

A Circle of All Nations ~ A Culture of Peace



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

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A REPORT ON WILLIAM COMMANDA'S WORK IN 2005

2005 has been another momentous year in the life of William Commanda, and he has been tireless in his pursuit of his vision to create an ever widening *Circle of All Nations* and an ever deepening *Culture of Peace* - this despite the ever increasing barriers dividing peoples, nations and cultures, and the daily increase in warfare, violence and suffering.

He has been no less fervent in his vigilant prayer and reminder for respect for Mother Earth, even as she engages in ever increasing efforts to cleanse herself of the abuses she has sustained, as indigenous peoples have warned and predicted over the past sixty years. In this regard, he noted with sorrow the irony that immediately the words "*America has never left its destiny to the winds of nature*" were uttered as Hurricane Katrina lashed the southern portion of Turtle Island, then Hurricane Rita gathered her strength, with devastating consequences. For the Carrier of the Seven Fires Prophecy, it is yet another sad reflection of the blind folly, arrogance and domination that had been foreseen as the heavy cloud to shadow his homeland five hundred years ago.



We have come to see our Elder's efforts focus on the two most important matters of these times, and indeed, as reflected in the heritage of his ancestors, the two most important guiding themes for them: respect for Mother Earth, and respect for all peoples. He hopes they become passions for us too.

It has been another very busy year for William Commanda, with many new milestones. We offer a thematic snapshot of some of his key moments of the past year. This is not a compilation of all his work and the information is not presented in a chronological sequence. As you know, his work is not funded in any way, he has no staff to help develop and implement his ideas, and he has no sophisticated communications strategy. Hence it is a challenge to impact the larger world. But many believe that his world is a microcosmic reflection of the *good* life, and so we



"It was prophesied that the time would come when the voice of indigenous peoples would rise again after five hundred years of silence and oppression, to light a path to an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood amongst all nations."

We must come together
with one heart, one mind,
one love and one determination

extract from his life the themes to be writ large, as it were, in the greater world. We hope it will give you a sense of his passions and priorities.

We hope that you will be inspired by the example of his enthusiastic embracing of new experiences, while remaining grounded in an ancient, inclusive value system, and will join wholeheartedly in the dispersal of the seeds he has nurtured in you.

You, his friends from across the globe, animate the *Circle of All Nations* and advance a *Culture of Peace*, in your lives, works, thoughts, prayers and efforts, and we thank you for your ongoing interest and loyal support of his many activities!



TRACING HISTORY IN ALGONQUIN PARK

Ancestral Connections

During the winter of 2004, William Commanda was drawn into the story of his ancestral roots in this land, and into uncovering another layer in the understanding of why his ancestors knew this continent they inhabited was Turtle Island.

He was invited to visit certain sites deemed to be of significant archaeological relevance in Algonquin Park; at the same time, his friend George Fenn was writing to him fervently about rocks and medicine wheels patterns he was uncovering in the Muskoka Lakes area. So in April 2005, we undertook the long trip to Huntsville, to commence the exploration of these finds. But, for whatever reason, William's body resisted (maybe we were not all ready for an experience

of this nature at that time), and we drove right back home to sort out his physical problems (more about this in the section on Health and Healing).



But of course, William is nothing if not a reflection of the spirit of his clan, the Squirrel, who won't back down from anything, and in October, we headed back to

Algonquin Park, to complete the work we had started earlier.

In brief, the plus ninety one year old hopped on to a Beaver plane and climbed rocks to visit a Giant Turtle Rock at a site his ancestors had visited regularly hundreds of years ago, even as the fingers of winter reached over the land. He performed a pipe ceremony, acknowledged by a member of the Squirrel family, and a reading of the Seven Fires Prophecy, and the area was consecrated by the elder's prayer and presence, and by the presence of his sacred medicines and objects; and a spiritual blanket of protection was placed over it. Now he is assisting archaeologist Bill Allen to uncover Algonquin names for significant landmarks, and this will serve to acknowledge and

honour the ancient history of his ancestors in this area, as well as protect it from further exploitation into the future.

George Fenn then took him to other sites marked by medicine wheels and turtle rock formations in the Muskoka Lakes area, and new realizations are emerging about the history, spiritual significance and energy of the area. Especially important and meaningful is the presence of Turtle. It adds depth to



our understanding of the significance of the name his

ancestors had for this continent Turtle Island; and to the sacred responsibilities of his people, the Mamiwinini, the nomad, for the protection of the land.

The mist over this history is beginning to lift. And a bigger story is unfolding. More about this at a later date. At this point, suffice it to say that the sacred sites of this land are emerging into our consciousness as Mother Earth herself cries out for protection.

