ceremonies, and contact with significant elders.

This legacy has alienated generations including parents of the present one. Small wonder then, that

Kennedy declared the entire Indian educational system to be "a failure of major proportions" (Congress, Senate, US, 1969).

If removing Native children from their homes was catastrophic, and if First Nations have used for thousands of years educational methodologies that today are recognized as enlightened, then a logical way exists to reverse the situation. Rather than practice assimilation, practice reverse assimilation: adapt education to First Nations cultural norms rather than the other way around.

In short, reverse assimilation must return to the First Nations the power to educate children as before. To be effective reverse assimilation would mean to reverse completely both the practices and the attitudes of the past; to acknowledge First Nations sovereignty in all matters pertaining to the education of the young; to accept that Native peoples have the right to choose both the methodology, and what is appropriate to teach the young. To do otherwise would be to perpetuate the errors - and the disastrous consequences - of the past.

In recent years a growing number of government officials in Canada and the United States have advocated

for First Nations sovereignty and its role in Indian education. Toward this goal, in 1973 the U.S. Congress commissioned the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE), a body of educators, officials and First Nations representatives, to investigate ways of reversing the failure of First Nations education.

Although the phrase, reverse assimilation, was not in use at that time, in its 17th annual report to Congress, Toward the Year 2,000: Listening to the Voice of Native America, the committee proposed strong measures to accomplish it. In the report's cover letter, dated 31 March 1991 and addressed to Senate President Dan Quayle, the council called for stronger efforts to "involve Native people in their own educational futures." The committee said this would be "a positive step in the right direction" (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991).

The council's report stressed First Nations autonomy as well as the merging of the American education system with traditional First Nations methods. If carried out the United States would, in key respects, affirm Native cultures and concede that the systems it once sought to destroy were valid. Although the United

States has been reluctant to adopt the plan, Canada, and the First Nations there are beginning to enact such goals.

The NACIE recognized the value of intimate elders as teachers, a method practiced from pre-contact times until the present:

> A Native model of education is a multi-generational model. Schools should welcome the meaningful involvement of Elders in Native education (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991, p. 96). . . .
>
> Alternative certification requirements must be instituted to allow tribal elders and community members to participate in the instruction of Native children (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991, p. 95).

Such steps, although preliminary, would be a step toward creating a partnership between education and First Nations cultures.

However, parents and elders affected by boarding school abuses likely would be reluctant to trust reverse assimilation. The council recognized this problem:

> Parents are still not part of the system despite efforts to increase their involvement. They know things must change, but they lack understanding of the system and how to influence it. They are angry, frustrated and alienated (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991, p. 95).

A partial solution would be to change the face of education through recruiting Native staff. But the lack of Native staff is a severe problem in the United States and Canada. Haida Gwaii, for example, called by many Canadians the Queen Charlotte Islands, is home to about 3,000 people, about half of whom are Haida. However, of the 71 teachers the school district employs, only two are Native. Obviously, one Native teacher per 750 Haida children is a sadly insignificant ratio.

Native teachers also would fulfil another goal of reverse assimilation: role modelling - a key tenet of traditional First Nation education. For thousands of years First Nations have experienced what for others, until recently, was theoretical: the effectiveness of education through emulation:

> American Indian and Alaska Native teachers, administrators, counselors, and specialists are needed in schools at all levels and in all areas because Native staff serve as role models for Native students and thus help increase self-esteem. Native staff are more sensitive to the cultural and learning styles of Native students because they share a common cultural and language background. We must establish targeted incentive and support programs to attract American Indian and Alaska Native young people into the education profession. Increasing the number of Native graduates who return to their own communities

> to teach would help reduce the high teacher turnover rates in remote locations (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991, p. 95).

Most likely, "Native graduates who return to their own communities to teach" also would reduce significantly the high student turnover rates as well. Currently, more than one out of three Native students fail to graduate (Bowker, 1992; Dehyle, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Reyhner, 1992; National Center for Education Statistics, 1989).

Providing that the United States and Canada aggressively recruit Native teachers and administrators, the next step toward reverse assimilation would be to integrate Native elders and parents into the system.

> Teachers must make it their business to get to know parents, share information with them, and enlist their involvement with the school (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1991, p. 96). . . . Schools in Native communities should have Native staff to interact with Native parents and create a comfort level that encourages their participation. These schools should have open classrooms where parents are welcome to come any time to observe and participate, and should establish a place where parents can congregate. Schools should offer extended building hours, parent-child library programs, and other family-based programs and services (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, 1991, p. 95).

Based on aboriginal cultural norms, reverse assimilation would be impossible to attain without Native elders and parents who teach.

Because of the shortage of traditional Native teachers, the NACIE realized that non-First Nation educators would remain part of the system. The council made it clear, however, that First Nations methodologies greatly differed from many non-Native teaching styles. Non-Native teachers, therefore, must treat First Nations with the same serious respect accorded cultures outside the North America.

> Non-Native teachers who go into Native communities should receive the same kind of language and cultural orientation that Peace Corps volunteers receive before they are posted. Their training should prepare them to recognize the different learning styles of Native students and learn how to provide appropriate instruction (including use of more experiential, participatory, and cooperative learning strategies) (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1991, p. 95).

Not only teachers but the curricula as well, therefore, must be reverse-assimilated. Native and non-Native teachers must make full use of the ancient, yet efficient, First Nations instructional methodologies:

> Where Natives are the majority, efforts should be made to assure that teaching and learning is not only <u>about</u> the culture, but <u>of</u> the culture. . . . Culturally appropriate

> instructional strategies are based on a multi-generational approach that asks students to focus on their own culture, work collaboratively in small groups, seek the wisdom of their elders, learn from the environment and experience, and demonstrate their learnings from the work they actually produce (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1991).

In short, American and Canadian education would do well to learn from the First Nations cultures they once attempted to destroy. Reversing the damage is a matter not of assimilation, as before, but of reverse assimilation.

In this regard the National Advisory Council on Indian Education stressed a central element of First Nations identity: the cultural significance of aboriginal languages:

> Extensive curriculum development and training of Native speakers as teachers is necessary to restore Native language capacity. The federal government should initiate a monumental extra effort in this regard to compensate for the monumental effort that was expended to eradicate Native languages over the past decades (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1991).

Reverse assimilation, therefore, as advocated by the NACIE, a committee appointed by an act of the U.S. Congress, would at long last address the core issues

through which the governments of the United States and Canada had devalued and deprecated the First Nations.

Although education's reverse assimilation would be monumental, in view of the educational gains on both sides, the winners would be everyone - First Nations and non-First Nations alike.

2.13 First Summer on Haida Gwaii

I have learned much about anger since I wrote that report. I know now that anger is never a constructive force, only a destructive one. Anger whether strong or weak, blinds. Convincing an angry person that anger is destructive is like trying to describe colours to a person who has never had sight.

The years ahead would teach me that lesson: that to build, not destroy, I would have to reject my own anger. However much anger seemed to be justified, I would have find a better way.

But still I needed to accomplish one more goal in my life. I needed to go home.

Using the video documentary skills I had gained as a television reporter, in 1993 I accepted a summer job on Haida Gwaii as a videographer for a Haida

archaeological survey team working in the Gwaii Haanas (Islands-Beautiful) archipelago.

Prior to the smallpox plagues of the late 19th Century, the archipelago that comprised the southern half of Haida Gwaii had been home to many thousands of people. After the plagues wiped out 90 percent of the Haida, within one generation the entire archipelago was entirely deserted.

Near the southern tip of Haida Gwaii was the ancestral home of one of my great-grandfathers. Tom Price was a renowned Haida artist and the last chief of Skan Gwaii Village, known in English as Ninstints. The village ruins, with its' ever-vigilant standing totem poles were spared the glass prisons of Vancouver and elsewhere. Skan Gwaii is open and vulnerable to Mother Earth. The world celebrates the spirit of indigenous freedom at Ninstints, naming the village a United Nations World Heritage Site.

I particularly remember the time when, at Skan Gwaii, I spent the night in the wide pit that had been the centre of the chief's longhouse. Sleeping near the still-standing totem poles and burial sites, dreams came to me. My body was asleep, but my spirit awakened. I

could feel myself in every tree, in the very soil underneath me. I was a returner.

In 1994 I was offered a position as the First Nations Education Coordinator for School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte).

This meant two things: I would be leaving behind the people and the students that I loved to fulfil a promise made to spirits at the Haida longhouse near downtown Vancouver.

I would work with all my heart because at last I was going home.

2.14 The Returner

I had come home to Skidegate Village. My cousin Pearle Pearson and her family; her brother Chief Skidegate (Dempsey Collinson), and his family immediately received me as one of their own.

For the first time in my life I was surrounded by people who looked a lot like me; people who would have passed for Mexican had they lived in Los Angeles.

The first six months were hard, but it was good to be there. My job was to assist with First Nations

education; to build programs that would contribute to the saving of the Haida language and culture.

I also assisted with building a network of First Nations workers in the northern regions of British Columbia. I learned firsthand why the languages were dying. Despite fanfare from political organisations, very few resources existed to save the languages, either human or financial.

On Haida Gwaii my first tasks were to find and encourage the hiring of Haida teachers, to build programs where none had existed, and to raise grant funds in support of the programs.

In September 1994, only two Haida people on the Islands were certified teachers. A woman in Massett Village was one of them and I was the other. The woman, a fine and exceptionally dedicated teacher, eventually lost her life to breast cancer.

I looked for new Haida teachers to work in our schools. In all of Canada I could find only four, one of whom had left the profession. None were willing to teach in Haida Gwaii.

In addition four Haida elders served in the classrooms as paraprofessional Haida language teachers.

I felt blessed to work with them. The paraprofessionals were paid a fraction of the regular teachers' salary, yet faced conditions that were among the worst in British Columbia. Familial dysfunction was extreme. The relationships between the Haida villages and the schools often were strained.

In Skidegate only 30 Haida speakers remained alive in 1998. At this time, fewer than 25 are left.

Wendy Campbell and I began building programs, writing and winning grants and encouraging community projects based on collaboration between the Haida villages and the schools.

We have been exceptionally successful. Coming home has answered some of my questions. It also has raised others.

Being a returner has been a difficult venture.

2.15 Alienation

My homecoming was one of the most important events in my life. At first I was nearly overcome with joy. I was home at last!

I wanted so very much to share my experience with others. I began writing in a medium dear to my soul:

poetry. In the first year I wrote a book, The Returners, documenting the joys, sorrows, hopes and fears of a First Nations person who had come home (See Appendix A).

But coming home was not to be the end of my quest for wholeness. After my life apart from my people, I I had so looked forward to living in Skidegate. However, my joy was to be short lived.

I was born a Haida but I was not raised as a Haida. Years before my coming to my homeland, as I began to embrace my Native identity I connected with other First Nations people. However, with the exception of a few close family relationships, in my homeland I was as unknown to the Haida people as they were to me.

On the one hand my experience in multicultural diversity was beneficial, but on the other it was a liability.

My experience was beneficial in that I had a deep personal understanding of First Nations realities and how they related to the non-First Nations world. This knowledge was valuable in building Haida language and culture programs as well as in interfacing with government agencies. Also, in my career away from the

Islands I had gained considerable skills in the fields of education, mass media and technology. These skills likewise were extremely useful.

However, my experience in diversity meant that my perspectives were not the same as those people who had spent most of their lives on Haida Gwaii.

When I went home, some accepted me but to others I was an outsider. To those who did not know my heart, it seemed to matter little that I had been accepted among other First Nations. My experiences were alien to them therefore I too was alien. Worse than that, I was an Indian educated at a university. To the ultra-conservatives among the Haida, that fact alone categorised me as a "non-Haida" regardless of my Haida blood.

What I experienced was akin to racism: a form of ostracism based upon personal characteristics beyond my control.

This experience was extremely demoralising. Throughout my lifetime, I had come to terms with prejudice based upon my race. However, when the Haida ultra-conservatives ostracised me despite my race, I was left completely overwhelmed and disoriented.

On the positive side my alienation has compelled me to examine my own tendencies toward racism.

When I arrived on Haida Gwaii I gravitated immediately toward the ultraconservatives among the Haida. I identified with them because subconsciously I still deeply resented "white culture" for the conditions under which I had grown up. Also, my experiences with "white" racists' treatment of the Lakota and other First Nations people intensified my frustration.

At first, on Haida Gwaii I too fought against the "white system" in every way that I could. I connected with the ultraconservative Haida. Together we commiserated, making plans to redeem our nation and our indigenous culture from "white" influences.

However close I felt to the ultraconservatives I was dissimilar in key respects.

My focus was upon building Haida language and culture programs. Unlike the ultraconservatives, This goal was central; fighting against "white culture" was not. Most important was what I was fighting for, not what I could fight against.

Also, I was part Jewish. Despite the fact that Jewish people have suffered greatly under racism, some ultraconservatives held my Semitic blood against me.

I also was resented because over my lifetime I had built close personal relationships with a number of "whites", notably Robert Casebeer, Tom Doty, Dr. Jodi Engel and others. I openly considered these "white" people as powerful allies; most certainly not adversaries in the cause of revitalising First Nations languages and cultures.

In the end I have come to be thankful for the ultraconservatives. At first the ultraconservatives saw me as an ally but soon they cut me off, seeking to hurt me in ways that ultimately hurt the Haida language and culture that I hold so dear.

Unintentionally the ultraconservatives helped me discover my true nature. As we are all victims of the coloniser, I honour them for that. In truth, to be a victim does not compel us to live as a victim. The ultraconservatives compelled me to examine a discontinuity in my own spiritual being. For just cause I hated the racism that had made me its victim, but unknowingly I too had internalised the coloniser. I had

become a racist. I loved some white people, but I hated white culture. Like Linus van Pelt in the inverse I loved people; it was "white" mankind I couldn't stand (Schultz, n.d.).

How could I abstract the notion of "culture" when in reality people are the culture? Culture is the sum of human activity, ideals and experience; past, present and projected. I could not "love" some white people and concurrently "hate" their entire culture. "White" culture had produced those who are worthy of love as surely as those same people had produced the nobler aspects of their culture.

With convictions like that, my tenuous relationship with the ultraconservatives was doomed from the start.

Soon after my arrival in September 1994, together we built the Haida Education Council (HEC), an ultraconservative body that served as a watchdog regarding over district and provincial policies and practices.

Six months later, on March 13, 1995, my relationship with the HEC abruptly ended. Once again my life changed permanently.

2.16 Building From the Ashes

When I founded the HEC I had wanted so deeply for the council to be part of an effective Haida language and culture program. HEC was envisioned as a consortium of Haida people from the two Haida villages of Skidegate and Massett. As such it met provincial standards for a body representing the interests of the Haida Nation.

In principle, HEC operated under the Skidegate and Old Massett village councils. In function, HEC interacted on a government-to-government basis with School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte) and the Aboriginal Education Branch of the Ministry of Education as part of a government-to-government relationship. But, in reality, HEC membership intentionally was selected to favour ultraconservative politics; the ideal that the Haida culture must be kept "pure."

My second step was to develop a new Haida language and culture program. Unfortunately, prior to my arrival, a $50,000 curriculum development grant was so badly handled than the Ministry of Education said it was going to take action to recover the money. The Ministry was right. The grant was abused. The money sat unused

in a bank account until the term of the project had nearly expired. Haida efforts to implement the project came too late. Despite the crisis, the ultraconservatives staunchly refused to hire anyone who was non-Haida to write the curriculum, qualified or not. No Haida curriculum developers existed, so the ultraconservatives hired a Haida who happened to be a linguist.

As good a linguist as he was, he was not a curriculum developer. The ill-prepared curriculum "document" was a mixture of unarticulated English language "topics." No scope-and-sequence existed. Haida language instructors were told simply to teach the English topics in Haida.

The Ministry of Education was outraged. Haida Gwaii urgently needed a comprehensive Haida language and culture instruction program, but under those circumstances it was out of the question to ask for more money.

And then I met Wendy Campbell.

Wendy is one of the best curriculum developers in Canada. Wendy, as a second languages methodology specialist, is renowned in Canadian educational circles

for authoring the first student-friendly French textbooks based on "whole language" instruction. The whole language system mimics the natural processes by which humans learn their first languages. In Canada, Wendy's curricula and textbooks are an unqualified success. After 20 years, her texts are still in high demand in schools throughout the nation.

Tony Vander Woude, President of Addison-Wesley Canada, the publisher, said recently that Wendy's core curricula have changed forever the manner in which second language resources are written and used by teachers (Vander Woude, Personal Communication, March 27, 2000).

Wendy's core curricula have gone international. In 1983, in the United States, Ms. Campbell's texts and curricula were adopted as the state-recommended French instruction program in Louisiana. Approximately the same year, the United Nations school for children of diplomats in New York City also adopted her program.

Over the years before I arrived on Haida Gwaii, the school district had contracted Ms. Campbell to deliver French teacher inservice. As a natural outgrowth, her services were extended to the Haida teachers.

I recognised her value immediately and requested permission to obtain her assistance in creating a comprehensive Haida language instruction system on Haida Gwaii.

Permission was granted, but because of the problems with the Ministry, my supervisor said that I would have to find a way to pay for the program myself.

I wasn't satisfied with that situation. I telephoned the Aboriginal Education Branch of the Ministry of Education. I assured them that we could create an effective curriculum and program, but the need for funding was urgent.

A top-level Ministry official, Aboriginal Education Branch head Brian Domeny, said that granting more money was out of the question due to the manner in which the last grant had been handled. Mr. Domeny reaffirmed that unless we met the requirements of the last grant, steps would be taken to recall the funding.

I asked for one chance to demonstrate our capabilities. I offered to submit a sample curriculum unit. If the quality was accepted I would have only two requests: that we be permitted to submit a new grant

proposal; and that, if we won the grant, the debt from the old project would be forgiven.

Mr. Domeny agreed.

I asked Ms. Campbell if we could co-author the unit. She accepted. She and I worked for two weeks together day and night writing the first units for a Grade 8 Haida Language and Culture Curriculum (See Appendix B).

The Ministry was impressed. We were granted permission to apply for a new grant, but only on the stipulation that Wendy Campbell and I specifically would be employed to develop and write the curriculum.

I was ecstatic. I took the plan straight to HEC.

2.17 Deradicalisation

The HEC meeting on March 13, 1995 had profound effects, upon my life and my future on Haida Gwaii.

We gathered at an inn along the Tlell River, roughly midway between Skidegate and Old Massett.

The group examined the Grade 8 sample unit. The student-centred unit was focussed upon culturally based activities directly coupled with student-selected Haida

language instruction. The HEC approved the unit unanimously.

One member commented that this was the first time she had seen school curriculum immersed so completely in Haida cultural ideals.

But then I mentioned Mr. Domeny's requirement that Wendy Campbell and I develop and write the curriculum.

An uneasy silence ensued.

"You're okay, John Kelly, but she's white!" one member finally said. "That's completely unacceptable!"

"What does her colour have to do with it?" I asked. "You all agreed her work was rich with Haida ideals."

"But she's white!" came the reply. "If you couldn't find a Haida, then why didn't you at least find a Indian who could do the same thing?"

Deep within me a deep pain gnawed at me. My spirit grieved. A lifelong angst mixed with remorse swept through my consciousness.

"Wendy's colour doesn't' matter at all," I said. "After all, I working with her, too,"

"Her colour is everything," I was told. "Look at what those white people have done to us!"

"This is racism!" I replied. Why didn't I see it; see all of us like this before? This is racism. We're all guilty of it; all of us!"

"Who are you to talk," someone said. "You are against white people too."

"I have done the same thing! I am just like you," I replied, fighting back tears. "This is racism! I won't have anything to do with this."

I was devastated. Over the next few weeks, my deepest fears wrestled night and day. As the struggle continued, a newfound awareness gradually arose: the evil in humankind is not white, black, yellow or red. The evil is racism; it has infected us all.

Determined to purge my own soul, page by page, I went through my book, The Returners. Suddenly, to my horror, everywhere I looked I saw my own racism: insidiously hidden behind years of angst and anger. One poem at a time, I revised the entire book, eliminating every derogatory reference to "white."

When I the task was finished, I included in The Returners the following entry:

2.18 Native Preference

The evening of 24 April 1995, an unprecedented shift took place in my poetry. I edited my book, removing from all poems but two - the word "white."

I would say more, but trauma is not as important as insight. The shift stems from the pain and the punishment I now see that we the Haida people needlessly are inflicting upon ourselves.

It is true the Coloniser has oppressed us, but why are we adopting those racial values, or should I say those lack of values? Throughout generations of racial abuse, our pride alone defended us. But, ironically, the sustaining pride of the last generation could in this generation become the arrogance that destroys us.

Prejudice is a brother to arrogance. It implies that a human being is inferior because of that person's race. Prejudice is not reason; it is anti-reason. It is an ignorant gut-level reaction that does not respond to logic, a reaction that blinds us both to friend and to enemy. One particularly dehumanising form of prejudice claims that another race is incapable of comprehending and acculturating our beliefs and values. This is darkness. It denies to every individual, and it

denies by extension to all humanity, the power to learn from one another; the power to build upon the commonality, the true spirituality that exists in every colour of the all of us.

Native Preference, designed by White and First Nations people working together, counters racial bias. Native Preference strengthens self-determination. But can we afford to insert our own racial bias; to use Native Preference to banish all white people? This is prejudice masquerading as preference: the exact spirit the Colonisers used against us. We will mutilate our spirit and our Nation if we nurture that seed within ourselves.

We must embrace, not reject, individuals of all colours who share a common vision with the spiritually mature among us. We must warn others concerning the virulence of our own anger and of our own fears, knowing that *the line between Native Preference and Native Prejudice can be thin - and that an even finer line exists between Native Prejudice and Native Racism.*

On my way to work yesterday morning, the reality seized me: it is not the Colonizer that our negativity is destroying. It is ourselves we are tearing apart.

