

# JIDWÁ:DQH “LET’S BECOME AGAIN”

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This narrative provides background on the International Indigenous Elders Summit of 2004 and the subsequent documentaries shared in various forums, including the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health Conference in April of 2007. It is the story of how Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous epistemologies, and Indigenous pedagogies require participation, engagement, and experience to facilitate the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. It is also the story of how academic research and resources can be utilized by and for Indigenous communities. The key is the development of true partnerships in which communities, Elders, and individuals are not merely the subject of research, but the animating force for the development, transmission, and utilization of knowledge. Through these community-campus partnerships innovative resources have been developed to transmit knowledge. The summit and the outcomes from it were not the result of any single person or project. The summit was the result of many people, many projects, and many visions coming together in true partnership towards the protection and promotion of Indigenous worldviews and our place in the world.

## THE PARTNERSHIP OF BECOMING AGAIN

Successful partnership requires that all parties be viewed as equals with a shared stake in the outcomes. Sadly, mainstream universities, most of their researchers, and most research funding agencies do not allow this level of equality. In the instance of the International Indigenous Elders Summit, Indigenous scholars and organizations brought resources together to assist the community of Six Nations in achieving their goals. Elders and youth from North, South, and Central America came together to find solutions to the critical social, economic, and health issues facing Indigenous communities; the partners included academics, the traditional hereditary Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council, community members, community leadership, Elders, youth, national organizations, and spiritual leaders. Common goals were developed through community meetings and spiritual gatherings; and a common vision was established. Relationships were facilitated throughout the community process, which has extended well beyond the original expectations of all the participants.

As an example of how this specific partnership has been shaped by the stakeholders themselves, we examine the dissemination of the “outcomes” of the summit. The summit Elders were a driving force of this process, and requested that all the information discussed be shared as widely as possible to help resolve historical trauma and the resulting health, social, and eco-

conomic issues. The youth supported the intent of the Elders and also wanted to share their ideas. The goal was to communicate the results of this event through all means including the development and dissemination of Elders/youth declarations authored by the Elders and the youth in attendance. These collective statements articulate fundamental ideas on the environment, ending violence against Indigenous women, and advancing human rights of Indigenous peoples. They serve both as a call to action as well as a guide for further action. (Copies of both declarations are included at the end of this paper).

While papers and presentations have been, and continue to be, a means of transmission of knowledge in Western scientific circles, alternative forms of communication were needed to reach communities and individuals outside of the academic realm. To this end, video documentation of the summit was undertaken. It is being developed into a series of documentaries which, it is hoped, will make the history of the summit and its outcomes more accessible to diverse audiences. The first of these documentaries is entitled “Jidwá:doh,” a Cayuga word that means “Let’s Become Again.” It is an apt description of the hopes and goals of the summit as well as an accurate representation of the process that brought the summit into being. The summit was a culmination of fifteen years of relationships established through research in Indigenous communities and grassroots participation in traditional gatherings. These relationships and exchanges resulted in a collective effort to address historical trauma and the subsequent intergenerational impacts.

## JOURNEYING TOWARD COMMUNITY CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS

For more than two decades, I have been struggling with Western constructs of what is Indigenous and what is Western. While I am a Mohawk woman, I have been educated as a cultural anthropologist and, in 1995, completed a PhD dissertation on the Lubicon Cree. I am still learning what all those identities and realities really mean. My re-education began while researching the Lubicon, a Cree hunting society from northern Alberta. They had minimal “contact” with settlers until the completion of the “road” into Little Buffalo in 1978. By 1980, there were at least 10 major oil companies with over 400 wells within the territory of the Lubicon (Asch, 1986; Goddard, 1990; Martin-Hill, 2008). They urged me to help them raise awareness about their struggle and create a relationship between them and the traditional

Haudenosaunee Council. The complex web of relationships between the “traditional Hereditary Council” of Six Nations and my research became intertwined when the leadership of the Lubicon Cree of Alberta, who held the Confederacy Council in high regard, wanted from me, not my skills as a researcher, but my “Mohawk-ness” as an Indigenous person. For me to follow Indigenous ethical protocols in the *field* required a relationship of reciprocity, and what they wanted I could not easily provide. My research became mired in my own community’s view of me, a Mohawk woman, raised off reserve, doing research in a northern Cree community for a PhD in Anthropology, and living at Six Nations, Ontario; at the same time pressured for concrete help by a Cree community thousands of miles away. What could be more confusing and complex?