THE VISION FOR VICTORIA ISLAND Indigenous Visionary

Over the past five years, Elder William Commanda has worked diligently to develop and promote a vision for an Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island. General information about this initiative and our efforts to date is available on the Healing Page of the: www.circleofallnations.com web site.

In advance of his annual *June 21 Gathering of Nations Pipe Ceremony* at Victoria Island, he made another effort to advance the vision. This commenced with an address to Prime Minister Paul Martin, at the May 2005 Canada/Aboriginal Round Table:

I am honoured to be here with you all and to welcome you to traditional Algonquin Territory.

Mr. Martin, a year ago you commenced this dialogue with the Aboriginal Peoples of this land, and today, you are finalizing this phase of the process.

For the past forty years, I have followed the direction of my ancestors who welcomed yours to this land, and I have worked hard to create a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*, to advance respect for Mother Earth and to advance racial harmony. I see today that Canada is engaged in one of the most interesting and difficult challenges of modern times reconciling a huge array of diverse interests, peoples and cultures.

My peoples have been crushed for a long time and sometimes it seems like we beg for crumbs and acknowledgment at a table where the world seeks its

place. We see churches, cathedrals, synagogues, temples and mosques reflecting the great diversity of cultures here, but there is still no place where indigenous peoples can gather together in the spirit of unity that used to mark our heritage.

On April 17, 2004, I showed you the Three Figure Welcoming/ Agreement Wampum Belt which signified the commitment of my ancestors in 1700 to share their country, grand natural resources and values with yours, with the land being held in trust for Creator and the unborn children. This was before my country was divided. Since then, our resources have been exploited, depleted and contaminated. The balance of life has been disrupted, and the centre can no longer hold things together. We have seen this in unprecedented fires last year and in floods this year.

I also said that the nation would not find true peace until the relationship with the first peoples of this land was healed, and we occupied our rightful position in the heart of this country. Sadly, it has been a year of great hardship, division and rancour. I have worried as we faced the threat of another division. We accept as a governing principle that one out of four key federal voices in this land can represent only its one constituency, and not the federation, and we have seen how dangerously close to dissolution this has drawn us, right on my doorstep. I have not been happy to see this strife and turmoil.

But my ancestors used to say the most nutritious walnuts emerge after the coldest winter.

In my mind, it is the indigenous peoples who hold the seeds for a vision of inclusion and collective sharing, respect and responsibility, and in our very



existence we serve as the glue to bond a fragile federation together. We must work together collectively for a strengthened nation.

The National Capital Commission was established about a hundred years ago and given the responsibility to create a sense of nationhood within this capital city on what remains unsundered Algonquin Territory and the spiritual heartland of my peoples. For well over thirty-five years, Victoria Island has been identified as the site for an Aboriginal Centre. Yet nothing materialized during the terms of previous prime ministers.

With the commencement of the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace, I

they all strongly support this goal.

I have also engaged with representatives of government. Canadian Heritage has demonstrated its interest and commitment to this initiative with the provision of \$50,000 to advance its development. Thus, architectural plans for the proposed centre have been advanced to the B level, and a viable draft proposal has been negotiated with a respected consultant for the National Capital Commission, and it stands ready for advancing.

Further to my meeting with Minister Scott last November, I believe that the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada recognizes how important it is for psyche of the nation for the vision to manifest. The Minister of Finance is cognizant of this initiative. He has seen very recently, in the visit of the Queen, the First Nations University in Regina serve to reflect, both publicly and globally, the improved profile of the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and Canada and the Queen.

This sentiment will only be amplified when the world come to Canada for the Olympics in 2010, if they find Aboriginal Peoples assuming a place of pride and inclusion in the heart of the country at the conclusion of the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace, showcasing Inuit,

Métis and First Nations.

The Queen's gift to the First Nations cements the acknowledgement of the sacred trust inherent in the relationship that the First Peoples of this land share with the monarchy; this linkage is formalized in the role and responsibilities of the Governor General of Canada.

I have met with Her Excellency on three occasions to discuss the vision for the Aboriginal Centre:

- In 2000, at the *Circle of All Nations* International Millennium Peace Gathering, to broker this idea;
- In 2002, to apprise her and the Chairman of the National Capital Commission, of



Plans By Douglas J. Cardinal, Architect

began to pursue the work of developing a vision for a fully inclusive indigenous peace-building cultural centre on Victoria Island actively.

Over the past three years, I have consulted with Algonquin communities in Quebec and Ontario, both on- and off- reserve; with non-status Algonquins in Ontario, and with the Métis of Quebec; with Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and with representatives of all the National Aboriginal Organizations, and National First Nations organizations; with Aboriginal organizations in the Capital region; and with non-Aboriginal peoples nationally and internationally, to develop a viable vision for this centre, and, I believe,



developments to date; and

- Most recently in November 2004, to present her with the developed proposal. I am encouraged by her interest and support.