We are fragmenting into even tinier *fragments* the thin hope of *wholeness* left in the wake of the conquest of the Yaats' X̲aadaay (Iron Man; white person).

We must not sanction ignorance merely because others were ignorant before us. Racism is infectious, like other diseases. And, like a disease of the night, racism easily is spread under cover of darkness between individuals; under cover of ignorance between Nations.

We cannot build our Haida Nation up, by tearing other Nations down.

The writings from which I removed the word "white" include:

- "Rene Descartes Was Not Born Here:" "White labels" became "Wasicu labels."
- An old title has changed: "Yaats' X̲aadaay Reality" became "One Race Reality." [*Now titled "World Series"*].
- "Commentary on Racing With Spiders:" "White people" became "Colonisers."
- "Dream Catcher:" "White man" became "iron man."
- "The People, YES!" "Words made of white shadows" became "Words made of iron shadows."
- "Declaration of a Non-Indian:" "The White man's expectations" became "The Coloniser's fantasies."
- Various footnotes: "Yaats' X̲aadaay = Iron man. Haida word for white people" became "Yaats' X̲aadaay = Iron man. Haida word for the Colonisers."

Due to the nature of the messages, "white" was retained in the poems "Racing With Spiders," and "We Are the World."

2.19 First Nations Angst On-Reserve: In-Situ Alienation

After the March 13th meeting, I saw again and again that my story was not an isolated one. In my work away from Haida Gwaii, I have encountered a number of university educated First Nations people who upon returning to their own homelands faced severe problems with reintegration.

Repeatedly, talented people who returned to work on behalf of their own people have experienced such extreme frustration that they moved away.

This loss of university-educated First Nations people also contributes to the decline of local expertise in First Nations language and culture revitalisation.

When alienation takes place off the reserve, it is external, a loss of personal identity due to negative interaction primarily with non-First Nations people.

Historically, First Nations individuals first experienced alienation when residential schools broke the chain: the ancient continuity of culture passed from elders to youths. Since that time, this loss of cultural identity has affected all First Nations people, both on and off the reserves.

Off-reserve, contemporary First Nations people suffer alienation due to constantly dealing with racism, personal disorientation, loss of supportive relationships, maladjustment and other factors related to culture shock.

However, individuals living in the midst of their own people also can suffer extreme loss of self-identity. This form of alienation is especially insidious.

This at-home loss of self-identity I call in-situ alienation, or alienation that takes place in the midst of a First Nations person's own community.

In-situ alienation takes two forms. First, in-situ alienation results when ultraconservative elements in the community ostracise university educated returners on the accusation that university life had caused them to become like "white" people. University educated returners also can suffer a sense of malaise due to the culture shock of changing from one culture to another. Second, lifetime residents experience in-situ alienation due to the rise of non-First Nations influences and the decline of First Nations languages and cultures.

In-situ alienation is psychological disintegration; at its core the opposite of social and cultural integration. Because it severs both individuals and communities from their cultural roots, it is a major contributing factor to the shortage of skilled First Nations language workers. More than that in-situ alienation weakens or destroys First Nations self-esteem and cultural identity. Thus it also plays a significant role in the decline and death of languages and cultures themselves.

As previously discussed, ultraconservative ostracism can alienate returners, however, even lifetime residents are alienated by the decline of cultural support. This kind of alienation results from the waning of First Nations languages and cultures in combination with powerfully conflicting acculturating influences such as biased public education, satellite television, popular magazines, movies and other forms of non-Aboriginal cultural media.

Returners can experience a combination of both forms of in-situ alienation. Especially for university-educated returners, cultural integration can be extremely difficult. Most severely affected are those

who, like myself, who grew up in non-Aboriginal cultures.

First-time returners can experience additional trauma related to unrealistic expectations. This especially can be true for university-educated returners, far more than for those who lived off-reserve in less intellectually and socially stimulating environments. Returners raised either on- or off-reserve arrive with expectations regarding their ancestral communities that can be significantly different than most long-term residents.

Symptoms of in-situ alienation range from a generalised sense of malaise, to severe social ills such as chronic depression and high suicide rates, as well as drug, alcohol and other addictions.

Chronic low self-esteem is an insidious consequence for all individuals affected including first-time returners, previously resident returners, and individuals who never left the reserve.

Language and culture revitalisation holds the key to ending in-situ alienation. If the decline of solid social institutions as embodied in languages and traditions are at the core of in-situ alienation, then

revitalising languages and cultures are integral to the solution. Secure cultural identity builds self-esteem. When low self-esteem is extant and is accompanied by a loss of belief that the old ways are relevant and should be revitalised, then the social health of entire communities can be jeopardised.

The problem is self-perpetuating. In-situ alienation spawns apathy toward revitalising languages and cultures. It causes deep-seated angst, resentment, chronic depression and anger turned both inward and outward. Consequently, afflicted individuals and even entire communities can become incapable of participating in healthy efforts to revitalise their Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Ultraconservatives unwittingly exacerbate the problems, when in anger and resentment they seek to "cleanse" the culture, to eradicate all "white" influences.

This "cleansing" phenomenon appears to be similar to the "cultural cleansings" of other nations, for example, Mainland China, the Middle East and Kosovo.

Ultraconservatives often are tolerated in the communities due to the fact that their loyalties appear

to be benignly centred on the Aboriginal language and culture. However, ultraconservative angst and anger toward "white" cultures often is directed at three groups: non-Aboriginals either married to local people or working on-reserve, children and adults of mixed-blood descent, and the returners deemed to have been influenced by "white" culture.

Talented non-Aboriginal people living on-reserve who possess the technological and professional skills necessary for language revitalisation can in extreme cases be driven away. In short, ultraconservative efforts to keep First Nations culture pure ultimately contribute to the language and culture's demise.

Exactly this situation occurred with a linguist, John Enrico, who for 20 years lived among the Haida until he could speak the language more fluently than most Haida people.

Enrico (1995) translated Haida stories collected in at the turn of the 20th century by linguist John R. Swanton, publishing them in a book, Skidegate Haida Myths and Histories.

Over the 20 years, Dr. Enrico gathered extensive linguistic and cultural data from a number of

exceptionally knowledgeable elders who have long since died. Based upon their input and that of others, Dr. Enrico currently is authoring a yet-unpublished dictionary of the Haida language.

Nevertheless, plagued with ultra-rightwing criticism, gossip, slander and harassment, Dr. Enrico eventually left Haida Gwaii to work elsewhere. As of this date, the Haida dictionary remains unpublished.

Thus "cultural cleansing" of non-Aboriginal influences contributes to the decline of Aboriginal language and culture and thus increases the effects of in-situ alienation.

Due to ultraconservative vigilance, to be deemed as being under "white" influence has extremely negative connotations. The underlying attitudes behind themselves in cultural cleansing result in suspicion toward anyone with sufficient off-reserve education and experience.

2.20 Pan-Indianism

Even those among the returners who maintain a positive Aboriginal self-image can suffer problems with social integration after they return. While living in

non-Aboriginal communities, many returners reinforce their Aboriginal identities by associating with individuals from other First Nations communities. In the process, many adopt an amalgamation of Indian cultural practices in ways that both complement and enhance their traditional practises.

Upon their return, the adaptive behaviours that strengthened the returners off-reserve devastate them on-reserve due to ostracism for embracing what is negatively referred to as "pan-Indianism."

These university-educated returners often embrace a broader Aboriginal worldview. However, ultra-rightwing vigilance can drastically intensify what normally would be moderate and resolvable in-situ alienation. This can exact a severe toll when the returners attempt to integrate into a less universalised Aboriginal environment.

Despite having much to contribute to language regeneration, these educated and experienced returners often undergo severe trauma imposed from the "real Indians:" those who claim to have grown up with minimal non-local influences.

In reality, with the pervasiveness of television and print media, a wide variety of outside influences have become very "local". The very concept of a non-influenced society is in fact an illusion. Nevertheless, the returners face stinging gossip, severe slander and harassment from individuals who in fact comprise a small portion of reserve residents.

The result often is that the returners become extremely discouraged and leave, and with them go valuable technological and professional skills. This problem contributes to a reserve "brain drain" and can impoverish otherwise viable programs for revitalising First Nations languages and cultures.

This scenario is especially tragic in view of the returners' potential to assist their communities with integrating into the larger world outside the reserve. A key to First Nations survival is for Aboriginal communities to experience themselves as part of a larger whole and to develop a sense of international indigenousness.

More than that, despite the historic effects of assimilation, the potential exists for Aboriginal peoples to embrace as non-threatening their inherent

connectedness with all others in the human race, including "white" people.

In short, if ultra-rightwing efforts to enforce cultural "purity" succeed in alienating all universalising influences, the consequences ultimately will be disastrous for the First Nations.

In this regard, I wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper serving Haida Gwaii. The letter, in the following section, illustrates what can happen when ultra rightwing conservatives attempt to "purify" the culture.

2.21 The Wild Ones

Indians believe in preserving wild life, or so I hear. Must be so, because Indian Country seems to have preserved a number of strange creatures. One in particular is the Screamin' Brown Eagle. The breed got that name when some real old-time Indians noticed the Screamin' Brown Eagle's tendency to scream at Bald Eagles because they've got feathers that are partly white.

Those all-brown eagles even scream at the young ones with the white spots. Maybe they're afraid of what

the Spotted Eagles will become when they grow up. One thing is sure: those youngsters' white spots really worry them. Probably those Brown Eagles really care in their own way, screaming because they want to scare the white spots right off the little guys.

By the way, you ought to see what those Screamin' Brown Eagles do to Doves; you know, those white birds who come here lookin' to make peace and all that. Doves must be their favourite kind of food; because Screamin' Brown Eagles try to gobble them up as soon as those Doves step across the Reserve line.

Screamin' Brown Eagles are screamin' all the time at Doves, Spotted Eagles and every other kind of reserve bird saying that the only good bird is an all-brown bird.

Fact is, I wonder about those Screamin' Brown Eagles sometimes. I hear a lot of them have been hoppin' sneaky-like around that feather-dye display at the community store last week. Brown dye was on sale. They all denied comin' around, but I saw some of them there for myself. Kind of makes you wonder if they're as all-brown as they put on.

All the other eagles must be pretty tolerant folk because they put up with those strange birds. Other Reserve birds do, too. For instance, even though the Black Ravens scream right back at 'em, they're pretty tolerant folk, too.

Truth is, nobody yet has ever kicked a Screamin' Brown Eagle off the reserve; probably because the most annoying stuff they do these days is to scream a lot and spread a lot of rumours about which bird's gonna sprout a white head next or a white tail feather or white spots.

I heard some Screamin' Brown Eagles talking loudly lately about burning books written by particular Doves. Those Doves have been seen writin' about Ravens who carve Ravens and clamshells, and some other Doves who publish dictionaries and tales from old-time Bald Eagle and Raven storytellers.

Seems like these Screamin' Brown Eagles never *really* burn the books; they just rankle, holler and threaten those who sell them.

I was just thinkin'. Good thing there are so few Brown Eagles. If there were more of them, they might

get a lot bolder than just screamin' at those book-writing sometimes-too-obsequious Doves.

I call them Doves *obsequious* because of their tendency to write good stuff. They even write good stuff about those Screamin' Brown Eagles. In fact they call them Golden Eagles.

I hear that Doves calling Brown Eagles "golden" makes those Screamin' Brown Eagles really mad. I guess the only good Dove is a dead Dove 'cause a dead dove is a quiet one.

Now I'm not really worried what those Brown Eagles will squawk about my writin' that Doves are obsequious. I don't think too many of them Screamin' Brown Eagles know what *obsequious* means anyway.

I had a scary thought: If there were more of those loud-talkin' (dyed) brown-only birds, the Reserve would become a fearsome place. All those Screamin' Brown Eagles might count their big numbers and band together.

Just to get back at the Doves for calling them "golden" instead of brown they might all go out and get *brown shirts*, put on red and black swastika wing-bands and start marching around the Reserve in force. And

then next - well - you all know what happens next: The Language Police!

Those Doves will end up as cooked geese.

2.22 Ancient Wisdom

As of the date of this dissertation, I have not decided when I will submit the letter for publication.

Satire often has unpredictable results.

More than that, a magnificent chief and elder, Nathan Young, died in February 2000. Nathan long ago advised me that it is better with patient integrity to *act* privately than with lack of timing and forethought to *react* publicly.

In my book, The Returners, a poem carried this elder's wisdom:

Eagles and Ravens

Wisdom without knowledge
is far better than
knowledge without wisdom,

but, wisdom with knowledge
is Power.

Still, the wisest Eagle
needs to watch out
for Power lines.

2.23 Language and Culture Revitalisation: The Bell Tolls for Thee

Despite ultraconservative fears of "culture pollution", over the years Aboriginal people of many First Nations have shared their ideals and beliefs with one another. This sharing and comparing intensified during and after the days when Aboriginal youth were compelled to attend residential schools together.

In cases where languages and traditional knowledge are dying, sometimes these shared ideals and values become the only option left to Aboriginal people who desire to embrace their First Nations identity and build their self-esteem.

Knowledge of the uniqueness of each person's own indigenous culture is extremely important. Important as well is our collective identity as the First Nations of the Americas.

Although some ultraconservatives stereotype shared ideals and beliefs as "pan-Indianism", such cultural contacts among First Nations could be tomorrow's prelude to unity and growth both for indigenous people and for the world as a whole. Essential First Nations ideals and traditional values, including respect for the Earth,

for others, and for self, are crucial to the survival of the planet.

First Nations contributions to long-term intercultural healing among all Aboriginal people very well may have already begun as the pan-Indianism of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Shared knowledge is like a pure spring flowing from the deep waters of that which is unique. Likewise, our First Nations ideals and beliefs are uniquely encoded within each of our languages and cultures. If our languages are allowed to die, along with them will be silenced the voices that speak on behalf of cultures that for many thousands of years have existed in harmony with the Earth.

Because of what we can share collectively, in many ways the health of our entire planet depends upon the outcome of our struggle to survive. As such, people who continue to work on behalf of First Nations languages are exceedingly valuable to all of humanity. Ultimately they are contributing directly to the wholeness and spiritual health of the human race.

Unfortunately, I and other indigenous people who have graduated from universities and who lived among

other First Nations are sometime unfairly criticised for embracing this "pan-Indianism".

The following story is based upon an inner conflict: my own desire to return to my own First Nation's unique beliefs and values while integrating my Haida identity with the emergent Aboriginal consciousness of the Americas.

The story is based upon true events. Because the events take place on Haida Gwaii, I have changed the names of the two characters.

2.24 The Eagle Ceremony

Carry dead Eagles to Rose Spit;
place them high in the trees,
far away from government
agent and warden.
Let them go back to cry
to the wind and to the moon;
and not to be preserved
and Earthbound
in a museum
where curators say,

"This is the way
they were
in Haida Dream Time;"

when they were
and they weren't
all at the same time.

The phone rang. It was Anna, of course.

"Jake, I just killed an eagle."

"Why?"

"Why? What do you mean, why? She flew up in front of my truck, that's why!"

Raven clan people say eagles are more noble than smart, but I hardly ever heard of one flying up in front of a pickup truck. Power lines usually get them.

I didn't quite know what to say.

"So . . . where is she now?"

"In my pickup. I was on my way to Queen Charlotte City."

"Where are you parked?"

"In front of the restaurant. You know, the Sea Raven."

I was hoping nobody would spot that eagle in the back of her truck. Around this island half the Haida are eagles; the other half are ravens. Anna's chances were running about 50-50 for the day.

Anna drove up to my cabin later that afternoon. Muffler was dragging. Hard for her to sneak up on anyone - eagles or me. Her primered dented pickup rattled and snorted for about five seconds after she turned off the ignition.

I always told her she was a lot prettier than her truck.

"Eagle's under the blanket in the back," she said. "I don't want to drive around with her anymore. Take her for me, will you?"

"What am I going to do with a dead eagle?

"Well, I thought maybe you could handle this. Maybe hold a ceremony or something."

"Ceremony? What kind of ceremony? Anglican, Methodist, Catholic or what? What else is left around here?"

"Well, you should know, you're an eagle. Don't you know any eagle ceremonies?"

"We used to have secret societies for that kind of stuff. At least that's what my uncles told me."

"So do one of those ceremonies," she said.

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"'Cause they were secret, that's why not. That's why they called them secret societies. Besides that, the last elder who knew the ceremonies died about a generation ago. Lots of people talked about saving the culture, but nobody put him on tape."

"Like I said, you're an eagle and there's a dead eagle in the back of my truck. That's all I know," she said.

"Look Anna, the only stuff I know is from Pine Ridge. Just because I spent four years there and learned a few Lakota Sioux songs doesn't mean I can do a dead eagle ceremony. Besides, that's a Haida eagle, not a Sioux one."

"So, what's the difference between a Sioux eagle and a Haida one?" she asked, "For all you know, maybe she flew in from Pine Ridge."

"Oh yeah? Sioux eagle in Haida-land, eh? Maybe that's why she flew up in front of your truck!"

"So you admit she might be a Sioux eagle?"

Her green eyes locked on mine. I looked away, pretending not to notice. I hated it when Anna used logic like that. She had me and I knew it.

I carried the eagle up the steps to my porch. Anna was right behind me.

"Maybe we could take her up north," she said. "Place her high in a tree - you know - at Rose Spit, where the raven found the first people.

"I didn't realize you were so spiritual-like."

Anna was always full of surprises.

My old cabin was deep in the woods, so I wasn't worried about wildlife officers or anything like that. Just the same, when Anna brought a red towel I covered the eagle with it. Red was the right colour for protecting eagle feathers, at least that's the way I learned it on Pine Ridge. Someone forgot to ask that

Haida elder with the ceremonies what he used to do, so nowadays we borrow this kind of thing.

The eagle's brown feathers still had white patches. On Pine Ridge some say those spots are spirits. In the Sioux language the spotted eagle - *wambli gleska* - is *lila wakan*, especially sacred and powerful. The eagle was just maturing, but too skinny; about half the weight she should have been.

"Must have been because of the fish," I muttered.

"What did you say?"

"The fish. No fish; the eagles are starving. Maybe that's the reason."

"For what?"

"For why she flew up in front of your truck. Eagles are too smart for that."

"Yeah? Ravens are smarter," Anna replied. "But there's a dead one that's been hanging off that fence over there. Rancher shot it. Ravens used to harass his lambs."

"Sounds like a capital offence to me," I said sarcastically. In the old days, nobody, not even an eagle, would have shot a raven. Old timers used to live

by rules of respect. But now, well, I guess someone forgot to record the elder talking about that, too.

"Anyway, the rancher doesn't even have lambs anymore."

"So why'd he really shoot it?"

"Habit, I guess."

"Say, Jake. You know ceremonies. Do you think you could? . . ."

I could see the wheels turning in Anna's sea-green eyes.

"Now wait just one gol-darned minute there, Anna."

"Gull? You got a dead seagull?"

"Seagull; eagull - what the hell's going on here? You've got a Haida man holding a Sioux ceremony for a dead eagle - and that sure as hell ain't no Sioux raven. I'm not going to hold a Sioux ceremony for a half-rotted Haida raven!"

Must have been those green eyes again. The next thing I knew, the dead raven was sharing my porch with a dead eagle. Regular bird mortuary my place was becoming.

Problem was, the raven stank. Real bad. And he had parts missing too.

"I'd do anything for you, Anna, but you gotta put him in a plastic bag. This is all a bit too much."

The rest of the day, I prepared everything until it felt just right. I spoke to the birds; not that they were much company. That's just the way the Sioux do it. Still, the cabin took on a feeling; sort of eerie, like I was being watched. Made me wonder where I fit in the pecking order. Raven, eagle, Anna and me.

Second day, I brought the eagle into my one-room cabin and put her on a big green plastic table near the foot of my bed. The eagle stayed with me all night.

The next day, Anna dropped by.

"So why didn't you bring in the raven?"

"Are you kidding?" I said, scratching at what felt like a bug in my ear. "Move that stinky raven in and I'm going to have to move out."

The eagle spent the third night inside with me too.

The cabin didn't feel quite right, so I went to sleep with Sioux ceremonial drum songs on my cassette player. That seemed to help; the eagle seemed happier - and so did my dreams.

Maybe Anna was right. Maybe it was a Sioux eagle who got lost; lots of us can identify with that.

At daybreak the cassette drums were still playing.

"Electronic Indians," I thought. "What'll we come to next?"

It was the fourth day. Anna came early.

I pulled back the eagle's wing admiringly. First time I had looked closely.

"Enough feathers for a dozen powwow dancers at the least."

"Don't get any ideas," Anna said. "I had a dream."

A flat-bodied two centimetre beige bug bombed onto the table. It lay on its back kicking it legs wildly, then flopped over.

"What kinda dream did you have?" I asked absently, coaxing the bug onto a paper bag.

"Well, I saw two feathers. Just two, one for me and one for you. You wouldn't want to take more feathers than she wants to give, would you?

"Wouldn't think of it," I replied, taking bag and bug to the front door. I blew hard, but the beige bomber clung tight. No way could I blow it off.

"Aerodynamic little bugger, aren't you?" I said. "Power dives at 200 clicks didn't shake you, eh?"

"Jake, did you hear me about the feathers?"

Another beige bomber scurried between two eagle back feathers, ducking under the down.

"No problem," I replied with a grimace as another bomber popped onto the table. "She keeps her feathers."

I burned sage in a coffee cup, passing the smoke over Anna, the eagle and myself. I remembered the raven on the porch. I sent Anna out to "smudge" that one. Probably should have used cedar, local stuff, you know. But the eagle did seem to like the overnight Sioux drums, so I used sage just like the Sioux do.