My father-in-law was a hereditary Chief and a member of the traditional Longhouse community. In order to achieve reciprocity, I had to return home from Alberta, armed with documentaries, pictures, and “the plight of the Lubicon” and explain to unfamiliar people why they should care about this “land claim” way out in northern Alberta. As a product of assimilation policy, I was not fluent in the language, was not raised “Longhouse,” did not know my own culture or history very well. However, I was now standing in the Onondaga Longhouse and asking the Confederacy to help the Lubicon. As you can imagine, it was terrifying for me and probably them too. Eventually, I succeeded, with my in-laws support, and returned to Little Buffalo with a Confederacy Chief. What happened next was unforeseeable, at least from my vantage point. A long journey of the mind and heart was beginning and discoveries of identity, Indigenous knowledge, vision, and the sacred all revealed themselves over the next two decades.

## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY

My community, Six Nations, Ontario, has greatly influenced how I think about central questions of who we are, what makes us Haudenosaunee, and what it means to be an Indigenous scholar. I still reside at Six Nations and teach at McMaster University, as well as Six Nations Polytechnic. The teachings of Elders and my community have helped me find a sense of peace with the concept of “Mohawk anthropologist.” The community, at times critical of my position/work, has had to grapple with the idea of having an anthropologist live next door. Having an anthropologist live in the community was sometimes greeted with distrust that I might reveal the sacred or exploit my culture and heritage for self gain. It was a long time before I understood

people’s apprehension. I felt victimized and persecuted by the very people I so wanted to please. It did not occur to me that I was part of “the institution” now — an insider-outsider. The ethical question of a professional researcher living within their own community had never occurred before and therefore never been addressed.

There is a full appreciation for all the people involved in this journey. The full gravity of shared community experiences and the Elders’ words still tug at my heart. The last twenty years has included working with the Lubicon and many other Indigenous peoples, which has been consciousness altering. In the end, I gained more knowledge of myself as a Haudenosaunee woman than I did of any other tribe, including the Cree. As for being an anthropologist, that’s another story all together. It is an oxymoron — an Indigenous anthropologist — in the words of an Elder, “Something just ain’t quite right about that.”

A PhD, in and of itself, meant little to me or my community. However, I have earned a certain level of approval from those I hold in high esteem. They watched and waited to see if I would exploit, appropriate, or pervert their knowledge. I did not. Since 1989, I have worked to come to terms with my own faults, weaknesses, limitations, and overall strengths as a Mohawk woman. In the words of an Onondaga woman, Wendy Thomas, “You need to think about how you think.” A decision to begin healing from the legacies of colonialism included a mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional transformation which altered my consciousness. Acknowledging the very real pain associated with Indigenous people’s realities is critical to clear thinking about how we came to be in the position we are today. My development as an anthropologist, academic, and Mohawk woman allowed me to critically explore the realities Indigenous people face daily.

## INDIGENIETY

Indigenous pedagogy acknowledges diverse ways of knowing and respects the pluralism of knowledge. An acknowledgment of geographic and cultural diversity is a part of Indigenous knowledge, pluralism is the foundation of our knowledge base. As defined in the *Report on the Protection of Heritage of Indigenous People* written by Dr. Daes for the United Nations, “Indigenous knowledge is a complete knowledge system with its own epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity ... which can only be understood by means of pedagogy traditionally employed by the people themselves” (cited in Battiste and Henderson, 2000:41).

Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant-Castellano suggests that Indigenous knowledge has a multiplicity of sources, including traditional, spiritual, and empirical (Shiva, 2000, cited in Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg). These are three common sources within Indigenous knowledge inquiry; the plurality of Indigenous knowledge engages a holistic paradigm that draws from the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of a people. The cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples recognizes that Indigenous knowledge is tied to the language, landscapes, and cultures from which it emerges. This point is reflected in a statement by Vandana Shiva,

However, under the colonial influence the biological and intellectual heritage of non-western societies was devalued. The priorities of scientific development ... transformed the plurality of knowledge systems into a hierarchy of knowledge systems. When knowledge plurality mutated into knowledge hierarchy, the horizontal ordering of diverse but equally valid systems was converted into vertical ordering of unequal systems, and the epistemological foundations of western knowledge were imposed on non-western knowledge systems with the result that the latter were invalidated. (Shiva, 2000:vii)

An Indigenous knowledge framework has been developed to address critical issues of colonialism undermining Indigenous authority and representation. Ironically, we validate empirical research with Western constructs that, historically, marginalized Indigenous ways of knowing (Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg, 2000; Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Our relationship to place and to the land has been well documented by non-Indigenous anthropologists. Indigenous scholars move beyond attachment to land; our very consciousness of our place in the universe is informed by the Creator and shaped by the land. These points are elaborated by Battiste and Henderson.