I sang the Four Directions Song, instructing Anna to turn with me toward each direction. A kind of power filled the room as I "loaded" my pipe in the Sioux way by inserting the wooden stem into the pipestone. Next I mixed tobacco and kinnikinnic from two green plastic bags as I had been taught.

"Nowadays, some people store it mixed," I said. "A Sioux *wicasa wakan*, holy man, told me to do it the old way. Keeps it separated until the right time."

"What's that on my wrist?" Anna asked.

A tiny red bug, no bigger than a speck, tried to scurry up her sleeve.

I caught it on my fingertip.

"Some kind of an eagle mite," I replied.

Anna frowned, then started to scratch.

I began filling my pipe. I offered a pinch first to the west and then to each direction in turn. I tamped the rest into the bowl; then plugged the top with sage. I explained to Anna that sage protected the mixture.

I prayed; then offered the pipe to Anna. We completed the ceremony the way I had been taught on Pine Ridge.

Anna seemed really touched; I felt okay too, except I itched a lot.

Anna itched too. On her belly, one of those beige bombers was crawling around in circles looking for a hole in her sweater.

"Uh, Anna, I think you better take it off."

"My sweater?"

"Yeah. I think eagle bugs like the fuzz."

Anna dunked sweater and bug into *my* washing machine. She didn't even ask for my permission.

A bomber was crawling on my bed blanket.

No permission needed. She dunked it too.

Meanwhile, a pair of red mites watched it all, obviously amused, from my pillowcases.

We dunked them too.

"How about your sheets, Jake?"

"You need to ask?"

I could see the sheets wanted to walk to the washer by themselves. That made sense. Every scrap of cloth in the house was crawling toward the bleach and hot water already.

As for the eagle, I gingerly helped her to rejoin the raven on the porch.

"Next time you ask me for a ceremony, Anna," I said, "I think we'll do it at your house."

The real reason I wanted to take the birds to Rose Spit in Anna's ancient Toyota had nothing to do with keeping bugs out of my Bronco. Her pickup weighed half as much as my truck.

"Aw c'mon, Anna, your truck floats in four wheel drive like an eagle feather over sand. Mine sinks in."

"You took your Bronco to Rose Spit just last week, Jake. My truck's getting too old for stuff like this."

"Ah, look Anna; of course this has nothing to do with those buggy birds riding inside my Bronco with us."

She raised her eyebrows at "inside," "Bronco" and "with us".

"Tell you what, Jake. We'll take my pickup."

Anna seemed unusually agreeable about the pickup. We rattled past the turnoff to Masset. I figured she was being cooperative about her truck because of the nice weather.

Both eagle and raven rode in the back in separate green plastic bags.

The rain forest was dark and cool. Off to the left Alaskan mountains dotted the horizon away out to sea. Next to Tow Hill two eagles flew across the road into the tall trees of Hiellan, my ancestral village.

"Look at that!" Anna exclaimed excitedly. "They're coming with us!"

I didn't respond beyond a quick nod. Lost in thoughts about Hiellan. Nobody remembers much about the old village site. I didn't even know how to pronounce its name until Reverend Johnny Williams told it to me. Glad Johnny's still alive, or I would have never known.

"Hello, Nunni," I said, glancing off into the deep rainforest.

"What did you say?"

"I said 'Hello Nunni.'"

Anna knew a little Haida. She stopped the truck. The hush was startling.

"You always talk to your dead grandmother like that?"

"Only since I've been coming here. Never knew her before that, except what I heard on a brittle old tape."

Anna said nothing, but those sea green eyes of hers spoke volumes. I looked away, pretending not to notice.

We retraced the outline of a vanished longhouse in the soft green moss.

"What's that?"

"Post hole," I replied. "See that? One at each corner. House was big enough for forty people."

"Some kind of white stuff down that posthole, Jake."

"Shit paper. Tourists trashed the posthole. Old time Haida used the beach for that. Tides gave us the first flush toilets. Real sanitary. I wonder what happened to respect."

The first stretch of beach was packed-sand smooth as new pavement. The truck didn't even rattle. We zipped along at a hundred clicks.

I kind of liked Anna's old truck. I'd seen lots just like it on Pine Ridge. Indian trucks: tough and unstoppable as the land itself. Spare parts here and spare parts there; Indian trucks lived forever.

That's more than I can say for our elders.

"The last time I was at Rose Spit I rode in on horseback," Anna said.

I pulled back from my mind tripping.

"Yeah? Sioux like horses. So does that make you a Sioux?" I teased.

"Haida prefer canoes," Anna teased back. "So does that make you a Haida?"

"Maybe that's my problem," I said softly.

Once again, the hush was startling.

"What'd you say?"

"Nothing important. Never mind."

But she was right about the canoes. I loved them! Haida canoes: 30 meters long and hollowed out from a single cedar log. Haida canoes: painted and hand carved with eagles, ravens and killer whales. Haida canoes used to be the pride of our people and the envy of the entire Pacific Coast.

Then along came Toyota and Ford. Toyota and Ford never once made an ocean-going canoe. Nowadays pickups and Land Cruisers have to do. Even at Rose Spit.

"So, tell me Jake, why are we in a truck?" Anna asked.

Sometimes Anna could read my mind. It felt real spooky when she did that.

"A Haida canoe would seem more natural," I observed. "I can almost see one out there headed for wild strawberry picking at Rose Spit. My uncles say the old time canoes could carry fifty people as far as Mexico, Hawaii and back."

"Archaeologists say the Haida couldn't have made it that far," Anna said. "Shows how much they know. Hawaiians look Haida."

"So do Mexicans," I said. "When I lived in L.A., people kept talking Spanish to me. I wanted to talk Indian, so when I went to Pine Ridge, I learned Sioux."

"Well, I learned Maori songs. We had some New Zealand Maori drop by the school. You know something? Those Maori look Haida too."

"Yeah. Even their canoes are shaped like ours. The old timers used to talk about Haidas going to New

Zealand, but no one put them on tape. Maori have totem poles; they rub noses when they greet; just like we used to do."

"We? Rub noses? You and me? When did I rub noses with you, Jake?"

Anna's green eyes sparkled mischievously.

"In your dreams, Anna. In your dreams."

Sand turned to loose rocks. Truck dug in hard. So much for anthropology. Rose Spit, just past the tree line, was still two miles away. I floored it. Anna's old pickup lurched forward spewing rocks. I fought hard, swerving around logs, rotted planks, fishnets, choker cables and plastic milk crates lurking behind every washboard mound. In the middle of that junk, the old myth-time raven would have had a real problem spotting that clamshell with the first people inside.

"If we bog down, Anna, we're done for!"

"Uh, Jake. Why don't you try the road up there?"

She was kidding, I thought.

"Yeah right. Where? I'll just pull over at the corner gas station and ask directions."

"Yeah, right," she said too softly. "Men never ask directions."

I didn't even try to hear her. Just as well. We lost her burned-out muffler back where the deep cobbles started.

"Jake! You just passed the access off the beach!" Anna shouted.

I just kept ploughing ahead. Wrong time to think about turning around.

Besides, just up there was Rose Spit; tip of the Haida world. I spun the truck nose-upward, wheeled around until the back end was high on the beach with the nose pointed downhill and sand flying in all directions. I was quite proud of myself.

"Good truck," Anna said, patting the Toyota's dashboard.

We climbed the heap of tidal drift logs. I carried the eagle. Anna took the raven.

On the other side of the log heap, Anna spotted the sand road she was talking about. I looked away, pretending not to see it.

"Look at that!" Anna said.

"You look. I got better things to do."

"No, look! Up there!"

Two eagles alighted in a tall tree.

"Looks like the same two from Tow Hill," Anna said.

"Nah. Couldn't be. How'd you figure that?"

"Well, how'd you figure my dead eagle wasn't a Sioux eagle?" I asked.

"I didn't."

"That's right, you didn't. So maybe she was."

"So what's that got to do with anything?"

"So, maybe those are the same two and they flew here from Tow Hill to watch us. Rose Spit's not too far to fly from Tow Hill!"

That damned logic of hers again. And her green eyes.

Those two eagles watched us closely. As we approached they stayed put, showing no fear.

"I think they want us to put the eagle up in that tree," Anna said.

"Now, how could you know that?"

"Well, for one thing they're not moving. They should be flying away by now. They want us to put the eagle up in that tree."

I knew better than to argue with Anna. Besides, it was her ceremony - and her green eyes.

"Old-time Haida used to leave their dead up in the trees," she said.

"Sometimes that's how I feel these days: left up in a tree."

"C'mon Jake. What'da ya mean by that?"

"Okay, okay," I said. "We'll do it up there."

We walked up the low hill. The spot was perfect; sheltered from sight and wind.

The eagles kept their vigil.

I began climbing the tree, dead eagle tied to my waist. I slipped on a mossy branch. Only thing that saved me was my untied arm.

I didn't have to look at those two eagles at the top. I could feel them watching me.

Branch by branch, I fought my way higher. Halfway up, I found a broad flat of green that could support the dead eagle's weight.

Carefully, I took her from the green plastic bag and wedged her among the branches.

I glanced up at the two eagles. For a moment, their image blurred and shifted like a mirage.

Perched on the mortuary branch, I rubbed my eyes. I looked again. I could swear the two eagles were smiling.

"Eagles can't smile!" I rubbed my eyes again.

"Hope you understand Lakota," I whispered to the eagles. "Mostly, it's all I know."

I hesitated, then began with the only Haida song I knew: an eagle song. Instantly, my whole body shuddered, then tingled with warmth. I continued singing. My arms prickled, then transformed into wings; my voice into eagle cries.

The eagles sat motionless. One extended her wings. I did the same.

A sudden wind, whistling through the branches, caught me. I felt released. Rising slowly, circling high above the trees, I could see Rose Spit curving outward to the north, submerging itself in a thin sliver of sand in the blue Pacific.

In the rushing wind I heard a piercing cry. Beside me flew the dead young eagle, home at last in the endless sky. To the east, far, far away, the Black Hills of South Dakota rose in silhouette over the Pine

Ridge Indian Reservation; directly underneath me was the place to which my own ancestors had come so long ago.

On the beach, far below, an emerald-eyed raven was pecking at a clamshell. I floated down. The raven cooed and coaxed softly. The shell opened a tiny bit. Dozens of bright almond-shaped eyes timidly peeked out. The shell opened wider. Tiny naked human beings emerged. One, with brownish hair and algae-green eyes, created vague memories of a distant future.

The song ended. My wings were arms again. The dead eagle lay motionless at my side. I had returned.

The two eagles were watching. As Anna had dreamed, I took just two feathers, giving thanks in one of the few Haida words I knew: "*Howa*."

My thank you was in Haida. It was a start, at least.

Inching my way to the ground, I handed Anna a feather.

"What happened up there?" she said. "I heard you singing, but I couldn't see you. Your voice sounded so far away."

"Yeah. Well, maybe some day I'll tell you about it."

I muttered to myself a prayer in words I didn't really understand, except that the prayer also seemed to come from very, very far away:

"Howa, Nunni. Howa, Chinni. This is dream time: the end is how it was in the beginning."

Anna, mimicking my earlier behaviour, pretended not to notice.

"Let's take the raven over there, on the other side the hill," Anna said.

The moment we turned, the two eagles flew off.

"Guess they don't want to hang around for a raven funeral," I said.

Anna's sea-green eyes sparkled mischievously. For the first time, I didn't pretend not to notice.

CHAPTER THREE:
HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES, ANALYSIS AND EPILOGUE

3.1 GENRE

In contradiction to critics who claim that oral tradition is the only is truly Aboriginal literature. North American written autobiography is an established genre, spanning 240 years.

In fact, North American First Nations quickly adapted oral traditions to written literature.

Autobiographies began appearing as early as 1762 when a Mohegan, Samuel Occom, who had learned to read and write, wrote an account of his life based upon his conversion to Christianity (Brumble, 1988).

Pitt University English Professor David Brumble (1988) in his book American Indian Autobiography documented more than 600 First Nations autobiographers. Although a significant number of the autobiographies were written in collaboration with non-First Nations writers, it is remarkable that so many were written in so short a period. Brumble (1988) wrote, "The history of Western autobiography spans some 4,500 years, but with Indian autobiography there is a marvellous compression of time."

3.2 First Nations Autobiography, the "Time-Compression Effect": An Outcome of Colonisation and Genocide

Time-compression in the development of the indigenous autobiography genre is the result of at least two causes. First, as mentioned above, Aboriginal nations supplemented oral tradition with writing at least two-and-a-half centuries ago. Second, colonialism and genocide completely disrupted First Nations life. The written genre provided a stable means of expression during this tumultuous time.

Michael Sajna (1995b) wrote, "As we study American Indian autobiography, then, we see again and again taking place in single lifetimes developments that took millennia in the history of Western autobiography."

This compression also indicates the intensity and the speed with which many First Nations cultures were swept away in the genocide and colonising expansion of European-based cultures. This rapid, deadly colonisation produced extreme cultural disruption and intense angst among First Nations people. Today, our descendants are removed only by a few generations from these near total losses both in lives and family. Those killed literally were the parents of our own grandparents.

According to one authority, Henry Dobyns (1983), the size of the pre-contact population of the Americas was approximately 145,000,000 for the northern hemisphere, at least 18,000,000 of whom lived north of Mexico. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, only five percent of the original population was left alive: 19 out of 20 First Nations people had been killed (Larson, 1997a).

David Stannard (1982) defines the period as "The American Holocaust." The holocaust wiped out nearly 95 percent of the indigenous population, far exceeding in scope even the Jewish holocaust. Stannard (1982) wrote, "The destruction of the Indians of the Americas was, far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world."

Regarding the holocaust, Larson (1997a) writes:

> The overwhelming magnitude of the horror visited on the indigenous peoples of the Americas also tends to obliterate both the writer's and the reader's sense of its truly horrific human element.

Beyond a doubt, this potent history of the First Nations in the Americas is inscribed deeply into the psyches of every Aboriginal community and person.

The reality of genocide cannot be ignored:

> The problem of the genocide perpetuated against the indigenous peoples of the Americas, to say nothing of the scope of that genocide, . . . has yet to be addressed on even the most basic levels. Nor has there been sufficient discussion of the continued genocide under which most of the survivors of the American Holocaust still exist.
>
> Furthermore, until American Indians can speak of such things as directly as do Boyarin and Stannard, they will not have fully recovered their sacred duty to community, and their discourse will remain incomplete (Larson, 1997a).

It is toward this goal that I have written this dissertation. The autobiography indeed was a "sacred duty to community." Hopefully it will produce a greater understanding both of First Nations language workers who have returned home and of the enormous task these workers have taken upon themselves. My intention is to empower greater support for the revitalisation of First Nations languages and cultures.

Based upon the ever-present realities of genocide and colonialism, it is understandable why all post-contact Aboriginal research, including my autobiography, must be interpreted is light of the historic impact and ongoing effects of European colonial dominance in the Americas.

3.3 Interpreting First Nations Autobiography: The Importance of the Insider Perspective

Researchers who seek to understand these stark and ongoing effects of the holocaust figuratively must become "one of us."

Only this "insider perspective" is capable of assessing the collective and individual effects and after-effects of colonisation and genocide.

To attempt interpretation as an outsider not only would be would be a mistake, most likely it would be impossible. First Nations realities in general are considerably harsher than those experienced in the coloniser's culture. These difficult realities and the milieu in which we exist are the substance of our lives. Consequently, the First Nations attitude toward life tends to be direct and personal. We have little time and often even less patience with academic philosophies.

> Within a situation where to live is to suffer; where to survive is to find meaning in life, Indian people often are not as interested in abstractions of experience as they are in making some sort of usable sense of their lives (Larson, 1997b).

Traditional First Nations values and ideals evolved over many thousands of years prior to colonisation. As such, these pre-contact traditions and Aboriginal languages

form a stable core from which to rebuild the First Nations.

My repeated experience in working with First Nations is that language revitalisation has a powerful and deep-seated effect upon the Aboriginal learner's well-being.

When communities re-learn their language together, communities heal together. Language is a common bond that heals family schisms and reverses personal isolation. Over and over again, in communities such as my own Skidegate Haida in 1998 as well as the Kitselas and Kitsumkalum Tsimshian in 2000, I saw the power of language revitalisation. I saw people open up together, families quench old enmities in tears together, and elders say at public language-celebrations with tears streaming down their faces, "Now I know our community will survive."

Such powerful experiences do not lend themselves easily to quantification. Only the insider perspective provides insight into the powerful community-rebuilding effects of Aboriginal language revitalisation.

Clearly, despite near-total community disruption, First Nations cultural values and social norms remain valid. Aboriginal language is the medium of both.

It is not correct to say that people who have been uprooted no longer have roots, nor that the disruption of cultures is the destruction of cultures. Quite the contrary, for First Nations and for nations such as Israel, cultures may be buffeted, but core values and languages can be rebuilt despite catastrophic disruption.

The insider perspective, as exemplified in naturalistic methodologies, offers researchers insights into the inner world of the First Nations. More than that, the researcher as an insider ultimately encourages understanding between members of formerly disparate cultures. Through the insider perspective, values and experiences may be discovered and shared to the mutual benefit of the researcher, those who the researcher is studying, and those who read and review the research. Perhaps in this way, naturalistic research may foster a greater appreciation for the values that our planet's ancient cultures mutually hold in high esteem.

Ultimately the greatest power of the insider perspective, therefore, is that it requires the "researcher," whatever his or her colour or ethnicity, to become "one of us".

3.4 Priorities of Two Worldviews

Living in the world of the coloniser is not easy. The basic reality-concepts of the two cultures often are divergent. Communicating requires an ability to comprehend the commonality between First Nations and non-First Nations worldviews.

First Nations people, to succeed in the traditional world and the colonised world, must develop the capacity to suspend disbelief in order to change modes from one cultural reality to the other.

For example, I, in "Eagle Story" fictionalised names to comply with Oregon State University's Human Subjects requirements. However, "Eagle Story" is based upon factual events, not fiction.

The eagle vision at the end of my story was real, whether or not it can be reconciled between the Aboriginal and the academic cultures. On the one hand, in the Aboriginal worldview, the eagle vision is

embraced concretely without question. In this reality, time and space are fluid; dreamtime is real-time. On the other hand, the academic worldview requires discourse, empirical justification and abstract explanation: in this reality, time and space are rigid; dreamtime is not real-time.

Both conceptual structures have merit. Although vastly different, both worldviews are relevant in their own context. Consequently, the challenge for First Nations autobiographers is to maintain credibility in both realities.

First Nations peoples experience; First Nations autobiographers write; academia interprets. To extract meaning from Aboriginal autobiography credibility must be based upon First Nations ontology.

In the thousand years after First Nations people established contact with Leif Eriksson, efforts toward the successful coexistence of two worldviews have been fraught with difficulties.

During the residential school era from the late Nineteenth Century through the mid-Twentieth Century children were uprooted from their homes in an attempt to assimilate them into the colonising culture.

Reprogramming failed. Then and now, with First Nations people living in the midst of non-First Nations communities, our Aboriginal roots and worldview have continued to affect us strongly.

Researchers into First Nations socio-psychological realities, therefore, need to understand that our worldviews remain fundamental and unique: not to be filtered through the biases of academic "realities."

The insider perspective requires that investigators be multiculturally fluent, capable of accepting the authenticity of First Nations realities without requiring rigid adherence to academic cultural norms.

3.5 Validity and Reliability: Data and the Researcher

Multicultural fluency is essential for readers of First Nations autobiographies. Larson (1997b) says that academic critics and researchers who are uninformed about Aboriginal cultural priorities run the risk of misinterpreting the validity and reliability of First Nations autobiographies. Larson (1997b) writes:

> . . . [I]ndividuals who undertake to write about themselves have been the topic of much concern. A primary worry has to do with the reliability of the author, based on the assumption that people do not remember events exactly as they occur. According to Georges

> Gusdorf [1985], for example, autobiography, "does not show us the individual seen from the outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been."
>
> Gusdorf's statement assumes that events have only single, inherent meanings, rather than several meanings or perhaps no meaning at all, and that meaning is discernable only by certain people. There is the further assumption that the person has no right to see himself as he believes and wishes himself to be. These are examples of Western-style thinking that attempt to establish correspondence with absolute values, or "truths" that attempt to contain "others" as well as the constantly evolving nature of reality. For a writer of American Indian autobiography . . . the application of absolute principles translates very quickly into an old colonial agenda concerned with other things than [the First Nations understanding of] truth.

The "insider perspective," therefore, and the First Nations understanding of truth, are absolutely essential to establishing the validity and reliability of First Nations autobiographic data.

3.6 Additional Variables: Decline of Post-Colonialist "Majority" Culture

The "old colonial agendas" of which Larson writes are changing. Within less than the space of a lifetime, cultural norms in the Americas are shifting away from the absolute dominance of the colonisers and toward a

multicultural society. In Canada and in the United States, for example, the former English-based "majority culture" demographically is becoming a "minority culture".

Because of this, the commonly used First Nations cliché of living "between two worlds" itself is becoming antiquated. Larson (1997b) notes that the modern First Nations autobiographer no longer writes to two worlds, but to far more complex multicultural Americas:

> This shift is illustrated in the way older autobiographies often consisted of a heroic narrative of "making it" in American culture and leaving old ways behind. Increasingly, however, "America" no longer offers one cultural ideal to seek or emulate. American national culture as well as social ideals are splintering into multiple perspectives, identities, voices, and discourses. As a result, writers are working relationally as a conjunction of cultures, working in intersections where their different backgrounds overlap. It is in these interzones where identity is being discovered and compromises or composites being negotiated. This creation is an amalgam of cultures and canons, spanned by the bridge of the self-referential, individual writer, the singular self with uniquely intercultural perspectives and experiences.

In reality, my autobiography already is inclusively North American rather than existing in the cultural realities of either Canada or the United States alone. I was born and raised in the United States, but my First

Nations community is in Canada. My autobiography and autobiographic poetry, therefore, span not only Aboriginal and colonialist cultural perspectives, but the cultural differences, similarities and histories of both the United States and Canada.

3.7 Multicultural Significance of First Nations Autobiography

This cross-border awareness of First Nations people who share territories between the United States, Canada, and Latino countries is common. The wider multicultural viewpoint available in such cases provides multiple reference points for cultural data.

In fact, the Aboriginal perspective is Pan American, far more inclusive and far more ancient than that of the United States, Canada, France, Spain, Portugal or other European-based colonising cultures. North American First Nations also share much in common with Central and South American Aboriginal peoples. As such, all nations in North America, Central America and South America are stakeholders in the mutual healing of all cultures in the Americas. Larson (1997b) writes:

> In addition, a growing number of lesser-known Indian writers are undertaking documentation of their special places in American society,

> allowing audiences to become part of Indian experiences, with their full shares of social despair and individual energy. These writers bring a sensibility to their work that is balanced by honoring a world of inherited traditions as well as engaging the world as it is encountered in daily life. Their work is informed but not elitist; it is studious but not unintelligible to those it might help most; finally, it balances the red road of Indian metaphysics with the black road of worldly experience.

One potent role of multi-cultural First Nations writers is to provide insights into the severe socio-psychological problems that colonialism has inflicted both upon victims and victimisers. In one of my poems, I address this concern:

We Are the World

The Whites distrust the Indians;
The Indians distrust the Latinos;
But *the Latinos are the Indians*
And they both forgot.

The Whites think they're Somebody,
In reality they are Everybody.
Our Haida Elders are dying;
But their words must never wither!
So the Potlatch carries on.
Yes, the Dancing carries on!
And the Spanish tongue grows stronger;
And their numbers are increasing;
And Africans seize the Senate;
And Indians petition the Parliament;
And Jews control the commerce;
And Asians storm the colleges.
Yes, the Dancing carries on!

And the
Racists are afraid of Everybody
Not white, ***even themselves.***
Too bad they can't Dance

Alone.

Truth is,
Nobody but nobody is anybody

Alone.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
24 December 1994

Note: The racial stereotypes in this poem are not the opinion of the author!

3.8 Timeless Motif: The Returning

Much has changed since, the first of 600 Aboriginal North American autobiographers, Samuel Occom, wrote in 1762.

Brumble (in Sajna, 1995a) notes the manner in which the older autobiographies provide insights into pre-contact North America:

> For me, the main interest of literature is that it allows me to see the world through the eyes of others, and American Indian literature allows you to do that very powerfully. All of a sudden, you are transported to preliterate, tribal cultures of many different kinds. The autobiographies put you right in the middle of those cultures. I find that just a wonderful experience.

Brumble's statement refers to pre-contact cultures. However, from first contact onward, the consequences colonialism produced a singular motif, the "returning," which has permeated nearly all First Nations autobiographies. This motif also is a dominant theme in my autobiography.

Regarding this motif, Michael Sajna (1995a) writes:

> Themes of loss and longing for the past dominate the literature of Native Americans. Regardless of the time in which they are writing or recounting their lives, what Brumble [1988] has found running throughout these life stories is a desire to return to the world as it was before the arrival of the white man. He has seen it in the preliterate

> recollections of nineteenth-century warriors, for instance in Two Leggings and in Joseph White Bull's "The Warrior Who Killed Custer." He also has found it in Charles Eastman's early twentieth-century acculturation work, From the Deep Woods to Civilization, and in the contemporary writings of N. Scott Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain, and Leslie Silko, Storyteller.

Sajna notes that more than two centuries of First Nations autobiographies has created a unique and well-established genre. This indigenous literary genre has unified and perpetuated the traditional connections between ancient cultural forms and modern Aboriginal autobiographies. Sajna (1995a) writes:

> Later Native American autobiographers, Brumble believes, attempt their return to earlier times by writing in a way that mirrors traditional oral storytelling methods, weaving personal reminiscence, tribal history, and family history.

This literary reconstruction of the First Nations traditional means of transmitting cultural information is extant in First Nations autobiography, including this dissertation and in The Returners (see Appendix A). Clearly, researchers utilising First Nations autobiography must consider the pervasive traditional forms in this literary genre, as well as the socio-psychological implications of the pervasive motif of the "returners."

3.9 Historic and Contemporary Applications: Sarah Winnemucca and Modern First Nations Autobiographers

Equally of note is the fact that the audience for the 600 autobiographies included non-First Nations people. This is only partly because the medium of writing and the literary conventions were of non-First Nations origin. As previously mentioned, many First Nations people were quick to adopt writing as a means of cultural communication.

Historically, early First Nations autobiographers faced, as do modern autobiographers, the challenge of living and writing from within two cultures: the First Nations oral-traditions and the European literary-traditions of the United States, Canada, Spain and Portugal.

Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (1847-1891), a nineteenth century Native rights advocate, was a pioneer in this multicultural genre (Winnemucca, 1883/1994).

Researcher Andrew McClure (1999) wrote an insightful defence of Winnemucca as an authentic First Nations writer. However, despite the fact that Winnemucca is the first woman known to have written a First Nations autobiography, she remains relatively obscure.

Likely, Winnemucca's lack of fame is partly due to what McClure says is the frequent assumption that she had assimilated into American culture and thus had lost her authentic Aboriginal voice. McClure (1999) writes:

> As anyone who has made such an effort will know, students of Native American literature looking for critical studies on Paiute author Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins will be unsuccessful in finding more than a handful of articles and short references to her work because very little has been done on this author

Despite the impressive quality of her work, and Winnemucca's importance as the first Aboriginal woman to write an autobiographical book, few critics and researchers have acknowledged her contribution. Only David Brumble (1988), Brigitte Georgi-Findlay (1993), and Katherine Fowler (1976) have completed studies about her life and work. Additionally, four writers: Gae Whitney Canfield (1983), Katherine Gehm (1975), Elinor Richey (1975) and Patricia Stewart, (1971) have referred to Winnemucca as an historical source (McClure, 1999).

McClure writes that perceived "assimilation" apparently is grounds for declaring a First Nations writer as "non-authentic," even, as in Winnemucca's case, when the accused continued to honour her identity as an indigenous person.

> The reason for this, I suspect, stems from a discomfort critics have for Indian writers like Winnemucca who seem to be overly assimilated and sympathetic with the dominant culture.
>
> Students of Native American literature look for ways writers overtly resist the dominant culture, and Sarah Winnemucca, initially at least, appears taken in by it and therefore of little value for literary study. As Randall Moon [1993, p. 52] writes of William Apess, another early Native American writer, there is a "political unease over Apess because he writes too much like a white person, with no trace of a Native 'voice,' and [he is] too Christianized to be recognized as an 'authentic' representative of Native America".

Accusing any person of assimilation who maintains their First Nations identity is racism in a form that highlights the "them versus us" paradigm.

In truth, acculturation in itself does not destroy a person's indigenous identity, personal history and belief structures. In fact, the struggle of Aboriginal people who have adapted to the colonising world is an authentic First Nations story. Such was the case with Winnemucca.

The criticism is especially interesting, in view of the fact that most of Winnemucca's critics themselves were enculturated through birth into the colonising culture.

Regarding this "them versus us" bias, McClure writes:

> The same "political unease" exists for Winnemucca, and some of the few critics who have written about her reflect that sentiment. For example, one of the only comments Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands [1984, p. 21] make about her work is that Life Among the Piutes "is heavily biased by her acculturated and Christianized viewpoint." Catherine Fowler [1976, p. 33] observes that there is widespread distaste for Winnemucca for similar reasons: "In the light of twentieth century ethnohistoric and ethnographic hindsight . . . , Sarah's position on assimilation, perhaps more than any other single factor, has led scholars, and to a certain degree her own people, to diminish her contributions to Native American scholarship."

Equally relevant is the fact that Winnemucca's critics did not live in her time. These critics do not possess an "insider perspective", a prerequisite for adequately assessing the realities with which Winnemucca and other colonised people have had to live.

3.10 The Contact Zone

McClure understands Winnemucca's realities. He notes that First Nations people compelled to adapt while maintaining their ethnic identity in the midst of the coloniser's culture have not assimilated. McClure (1999) writes:

> In studying Native Americans, or any colonized people, one must use the term "assimilation" carefully, since some degree of assimilation is essential to cultural and physical survival. . . . [T]he term here is deceiving: perceptions that label writers such as Winnemucca as "assimilationist" tend to construct a binary assimilationist/tribal opposition that fails to allow for an ethnocritical reading that would look at Winnemucca's position as one that negotiates what Mary Louise Pratt calls "the contact zone," which she defines as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" [Pratt 1992, p. 4].

Pratt's (1992) contact zone refers to the areas where the colonised and post-colonising cultures meet. As such, the contact zone is extremely important to First Nations workers in language and culture revitalisation.

McClure notes that Winnemucca lived her life in the contact zone serving as a mediator for her people. He said that in negotiating the contact zone, Winnemucca did not assimilate into the colonising culture. Despite unrelenting pressures, Winnemucca maintained her Native identity. Her life was dedicated to the survival of First Nations people despite the oppression of colonisation and genocide (Brumble, 1988). McClure (1999) writes:

> Because she became fluent in English and fully proficient with Euro-American customs, she inherited the role of translator, mediator, negotiator, and all-purpose go-between for her people as they lost more and more of their land. In the process of becoming acculturated to Western customs and language, Winnemucca never lost her Paiute identity nor did she devalue or abandon it; in fact, as David Brumble points out, Winnemucca herself never had any trouble with her identity. There is nothing in her book about "a moment when she decided that, really, she preferred the white to the Paiute way" [Brumble 1988, p. 65].

Winnemucca lived among both "whites" and Paiutes, yet she never conceded her Paiute identity. In short, acculturation and adaptation is not necessarily assimilation.

In that respect, Winnemucca was a forerunner for First Nations people who are dedicated to saving their languages and cultures while living in both the Aboriginal and the coloniser's worlds.

Winnemucca as such is similar to myself and to other contemporary First Nations autobiographers in that she encouraged understanding and support through all legitimate means.

Nevertheless, some non-Aboriginal and ultra-conservative First Nations critics accuse many Aboriginal writers of assimilating and "selling out" to the "whites".

Winnemucca, resisting this same accusation, has the distinction of being a pioneer in this arena as well. McClure (1999) writes that:

> . . . the question of assimilation becomes more complex because she often made direct appeals to the romanticized, invented constructions of Indian identity, even as she dismantled these constructions in her work. Winnemucca was a master at maneuvering between the dominant culture and her Paiute culture in order to preserve as much of her tribal culture as could be saved and to serve as a voice for the Paiutes. Life Among the Piutes is an important autobiography both in terms of giving an account of the complexity of tribal identity as represented through the bi-cultural medium of the autobiography. . . . Her autobiography, loaded as it is with sentimentality . . . is a powerful assertion of Winnemucca's Paiute identity, despite outward suggestions that she might have been perceived by other Paiutes as a "white man's Indian" [Fowler 1976, p. 34]. In fact, these apparent concessions to Western culture – sentimentality, her diplomacy with whites, and her acculturation – are what make her work subversive and dialogic.

This "subversive an dialogic" spirit in which Winnemucca advocated for the First Nations survival is equally valid today. Effective Aboriginal writers and language workers can relate to altruistic people both in the First Nations world and in the coloniser's world. For that reason, these First Nations individuals are able to translate the realities of the one into the other.

Perhaps this ability to comprehend more than one culture is a reason that Winnemucca was criticised as an "assimilationist." However, Winnemucca's strength as a First Nations autobiographer stands in opposition to such personal attacks. In McClure's (1999) words:

> Winnemucca consistently resists falling into invented identities, and that is what makes her, to my mind, such a significant Native voice; the degree to which she adapts and changes to survive is great, and it leads to a self that resists definition and categorization. . . .

Brumble (1988) writes that Winnemucca:

> . . . spent time among whites; she spent time among the Paiutes. In reading her book we may see implicit in some of her experiences features of a cultural identity crisis, but she seems herself not to have thought about her life in this way" (p. 65).

McClure (1999) writes that knowledgeable Aboriginal autobiographers who are fluent in both First Nations and non-First Nations cultures fulfil crucial roles in negotiating understanding between the cultures:

> The Native American writer who appropriates mediums [sic] of the dominant culture – autobiography and English – must likewise inherit the complex role of a translator of cultures: Native American autobiographies are the essence of translating cultures. Sarah Winnemucca's process involved constructing herself bi-culturally in a literary form that was traditionally monocultural: she was interested in studying the complexities of her ethnic experience. She interacted and

> negotiated with a hostile dominant culture which had rigidly narrow conceptions of "Indian," and what an Indian could get away with saying in the confines of the authoritative discourse through which she spoke. Since Sarah Winnemucca was writing in a time when very few Native Americans got into print without the assistance of non-Native translators or editors, she had to carefully anticipate manipulating her work to a specifically non-Native audience.

For Winnemucca, writing in the contact zone was extremely challenging. It would be a mistake to judge Winnemucca as though she lived in today's world equally as much as it would be a mistake to call modern First Nations autobiographers "assimilationists" because they do not live like Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal people.

On the contrary, in the context of the times in which Winnemucca wrote, she demonstrated an amazing ability to maintain her Aboriginal integrity while adapting to the world and the literary forms of the colonising culture.

Winnemucca was a pioneer, a forerunner of modern First Nations autobiographers, despite the criticism that she had been assimilated and that her writings were not "Indian" enough. In truth, Winnemucca practised reverse assimilation. She "assimilated" non-First

Nations literary forms into her First Nations world, not the other way around.

No doubt many modern First Nations people continue in that tradition. This human ability to adapt useful knowledge into an indigenous culture reinforces Aboriginal self-identity, and ultimately liberates First Nations people from the non-Aboriginal one-dimensional, ethnic stereotyping.

Gerald Vizenor (1994) writes that healthy, dynamic Aboriginal cultures have successfully adapted European literary forms to Aboriginal purposes:

> The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance to tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many tribal people in the postindian world (p. 105).

First Nations literary genre can powerfully adopt the coloniser's literary conventions for indigenous purposes. Regarding this, I wrote a poem and commentary in 1995.

Racing with Spiders

A brown spider races across the cobbles.
"The Founding Fathers must have missed you," I say.
"Too bad *We* were not so tiny."

Reading Indian poetry on a bright Winter day.
The Sun crawls low over
icicle-blue Skidegate Inlet:
A slow moving tetherball
tied to a dancing chain of fire.

Moresby Isle's mountainous multitudes,
once proud and bristling with green-black spires,
now lie sullen and barren as shaven bears.
"I wonder how the hills keep warm at night?" I ask.

Indian poetry is powerful, the preface says;
Indians know the spirit of words.
The editor enjoys "working with Native writers,
many of whom would be famous," she says,
"If they were not Indian."

"Famous to whom?" I respond.
If the Colonisers ignore us,
it is not because we are Native,
it is because they do not want
the remembering;
they do not want us reminding them
that we who once were, still are;
that, as long as the children live,
so will live the memories of our ancestors.
That as long as bigotry haunts the human soul,
so will live our anger and our suffering.
We are an unwelcome and unsolicited
twinge;
galling bites,
on hot and soul-tossed nights
between sheets too *white* for comfort.

No, we are not famous.
We dash softly over darkened walls,
then weave our webs in window panes
of a people who so utterly
have hidden the Sun
that silk-laced Moonlight equally
is agony.

Perhaps the children of a thousand winters
hence will read our Native words,
and finally understand.

As I write I remember
the little spider speeding so lightly
across the cobbles.
"They never noticed you," I say.
and I am glad.
You spin enchantment;
we now know
to snare the enemy in
his own language starkly knit
in the realities and nocturnal dreams
of our Native spirits.
I am glad, Kuhljuyaang, that *We*,
and you
are not so tiny.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
22 January 1995

Commentary on *Racing with Spiders*

As Requested by the Ketchikan Indian Corporation

A poem is words; *it's* Truth, more than words. Truth is a high mountain lake. Words, merely the surface, mirror the outer world. The inner spirit, the *soul* of poetry, dwells within the waters: transfused with unfathomable realities that sometimes even poets do not understand.

To dive deeply into poetry is to experience Truth.

The poem, R*acing with Spiders* speaks of an enemy; not an outer enemy, but an inner one. The enemy is the colonial spirit that allows a particular gender of a particular people to claim to be "The Founding Fathers" despite the fact that First Nations men – and women – have been here, solidly *founded*, since the beginning of time.

Language unifies. Knowing this, the Coloniser tried to take away our tongues, claiming that English was superior. Yet it would be a mistake for us to be reactionary, to denigrate English, because it too has a rich heritage.

Language is more than words. Our Native spirit *itself* speaks through the Haida carver's art, the potlatch and the dance. The carver's legacy, the communal *web*, the sweep of an Eagle dancer – and poetry – this language of spirit invalidates the bigotry of the Coloniser; it unifies *all* living beings.

Language and culture are inseparable. To speak English and other tongues in addition to our Haida language is to ascend the higher *mountaintop*: to see the world from the consciousness of more than one culture. As First Nations people powerfully alive, we can communicate from whatever height of mind and depth of heart we choose, in more than one culture's ability to hear. We can articulate our Native spirit eloquently, even – when we *choose* to do so – in the very language of the Coloniser.

Language is a strand that weaves the *fragments* into the *all*. We are Haida. We value our own language. But by whatever means *we* communicate, our spirits must be strong. We must see ourselves as one. We must not be deceived into denying this, nor into forfeiting our heritage.

This truth is the essence of *Racing with Spiders*.

The reality is that the language of the Coloniser is the only tongue many of us know. To survive we must appreciate who we are. We must breathe deeply, sensing that *we are related* to the sea, to the mountains, to the forests and to one another. We are the *all*.

Without our languages we do not cease to be First Nations. We no more lose our Nativeness than do any of our relatives who are mute. Words are not the only form of speech. Truly, many languages exist; from the cry of the eagle, to the manifold voices of the raven, to the subtle whispers that pass lightly between the trees.

All life communicates *soul*; the essence of life *itself* is a language. Across the generations, our ancestors and *all* living beings speak of the power to survive in the face of overwhelming odds. We who are alive today are exact testimony to that language of spirit. It behoves us, then, to commit our hearts unselfishly to our Native ways. When our heritage and our hearts are strong, our children are strong. When our children are strong, *we* are strong.

For our children's sake we must keep our Native tongues, for each language is a silken strand in the larger web of the *all*: the pattern of the *Whole*. When a Native language dies, part of *us* – part of all humanity – further crumbles into *fragments*.

Together we must weave the dream that catches our own visions; our own dreams; our own realities; in our own languages. We must wrap in spider's silk the foreign English tongue, lest that tongue instead transform us into what most of us can never be successfully: The Coloniser in brown skin.

Racing with Spiders was a real experience. I actually did see a spider speeding across the cobbles last Saturday. This reminded me that, as the Coloniser's own Bible says, "The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king's palaces" (Proverbs 30:28).

The biblical analogue is not perfect. Spiders are real; in a house or in a forest. The self-proclaimed "kings" are not. I honour *Kuhljuyaang*, the Haida spider. I honour our First Nations. Our ability to shape cedar and poetry creatively – using our own honed stone and the Coloniser's steel – is our ability culturally to dwell where *we choose*. In our reintegration with the *all*, we are empowered to dash across even the Coloniser's walls at night, weaving webs of Truth in places that cannot be ignored.

In this regard, the brown spider is my teacher. She lives on, true to her nature, spinning her silk and gathering her food. Despite the *fragmentation* of her environment, she continues faithfully to weave, spinning from her inner being a pattern of the *Whole*.

We must do the same.

Spiders and indigenous people are close relatives: both are intelligent and spiritually powerful. In fact, as our ancestors know, everything that exists is intelligent and powerful. If some choose not to see Native artists as significant, then that is their choice and their loss. We are not tiny, and we will not go away. We are the children of our grandparents, of our Nunni and our Chinni. Our thousands of years upon this land are enough to sustain us through this crisis, or any crisis to come.

How'a!

Mitakoyasin

John Medicine Horse Kelly
26 January 1995

Aboriginal autobiography, therefore, is a point in the contact zone that is extremely important to First Nations language and culture workers. McClure writes:

> By appropriating the language and literary conventions from the culture of dominance, Native writers are empowering their own culture and voice. Native American autobiography, then, is a powerful means for Indians to negotiate the contact zone (5).

Through tis indigenous genre, support may be garnered for First Nations language revitalisation.

Over the past 120 years, Sarah Winnemucca and later First Nations autobiographers have responded in similar ways to the impact of colonialism and genocide. These Aboriginal individuals are communicating in language understandable to the non-First Nations world. At the same time these writers have faced the challenge of maintaining their integral connectedness with their Aboriginal cultures.

3.11 Transculturation

The ability to adapt intelligently to changing environments without sacrificing cultural integrity is a powerful tradition in all successful human cultures. This skill is a "tradition" as important as any other.

McClure (1999), refers to this tradition, one that Louise Pratt's (1992, p. 6) termed as "transculturation":

> Individual self-definition is independent of the larger tribal identity and thus alien to Native cultures. However, when Native figures undertake this process, this "transculturation," becomes the strength of First Nations cultures in which subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for" (McClure, 1999).

Using the coloniser's English to uphold Native identity was a crucial challenge for Winnemucca, especially because her first language and worldview was Paiute.

Winnemucca's accomplishment was remarkable in her time. It would equally remarkable today. First Nations writing that speaks to all nations in English and/or a First Nations language remains an impressive accomplishment.