Indigenous peoples regard all products of the human mind and heart as inter-related within Indigenous knowledge. They assert that all knowledge flows from the same source: the relationships between global fluxes that needs to be renewed, the people's kinship with the spirit world. Since the ultimate source of knowledge is the changing ecosystem itself, art and science of a specific people manifest these relationships and can be considered as manifestations of people's knowledge as a whole. (Battiste and Henderson, 2000:43)

This is an Indigenous thinking that moves beyond voice or even perspective, embracing Indigenous knowledge on several levels, crossing cultural boundaries. Indigenous people, in all their diversity, have a common set of

assumptions that, when put together, form an epistemological foundation and context. This paradigm is constructed as a collective core of interrelated assertions about Indigenous reality. Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy necessitate the articulation of Indigenous methodologies.

## INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

Indigenous methodology is best summed up by Marlene Brant-Castellano:

The knowledge valued in aboriginal societies derives from multiple sources, including traditional teachings, empirical observation, and revelation.... Aboriginal knowledge is said to be personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language.... (Brant-Castellano, cited in Dei, Hall, and Rsenburg, 2000:25)

The development of an Indigenous discourse creates a greater presence of the community in research methodology, design, priorities, and implementation. The community are more than collaborators, they are the intellectual investigators and contributors. It is crucial that Indigenous peoples have the space and support to initiate an Indigenous research agenda of self-determination, collective human rights, and nation building (Smith, 1999).

Indigenous peoples living off the land were long viewed as inferior, underdeveloped, and unworthy of *preservation* by Western state institutions. The lack of value placed on Indigenous cultures and their ways of life has been hidden behind jargon such as the “survival of the fittest” or “manifest destiny” or, today, globalization (Brody, 1981; Berkhofer, 1979; Berger, 1977; 1991; Coon-Come, 1995). World-renowned anthropologist and Harvard-trained ethnobotanist Wade Davis states:

Even as we lament the collapse of biological diversity, we pay too little heed to a parallel process of loss, the demise of cultural diversity, the erosion of what might be termed ethnosphere, the full complexity and complement of human potential as brought into being by culture and adaptation since the dawn of consciousness.... Worldwide, some 300 million people, roughly five percent of the global population, still retain a strong identity as members of an indigenous culture, rooted in history and language, attached to myth and memory to a particular place on the planet ... collectively representing over half of the intellectual legacy of humanity. (Davis, 2000:12)

In Canada, there were over sixty Indigenous languages; today only four are expected to survive (Davis, 2000:12). In North America, the cultural sur-

vival of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge depends in large part on the dominant society's willingness to value them. If the Lubicon Cree are an indicator of Canada's position on the rights of Indigenous peoples, things do not look good. In an era of globalization, without the state's good will, scholars will do little more than document one tribe's extinction after another and witness history being repeated in the new millennium. What would that be like? In North America alone, precontact population estimates reported by J. Moony as a mere one million Indigenous inhabitants have been proven fantastically wrong (Jaimes, 1992). The range is closer to 18 million with fewer than half a million surviving into the 20th century, a result of what is now being called a genocidal campaign (Jaimes, 1992; Wearne, 1996). Whether North America is prepared to accept any responsibility for the destruction of 90–98 percent of the Indigenous population is questionable. Indigenous scholars Annette Jaimes, Roland Chrisjohn, and others argue that the US and Canada have yet to acknowledge the existence of a Native American holocaust which decimated over 90 percent of the Indigenous populations north of the Rio Grande (Jaimes, 1992). Why does no one talk about this? Why do our children not know the horror their great grandparents survived? Indigenous knowledge and methodology are critical to tackling the enormous challenges and barriers faced by Indigenous peoples when they try to tell their truth. Historical trauma, the legacy of colonialism, must be addressed within a framework that respects the aspects of our collective history that have yet to be fully articulated.

## SELF-DETERMINATION AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Recent Indigenous work has shown that issues such as self-determination and Indigenous social justice require an analytical framework for examining various problems identified by Indigenous peoples. The exploration of Indigenous thought, theory, and methodology is within a self-determination agenda, which includes the right to represent an Indigenous situation as authoritative. To revisit the original research with the Lubicon and understand the struggle of this small Cree community in northern Alberta against multinational corporations and government's encroachment for cultural survival, and sovereignty will be, as one Elder stated, "a long journey of the mind."

## THE COLLECTIVE APPROACH OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous peoples’ assumptions about social reality, dynamics, and value systems are immersed in spiritual relationships with the natural world — a tradition of ideas that when brought together form a common adherence to the Creator’s natural law (Alfred, 1999:4; Hill, 1992:63). John Mohawk, the late Seneca scholar, refers to the development of the Iroquois Great Law, which established a Confederacy with the principle of peace as the foundation of Haudenosaunee thought and law. The Peacemaker, one of the greatest Haudenosaunee philosophers, convinced the five Haudenosaunee Nations embroiled in war, that thinking with a good mind and reason would lead to peace and power. He argued that the greatest gifts given to humans — their mind and heart — would, when combined with developed oratory skills, overpower the practice of ruling through fear. The philosophical enlightenment of the Haudenosaunee took place at about the same time as the Europeans were developing their conquistador thinking (Barreiro, 1992:25). The concepts developed by the Haudenosaunee demonstrate that a developed consciousness existed prior to the arrival of Europeans, and illustrate the Peacemaker’s promotion of strength through unity (Wright, 1992:223–238; Lyons and Mohawk, 1992:1–13). The concept of unity has appealed to Indigenous people throughout North America. Over the last twenty years, I have learned that unity or social cohesion and mobility is the key to restoring health and wellness for Indigenous people.