McClure (1999) writes that this multicultural fluency is instrumental in the struggle against colonialism's stereotyping and racism:

> The very existence of autobiographies by Native Americans is a movement away from static, invented notions of Indianness. In

> using this literary genre, the authors are adopting and appropriating the conventions of the dominant culture in order to strengthen their own. . . . [T]he appropriation of English and its literary forms is ironic and subversive, and it ultimately leads to a liberation from one-dimensional, stereotyped inventions of ethnic identity.

As Paulo Freire (1970/1993) points out, the struggle to eliminate stereotyping not only benefits the oppressed, but the oppressor as well:

> Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both (p. 26).

In Winnemucca's time the survival of the First Nations required successfully adapting to the onslaught of the Euro-Americans. The struggle has changed over time, but the urgency remains much the same. In the present, the survival of First Nations identity and self-esteem requires successfully revitalising and perpetuating indigenous languages and lifeways.

3.12 The Eulogy Phenomenon: Voices of the Survivors

Remarkably, from 1762 onward Aboriginal autobiographies have attracted members of the very

cultures that colonised and killed First Nations peoples.

This American Holocaust eulogising phenomenon remarkably parallels the European Holocaust. Larson (1997a) writes:

> Examination of literatures by and about American Indians reveals a pragmatic and humanist authorial personality determined to constitute and preserve American Indians by writing. One example is Jonathan Boyarin's analysis of the relations of Jews and Indians in Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory [1992]. Boyarin discusses how the European and American mainstreams constantly eulogize the other's victims, and the concomitant juxtaposition of "native" voices inside the respective empires as a way of resisting. Boyarin does not mince words, stating that contrasting fictions by French Jew Patrick Odiano and American Indian Gerald Vizenor are "the voices of survivors, written after genocide, on the soil of genocide."

Larson's phrase, "constituting and preserving American Indians by writing" is especially relevant to First Nations autobiographers. As Freire (1970/1993) advocated, the voices of these survivors might help restore "the humanity of both" (1970/1993, p. 26).

Ironically, the post-colonisers' tendency to eulogise might bring about their release from a prison of their own making. In a poem in The Returners, I wrote:

Racist

One day you'll look around
And, to your surprise,
Every one of us will be gone.
All the "Indians" escaped.
And then
You'll look around
And realize
That all the time
You were wrong.
You never owned us.
We were born free.
It was you . . .
You were the one
Trapped in the prison.

If Earth as a planet is to move beyond the overwhelming impact of racism and the American Holocaust all who were involved should openly participate, not just the Aboriginal peoples. On a national scale, the responsible governments include not only those in the Americas, but the European governments that colonised the Americas.

3.13 Re-Negotiating the Contact Zone: First Steps Toward Reversing the Effects of Colonialism and Genocide

Most certainly as a prelude to national and personal healing, the United States, Canada, Mexico and other Central and South American governments must openly

acknowledge their moral responsibilities both for the colonisation and the holocaust of the Americas.

As has been done in the aftermath of the Jewish holocaust, honest dialogue is important for healing both victims and descendants of the victimisers. Stannard (1982) writes, "We must do what we can to recapture and to try to understand, in human terms, what it *was* that was crushed, what it *was* that was butchered."

Larson (1997a) writes that "the Sand Creek massacre stands out in terms of horror visited on Indians." He quoted the testimony before Congress of one cavalryman who was there:

> There was one little child, probably three years old, just big enough to walk through the sand. The Indians had gone ahead, and this little child was behind following after them. The little fellow was perfectly naked, travelling on the sand. I saw one man get off his horse, at a distance of about seventy-five yards, and draw up his rifle and fire—he missed the child. Another man came up and said, "Let me try the son of a bitch; I can hit him." He got down off his horse, kneeled down and fired at the little child, but he missed him. A third man came up and made a similar remark, and fired, and the little fellow dropped (Congress, U.S., 1865).

Added to incidents of outright genocide such as Sand Creek were hundreds of thousands of deaths from diseases and other causes. Cultural disruption was total. In

the western advance of European-based culture came the complete loss of indigenous independence, traditional hunting grounds and subsistence resources. Colonialism replaced these with ethical and religious domination, destruction of families and lifeways and often, removal from ancestral lands.

In the aftermath of "the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world," (Stannard, 1982) the present effects of colonisation upon Aboriginal self-identity and self-esteem must not be underestimated. The modern-day impact in "Indian Country" is universal.

3.14 The Power of First Nations Autobiographies

Evidence of colonisation's consequences are pervasive. First Nations employment, income and life expectancy rates are among the lowest in the world, while rates for suicide, psychological dysfunction, school dropouts, alcoholism and foetal alcohol syndrome are among the highest (Hammerschlag 1982; Crawford, 1994).

Rebuilding Aboriginal self-identity and self-esteem requires reversing the consequences of colonialism,

including the annihilation, both directly and indirectly, of languages and traditional cultures.

Under these circumstances, revitalisation mandates providing effective socio-psychological support for language workers and fluent elders. First Nations narratives, including autobiographies provide direct insights into the dynamics of First Nations realities.

Regarding First Nations literature Kathryn W. Shanley (1997) writes:

> Perhaps this is where literary criticism and cultural studies can most usefully enter: first, to be an audience; second, to amplify those voices barely heard, or not heard at all without a committed audience; and third, to offer a prefatory sign as to why those voices and literatures ought to be heard, read.
>
> Then again, perhaps we ask colonial and postcolonial theory (and theorists) to do something for us, to clarify, categorize, and quantify in ways that the discourse's very language cannot reconcile with itself.

Shanley notes that the inherent weaknesses both in non-First Nations literary criticism and academic cultural studies are the potential biases of critics and researchers who were raised in the dominating cultures.

First Nations literature must not be criticised through the coloniser's biases. The First Nations genre is unique. As did oral literature, First Nations written literature developed in an Aboriginal milieu.

This post-contact indigenous artform, including autobiography, blends First Nations traditions into the written genre adopted hundreds of years ago. Because of this, First Nations literature can bridge the epistemological gap between the cultures. Shanley (1997) writes:

> The breadth and depth of human suffering that colonial/postcolonial theory seeks to know, to describe, to dispel, and all that exists within and beyond victimization, perhaps best find expression in creative literature, oral and written.

With the limitations of biases in mind, Shanley (1997) expresses a guarded optimism toward the value of academic methodologies in fostering communication between the cultures.

> If nothing else, critical theory and criticism (that is, applied theory) can invite indigenous peoples to the discussion and extend to them the microphone, but issues of domination persist, even or especially in such gestures. That is the paradox of speaking from "centers" of "intellectual tradition," and from the perspectives and privileges of predominantly writing-oriented cultures.

Paradoxical or not, First Nations narrative and autobiography provide crucial insights both for Aboriginal and academic cultures. Through this mutual understanding, First Nations could be better assisted with the recovery of their traditions and lifeways.

Clearly the lack of an effective interface between the cultures perpetuates the problems colonialism has generated. Within the memories of generations yet alive, First Nations angst has been deeply rooted in colonialism and genocide. In this regard, the Jewish nation and the First Nations of the Americas share common ground. Germany does not stand alone in the realm of recent atrocities.

The consciousness of exploitation, colonialism and genocide is carried strongly in a number of poems from my previously unpublished book, The Returners. Included is the following:

Caves

Two weathered bones alone remain
Above the sleepless, churning sea
That watches this dark and timeless womb
In which a human frame should be
Wrapped in cedar, foetal-formed and *Whole;*
In Foam Woman's care for eternity.

Two shattered bones are all that stayed
Of the Haida woman tucked away
Within graven Eagle and Grizzly Bear's
Everlasting and vigilant gaze.

Once safely kept:

Beyond the raging, grasping sea;
Beyond the barriers of rock and bay;
Beyond the wild and torturing wind;
Beyond the fleeting of day to day;
Beyond summer wave and winter storm;
Beyond where the restless tide holds sway;

But not beyond
the Yaats' Xaadaay*.

Two bones alone remain of we;
All of the *all* they left to be.
Scattered amidst the slivered debris;
The *fragments* of our humanity.

* Yaats' Xaadaay (Iron Man)
A Haida word for the colonisers.

In Gwaii Haanas, *Beautiful Islands*
John Medicine Horse Kelly
July 1993

The event that inspired my poem was a 1993 archaeological survey on Haida Gwaii in which I participated. From a burial cave had been taken all the traditional objects lovingly left with the body. The traditional hand-carved cedar burial box was gone, and fragments of woven cedar mats littered the cave floor. From the pieces left behind I could see that a burial for a person well respected and loved had taken place.

However, nothing of value was left except for two objects. There on the cave floor were two weathered human bones.

The sight shocked my psyche with two previously disparate images. I remembered similar bones in photographs and films from my own childhood when I learned about the atrocities of the Jewish holocaust. I also remembered the horror in the faces of my Haida uncles as they told me about the coloniser's oppression and the smallpox plagues that killed 95 percent of the my nation.

I know very well, therefore, that a full understanding of First Nations people today requires that researchers include the ongoing dynamics of genocide and colonialism.

In regard to genocide in the United States, Larson (1997a) writes:

> Genocide means the intentional killing of women and children – for no population can survive if its women and children are destroyed. Such atrocity is clear evidence of a sickness that must be treated, for the good of perpetrator and victim alike. The United States has never properly treated its participation in indiscriminate killing, and the theft of nearly three billion acres of Indian lands, offering instead palliatives such as "citizenship," the Indian Reorganization Act, and the careful doling out of small amounts of money by the Indian Claims Commission.

Money is not enough. A mutual commitment to revitalising First Nations languages and cultures would provide a strong foundation from which to begin rebuilding First Nations pride, self-identity and self-esteem.

3.15 Reconstruction: An Aboriginal Peace Corps

In the quotation above, Larson's reference to the "careful doling out of small amounts of money" deeply troubles me.

The colonial days of enforcing First Nations dependency through woefully inadequate "doles" is not

over, despite reassuring speeches in this era of "enlightened" détente.

In reality, First Nations language workers are compelled to seek language and culture grants like beggars with their hands extended. In truth, national governments in the Americas must commit more than the "small amounts of money" typical of such efforts in the past.

Recently, the Canadian government committed $20-million over a four year period for First Nations language and cultural revitalisation. At first glance, $20-million seems like a lot of money.

However, divided among the provinces and divided again over each of the four years, almost no money was appropriated for each nation. Only a limited number of First Nations received grants of only a few thousand dollars. The speeches, nevertheless, continued.

Obviously, talk alone accomplishes little or nothing. Urgently-needed is effective support for Aboriginal people working on the front lines to revitalise First Nations languages and cultures.

Currently, grants are the usual mechanism for appropriating funds. However, the grant process itself

as presently structured is reminiscent of the coloniser's methods of enforced dependency. Today, each First Nations is compelled to compete with every other First Nations for always limited funds.

The granting system perpetuates the heritage of colonialism. First Nations people are reduced to begging for the healing of our nations while fighting among ourselves for the few dollars available. This loss of power and sovereignty is especially tragic in view of the fact that nearly every First Nations language is on the verge of extinction.

No amount of money by itself will revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures, no more than would providing seed money by itself grow crops for starving nations.

Effective assistance requires forging a multicultural coalition, an Aboriginal Peace Corps, that would unite First Nations and non-First Nations in the Americas. This high-profile and adequately-funded approach is absolutely essential. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities must be melded to provide expert training and assistance to implement Accelerated language learning and community-based programs. This

unification is the only real hope in these last-remaining days for most First Nations languages.

An effective nation-rebuilding Aboriginal Peace Corps would require a highly-visible mutual commitment. The coalition would combine the work of governments, experts from the private sector and, at the grass-roots level, First Nations elders and workers.

3.16 The First Steps Toward An Aboriginal Peace Corps

An example of the first steps toward such an effort is the movement that produced for Jews the U.S. Holocaust Memorial. The governments of the Americas at the minimum must equally and openly acknowledge their responsibilities for First Nations holocaust. Such an acknowledgement would provide a forum for building an multicultural coalition to rebuild the languages and cultures of the First Nations. Larson's (1997a) wrote:

> The inequity of such reparations remains to be adjudicated, along with other questions related to moral bookkeeping such as the implications of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial. Until such matters are addressed, the discourse of American Indians especially will not have achieved morality of the kind that could result from directing all the available force of kindred minds at the crude mass of experience in an endeavor to extract meaning from it.

It will be possible to "extract meaning" from First Nations life only when all cultures of the Americas address the realities which have pushed many First Nations to the verge of extinction.

An honest commitment to open dialogue would be a small yet significant step toward building this absolutely essential multicultural coalition: an Aboriginal Peace Corps.

First Nations autobiography is a valid means of communicating some of the reasons why an Aboriginal Peace Corps is necessary. My hope is to encourage immediate and knowledgeable intervention before virtually all Aboriginal languages are extinguished.

All on-reserve people are direct witnesses to the mounting death toll among the last of the linguistically- and culturally-fluent elders. We know that these are the last possible days to revitalise our First Nations languages and cultures. By all means available workers and the last few elders fluent in their languages must be encouraged to persist and to succeed.

For that reason, high-level accelerated language learning skills are absolutely crucial to the survival of First Nations languages and cultures.

An Aboriginal Peace Corps that empowers First Nations with the necessarily skills needs the full and strong support of all governments and communities in the Americas. This is not only for the sake of the workers, elders and indigenous communities, but also for the sake of all who desire to assist with reversing the tragic effects of colonialism, racism and genocide.

3.17 Epilogue

In Canada, First Nations governments generally change every two years. In contrast to the stability provided by traditional governments of chiefs, matriarchs and elders, the band (tribal) council system is extremely unstable.

The council system, installed by the Canadian and U.S. governments, are the heritage of colonialism. The councils are replaced every two years, and often are elected based upon family relationships rather than competence or integrity. The resulting lack of stability

and continuity frequently jeopardises efforts to revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures.

A new band council has been elected on Haida Gwaii and ultraconservative politics are more in evidence. As a result, I have been required to step back from all but personally-financed work on Haida Gwaii. My work with ALLanguages Group will go on, but of necessity it will continue primarily with other First Nations in Canada and the United States.

This situation has affected many people in our community, most of whom continue tell Wendy and I that they love us and appreciate us. I will follow my elders' council. "Be patient," they said. "After the next election you can take up where you left off." I wonder, in a year and a half, how many of our elders, will still be alive? Throughout Haida Gwaii in the last three months alone, three Haida-fluent elders have died.

This situation deeply grieves me. My return home has been pre-empted by ultraconservatives that have opposed me in large measure due to my being raised and educated "away."

I am not overly surprised regarding the political situation on Haida Gwaii. The realities of being an

Aboriginal person living either on- or off-reserve have always been stark.

To arrive at a point at which I was ready to take on responsibilities for assisting with reviving my language, it was necessary for me to advance toward autonomy (Maslow, 1954; Maslow, 1968; Maslow, 1970; Quantz, 1997). My challenge was to continue onward despite a lifetime of angst as an Aboriginal person in the midst of a culture suffering under colonialism. In this regard, Sumerlin & Bundrick (1996), applied Maslow's concepts of self-actualisation:

> Movement toward optimal function requires courage. Maslow (1971) declared that self-actualization involves making growth choices rather than fear choices and thus that self-actualization is accumulated in degrees. Maslow (1971) contended that self-actualizing entails identifying defenses and being able to give them up, leaving one vulnerable and open. . . .
>
> He thought that resolution of physiological, safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem needs was necessary for self-actualizing.
>
> Some tasks associated with self-actualizing are intrapersonal (Maslow 1968). For example, self-discovery, selection of potentials to develop, making plans, and constructing a life-outlook involve contemplation. For such assignments, self-acceptance, introspection, comfort with being alone, and an understanding of capacity are required. Maslow conceptualized self-actualization as a need "to become more and

> more what one idiosyncratically is" (Maslow, 1970, p. 46).

The poem on the cover of my poetry book says: "The Returners thought they had returned because the Grandchildren needed them; Only to discover that they also needed the Grandchildren." The poem is true. Haida Gwaii provides me with an unparalleled opportunity to self-discover, to develop potentials and to construct a life-outlook though self-acceptance and introspection.

Gold, as the cliché says, is refined in the fire.

After completing my coursework for my doctoral studies at Oregon State University, I for the first time lived and worked among my people in British Columbia. The journey to my homeland was difficult, but no more difficult than was my journey after I arrived. Both journeys, I discovered, are typical of the ordeals through which many First Nations workers live.

Wendy and I have raised more than $500,000 for Haida language projects and successfully created school and community programs on Haida Gwaii. We have been greatly encouraged, especially by our elders, but still the struggle continues.

I now understand what I did not know before I came home: that the reserves are oppressed by the actions of

those who have internalised the methods of the colonisers (Freire, 1973/1993). Such trauma is extant in "Indian Country" despite efforts of altruistic individuals in both the First Nations and the non-First Nations to undo the damage of colonialism.

To revitalise First Nations languages and cultures, all people must work with one mind. I believed this when I arrived and I still believe it today. Yet often the members of our own villages become the workers' most ardent adversaries.

What I have learned over my six years working here is that the same adversity affects many others who have moved to their ancestral villages after being born and raised "away."

I cannot, and do not, blame those who have proclaimed themselves adversaries. We are victims of the colonisers, but we don't have to think or act like victims. All of us are accountable for our actions, yet the blindness of some is understandable. They as well as we are to be honoured for our survival as First Nation people.

According to Paulo Freire (1970/1993), when members of colonised communities have been stripped of their

authentic cultural identities they become "dehumanised," suffering loss of self-esteem and autonomy. As a result, some of these people unwittingly internalise the identity and values of the oppressor.

Some community members, particularly those who gravitate toward the power structure, then become the oppressors of those who possess autonomy. As such they alienate those who come to the communities with high ideals, outside education and a desire to join with other community members to rebuild their culture. Larson (1997a) writes:

> [O]f all the strange phenomena produced by society, certainly one of the most puzzling is self-hatred . . . . wherein Indian people attack one another. Because the near-total destruction of American Indian cultures happened so recently, Indians are afraid to speak of it, let alone be critical, so they oftentimes criticize themselves. Sander Gilman has analyzed a similar phenomenon where Jewish anti-Semitism reflects certain basic structures inherent in all manifestations of self-hatred.

Gilman (1986) said this self-hatred invokes mirages of the oppressor's stereotypes. In the absence of the coloniser designating "good Indians" and "bad Indians" new targets become the stereotyped "other" and some First Nations people become oppressors of ourselves. For example, in ultraconservative circles, First Nations

people who do not fit the ultraconservative mould are stereotyped as "apples": red on the outside and white on the inside. In truth, no Indian whose Aboriginal self-identity in any form has survived should be stereotyped as an "apple".

Gilman (1986, p. 2-4) writes:

> Every stereotype is Janus-faced. It has a positive and a negative element, neither of which bears any resemblance to the complexity or diversity of the world as it is. The positive element is taken by the outsiders as their new definition. This is the quality ascribed to them as the potential members of the group in power. The antithesis to this, the quality ascribed to them as the Other, is then transferred to the new Other found within the group that those in power have designated as Other. For every "noble savage" seen through colonial power a parallel "ignoble savage" exists. Within the world of the Other, a world seen as homogenous by the reference group, with its presumed privilege, the same dichotomy exists. There are nobler savages and yet ignobler ones.

When ultraconservatives become "those in power" outside-educated returners become "apples". I believe that even the ultraconservatives are unaware that this internalised oppression is a replica, a "mirage," of colonialism's stereotyping.

It is sad that the "insider-outsider" dichotomy (Larson 1997a) is transferred from the old oppression to

the new oppression under those who are the colonisers' heirs.

I believe that those who do this are completely unaware that they have become the tools of the very colonisers they so deeply hate. Larson (1997a) writes

> This replication of the insider-outsider dichotomy within American Indian groups is also representative of the allegorical structure of the authenticity debate, wherein mixedbloods are assigned lower status by other Indians. Once this deeper structure is unpacked, however, it can serve as the backboard for more positive and forward-looking discussions. . . . [W]e expect at some point a transition from diagnosis to treatment, and, ultimately, to seeing the patient cured. At the present time, however, such healing has not taken place.

In effect, internalised colonialism is self-perpetuating, existing long after the original colonisers have departed. The oppressed become the oppressors, in turn oppressing those who are capable of assisting with revitalising languages and cultures. The only hope, as Larson says, it to "unpack" this deeper structure, to bring it out into the open. Obviously, those who so desperately despise colonialism would quickly change their ways if they knew that they had allowed themselves to become unwittingly employed in its service.

Freire (1970/1993) discussed this "internalised coloniser" phenomenon from the "divide and rule" praxis:

> There is a fundamental dimension of the theory of oppressive action which is as old as oppression itself. As the oppressor minority subordinates and dominates the majority, it must divide and keep it divided in order to remain in power. The minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating the unification of the people. . . . It is in the interest of the oppressor to weaken the oppressed still further, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them. (p. 122).

If we truly understood the power of the "unification of the people" we would never allow ourselves to be dehumanised: We would never go against the counsel of our elders to respect and to honour the Earth, all others and ourselves.

Freire (1970/1993) would caution us against internalising the coloniser's system to the point where the mindset of the oppressor lives within the oppressed. Under the colonisers' mindset, indigenous people by all means possible must be kept divided. Autonomous people are to be feared. The oppressor's dehumanisation can produce people who not only fear true autonomy, but also are conditioned to oppress autonomous members of their own communities.

Colonialism thus generates a self-perpetuating cycle of interactions between members of an oppressed community. Freire (1970/1993) writes:

> The oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor . . . are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (p. 28). . . . (T)he oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for then, to be men is to be oppressors (p. 27). . . They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised. Their conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation . . . (p. 30).

Alienation, particularly in-situ alienation, is the tool of colonialism, and thus becomes deeply ingrained in the people. Thus internalised, colonialism always is continually working toward the destruction of indigenous communities. A crucial target is our languages and cultures.

A necessary condition for restoring cultural identity and self-esteem is to recognise and reject the

internalised coloniser. This, as Freire (1970/1993) says brings us to our truly human selves, as well as our indigenous "power to transform the world" (p. 30).

It is not for me to question whether Aboriginal people will revitalise our languages and cultures. As Ogallala Lakota (Sioux) medicine man Pete Catches taught me, we all must come to live within our true natures. To revitalise our languages and culture, each of us must "become more and more what one idiosyncratically is" (Maslow, 1970, p. 46). Individually, every Aboriginal person must realistically assess the true cause of dysfunction rather than reacting with bitter anger to the new oppressors.

This ability for each person to "become what one is" is absolutely essential for returners who work toward revitalising their languages and cultures.

In truth, colonialism to one degree or another has dehumanised all of us, and healing is held in check until we realise this. Recovering our true natures is a process Freire called "humanisation."

> It is essential for the oppressed to realise that when they accept the struggle for humanisation they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle (p.50).

Freire said that colonised people are not fighting for freedom from hunger. He quoted Erich Fromm (1966) as saying that the struggle was for the:

> . . . freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well-fed cog in the machine. . . . It is not enough that men are not slaves; if social conditions further the existence of automatons, the result will not be love of life, but love of death.

The oppressed, having been shaped within the genocidal climate of oppression, must struggle until they rediscover what Pete Catches said was their "true nature." Freire called this process life-affirming humanisation. (Freire (1970/1993, p. 50).

This humanisation Freire (1970/1993) described as "the quest for human completion" (p. 29). I have personally experienced this quest and believe it to be an prerequisite for all Aboriginal people who desire to participate in Native language and culture revitalisation.

The problems faced by on- and off-reserve people are different, but the solutions are remarkably the same. Re-humanisation, or the regaining of authentic identity and self-esteem, is the only real solution (Freire, 1973/1993; Quantz, 1997).

The language and culture crisis itself is truly cyclical. Revitalising Aboriginal language and culture is an essential prerequisite for Aboriginal self-esteem (Crawford, 1994). Conversely, Aboriginal self-esteem is an essential prerequisite for revitalising Aboriginal languages and cultures.

To borrow the coloniser's own image from a long-controversial tale, like the tigers in The Story of Little Black Sambo (Bannerman 1898), the problems and the solutions are connected head to tail, chasing each other 'round and 'round until it is impossible to see the "tigers" at all. Unfortunately without an international multicultural coalition of communities and governments, such as my proposal for an Aboriginal Peace Corps., language workers will remain supported. If that continues more than a few precious years, our First Nations languages, like Little Black Sambo's tigers, also will surely melt away.

Unquestionably, working side-by-side with knowledgeable members of other communities, we as Aboriginal people have the power to revitalise the hundreds of languages on the verge of extinction. Our indigenous strength is in our elders who yet speak their

languages, the members of our Aboriginal families/clans, and our workers who deeply care about our languages and cultures.

A sobering reality is that without international unity and strong support for these workers, their efforts will fail. Every day our First Nations lose precious elders, the last in a thousands-years chain of language speakers. Every day First Nations people battle against socio-cultural disintegration.

In truth, First Nations many workers cannot will not withstand the ordeal much longer without relevant support and affirmation. Our depleted ranks of few language and culture workers can continue working only as long as their "natures" remain strong.

A close friend of mine, a Mohawk Canadian Aboriginal person and the national director of a Canadian First Nations organisation, is completely dedicated to Aboriginal language and culture revitalisation. Nevertheless, recently he resigned.

My friend reported with great relief that finally his family could live a normal life.

"It is good not to have to wear my cultural identity on my sleeve anymore," he wrote. "The stress

was killing me. More importantly, it was killing my family." (Personal communication, April 2000).

I grieve the loss of this compassionate and capable worker, especially knowing that essentially all First Nations workers live under similar stressors.

I am fully aware that others after me will draw conclusions based upon their own insights and opinions regarding this dissertation.

For me, my vulnerability is an acceptable risk in view of the potential benefits. For that sake of First Nations language and culture workers, for the revitalisation of First Nations self-identity and autonomy, and ultimately for the sake of humanity, I knew the time had come to write.

To every one of you who have an understanding heart, I say:

"Howa sta!"

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
AUTOBIOGRAPHIC POETRY

The Returners: A Journey of Rediscovery

John Medicine Horse Kelly

Written in Haida Gwaii

Aboriginal Living Language Group
PO Box 383
Woodlawn, Ontario, Canada
K0A 3M0
Tel: (613) 832-4546

The Returners

thought they had
come back
because
        the Grandchildren
needed them;
only to discover
they also
        needed
                the Grandchildren.

This book is dedicated to *All* who wished me well or ill, without whom I never would have written. Thank you for consciously or unconsciously reflecting to me the pattern of the *Whole*, the *Great Mystery*. Thank you for teaching me the meaning of love; for keeping me on the path that led me to myself, to my relatives and to Haida Gwaii.

Particularly to be remembered are:

- The Reverend Minister Peter Reginald Kelly, my Chinni: "Grandfather"
- Gertrude Kelly, my Nunni:"Grandmother"
- T. Reginald Kelly, my Gagii: "Uncle and mentor"
- Selma Kelly, my aunt by marriage.
- Horace Lloyd George Kelly, my Gagii.
- Chief Skidegate, Clarence "Dempsey" Collinson, my cousin and my Kihlsly: "Chief"
- Irene Collinson, my cousin by marriage.
- Arnold Pearson, my cousin by marriage.
- Pearle Pearson, my cousin and K'uhljaad Ganga: "Haida woman most esteemed"
- Chuck Jackson, my Cow Creek Band - Takelma Wi-ku'uyum: "Of the People by the (Rogue) River; friend who would never speak badly of me."
- Wallace Black Elk, my Kola: "Friend for whom I would lay down my life"
- Grandpa Pete Catches, through Robert Grey Eagle my adopted Lakota Tunkasila: "Friendly people (Sioux); Grandfather."
- Sydney Keith, a Lakota Tunkasila
- Robert Grey Eagle, my Kola and my brother
- Nathan Young, the late Chief of Tanu, my very wise Gagii
- The Reverend Minister John Williams, the ascendant Chief of Tanu, my elder-friend and my mentor

Life

is a process

of

careful *editing*

A Special Thank You

to

Wendy Campbell

who

patiently and joyfully

edited the music in this book.

Please Read Before Opening!

It is risky business writing directions for a book. At least two possibilities exist:

1. Nobody will read them. People don't read instructions anyway until *after* they wreck the bicycle, the appliance, or whatever.

2. People will think the book can't be that good. After all, it *needs* directions.

I will take that chance. This book is not about building bicycles, it is about *finding* . But *it is not about finding Indians*. It is the journey home of one person -- a Haida person. Hopefully it is universally human. Definitively, it is about me.

I was reluctant to publish this book, but friends, relatives, and even an enemy talked me into going public with my return to the *Islands of The People:* Haida Gwaii. My poetry is my private journal; in the words of another poet, we write to ourselves while the rest of the world listens in. A poet's solitude is sacred. If this book helps you on your own journey home, then -- and only then -- have I justifiably sacrificed my privacy.

Read on and understand: this journal is the road map to all of Hell this Haida has ever known and the *Whole* of Heaven he hopes to find. (The churches, by the way, amply supply First Nations writers with good analogies like these.)

My message attests that First Nations people -- unilaterally -- are fragments. Anthropologists claim that our *cultures* have been fragmented. But cultures do not exist. People exist. *Culture is ourselves expressing ourselves to ourselves -- past, present and future.* Culture is our way of life: our relationships with one another and with the Universe. *We the people* are the culture, but in the wake of the Iron Men every man; every woman; every elder; every child has become a fragment.

I, too, am a fragment; my writing reflects this reality. When one builds a puzzle, the scattered pieces interlock in special ways. I arrange the selections by how they fit together, no more and no less. I am told that organizing my work chronologically would reconstruct how I am changing during my journey. But change is not like that; growth is not linear. Life is a mystery that does not lend itself to calendars. For that matter, my writing is a mystery even to me. I know it only as a tiny voice speaking to the *Whole.* My writing is done when it's done: when it *feels* right.

During the past 35 years I have developed my own voice. My poems are braided hair; poems within poems, so to speak. Generally, the regular typeface forms a self-contained poem, the italics form another, then *all* the strands interweave into one.

The title, and occasionally how I sign my name, comprise fourth and fifth parts of my poems. Four or five are sacred to many First Nations.

This style is what I call *tandem poetry*. I design it for two people to read aloud. Reading in turn, one person voices the regular typeface, then pauses while the other reads the italics. The reciprocities between the parts and the whole are clearest this way. The effect is enhanced when a man and a woman read together. Male and female combining in separate unity is in itself a great mystery.

I am conscious of these relationships. Each poem is a fragment and each fragment in turn breaks into more fragments. Yet each complete fragment is incomplete beyond itself. Each must interconnect, patterning synergistically into the *all*. I say the *all* because while the *all* does contain the pattern of the *Whole*, it is not the *Whole*. The *Whole* is a Great Mystery. The Lakota *Wicasa Wakan,* or holy people, told me that this Great Mystery is *Wakantanka*. It is powerful; it is sacred; it is vast. *Touching the Whole* is an inexpressible experience. *Touching the Whole* is not understanding; *it is Being*. This way of existing is beyond words.

I first sensed that sacred place I call the *Whole* years ago on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and especially in the Black Hills: *the Lakotas'* Paha Sapa. I always will remember with respect Sydney Keith, Grandpa Pete Catches and other Oglalla Lakotas who pointed me toward the Islands of The People: *our* Haida Gwaii.

"Don't get too comfortable here," my brother Robert Grey Eagle told me. "You've got to go home. That's where you belong."

And where I belong is where I've come -- home.

This journal, I pray, will be the tracks I leave for you on Naikoon Beach: Footprints leading to -- and from -- my ancestors.

I conclude with a prayer the Lakotas taught me: a prayer that seals each of life's ceremonies and one day will complete my own journey to the *Whole*. The Lakotas say, and so do I:

Mitakoyasin! All my relations!

Intelligence

There is a lot more intelligence
In being connected with a bird
Than there is in being
Connected
With a University.

Spiritual Wisdom does not come by degrees.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
10 November 1994

Potlatch

Why can't you understand,
Why *we wouldn't dance for you?*
Why *you went home*
Empty.
It's our soul;
That *is not for sale.*
It's Argillite poles
For which, years ago,
You paid
Twenty-five cents an inch,
Or it's a dance that celebrates
The relationship
Between our children
And our past.
It's All living things,
And it's *not for sale*
At twenty-five cents
An inch,
And it's not for sale
At twenty-five cents
A step. *But, come,*
Come *If you'll Celebrate*
Life with us!
Celebrate!

You'll never go home
Hungry.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
20 November 1994

Haida Carver

Some carve *in wood*,
Some carve *in stone*.
I carve *in words*.

Music is movement.

And the rhythm
And the dancing
Drift
beyond
time.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
4 February 1995

Racing with Spiders

A brown spider races across the cobbles.
"The Founding Fathers must have missed you," I say.
"Too bad *We* were not so tiny."

Reading Indian poetry on a bright Winter day.
The Sun crawls low over
icicle-blue Skidegate Inlet:
A slow moving tetherball
tied to a dancing chain of fire.

Moresby Isle's mountainous multitudes,
once proud and bristling with green-black spires,
now lie sullen and barren as shaven bears.
"I wonder how the hills keep warm at night?" I ask.

Indian poetry is powerful, the preface says;
Indians know the spirit of words.
The editor enjoys "working with Native writers,
many of whom would be famous," she says,
"If they were not Indian."

"Famous to whom?" I respond.
If the Colonizers ignore us,
it is not because we are Native,
it is because they do not want
the remembering;
they do not want us reminding them
that we who once were, still are;
that, as long as the children live,
so will live the memories of our ancestors.
That as long as bigotry haunts the human soul,
so will live our anger and our suffering.
We are an unwelcome and unsolicited
twinge;
galling bites,
on hot and soul-tossed nights
between sheets too *white* for comfort.

No, we are not famous.
We dash softly over darkened walls,
then weave our webs in window panes
of a people who so utterly
have hidden the Sun
that silk-laced Moonlight equally
is agony.

Perhaps the children of a thousand winters
hence will read our Native words,
and finally understand.

As I write I remember
the little spider speeding so lightly
across the cobbles.
"They never noticed you," I say.
and I am glad.
You spin enchantment;
we now know
to snare the enemy in
his own language starkly knit
in the realities and nocturnal dreams
of our Native spirits.
I am glad, Kuhljuyaang, that *We*,
and you
are not so tiny.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
22 January 1995

Commentary on *Racing with Spiders*

As Requested by the Ketchikan Indian Corporation

A poem is words; *its* Truth, more than words. Truth is a high mountain lake. Words, merely the surface, mirror the outer world. The inner spirit, the *soul* of poetry, dwells within the waters: transfused with unfathomable realities that sometimes even poets do not understand.

To dive deeply into poetry is to experience Truth.

The poem, R*acing with Spiders* speaks of an enemy; not an outer enemy, but an inner one. The enemy is the colonial spirit that allows a particular gender of a particular people to claim to be "The Founding Fathers" despite the fact that First Nations men -- and women -- have been here, solidly *founded*, since the beginning of time.

Language unifies. Knowing this, the Colonizer tried to take away our tongues, claiming that English was superior. Yet it would be a mistake for us to be reactionary, to denigrate English, because it too has a rich heritage.

Language is more than words. Our Native spirit *itself* speaks through the Haida carver's art, the potlatch and the dance. The carver's legacy, the communal *web*, the sweep of an Eagle dancer -- and poetry -- this language of spirit invalidates the bigotry of the Colonizer; it unifies *all* living beings.

Language and culture are inseparable. To speak English and other tongues in addition to our Haida language is to ascend the higher *mountaintop*: to see the world from the consciousness of more than one culture. As First Nations people powerfully alive, we can communicate from whatever height of mind and depth of heart we choose, in more than one culture's ability to hear. We can articulate our Native spirit eloquently, even -- when we *choose* to do so -- in the very language of the Colonizer.

Language is a strand that weaves the *fragments* into the *all*. We are Haida. We value our own language. But by whatever means *we* communicate, our spirits must be strong. We must see ourselves as one. We must not be deceived into denying this, nor into forfeiting our heritage.

This truth is the essence of *Racing with Spiders*.

The reality is that the language of the Colonizer is the only tongue many of us know. To survive we must appreciate who we are. We must breathe deeply, sensing that *we are related* to the sea, to the mountains, to the forests and to one another. We are the *all*.

Without our languages we do not cease to be First Nations. We no more lose our Nativeness than do any of our relatives who are mute. Words are not the only form of speech. Truly, many languages exist; from the cry of the eagle, to the manifold voices of the raven, to the subtle whispers that pass lightly between the trees.

All life communicates *soul*; the essence of life *itself* is a language. Across the generations, our ancestors and *all* living beings speak of the power to survive in the face of overwhelming odds. We who are alive today are exact testimony to that language of spirit. It behoves us, then, to commit our hearts unselfishly to our Native

ways. When our heritage and our hearts are strong, our children are strong. When our children are strong, *we* are strong.

For our children's sake we must keep our Native tongues, for each language is a silken strand in the larger web of the *all*: the pattern of the *Whole*. When a Native language dies, part of *us* -- part of all humanity -- further crumbles into *fragments*.

Together we must weave the dream that catches our own visions; our own dreams; our own realities; in our own languages. We must wrap in spider's silk the foreign English tongue, lest that tongue instead transform us into what most of us can never be successfully: The Colonizer in brown skin.

Racing with Spiders was a real experience. I actually did see a spider speeding across the cobbles last Saturday. This reminded me that, as the Colonizer's own Bible says, "The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king's palaces" (Proverbs 30:28).

The biblical analogue is not perfect. Spiders are real; in a house or in a forest. The self-proclaimed "kings" are not. I honour *Kuhljuyaang*, the Haida spider. I honour our First Nations. Our ability to shape cedar and poetry creatively -- using our own honed stone and the Colonizer's steel -- is our ability culturally to dwell where *we choose*. In our reintegration with the *all*, we are empowered to dash across even the Colonizer's walls at night, weaving webs of Truth in places that cannot be ignored.

In this regard, the brown spider is my teacher. She lives on, true to her nature, spinning her silk and gathering her food. Despite the *fragmentation* of her environment, she continues faithfully to weave, spinning from her inner being a pattern of the *Whole*.

We must do the same.

Spiders and indigenous people are close relatives: both are intelligent and spiritually powerful. In fact, as our ancestors know, everything that exists is intelligent and powerful. If some choose not to see Native artists as significant, then that is their choice and their loss. We are not tiny, and we will not go away. We are the children of our grandparents, of our Nunni and our Chinni. Our thousands of years upon this land are enough to sustain us through this crisis, or any crisis to come.

How'a!

Mitakoyasin!

John Medicine Horse Kelly
26 January 1995

The burden of humanity
Has always been that spirits of low

Consciousness

Too often sit in High Places

John Medicine Horse Kelly
21 May 1995

Moonlight

This dream is disguised
This dream is
Moonlight in forests,
Slipping down soft beams,
Whispering in shadows
Through the trees
"I love you."

Moonlight, looks like
Sunlight, only Sunlight
Shouts.
While Moonlight
Would slip by secretly
If it could.
But it couldn't.
I almost was caught
Unaware,
But I felt it
Coming;
Sliding silently
Through windows
Between grey clouds,
From a long, long time ago.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
15 October 1994

Haanji

My friend and I;
sacred journey;
trail under sky;
feet shod in otterskin;
my friend and I.

My friend and I;
we travel; we rise;
Sun and Moon descry;
feet shod in otterskin;
my Friend and I.

Haanji = Haida Returner,
i.e., reincarnated spirits

Otter: Dualism -- Sea otter provides skins for Haida chiefs' and matriarchs' garments. Land otter is mysterious. To look into her eyes is to have her capture your soul.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
7 March 1996

The Knowing

Native language is a conspiracy:
Code words scrawled
On dog-eared matchbooks
Spirited between First Nations;
Slipped past generations.

Native language is a conspiracy.
Watchful trepidations
Under cover of moonlight;
Stealthy whisperings:
"We are The People, YES!"

John Medicine Horse Kelly
23 March 1995

For April Love

And that's when you find things:
When you're not looking.
When you're looking for things
Is when you can't find them.
And it's those who learn to love
The small things
That they find;
Those are the ones
Who find the greatest
Things of all.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
20 November 1994

Haida Gwaii Anniversary

Night stroked the Earth
Lightly, with phantasmic fingers.
Father Sky!
It was your lovesong!
Pulsating, rhythmic flight;
Stars like Fireflies watched
From behind a filmy veil
of night.
While humans only
Dreamed of things
Meaningless and trite,
You spawned
Impassioned rivers
Beyond man's sight,
Penetrating
A procreant, vaginal Earth
With fertile
quivering columns
of multi-coloured
Light.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
30 November 1994

Ferry Tale

Queen of the North;
Inside Passage
On Canada Day.
Red Roses on every table.

Proud Killer Whales:
Killer Whales emblazoned
With Red Ovoids,
Slip past to starboard
Unnoticed.

The red roses are plastic.
My muffin, organic.
Or maybe?
The red roses are organic;
My muffin, plastic.

Unseen oarsmen slap the water,
Warriors raise their ghostly paddles,
And singing an ageless song,
Vanish in the mist.

The Queen moves on.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
1 July 1995

Meschiya

The woman bowed down
And murdered a flower:
A tiny ochre-coloured one
With a yellow sun centre.

Peekaboo bloom
Shielded by green grasses,
She found you
beaming
In Haida Gwaii,
And
callously
snapped
your
neck.

Meschiya,
my Haida Flower,
You felt your tiny life shatter.
You weren't spared the pain,
Three thousand miles away,

"Rapid City," the woman said,
"Was much more memorable.
Blossoms blooming all around:
Red, White and Blue.
Big, Beautiful and Bountiful!"

Mato Paha: Lila Wakan.

Memories of Meschiya.
I won't have flowers
Brought to me,
My daughter.
Walk in beauty.

Bring me to flowers.
We'll cherish
The tiny ones we find.
The flowers the Iron Men
Trample
are
the
most
dear.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
26 June 1995

Mato Paha = Lakota word for Bear Butte:
A Lakota prayer site near Sturgis, South Dakota.
Lila Wakan = Extremely sacred.
Iron Men = Yaats' X̲aadaay. Haida word for the Colonizers.

Mystery

Love is not happiness
Love is not sorrow.
Love takes more courage than both.
The mystery is:
How could anything so fragile as
love
Be so strong?
How could anything so soft,
Be so hard?

John Medicine Horse Kelly
21 February 1995

Haida Woman

The typical Haida Woman
Has two lips
With which to kiss her Haida man,
Two arms
With which to hold her
Haida man,
And to watch her Haida man:
Two thousand eyes.....

"And don't you forget it," she says.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
27 November 1994

Caves

Two weathered bones alone remain
Above the sleepless, churning sea
That watches this dark and timeless womb
In which a human frame should be
Wrapped in cedar, fetal-formed and *Whole;*
In Foam Woman's care for eternity.

Two shattered bones are all that stayed
Of the Haida woman tucked away
Within graven Eagle and Grizzly Bear's
Everlasting and vigilant gaze.