Only recently, however, have scholars of the West examined the First Americans as interdependent societies with political, social, and economic structures which operated on intellectually developed sets of principles. Progress, development — or in more contemporary terms, globalization — are not automatic death sentences for Indigenous cultures. Indigenous peoples are connected by common principles, ideologies, and resistance to their oppressors. They share common bonds related to a *collective* colonial experience, and a belief system based on all-empowering *consciousness and rationality*. Spirituality is central to understanding the epistemological foundations of Indigenous societies. Ceremonies reproduce and reaffirm Indigenous ideologies and identities. This core of our thought is considered unscientific by the academic institutions we are attached to.

The cyclical and comprehensive multidimensional Indigenous epistemology accounts for the dynamics of coexistence and interrelationships. Progress and development are not logical concepts in our circular model. The past, present, and future inform everyday actions, including political, social, economic, and spiritual spheres as a related whole (Cajete, 1999; Deloria, 1992). To assume human behaviours are solely moulded by economic or political issues is foreign, if not absurd, to Indigenous peoples.

Our ceremonies and spirituality are the core manifestation of Indigenous ideology or ideas about the world. Ideas and beliefs emerge and are reinforced through physical and spiritual factors. Cultural expressions of Indigenous thought are diverse, but assumptions about our interconnection and kinship with the universe are similar. Each sphere of the circle — the social system, the economy, and political structures — is fueled by the spiritual centre. For example, the Potlatch of the Northwest Coast Natives is more than ceremony; it is the spiritual, political, economic, and social centre point of the people that bonds their communities together and redistributes wealth.

In a holistic framework, time and space are collapsed. The intimate relationship with history is a social fact; mapping the future is tied to events of long ago. This circular time frame moves distances in a manner foreign to Westerners. Space is aligned with the movement of time. The understanding of the ties to all of the cosmological relationships — the earth, stars, and the universe — divides space in a kinship system based in naturalized law. The earth is mother; the moon, grandmother; the sun, father or uncle, etc. The idea of compartmentalizing space according to property/commodities is another foreign concept for Indigenous people and it conflicts with the spiritual values that shape Indigenous consciousness (Deloria, 1994:99).

The resistance to colonial forces, another common theme among Indigenous peoples worldwide, is less a reaction to material or cultural domination than an expression of sacred knowledge given to the people by the Creator. The strength of Indigenous “power” through ceremonies is witnessed in the repeated efforts of colonists to wipe out such practices. The Potlatch, Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, and many other ceremonies were outlawed in Canada through the Indian Act in 1914 and punishable by prison. This was not repealed until further revision to the Indian Act in 1951. It was not until 1978 that the US allowed ceremonies to be practiced openly (Cummings and Steckley, 1999; Jaimes, 1992:17). Elders often refer to ceremonies as a source of knowledge, much as Western scholars refer to “classical” literature. Living off the land and practicing “a way of life” is the central privi-

lege many Indigenous groups seek as an inherent right to self-determination. Indigenous knowledge is alive in practice because of the oral mode of transmission, an ongoing dialogue in which Indigenous peoples have long participated. The experiential nature of Indigenous knowledge fosters a rich and total sense of the understanding process. Individuals are recognized as being “wise and experienced” and are respected by their community when they are “keepers of the culture.” Because their knowledge was marginalized through colonialism, Indigenous knowledge could only be fostered by developing an “underground railroad,” using institutional money to develop networks and exchanges under the guises of accepted Western “research.”

## SORTING OUT THE SACRED

Understanding how Indigenous culture uses ceremony to inform views, beliefs, values, and heritage may be challenging. However, to omit ceremony from Indigenous research would be to omit the ideological centre of Indigenous existence. On my second visit to Little Buffalo, Alberta a Haudenosaunee Rayoiner (Hereditary Chief) traveled with me, which indirectly positioned me as “traditional.” The presence of the Elder, and the Indigenous knowledge he held, brought a sense of dignity and integrity to the research of the Lubicon community. This was not a calculated research move, but an earnest attempt to link the Lubicon struggle to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in a broader network with mutual support. I relied heavily on the guidance of the Elder who traveled with me. He helped me to interpret experiences in a manner that did not jeopardize the sacred.

He explained to me several times the need to remain quiet and follow the lead of the Lubicon. He warned me to not walk in front of them since I did not know the land or what I might be walking on. Today I understand exactly what he meant. It is their land and the spirits of their ancestors or guides reside in certain places. I would demonstrate ignorance by wandering around their land, treading on sacred sites.

## REDEFINING THE ROLE OF AN INDIGENOUS SCHOLAR

The collective Nation to Nation nature of my PhD research shaped both the research design and content. Indigenism that forged a common identity between the Lubicon and the Haudenosaunee which created, for a time, an alliance, rather than a collaboration. This distinguishes my research as

an Indigenous researcher. The development of trust between my people and the Lubicon provided a depth and richness of knowledge which formed the core of my research. This relationship was formally acknowledged by placing each other in kinship positions resulting from trust and spiritual guidance. The Lubicon actively resisted accepting me as a “research team investigator” of which they were formal “signatories and partners.” In the community, the Lubicon gave me a role in the Lubicon kinship system and as a liaison between the Haudenosaunee and themselves. This dynamic extended far beyond the Lubicon and ultimately led to the vision of the 2004 International Elders Summit some 15 years later.

In 1991, the Lubicon political leadership urged me to organize the Lubicon women into an active politicized group. Chief Ominayak was concerned that the entire tribal council of the Lubicon might be imprisoned on charges of “arson” at a vacated logging camp. In this climate of heavy-handed policing and subsequent charges of 13 Lubicon men, 5 in political positions — all looking at decades of prison time if convicted — he wanted the women to be more actively political. I organized political and spiritual gatherings, attended ceremonies and meetings with government officials. My work during that time was not advocacy anthropology; my understanding of a reciprocal obligation and respect for Elders and leaders shaped my interaction with the Lubicon and my own community. In the end, the charges were thrown out of court.

The methodology of reciprocity includes the integration of the community’s objectives and goals even if they “fall outside” the immediate research project. Accountability to the community demands a reciprocity; for me, this was the Lubicon agenda to develop a relationship with, and support of, the Haudenosaunee. The goals of the Lubicon demanded work I never prefigured into the equation such as: holding information meetings about the Lubicon in my own community to gain interest and support for their immediate struggle and coordinating meetings between the Six Nations Confederacy and the Lubicon in both communities. This brought a new dimension to my research with the Lubicon. The Confederacy placed the responsibility of organizing meetings, written information, travel arrangements, and fundraising on my shoulders. I had to serve as a liaison between the two Nations and still meet academic requirements. My reinvented role became a full-time mandate. I carried out these responsibilities with a great deal of fear and trepidation since it raised questions, within my own community, about my motives. I was obliged to learn Haudenosaunee protocol and mediate this work in a

culturally appropriate manner for the two peoples. As a person not born to a traditional family, I landed myself in a bit of hot water with community people who felt I had no right to be working with the Confederacy — and they were right. Although the reciprocity exacted a personal toll, the relationships established, networks developed, and amazing experiences of traditional knowledge transmission were worth every moment. I am still uncertain whether I failed or passed in the eyes of those that tested me.

The Lubicon desire to have Haudenosaunee leaders, Clan Mothers, and Chiefs visit and support the community by attending Roundances, Tea Dances, and court hearings nurtured a sharing of world views on the environment, sovereignty, spirituality, and many other subjects. It is certain the conversations on many subjects would never have naturally occurred without the presence of Haudenosaunee leaders and Elders. I was able to listen to a natural flow of conversation of Indigenous leaders, as the two cultures learned how common and how different their struggles were and are. In turn, all involved assisted my research whenever and wherever possible.

There is a contradiction in being Indigenous and an anthropologist. Being at once the subject-object and “authority” or nonauthority community member, and negotiating my position in the academic institution is, at times, impossible. As a Mohawk woman, I have been socialized to defer to Elders as the “authorities.” The key is to avoid the hegemonies and illuminating forces of either world, and, more importantly, to redefine my role as an anthropologist whose identity is shaped by my nation and my community rather than academia. The most important lesson learned is to never consider oneself an expert on anything, and this defies academic tradition.