Once safely kept:

Beyond the raging, grasping sea;
Beyond the barriers of rock and bay;
Beyond the wild and torturing wind;
Beyond the fleeting of day to day;
Beyond summer wave and winter storm;
Beyond where the restless tide holds sway;

But not beyond
the Yaats' Xaadaay.

Two bones alone remain of we;
All of the *all* they left to be.
Scattered amidst the slivered debris;
The *fragments* of our humanity.

In Gwaii Haanas, *Beautiful Islands*
John Medicine Horse Kelly
July 1993

Yaats' Xaadaay = Iron Men:
Haida word for the Colonizer.

Soul Stealers

Against we and we alone
Yaats' Xaadaay,
Have we sinned.

Our longhouse is fallen,
our tongue is silenced,
our disincarnate names
drift like spirits' shadows.

Oh, Yaats' Xaadaay!
How could we allow you
to cross our souls *saying,*
"Jesus, was brown like us?"

How, *in the Name of He,*
from the cradle board
to the mortuary tree,
did we shatter
the Whole of we?

"Jesus, if you were brown like us!"
tell us!
Which of *all*
our endless fragments,
can we call home, now
that
the Iron Men have come?

We have not been
bought nor sold
like the trees and the fish,
and yet
heartless
agony
ex ists.

Our arms reach outward
and crack the brittle Sky;
the splinters pierce our bleeding sides,
"Father forgive them!
They know not what they do!"
But Mother Earth is dead to us;
she neither quakes nor answers,
and brown and broken clouds
yield no tears nor thunders.
Our heads hang. We moan,

"Yaats' Xaadaay, into your *spirit*
we commend our *hands*."

"Jesus, why were you were brown like us?"
we sing, but no sound comes.

Our ancestors own no song for the death of Trust.

Yaats' Xaadaay = Iron Men:
Haida word for the Colonizer

When the smallpox hit, they said that God was punishing us for worshipping graven images. To save our children, we cut down our totem poles ourselves.

T. Reginald Kelly
A Haida elder

Iit Gyaagaa, Klii ahls
John Medicine Horse Kelly
12 February 1995

Dissonance is

the Harmony experienced
by ten Haida singing
in the Skidegate Church.

"You should write a dictionary," she says.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
21 December 1994

Indian

Go talk to the Grandmothers and the Grandfathers;
They'll help you, but I can't.
I still live with anguish

Buried under memories,

Iced, until a numb chill
Distills away thoughts
Of children unfed; relationships shattered.
You go, you talk
To the Grandmothers and the Grandfathers.
Perhaps they'll tell you
What it means to be

Indian.

I want to be done with you,
To go to a secret place

Alone

Among ghosts and other relations.
I want to stay there
'Till the land moves

Beneath me;

'Till I taste the soft, clean scent
Of Mother Earth again.
I want to embrace Her
As my ancestors embraced Her,

Exposed

'To Sea, 'till waves infuse me;
'Till Wind and Sun and Moon turn

to Blood,

And

I Break Through,

Feel joy -- and pain -- again.

When I have done this;
When warm breath returns to me,
Then if still you wish to do so,
Come, tell me what it means
To be

Indian

John Medicine Horse Kelly
October 1991

Inspiration for

Winter Feast

The night was cold and bright, moonlight mirrored in newly fallen snow. My Bronco hugged the curves of an abandoned logging road threading its way precariously under the breast of Sleeping Beauty mountain.

"I got pregnant on purpose," my friend Aileen said. Tian, her two-year-old son slept peacefully beside her

Tian was named after a west coast village wiped out by smallpox, flu and social disintegration. Throughout Haida Gwaii, only five-hundred people in two villages had survived.

"Tian was a gift," Aileen said softly "I wanted something to fight for."

Her raven black hair glistened in the moonlight; her beauty as fresh as the Haida night.

The young mother interrupted my thoughts. "My friends drink too much. I think I do too."

I pulled off the road, snow crunching in protest.

"I'll be right back," I said.

The icy breeze nibbled at my nose and teased my waist-length hair. I waded into the snow and scooped some up; so clean and so icy it stung my fingers. Returning to the truck, I opened the door, my cupped hands aching with the cold. I ate a bit then extended the rest to my friend.

It was an offering.

"Here," I said. "When you feel like getting drunk come up here, rest in the moonlight, and eat some more."

Aileen's dark eyes softened. She smiled, acknowledging my gift. For the longest time we sat in silence, watching the moon dancing slowly across a blue-black shell-button sky. A lone owl called out. Stars above shone steadfastly; like elder's eyes.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
25 December 1995

Winter Feast

Floor of Earth,
Longhouse Sky;
Fire warms me.
Sun Chief dances
through ice winter day.
Snow is Sun-down
lightly wafting.

Children are laughing;
puffing at sun-beams
in drifting-down-snow.

Owl-winged Moon;
Shell button Sky,
Woman warms me.
Sun's Lover dances
through ancestor night.
Stars are Elder-eyes
brightly watching.

I am lulled to sleep,
drinking Moonlight;
Intoxicated by snow.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
8 December 1995

Haida

Environmentalists fight to preserve the land. We are not environmentalists. We are Haida. Environmentalists fight for the trees. They are not the trees.

See the trees? The trees are *us*. *All* the green things -- *all* the blades of grass -- are *us*; the animals are *us*; the waters are *us*; the swimming creatures in the inlets are *us*; the eagles and the ravens who fly above the trees are *us*; the land itself is *us*. We do not live on Haida Gwaii, *we are Haida Gwaii; the Islands of The People. We* are fighting to preserve ourselves. The survival of our land is the survival of ourselves; the survival of our children; the survival of *all* children.

That is why we fight. We do not fight for the land; we do not fight for human rights; we do not fight for the environment; we do not fight for the eagles; we do not fight for the killer whales. *All* that is here, and *all* that we fight for, is *us*.

We fight for *us*.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
6 November 1994

The Gift

When I chose to come to Haida Gwaii, I chose to live among my relatives. I chose the *all*. I chose to live in a world that few Iron Men care to understand; a world in various stages of disintegration and reintegration; of destruction and recovery. *All* First Nations people everywhere, including myself, are fragments. *All* of us are drawn by an incredible force to regain the *Whole*.

Despair and death are no strangers to us. But I know this much; living among my Haida relatives has taught me. Every individual is given a measure of pain to carry through this world. We have no choice about experiencing this. Pain is just there. But how we handle pain makes all the difference in our lives. If we carry our measure poorly, life disintegrates into chaos. If we carry our pain with courage and honor, we can do incredible things; we can touch the *Whole*; and anyone who touches the *Whole* recovers the *all*.

Pain, then, is like other gifts to us. Choice is built into it. Pain either makes us stronger or brings us to ruin. In this, as in all the Great Mystery's gifts, therefore, choice is the key. The more powerful the gift, the more powerful the outcome. And, within every *fragment* who touches the *Whole,* the more powerful becomes the *all*.

John Medicine Horse Kelly

December 1994

Haida Gwaii Is

Winter deaths; births, peace, conflict, elders dying, children playing, youths leaving, adults returning, salmon spawning, life, relatives, friends, enemies, working together, working apart, loss, gain, food sharing, traditions, Haida here, Haida in the cities, Haida united against the world, Haida divided against each other, stinging gossip, mutual trust,

Home: the hearth that warms,
Also can consume.

Weakness, shame, anger, joy, strength, myself, others, good, bad, greed, generosity, the Indian I sometimes wish I were not, the Haida I am proud to be, chiefs, fishermen, poets, loggers, argillite carvers, Lyell Island, blocking roads, chiefs and elders arrested, the voyage of the Lootas, Haida canoe rammed by a seaplane, six Haida in Vancouver for contempt of court, supreme court judge at a potlatch, Haida fighting for the right to fish, pole raisings, band politics, linguists,

But Haida Gwaii is us;
We fight for us.

Sobriety, drunkenness, spirituality, child abuse, shattered relationships, nunni's love, uncle's guidance, traditional clans, traditional songs, taking food home from a potlatch, trees silhouetted under an aurora, eagles wrestling in mid-air, the whoosh-whoosh of raven wings, cousins, blood, despair, celebration, smallpox, tuberculosis, diabetes, residential schools, anthropologists and archaeologists coming and going, and still after thousands of years we are

Haida Dancing!

John Medicine Horse Kelly
20 December 1994

The Edge

Look at us! We are *Haida*
Dancing! Not walking.
We are *Dancing*.
Dancing!
On the edge
of a knife.

"Life is like *walking* on the edge
of a knife," the elders say.

Hey, if we have to live on the
edge, we might as well dance!

John Medicine Horse Kelly
8 January 1995

Life!

Gather rosebuds while you may.

Is a Near Death Experience.

We just don't know it yet!

Does that mean
Death is a Near Life Experience?

"The warriors wait outside,"
The spirit chief told my Chinni
As he lay near death.
"My warriors are valiant. Like you, they
ncave never turned their backs in battle;
Have never run from the fight
We have come for you because
We are one man short,
But it is not time. Not quite yet.
We will return for you at battle's end."

Chinni: Haida word for grandfather.

The doctors did not know it,
But my chinni did.
He smiled and knew.
The Reverend Minister Peter Kelly,
Haida chief and warrior,
Recovered --
that time.

"Life is short,"
Uncle Horace said
Before he died.
"It is not how long
We live that matters,
But how well."

John Medicine Horse Kelly

10 January 1995

Rene Descartes Wasn't Born Here

John *Medicine Horse* Kelly
20 January 1882

Don't call me Indian,
Don't call me Native American.
I don't wear Wasicu labels;
I Connect, therefore
I am *Indigenous to*
Grandmothers, grandfathers,
Aunts, uncles, children,
Grandchildren, *Mother Earth and*,
My woman person;
Sky, Wind, Lakota, *Haida*
Sun, Moon, Raven, *Eagle*,
and
Other Earth Nations.

Don't call me Indian;
Don't call me Native American;
Don't label me at all.

I RELATE,
therefore,
I AM

●

Wasicu (washee-chu) =
Lakota word for the Colonizers.
Translates: "He talks too much"
and "the fat taker."

John Medicine Horse Kelly
1991

I Relate, Therefore, I am

ORDER COULD NOT RESULT FROM CHAOS IF CHAOS DIDN'T ALREADY CONTAIN ORDER WITHIN ITSELF, LIKE THE PATTERN OF AN OAK WITHIN AN ACORN. Order and chaos, Light and dark, love and hate, good and evil, hot and cold, motion and stillness, matter and space, time and timelessness, *Whole* and *fragment*. The boundless dichotomies. Are these the products of human thinking; merely of synaptic binary switches in the brain; of *on* and *off*? Or is systemic order really the basic stuff of the universe?

Physicists wrestle with the fact that orderly systems sometimes develop spontaneously from chaos, thus increasing order. Perhaps this *order* exists because at the Big Bang, when unitary matter reacted to First Motion, every *fragment* that was hurled outward "remembered" the intricate patterns of *Whole*. Some systems went further, duplicating themselves into newborn systems that duplicated again and again, *ad infinitum*.

To carry the concept further, this ability to systematically organize chaotic, *fragmented* matter and energy and then to *reproduce* is a primary description of a life force.

The stuff of the primordial Acorn -- matter, plasma, energy -- conceivably existed in some form within the Big Bang. Certainly this unitary existence contained the potential to spawn life -- to become self-aware. The possibility was real that one day some fragments would look around at the other fragments and sensing the *Whole,* would say, "I *feel*, therefore, I *exist*! Though I am a *fragment*, I am part of the *all*. I am not alone! *I relate, therefore, I am!*"

The spiritual elders of the Lakota, the Wicasa Wakan, teach respect for such realities. They know the Universe is alive and unfathomable: that *First Motion* is unimaginably powerful, vast and sacred. *This is Wakantanka: a Great Mystery.*

In the beginning was *First Motion*. And *First Motion* moved upon the face of the Deep; *existence* exploded outward. But, *each disintegrated fragment contained within itself the Seed: the original pattern of the Whole.* Thus, began the eternal dance of darkness and light; of chaos and order; of hate and love; of war and peace; of death and rebirth; of the void and consciousness; *of disintegration and reintegration;* of the knowledge of the university and the wisdom of the Native elder. Thus began us all. And thus every one of us, First Nations and all humanity alike, are 14 billion years old -- even our children.

We *relate*, therefore, *we are*.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
15 December 1994

Don't Feed the Bears

There are Grizzly Bears
On the University campus.
Bears! Everywhere!
Grizzled
Red and Black
Bears;
Bears loose in the Library;
Bears gorging
on Euro re-past;
Bears in blue jeans;
Bears in business suits;
Bears with notebooks;
Bears running amok
In the Mall;
Bears in the Classroom with
laptop computers;
Bears in the Student Senate;
Bears carrying pipes;
Potlatched Bears;
Kiva Bears;
Bears with elders praying.

Don't feed the Bears
Lest they lose their
Fear of Iron Men;
Lose their fear and
With resolute ovoid eyes;
Wild natures;
They keep their Power;
They confront us.
Bears, immune to
Colonizers,
Must be shot,
Lest they turn on us;
Challenge us!
Or worse:
With brown eyes,
Fearless open eyes,
Grizzly Bears go back
To the **Preserves**.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
3 May 1995

Eagles and Ravens

Wisdom without knowledge
Is far better than
Knowledge without wisdom

But, wisdom with knowledge

Is Power

Still, the wisest Eagle
Needs to watch out
For Power lines.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
17 December 1994.

Undefeated

To those who say
We are a defeated people,
I respond like Spring.
Sun follows Winter,
Earth, now, has spun
full circle,
Look upon us, now,
anew.
Look upon
the flourishing of
Our cultures;
Upon
the flowering
Of our grandchildren.
You **never**
Defeated us.

As before,
We renew this day
our songs;
We renew the waci,
our dances;
We renew *our bonds*
With Maka Unci,
With Earth,
our Grandmother;
With Anpa Wi,
The Day-Sun;
With Tate,
The Wind-Spirit;
And with Siigaay,
the Sea.
All **these**
are our relations!
It is a good day,
this day
A good day
to live!

Mitakoyasin.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
18 November 1994

Haida Summer

The sun rose in pink and golden fire over Hecate Strait this morning, light spilling through Pearle's kitchen window on a late September day.

"Indian summer," I remarked. "Wonder how long it will last?"

Come to think of it, I mused, Indian Summer comes and goes. Maybe that's why the Yaats' Xaadaay, the Iron Men, named it after us. Indian summer, they hoped. Wishful thinking on their part.

"Here, it's called Haida Summer," my cousin Pearle replied.

I smiled. The new-come Yaats' Xaadaay were wrong. For more than two hundred years, the Haida have watched *them* come each Spring and retreat each Autumn in fear of our mighty Winters. Maybe, then, we should rename it *Yaats' Xaadaay Summer*, because, every year, we have seen the Iron Men come and go.

We know the Haida are going to be here a long, long time. We shall be here as long as the land itself shall be, because we are the land. We shall be here until time's end, because it was in time's beginning that we saw our first sunrise here. We always have been here, and we shall continue to be here; for as long as late September mornings come and go, and for as long as the sun continues to rise in a sea of pink and golden fire over cold blue Hecate Strait on a crisp Autumn day.

We shall be here.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
21 September 1994

Racist

One day you'll look around
And, to your surprise,
Every one of us will be gone.
All the "Indians" escaped.
And then
You'll look around again
And realize
That all the time
You were wrong.
You never owned us.
We were born free.
It was you . . .
You were the one
Trapped in the prison.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
27 October 1994

Brothers

Seattle is dying;
The city, slowly
Choking to death
On Arterialschlerosis.
Nothing can get out;
Nothing can get in;
Suffocating in its own waste;
Bloated with excess;
Freedom gone;
Breath denied;
Congestion,
Followed by
Car
diac arrest;
Turning grey as death
And cold like
Concrete highways
Going no where.
Oh, Duwamish Chief!
They weren't brothers after all!
Those - - -iron -
- - - - - cages -
- - - - - - - - - - inch - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - forward - - - - - - - - - -
- without - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -bleeding.

On the road to Haida Gwaii
John Medicine Horse Kelly
27 December 1993

The World Series

Races and

Hue

in a child's eye view;

a child's why? view.

Oh, thrill to the game!

chill to the game!

through stubborn

cracks

in an

out-and-out fence.

Oh, cry for the Child!

sigh for the Child!

just

one Crack at it;

one *tiny* *crack*

John Medicine Horse Kelly
19 April 2000

The human mind that brands other human minds is subject to a limitation of mind. Although every fragment contains the Whole how can any *fragment* claim to be the *Whole*?

Haida Warrior

(My apologies to Chief Skidegate's boat)

War has changed
(the old Haida Warrior
lamented).
The old way is gone.
We kill now,
without shedding blood.
We bleed,
but no one sees it.
We die,
but never lay down
to rest.

The old war was easier:
We fought
with honour. We knew
our enemies;
knew who could be
respected
and who could not.
But, now --
the enemy has
no *colour.*

Brothers and sisters, why?
among
ourselves, do we fight
without
scrutiny or sight?
How did
our warriors lose
their
honour?

If our nations are
to survive,
(the old Haida warrior
sighed, from
bloody wounds
hidden deep
inside), I think, now,
we must
learn who the enemy is;
learn why,
and for what, we are
fighting.

It is time, now, he cried,
we must
learn a new way:
Our warriors
must learn how to fight
without
being at war;
we must
learn how to be at war
without
fighting; so that <u>all</u>
First Nations
that did survive the
old wars,
can *win* without
any
Child
losing.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
17 January 1994

Wisdom's Child

Any child
is far *wiser* at birth
Than
any theologian
at *death*.

Suffer the little children
To come unto me,
And forbid them not:
For of such is the
Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:14).

Verily, I say unto you,
Except ye be converted,
And become as little children,
Ye shall not enter
The Kingdom of Heaven.
Whosoever therefore
Shall humble himself
As this little child,
The same is the greatest
In the Kingdom of Heaven
(Matt. 18:3-4).

John Medicine Horse Kelly
15 April 1995

Agenda

When it comes to the exercIse of power, motIve is everything.

K

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t

13 March 1995
John Medicine Horse Kelly

. . . . and she talked about sovereignty and she talked about oppression and she talked about Haida rights and she talked about Power and she talked about money and she talked about history and she talked Lyell Island and she talked about the struggle and getting what is our . . . . but she never seemed to notices that she never once mentioned – the word "children."

Peace

At all costs
Is WAR!

Some people can never experience

Peace

Unless it, too,

is passionate.

The lust for intensity
Is the root of all conflict.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
8 April 1995

Warrior!

The truly powerful
Can afford to be gentle.

True courage does not require
The absence of fear.

"A Haida warrior who knows
he is about to be taken as a slave
will stand in the hail of arrows
rather than dishonour his family,
his clan and his people.
Self-sacrifice is the *power*
of the Haida Nation;
Honour is our way of life."

-- T. Reginald Kelly

John Medicine Horse Kelly
3 March 1995

Self DeterminNation

up,

How can we build our Haida Nation
When we tear each other

down?

John Medicine Horse Kelly
6 April 1995

Wendy,

Another late night poem -- perhaps too stark for the book. But who knows. Hidden in this poem is survival, not death -- the survival of those who choose to live honourably; choose to live with courage and with moral fortitude. Life without these qualities is not life; not life -- even though we live. My prayer is with the Haida Nation; with my own people. *We* must choose, now, to live. No one else can choose for us.

Once Were Warriors

Tribe follows tribe,
Nation follows Nation
like the waves of the sea.
Here rises and falls
the Haida Nation:
Mighty on the Coast . . .

And FEARLESS!
to the last
warriors.

DEATH!
It is the order of Nature
and regret is useless.
Yes, regret is useless.

Tribe follows tribe,
Nation follows Nation
like the waves of the sea.
Here lives and dies
the Haida Nation:
Mighty on the Coast . . .

Our FIERCEST!
foes are
each other.

IF!
It is the order of Nature
and regret is useless,
then...regret...is...useless...

Chief Seattle
Duwamish Nation 1854

John Medicine Horse Kelly
Haida Nation
3 November 1995

Epilogue To
Once Were Warriors

My sister Carol,

Thank you for being you.. In your directness truly you are a friend. Yes, I cry into the wind (and I write poetry, too). Yes, I talk to the Great Mystery -- often from moment to moment. And, yes, that One says things to me that sound very much like what you say: if our people survive it is meant to be. Tribe follows tribe, nation follows nation. We are like the waves of the sea. Regret is not a useful option. If we follow the Creator's Spirit in communion with our spirits then all is well. If not -- if trouble and frustration cut us off -- then we know not where we are, nor who we are, nor where we are going. The troubles of our families and our First Nations easily can crush us. But the battle that singly and collectively seems to be ours is not ours really. The Source of the Sea bears the true responsibility -- and the only pure Love -- toward us all.

The Great Mystery says this to us: love first, then "what your hand finds to do, do with all your might." This is what I call the warrior spirit: to act from Love, not from angered violence; from commitment, not from self interest. Our inner being compels us to be true to ourselves, to our families, to our clans, and to our tribes, We *must* do this. True, we are the *waves* in our *ways of being*; but in our *being* -- whatever our color -- we are the Sea. The waves pass one by one. Only the Great Mystery knows how long each wave shall last. Ultimately, only the Great Mystery -- and the Sea -- remain.

My responsibility is to follow my heart: to love and to act with uncompromised integrity; to be a warrior with all my soul. My battle is not to decide for myself whether *it is a good day to die or a good day to live*. That belongs to the Great Mystery. What truly matters is *how* we live, not how *long* we live.

I wrote a poem to that effect, but it still is in the initial stages; not ready for release yet, just for the consideration of the few intimate brothers and sisters I have. Perhaps it is too grim for my book. Perhaps not. We shall see.

Native Preference

The evening of 24 April 1995, an unprecedented shift took place in my poetry. I edited my book, removing from all poems but two -- the word "White."