## NOT SEEKING APPROVAL, BUT RESPECTING SOUL WOUNDS

I don’t think it is possible in our way to fail as long as we follow the original laws and bring forth what we know with a good mind and heart. The hope in our hearts comes from the Creator. I was warned by the Chief who traveled with me that, “What happens to the Lubicon, we will all follow, if they win we all win.” Today, I know what he said is the truth. Or, as Bernard Ominayak sums it up,

As long as I am standing, which may not be too much longer [chuckles], I will move in the direction given to me by the Elders. I cannot, with good conscience, accept a deal that sentences us to a lifeless life, one cannot know the agony of try-

ing to keep going for reasons that others don't comprehend. If the people want to go in another direction, then they must find someone else, because I cannot accept a bad deal my grandchildren will pay for to appease a few. I'd like to go to my grave knowing I followed our ways and did the right thing. You know, it's easy to take the fast way out when you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. When all you see is death and sickness, despair and growing social problems. But, as long as we follow our ceremonies, follow those instructions that have helped us survive for thousands of years, [and] then I know there is hope. Someday, maybe people will see that this is what it is, a white government trying to wipe out a people who are sitting on billions of dollars. From what I have heard this is what they have done since they came to this land, yet people don't want to believe it, they are afraid to say it, afraid to know that it is true. But, I never talk about it, because just getting people to understand [that] Canada breaks its own laws, uses courts to legalize their greed and so on is more than enough. I know the truth of the matter as do the old people. They are intentionally destroying us in the hopes the Lubicon will be destroyed for good. Yet, I must sit across from these bastards and deal empty deals, public affirmations for them to say, "we tried, see here are the records of proof." So they can cover their asses when someone calls it for what it is, genocide. They can get jokers to feed the public their bullshit while all the time they know, we know. Hopefully the world will know what in fact Canada is doing here and has done to my people. And for that, there is no amount of compensation, no deal that can compensate the land, the animals, the water, and the air, the human lives lost, marred, and destroyed. No, the white will never tell his truth because if he had one he wouldn't do all the destruction to the world he has done. (Ominayak, June 1992, cited in Martin-Hill, 2008)

The Lubicon know, for example, that the destruction of the land, and thus, the animals, directly relates to their ill-health. As a "scientist," stating that the destruction to the Lubicon's land base is directly responsible for their social ills requires me to "measure" the impact and variables of that development. We cannot tell our truth in Western science — it serves science's interest, not ours. As we move into discourses with conservative caution, neither trying to prove ourselves or look for approval, we move in the pursuit of social justice.

## LOOKING BACK, WHAT DID I LEARN?

After the passing of many Elders from Six Nations and Lubicon including my own mother, I began to comprehend what they wanted me to see. While I was criticized for working with the Confederacy, the Cree, Sioux, Navajo, or "others" instead of my own people, I realize what it means to have vision — and they possessed vision. Not knowing my own language, lacking tradi-

tional knowledge, I often wondered why they wasted their time with me. Part of it was my Mohawk qualities of courage, determination, and curiosity. They felt there was value in my educational ties to the university; one day perhaps I would “get it” and continue their vision. The fact that I was going to be an anthropologist meant something to those “old timers”; the chiding I took was a fond teasing, a gentle reminder of remaining Indigenous. They knew they were going to have their very own anthropologist.

## CARRYING THEIR VISION TO THE ELDERS SUMMIT

Through these many relationships, I was pressured to bring together Indigenous leaders, to find ways for them to continue to meet and discuss what I now know as “Indigenous knowledge.” I used university money, research money, money from bake sales, and whatever I could beg or borrow to find ways that the traditional knowledge carriers could network and have intellectual exchanges that facilitated their collective well-being. I had to “justify” what we were doing to the institutional world, but all I knew was that they desperately wanted to work together, talk, learn, and develop meaningful relationships with one another, and it was me they harassed to make it happen. So I called these events and conferences, “Drum Beat” or “Cry of the Eagle” or whatever, and hosted them on the campus of McMaster University and within the community of Six Nations. It was a deliberate strategy to open the exchange up to university and community alike, but the real agenda, the hidden agenda, the *intellectual underground railroad* was the exchange of Indigenous knowledge. After the public talks were over, their time began. There they were, Clan Mothers, Confederacy Chiefs, the Innu, the Lubicon, the Hopi, the Ojibwe, the Mayan — all leaders and Elders sitting around tables at Kick’s Korner Kitchen (mockingly called KKK) off a dirt road on Six Nations until two or three in the morning.

The late, white-haired Cal Miller stood up hitting his cane hard on the floor — “Now the West! The West say what it is you have to say!” Slowly, Lubicon Chief Bernard rose and shared his insights, what his Elders told him. I sat in the corner so tired, and yet the hair on the back of my neck stood up — I listened intently and learned. Bleary eyed by day four, we sent them off and I caught hell from just about everyone. “What do you think you are doing?” “Who the hell are you to be working with our chiefs and clan mothers!” Then the bills rolled in: the phone bills, the food bills, the essay papers due at university. At those moments, I swore I’d never do this again. But I did.

I know why community members were angry. I had no right to work with their most knowledgeable leaders. I had no right to gain access to something so sacred; history had taught all of them how I, the anthropologist, would surely exploit their knowledge for my own gain. But then, one by one, those powerful traditionalists began to pass on — only a handful of the chiefs and clanmothers from the 1990s are alive today. We lost an incredible amount of knowledge in that time and the community reeled, as did I. The Lubicon lost their strong Elders too, and others. Now what? There are a handful of young men and women dedicated to learning who have worked hard, but we lost more than men or women. We lost a part of our intellectual legacy — one that I do not possess but, for a short period, accessed. People, who were once angry, now call and quietly ask, “Do you have any tapes from one Drum Beat or Cry of the Eagle?” I respond, “No, you told me not to film or record!” And they say “Why did you listen to us?” But, by the time of the International Indigenous Elders Summit, some of the most conservative traditionalists told me, “Make sure you record everything!” Lessons have been learned, not only by me, but by the people as a whole.

## PULLING TOGETHER THE PAST FOR A FUTURE

The experiences, relationships, and learning from the last twenty years have led us here. In 2000, a group of women, at my request, came together and shared their dreams and visions. We developed a plan — a collective vision. Our dreams and visions said that we would see a journey on horseback, on foot, a gathering of Indigenous Elders “to change the next five hundred years.” We began lobbying locally, nationally, and internationally. We worked hard and, in the end, had the support we needed from the Unity Riders (who have traveled on horseback in memory of the ancestors’ footsteps to “mend the sacred hoop” from the west coast), the Confederacy, and national organizations. Our hopes and dreams are to see through what those old ones could see, the power of unity, the power of Indigenous knowledge.

By far, the Six Nations Community Trust Fund provided us with the most monies to hold the International Indigenous Elders Summit in 2004. The spiritual leaders of the Unity Ride agreed to ride across Canada and the US arriving on foot and horseback to “seek shelter under the Tree of Peace.” Though we are mired in community politics and internal turmoil, we continue to bring the women of Six Nations and elsewhere together, to change the current state of our people. While no one thinks one event will fix it all, we are working towards a day when our children will not want to take their own

lives, where our women are not beaten down, and our men assume their responsibilities as leaders and protectors. We are trying to complete what our Elders tried to show us; it is in their paths we tread.

Many partners offered the necessary pieces to successfully host such a gathering. The First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Centres at the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) assisted with some travel arrangements for Elders. Shortly after our community meeting in 1999, NAHO approached me to write an environmental scan on traditional medicine. They said I would be traveling across the country to talk to Elders. I said, “yes!” Did I want to write about traditional medicine? “No.” Did I need to talk to Elders about participating in the Summit? “Yes.” NAHO knew my agenda and they got a pretty good research paper on traditional medicine. Their Policy and Research Unit continued to offer financial assistance, and help organize and prepare meetings. For NAHO, this process is an example of how a national organization can, and should, partner with the grassroots to make an impact on our communities. All too often, organizations attempt to provide assistance, programming, or research in areas decided or directed by government policies or funding agendas, instead of saying what do you need and how can we help your agenda? Overcoming issues of jurisdiction, politics, and fear is often the hardest part of navigating the various “systems,” which are supposed to be in place to assist and support Indigenous communities.

As is most often the case, the limited support that was provided to the Elders was completely eclipsed by the openness, depth, and authenticity of the wisdom that was given in return. This process reinforced the certainty that the best hope for the improvement of the health of Aboriginal peoples lies in the protection, support, and utilization of our own communities and their Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

As an anthropologist and the Director of McMaster University’s Indigenous Studies Program, I was able to gain campus, local, national, and international support for this event. As a Mohawk, I attended ceremonies, rode 2000 miles on horseback, and listened to Elders — and the community gained their collective knowledge and support.

## CONCLUSION: A NEW ERA

I did not know then what I know now. All around me during my years of field research for a PhD in anthropology was truly Indigenous knowledge. They knew the animals, the land, and the spirits that are attached to the land.

They knew the ceremonial knowledge, the medicine, and the outcome of the destruction of these things. They left us with a great responsibility, knowledge that is somewhat burdensome, yet many of our answers to the human condition lie within the nests of Indigenous knowledge. I did not know I would be in a position to bring together community and campus to improve the health and quality of life for Indigenous people. This journey and training will always be traced back to the Lubicon — to an Elder named Albert Laboucon who told me, “If we put our drums together, our medicine — we can win this thing.”