I would say more, but trauma is not as important as insight. The shift stems from the pain and the punishment I now see we, the Haida people, needlessly inflicting upon ourselves.

It is true the Colonizer has oppressed us, but why we are adopting his racial values, or should I say his lack of values? Throughout generations of racial abuse, our pride alone defended us. But, ironically, the sustaining pride of the last generation could in this generation become the arrogance that destroys us.

Prejudice is a brother to arrogance. It implies that a human being is inferior to us because of that person's race. Prejudice is not reasoned, it is anti-reason. It is an ignorant gut-level reaction that does not respond to logic; a reaction that blinds us both to friend and to enemy. One particularly dehumanising form of prejudice claims that another race is incapable of comprehending and acculturating our beliefs and values. This is darkness. It denies to every individual, and it denies by extension to all humanity, the power to learn from one another; the power to build upon the commonality, the true spirituality that exists in every color of the *all of us*.

Native Preference, designed by *White* and First Nations people working together, counters racial bias. Native Preference strengthens self-determination. But can we afford to insert our own racial bias; to use Native Preference to banish all white people? This is prejudice masquerading as preference: the exact spirit the Colonizers used against us. We will mutilate our spirit and our Nation if we nurture that seed within ourselves.

We must embrace, not reject, individuals of all colors who share a common vision with the spiritually mature among us. We must warn others concerning the virulence of our own anger and of our own fears, knowing that *the line between Native Preference and Native Prejudice can be thin -- and that an even finer line exists between Native Prejudice and Native Racism.*

On my way to work yesterday morning, the reality seized me: it is not the Colonizer that our negativity is destroying. It is ourselves we are tearing apart; we are fragmenting into even tinier *fragments* the thin hope of *wholeness* left in the wake of the Yaats' X̲aadaay.

We must not sanction ignorance merely because others were ignorant before us. Racism is infectious, like other diseases. And, like a disease of the night, racism easily is spread under cover of darkness between individuals; under cover of ignorance between Nations.

We cannot build our Haida Nation up, by tearing other Nations down.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
26 April 1995

The writings from which I removed the word "white" include:

- "Rene Descartes Was Not Born Here:" "White labels" became "Wasicu labels."
- An old title has changed: "Yaats' Xaadaay Reality" became "One Race Reality."
- "Commentary on Racing With Spiders:" "White people" became "Colonizers."
- "Dream Catcher:" "White man" became "iron man."
- "The People, YES!" "Words made of white shadows" became "Words made of iron shadows."
- "Declaration of a Non-Indian:" "The White man's expectations" became "The Colonizer's fantasies."
- Various footnotes: "Yaats' Xaadaay = Iron man. Haida word for white people" became "Yaats' Xaadaay = Iron man. Haida word for the Colonizers."

Due to the nature of the messages, "white" was retained in the poems "Racing With Spiders," and "We Are the World."

Apparitions

In the dark, I heard Thee, Stars,
Softly singing to the Sun.
"Now sleep, *Shining* One;
Sleep deep and long;
Now sleep while dusks of days,
Drift toward dawns.
Do not weep, Radiant Child,
We are *all* thy Dreams.
Thy time of clouded tears
Is come and gone.
Now rest, be still;
Now peace is come."

One weary *Star* winks and yawns;
One toil worn sentinel of the Day
Sleeps and slips away;
A northern ochre blush
Glides deeply into blue.
Be still my soul! O' Heavens, hush!
All Thy heart lies open unto me.
Now slides the silent meteor on,
And leaves a shining furrow,
As Thy thoughts in me.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson,

"Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal" 1681.

Our Sun is a child of the stars.
Like us: Stars, Elders, Dreamers, Ancestors;
Come in *all* colors and brightnesses.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
12 June 1995

Deep Waters

I am like sunlight in water
Ever-changing with each
Dancing shaft of light.
I am a man, but
I, too, contain multitudes;
A pattern of light
Scattered through
The deep waters
Of my ancestors.

John Tasunka Pejuta Kelly
10 October 1894

November Love

Love is a night tempest,
a hale wind,
Spinning under dark clouds.
Oh, trees, waiting by the water,
Waves are your fingers;
Rocks are your drums.
Come, trees,
Come, trees!
Come dancing with the wind.
Nothing more.
Come bending or breaking.
Nothing more.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
27 November 1994

Dream Catcher

Iron man,
You are not
Spiderman.

You took this
Red willow hoop,
This web of Life,
And gave back
Splinters and
Cobwebs.
Mitakoyasin!
All my relations . . .
Lie shattered.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
27 December 1993

Commentary on Dream Catcher

In the poem, *Spiderman* is Iktomi, the Lakota spider: a tricky character who often tries to help, but tends to get tangled up in his own devices. Iktomi did well, though, in giving people the *dream catcher*: a small willow hoop with a web woven inside of it. The dream catcher hangs over children's beds and other places where it can snag bad thoughts and dreams, letting only good ones through. To this day, the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota and other First Nations craft it for this purpose.

M*itakoyasin*, a frequent expression in Lakota spiritual life, translates as *all my relations*. *Mitakoyasin* gives thanks that all living things are related. In *Dream Catcher*, *Mitakoyasin* acknowledges those among my adopted people, the Lakota, who years ago encouraged me to find my relatives among the Skidegate Haida. My struggle for reintegration is a tiny part of a larger battle. All First Nations people today are warriors faced with a challenge more deadly than any conflict in our thousands of years on Mother Earth. We faced ice ages and prevailed; we faced floods, famines, earthquakes and wars; yet still we survived. Never before have we faced total destruction: the annihilation of our families and languages; our nations and tribes -- Mother Earth herself. *Dream Catcher* is not negative. It is not "reverse racism." The poem universally is human; evidence of our battle and a legacy for generations to come. This is our prayer: We will flourish; we *will* pass the unbroken Circle, the *Dream Catcher,* intact to our children, to their children and to their great-great grandchildren.

Mitakoyasin!

The People, Yes!

Yaats' Xaadaay,
What do I call you?
What do I call myself?
If you are the "majority culture;"
If you are "dominant;"
I become a minor
And, by my own mouth,
you dominate me.

Why have I allowed you to weave
The web of my own understanding?
You are numerous, yes;
But not dominant;
We are fewer, yes;
But not submissive.

Words made of iron shadows;
Are not substance.

In my words, therefore --
In my nunni's words --
I will call you
Yaats' Xaadaay,
The iron man.
You brought hardness to me;
Brought cold-steel hardness, yes.

To my Lakota unci
You will be wasicu;
You take the fat;
You talk too much,
Too many ravenous words, yes.

As for my people,
Our ancestors teach
Our words to be few.
We will be
Haida.
My relatives will be
Lakota,

We are the "people!" YES!

Yaats' Xaadaay = Iron man.
Haida word for the Colonizer
Nunni (nun-eye) = Haida grandmother
Unci (oon-chee) = Lakota grandmother

John Medicine Horse Kelly
25 February 1995

We Are the World

The Whites distrust the Indians;
The Indians distrust the Latinos;
But *the Latinos are the Indians*
And they both forgot.

The Whites think they're Somebody,
In reality they are Everybody.
Our Haida Elders are dying;
But their words must never wither!
So the Potlatch carries on.
Yes, the Dancing carries on!
And the Spanish tongue grows stronger;
And their numbers are increasing;
And Africans seize the Senate;
And Indians petition the Parliament;
And Jews control the commerce;
And Asians storm the colleges.
Yes, the Dancing carries on!
And the

Racists are afraid of Everybody
Not white, ***even themselves****.*
Too bad they can't Dance

Alone.

Truth is,
Nobody but nobody is anybody

Alone.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
24 December 1994

The stereotypes in this poem do not reflect the opinion of the author.

Progeny

We are not sovereign.
We are wiser than that.
We do not need to reign;
We are the children of rain;
The offspring of oceans and inlets;
The progeny of wind.
We circle with the seasons;
With the Moon and Sun;
We flow with the tides;
With the rivers and streams.
We are not sovereign.
We have no need to be.
We are the people, YES!
We are Haida Gwaii;
We are *Whole*;
We are kindred;
We are free.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
25 February 1995

Rose Spit

Wave after wind-tossed wave strokes her
shore.
Turquoise breakers rise and fall; rush and explode.
The woman, aroused, lithely arches her stone
beaded back;
Her thin tightly-drawn body throbs, swiftly
mounting
Between the hissing spume and impassioned
thunder
Of two equipotent seas. She shrieks wildly in
the wind;
She cries fervidly to a Killer Whale; she moans
softly
To a Raven. Her airy foam fondles his night black
wings.
She yields to the gravid tide. She sighs, and
births;
In the presence of *All Living,* she issues forth:
the Haida Nation.

". . . and a raven, walking along the
beach one day, spotted a clam shell . . ."

John Medicine Horse Kelly
of the Naikoon People

The Returners

And the darkness that was empty
Saw the brightness, that was energy
And the darkness was enraged
Because the brightness
Contained everything,
While it was nothing.
And the darkness tried
To devour the brightness,
So that it could contain
Everything and, that failing,
The darkness tried to trick
The brightness into thinking
It, too, was darkness and
That darkness was brightness,
Then all would be darkness;
Then all would be nothing.
But the Great One saw this:
The Great Mystery, who is
Beyond everything, and
Who contains everything,
Even the brightness
and the darkness.
And the Great Mystery said,
"This will not be."
Then First Motion moved again,
As It had moved in the beginning.
Existence exploded outward;
Filled all the Universe,
And ignorance rolled up
Like a blanket.
The Buffalo, the Salmon;
All the Earth People returned.
And,
all became brightness.
Even the darkness.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
8 April 1995

Declaration of a Non-Indian

I, for one, will not fulfill
The Colonizer's fantasies.
I will not be savage
Like a beast for him;
I will not be childlike
And spiritual for him.
I refuse to be the wild Indian;
I refuse to be the tame one, too.
In fact, I will not be Indian at all.
Why should I allow myself to be named
By the 500-year-old mistake
Of a lost Italian?
My relatives name me.
I am Haida.

By day, I stand
Strong upon Our land.
And, by night, I rest in
Earth-woman's embrace.
I am not an Indian;
I am not a savage;
I am not a spiritual-child.
I am a man.
I *breathe honour*;
I am Haida.

John Medicine Horse Kelly
21 October 1994

APPENDIX B

Social, Economic and Political Systems: Customs and Traditions

Concept

Different cultures conduct their business, commemorate events and honour people in different ways. For Haida people, the potlatch is the heart of the system by which people honour others, define territories and resources, present issues and make major decisions.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will learn about the importance of the potlatch system
- Students will research potlatches in their own families and clans
- Students will compare Haida customs and traditions with those of other First Nations
- Students will plan and put on a feast honouring their transition to Secondary School

Srwaansang / One / Srwaansing

Objective

Students will learn about the importance of the traditional Haida potlatch system.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Haida Culture in Custody: The Masset Band; Mary Lee Stearns; University of Washington Press, Seattle; Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver; 1981.
- A Haida Potlatch; Ulli Steltzer, Douglas & McIntyre, Ltd., 1615 Venables St., Vancouver, BC, V5L 2H1; 1984.
- Haida potlatch videos: Vince Collison, editor; Council of the Haida Nation; Old Massett Village; PO 589 Old Massett Village, Haida Gwaii, VOT 1M0;
- A Strict Law Bids Us Dance; on file, School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte)
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-1*
- Student Portfolios

Student Activity

- ❑ Invite elders to share with students information about potlatches and feasts in the past and in the present. Encourage students to ask questions about the different types of potlatches. Ask students to include questions about the hosting of a feast or potlatch including the serving, gift-giving and speech protocols. Students may wish to supplement their knowledge utilising the information contained in the resources or in similar materials.
- ❑ Have students consider phrases they would like to learn in Haida to introduce themselves at a potlatch. Ask invited elders to assist students with their individual requests. Have all students listen and repeat the Haida phrases as the elders pronounce them. If possible, as students are practising orally, write the phrases on the board. Ask students if they would like their names next to their Haida phrases.
- ❑ Ask students to work in small groups. Include elders and/or parents if possible. Have students brainstorm what they already know about traditional Haida feasts and potlatches. Have a recorder in each group note comments for whole-class discussion time.
- ❑ Ask students to report on the results of their brainstorming. Note their comments on the board. Ask students to share any new information they have learned from the elder or parent involved with their group.
- ❑ Inform students that they will be planning and putting on a feast at school. Encourage students to prepare for the activity by researching the potlatch system. Encourage them to ask elders, parents or other community members about feasts they have hosted or attended. Have students record the results of their research on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-1*, including a family photo of a feast or potlatch if possible.
- ❑ Have students express in their portfolios their feelings about being involved in a potlatch in the past or about their involvement in the upcoming one.

Sdang / Two / Sding

Objective

Students will compare and contrast traditional feasts and potlatches in the past and in the present.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Chart paper
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-1* and *SEP-2*

Student Activity

❑ Have students share with a partner or small group what they learned during their research about feasts and potlatches. If they have included a photo on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-1*, suggest that they share it with the group. Encourage students to practise the Haida phrases they have chosen to learn to introduce themselves at their school feast.

❑ Ask invited elders or community members to work with small groups of students. Challenge students to compare what they have learned at home about recent potlatches with what the elders shared about traditional potlatches and feasts in the past. Have a recorder in each group note comments for whole-class discussion time.

❑ Post large sheets of chart paper on the wall. Ask students to report on the results of their discussions. Note their comments on the chart paper under the headings "Past" and "Present". Encourage students to use the chart-paper notes to compare similarities and differences about potlatches in the past and in the present. Have them record their comparisons on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-2*.

Hlrun.ahl / Three / Hlrun7uhl

Objective

Students will research and compare the traditional Haida potlatch system with that of other First Nations.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Map of First Nations from First Nations Studies 12 IRP
- Address list of First Nations from First Nations Studies 12 IRP
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-3*
- Haida potlatch videos: Vince Collison, editor
- Lillooet Band (Video); Knowledge Network, date unknown
- A Strict Law Bids Us Dance (Video); on file, School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte)
- Chief Gaala: Oliver Adams (Video); Oliver Adams family, Old Massett Village
- Hamatsa Dancers (Video); Alert Bay Kwakiutl.
- Student Portfolios

Student Activity

❑ Have students work with a partner or a small group. Distribute copies of the map

showing the traditional territories of other First Nations. Encourage each group to choose another First Nation they would like to research

- ❑ After groups have chosen which potlatch system they would like to research, have them write letters to the appropriate Band Councils introducing themselves and describing their Haida Grade 8 Language and Culture activities. Discuss with students what personal information they feel they should include in their letters and how they should request potlatch information in return. For example, students may wish to request access to potlatch videos for the duration of their research project. Have groups produce the final copies of their letters on blank Student Activity Sheets.
- ❑ As groups receive responses, have them compare what they have learned about traditional Haida feasts and potlatches with those of other First Nations. Have students note the similarities and differences on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-3* in preparation for whole-class discussion. Students may wish to supplement their knowledge utilising the information contained in the resources or in similar materials.
- ❑ When groups are ready, have each present to the class the results of its research. Suggest to students that they use this opportunity to practise the introductions and Haida phrases they plan to present at the upcoming student feast. Invite elders to participate in the student presentations to provide the class with feedback on their Haida phrases. Encourage the elders to provide further insights as students compare the traditional Haida system with others.
- ❑ Have students write a "thank you" to the First Nations that provided them with information. Encourage students to share in the letters how they felt about their research projects. They also may wish to include these reflections in their portfolios.

Stansang / Four / Sdansing

Objective

Students will research and compare the different types of traditional Haida feasts and potlatches.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Gyaehlingaay: Traditions, Tales and Images of the Kaigani Haida (131 pages, maps, folklore. Some text in Haida and English on the same pages.); Carol M. Eastman, et al.
- Haida potlatch videos: Vince Collison, editor
- Haida Culture in Custody: The Masset Band; Mary Lee Stearns
- A Haida Potlatch; Ulli Steltzer
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-4*
- Student Portfolios

Student Activity

- ❑ Invite elders to share with students information about the different types of potlatches and feasts. Encourage students to consider which of the various types of potlatches or feasts they would like to research further.
- ❑ Have students work with a partner or a small group interested in the same research subjects. Encourage students to ask elders, parents and other knowledgeable persons to assist them in learning more about

specific types of potlatches. Students may wish to supplement their knowledge utilising the information contained in the resources or in similar materials. Have students record the results of their research on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-4* in preparation for sharing with the class. If possible, suggest to students that they include videos, written material and family stories in their presentations.

- ❑ As each group is ready to present its information, challenge students once again to introduce themselves in Haida to the class. Have students listen to the presentations and record on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-4* new information about customs and traditions they have learned from each presenting group.
- ❑ Encourage students to reflect in their portfolios upon their appreciation of customs and traditions in the Haida feast and potlatch system.

Tleehl / Five / Tleehll

Objective

Students will choose a story for sharing at their feast.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Gyaehlingaay: Traditions, Tales and Images of the Kaigani Haida (131 pages, maps, folklore. Some text in Haida and English on the same pages.); Carol M. Eastman, et al
- Haida Myths and Histories; collected by John R Swanton; edited and translated by John Enrico
- Haida Texts and Myths: Skidegate Dialect; John R. Swanton
- Haida Texts: Masset Dialect; John R. Swanton
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-5*
- Student Portfolios

Student Activity

- ❑ Invite elders to share stories and legends with the class. You also may wish to provide students with written versions of the stories. Encourage students to consider which stories they would like to tell at their feast. Students may wish to supplement their knowledge utilising the information contained in the resources or in similar materials. Have them think about Haida phrases they would like to learn for including in their stories.
- ❑ Have students work with a partner or a small group. When groups have chosen their stories, ask invited elders to assist students with their Haida language requests. In preparation for their story planning, suggest that students note their Haida phrases on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-5*.
- ❑ Encourage students to practise their story-telling with visiting elders. Challenge them to include as much Haida as possible in the story. Students may wish to divide the responsibility of the story-telling among members of their groups. Have students note on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-5* any story details they would like to keep as a reference.
- ❑ Suggest to groups that they may wish to practise with another group before telling their stories at the feast. Include invited elders to assist the story-telling groups with their Haida phrases.
- ❑ Have students reflect in their portfolios upon the experience of story-telling and how they feel about sharing a story at their feast.

Tluwan.ahl / Six / Tllrun7uhl

Objective

Students will plan the feast that honours their transition to Secondary School.

Suggested Learning Resources

- Haida Culture in Custody: The Masset Band; Mary Lee Stearns
- A Haida Potlatch; Ulli Steltzer
- Haida potlatch videos: Vince Collison, editor
- Chart paper
- Video camera
- BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-6* and *SEP-7*

Student Activity

- ❑ Invite elders and other members of the community to discuss the protocol surrounding the type of feast the class has chosen. In addition, ask the visitors to describe the various details involved in preparing for such a feast: the food gathering, food preparing, hosting, inviting, gift preparing and giving, food serving, planning for speakers, thanking and so forth. Encourage students to pay close attention so that each can choose an aspect for which to be responsible. To further their knowledge students also may refer to books on Haida cultural practices.

- ❑ Divide the students into groups according to their preferences. Have each group plan how it will perform its tasks for the feast. Suggest to students that they use BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-6* to develop their action plans. If possible, invite elders and other community members to participate in the critical planning stage.

- ❑ As groups develop their plans, record their progress on large sheets of chart paper. To synchronize the planning of the entire event, encourage students to check and compare their work frequently with the other groups.

- ❑ Inform students that they should involve other community members as much as possible. Brainstorm with the class various ways of doing this, from asking for help with the feast preparation to inviting guests and speakers. For follow up, note class discussion results on chart paper.

- ❑ When the feast day arrives, videotape the event for students to reflect upon later. In particular, it will be useful for students to self-evaluate their Haida-language introductions, their story-telling and any songs or dances they have chosen to perform.

- ❑ You may wish to have students write a newspaper article for Haida Laas and for the Queen Charlotte Islands Observer that properly honours and thanks all participants. In planning, the class already may have chosen one group to be responsible for this; otherwise you may wish to use the opportunity as a learning experience for all students. Students could plan the content of their newspaper article on BLM/Student Activity Sheet *SEP-7*.

- ❑ Have students reflect in their portfolios upon the experience of planning and attending their feast. Encourage them to note as well what they have learned about the customs and traditions of the Haida social and political system.

Suggested Learning Resources

Social, Economic and Political Systems Customs and Traditions

Books

- Gyaehlingaay: Traditions, Tales and Images of the Kaigani Haida (131 pages, maps, folklore. Some text in Haida and English on the same pages.); Carol M. Eastman, Elizabeth A. Edwards, Lillian Pettviel and Duane Pasco; Burke Museum Publications, distributed by the University of Washington Press: Seattle; 1991.
- Haida Culture in Custody: The Masset Band; Mary Lee Stearns; University of Washington Press, Seattle; Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver; 1981.
- Haida Myths and Histories (Haida and English); collected by John R Swanton; edited and translated by John Enrico; Queen Charlotte Islands Museum Press; Haida Gwaii Museum at Qay'llnagaay; Skidegate, BC, V0T 1S1; 1995.
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Video

- Lillooet Band; Knowledge Network, date unknown
- A Strict Law Bids Us Dance; on file, School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte)
- Chief Gaala: Oliver Adams; Oliver Adams family, Old Massett Village
- Hamatsa Dancers; Alert Bay Kwakiutl.
- Haida potlatch videos: Vince Collison, editor; Council of the Haida Nation; Old Massett Village; PO 589 Old Massett Village, Haida Gwaii, VOT 1M0;

Other

- Map of First Nations from First Nations Studies 12 IRP
- Address list of First Nations from First Nations Studies 12 IRP

Additional Resources

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