We hope and pray that the International Indigenous Elders Summit will be a continuation for our ancestors while we honour their vision and develop our own. Collective declarations of the Elders and of the youth that were presented at the Elders Summit have since been carried to the United Nations by the Spirit of the Youth, another outcome of the Elders Summit. The youth promised the Elders they would carry these messages and share them with the world. *Jidwá:doh* “*Let’s Become Again*,” a documentary telling the story of the Elders Summit and the Elder and youth declarations, has been screened in North America at various venues, including Community Campus Partnerships for Health 2007, and in eight European countries. The declarations, the documentary, and their presentation to the UN were the focus of the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples’ Day Celebrations August 9, 2007 (UNwebcast archives). At the time of this writing, two of the planned documentaries from the summit are complete and the third documentary will be released before this summer. Another outcome of the Elders Summit is the formal creation of the Indigenous Elders and Youth Council, a group that monitors and facilitates the implementation of the Elders and Youth Declaration. When the Spirit of the Youth presented at the UN in August 2007, they were invited back to the United Nations to present the declarations to the entire Indigenous Peoples Permanent Forum World Caucus in the spring of 2008. The proceeds of the documentaries fund the Indigenous Elders and Youth Council; it is just enough to sustain the network. The vision, tasks, outcomes, and work of the Elders Summit, however, will not be complete for some time, if ever. The partnerships and networks that support this work continue, as does the intent to overcome the damage and the pain of the last five hundred years. “*Jidwá:doh: Let’s Become Again*” is just one of the many media used to nurture the Elders’ vision. It is my goal to one day “openly” support grassroots movements, community agendas, and cultural

exchanges without hiding behind some Western event or concept. One day our knowledge will no longer remain hidden, underground; that is why we all do this work.

International Indigenous Elders Summit 2004  
The Decade of Indigenous Peoples

**Elder’s Declaration: Kindling a Fire**      **DRAFT**

Elders from North, South and Central America gathered on Haudenosaunee territory for six days to share our achievements and future prospects on peace and unity. We reflected on the effects of historical trauma and the path towards decolonization for Indigenous Peoples of the America’s. A common sense of history binds us while oral traditions, lived experiences, gathered knowledge and re-found wisdom build bridges among us. Our heart rests on our kinship with one another and with all beings of the universe and the cosmos. Our spirits are no longer homeless. We are grounded on Mother Earth. We are connected to and responsible for those who are here, those who are yet to come and those who have been. Our authority flows from these sources. They set the nature, direction and pace of action. We will set the agenda, we will move it forward, we will do it now and we will monitor and measure its progress. Our collective minds and hearts hereby declare the following:

**Women Give Life:**

Violence against Indigenous women must cease.

Women are the mothers of our nations and their authority must be recognized within and outside Indigenous nations.

**Living Treaties Make Healthy Nations:**

Historical treaties must be recognized and interpreted from our perspective.

Nationhood is ours to keep and exercise.

International treaties must secure our future and that of future generations.

**Education is Right:**

It must be made available to everyone.

It must include our own languages and the resources to support this goal.

It must include traditional teaching practices, cultural practices and history from our perspective.

**Tradition Must Lead:**

Indigenous leaders who hold traditional values, beliefs and cultures must be recognized and respected as leaders in their own right and by the world.

**Roots run deeply:**

Indigenous forms of determined who our people are must be acknowledged.

Assimilation policies and practices being forced on our people must stop.

New forms of colonization must stop and decolonization must begin in earnest.

**Laws Exact Justice:**

Traditional laws and forms of justice exist and must be respected.

International tribunals must deal with the persecution and murder of our people.

First Environments Last:

Environmental assessments must include the traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

Mother Earth and everything she holds including water, plants and animals must be acknowledged and protected. A consciousness of waste management is necessary.

Genetic engineering is not acceptable.

Sacred sites and artifacts and lands must be honoured, protected and restored.

Benefits derived from natural resources must be shared equally with Indigenous peoples.

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH DECLARATION: KINDLING A FIRE**

We as Indigenous youth have gathered on the Haudenosaunee territory for six days to share our achievements and future prospects on peace and unity. We reflected on the effects of historical trauma and the path towards decolonization for Indigenous youth of the America's. A common sense of history binds us, while oral tradition, lived experiences, re-found knowledge and gathered wisdom build unity and purpose among us. We are connected and responsible for seven generations. The following statements call for immediate action. As Indigenous youth leaders we will set the agenda, we will move it forward, we will do it now, and we will monitor and measure its progress. Our collective minds and hearts hereby declare the following a living document;

1. Past, present and future exploitation of our culture, customs, traditions, and environment are no longer acceptable;
2. Indigenous languages are our inalienable rights of passage, they are our first language, they are integral to instilling our identity and must be accredited, implemented and accepted without interference;
3. Young leaders must be represented at all gatherings to reflect, network, debate and to make decisions on matters affected us and that of our communities;
4. Youth have a right to create opportunities so we can live a healthy traditional lifestyle to nurture our talents, whether they are traditional, artistic, athletic, academic;
5. Youth have a right and a responsibility to practice a traditional way of life, where as guardians we implore ourselves to take action to protect, preserve and restore Mother Earth and all Creation and to free our people from hindrance and/or prosecution.

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