Likewise, I have also met with Alex Himelfarb, Clerk to the Privy Council Office and Secretary to the Cabinet, and many other senior federal bureaucrats and ministers. The Aboriginal Caucus of the Liberal Party, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Mayors of Ottawa and Gatineau, and MPs such as Ms Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Mr. Ed Broadbent, and Elijah Harper and others are also aware of and have expressed great interest in this initiative. Easily a thousand others have signed petitions in support of the vision.

I am told we only need the political momentum to galvanize us into action. Mr. Martin, you have the power to do take this action as fulfillment of the sacred trust and obligations to the First Peoples.

Since the commencement of your term in office, you have demonstrated a commitment to forging a new relationship with Aboriginal Peoples on behalf of the peoples of the land. I am greatly encouraged by your leadership and courage in announcing to the country that its relationship with Aboriginal peoples is of crucial importance to the federal government, first in the inclusion of Aboriginal ceremony at your investiture, then in establishing of the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, and finally in conducting these Roundtables.

The concrete manifestation of this commitment needs to be visible to the country at large, the original settlers who need to reconcile with First Peoples, and the newer immigrants, who have very limited knowledge and awareness of us. At the same time, it must contribute to strengthening Aboriginal Peoples individually and collectively. This commitment can be made evident and visible in the endorsement of the vision for Victoria Island.



This would constitute the tangible, public expression of the commitment of this government to the First Peoples. I continue to pray for the materialization of this work during my lifetime.

I have faith that you will find the strength and demonstrate the leadership to take just and honourable action on this file. I am available to discuss this matter further with you and your colleagues at any time.

On June 21, I shall be hosting the fifth annual Gathering of Nations Pipe Ceremony at Victoria Island to continue my prayer and work for all people. June 21 was identified as Indian Day in 1945 by native activist Jules Sioui; a few years ago, the former Governor General formally recognized the date, and today, many join in this celebration of National Aboriginal Day.

I invite you all to join us on June 21. I am sure you will be heartened when you see the multicultural face of Canada join Aboriginal Peoples in celebration on the ancient spiritual meeting grounds of my ancestors, and you will see that when we learn to come together with *one heart, one mind, one love and one determination*, the seeds of peace-building can and indeed shall blossom and embrace all.

Sadly, other than Ms. Blondin-Andrew's participation in the June 21 Pipe Ceremony, nothing tangible has resulted yet. There was no response from the Prime Minister. And, as evidenced in correspondence to the many folk who wrote to the Prime Minister in support of the Elder's vision, the government of Canada itself is not clear as to who holds responsibility for this file: the Prime Minister, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Canadian Heritage or the National Capital Commission.

Ironically enough, we are at the point of another leadership crisis in federal politics, with the threat of separation rising again. We reiterate the words of the Elder:

"In my mind, it is the indigenous peoples who hold the seeds for a vision of inclusion and collective sharing, respect and responsibility, and in our very existence we serve as the glue to bond a fragile federation together. We must work together collectively for a strengthened nation."

One can see the wisdom of the sacred Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt in this message.

Likewise, we all need to work together for the all-inclusive vision for Victoria Island to manifest.



Peace Building Conference Centre

- Site for sharing Indigenous Culture Values & Ideology
- Cross Cultural Training
- International Peace Building Conference/ Reconciliation Centre

Indigenous Healing Centre

- Strengthening Indigenous Identity
- Supporting Language, Education and Cultural Expression
- Strengthening Indigenous Relationships

The Core Vision

- Healing Indigenous Peoples
- Healing relationships With others
- Healing relationships with Mother Earth

Asinabka - Place of Glare Rock

- Sacred Circle of Nations Meeting Grounds at Victoria Island
- Forested Chaudiere Island
- Undammed Chaudiere Rapids

Victoria Island Island of Fire

- Indigenous Spiritual Healing / Resource Centre and Heritage / Historic site
- Peace Building Conference Centre
- Pow Wow Grounds

William Commanda's Vision For Victoria Island

SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION

Squirrel Energy

In the United States:

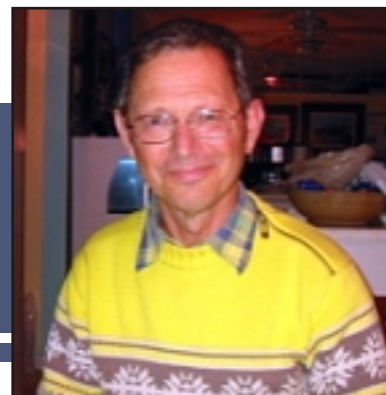
Ever the nomad, William Commanda journeyed to New York State, accompanied by his daughter Evelyn Commanda Dewache, to participate in the Humanity's Team *Seeds of Transformation* Conference at Bard's College, New York State, in early June. This is the effort to advance spiritual growth, individually and communally, developing under the wing of charismatic speaker and writer, Neale Donald Walsch, who has engaged and empowered countless peoples across the globe through his inspirational *Conversations with God* (books). The Elder led the inter-faith ecumenical celebration organized by Betsy Stang, Founder of the Wittenberg Centre, and offered a workshop on his vision for racial harmony and peace-building. Amongst an impressive team of renowned spiritual leaders and writers, it is significant that the conference organizer Gerry Harrington said this about the Elder's contribution:

I find it amazing that more than a week has gone by since the "Seeds of Transformation" conference at Bard College ended. The presence of Elder Commanda, his daughter, (the Taino drummer Roberto Borrero) and you at that watershed event is still felt very clearly and strongly by me and by so many other participants.

On behalf of Humanity's Team and the Institute of Advanced Theology, thank you very much for the honor of your presence and blessings, and exceptional contributions that all of you made to that weekend and to our lives! Grandfather's incredible wisdom and knowledge, expressed during the ecumenical service, at the screening of "A Seat at the Table" and in his outdoor talk Sunday afternoon were, in a word, phenomenal! Indeed, from the evaluation forms we received, he was a conference highlight for many people!

I hope that Grandfather, his daughter and you derived pleasure and satisfaction from the weekend as well, and that you experienced a wonderful sense of joy, love and fun there, in addition to intellectual engagement, cultural diversity, religious pluralism and spiritual emancipation. If you did, then I feel that I succeeded in one of my goals for the conference.

Some proof that our Elder really did make an impact? On a very cold December morning, Colin Horscroft arrived, without notice in Kanata, all the way from England, to find our Elder, having been so moved by his message at the "Seeds of Transformation" Conference!



In Canada:

Elder Commanda also planted the seeds of a new energy on Parliament Hill, on two occasions recently. He was invited to say the closing prayer at the Launch of the Seventh Annual Remembrance Week Celebration in the Senate Chambers, and it was a particularly significant moment, as Aboriginal Peoples had just returned from a unique mission, the Calling Home of the Spirits of Aboriginal Veterans who had perished in Europe, and they were an integral part of the launch. Those who know the shameful history know how shabbily Aboriginal Veterans have been treated in this country that they served with such strength and sacrifice in its overseas wars. As he lit his sacred bowl of sage, one veteran walked across the room to be smudged by the



Elder. At the end of his prayer, countless other people came forward to be smudged, and it seemed the line would never end. Even the Speaker of the Senate presented himself to be smudged, and later, William received a very gracious letter of thanks.

A month later, he offered the Opening Prayer at the Nelson Mandela Canadian Youth Conference, in the West Block, Parliament Hill, and this time, his words regarding harmony and interrelationships, struck a cord for Ottawa-Carleton MP Marc Godbout, who made a special point of thanking the Elder for his words, saying it was the kind of wisdom Parliamentarians need to listen to more often on Parliament Hill; he added that he wished more of his colleagues could have heard and been guided by the Elder's words about learning to work together for the good of Mother Earth and all her children.

I was reminded about the naming of a hall within the Parliament Buildings the Aboriginal Room, several years ago, when, for the first time we heard a representative of the federal government, Don Boudria, then Speaker of the House, thank the Elder for the use of what he acknowledged was Algonquin Territory.

And, yes, yet another seed was planted by the Elder on those austere grounds; a few years ago, the Elder did a pipe ceremony in the Senate Library the circular building with the cupola, the one part of the Parliament Buildings that was spared during the great fire that destroyed the buildings in 1916: a prayer that the original peoples of the land would take their rightful place in the governance of the country, as had been anticipated by his ancestors.

I am reminded of the Elder's words to the Prime Minister in May, 2005, at the time of the first motion of non confidence in the government of the land that many believe is the most blessed in the world:

We accept as a governing principle that one out of four key federal voices in this land can represent only its one constituency, and not the federation, and we have seen how dangerously close to dissolution this has drawn us, right on my doorstep. I have not been happy to see this strife and turmoil.

It is interesting to hear the Prime Minister himself iterate this very sentiment today when he tells us now, as a part of his election campaign in his disrupted mandate, that he won't let his country be broken up, and the birthplace of his children torn away from him. Surely the deep irony cannot be lost on him.

TREE PLANTING Elder Statesman

On another occasion, Elder Commanda was invited to serve as an Honorary Co-Chair and to offer the Opening Prayer of a Conference against Hatred and Racial Discrimination in Ottawa. Despite its limitations, it provided the multi racial participants with a glimpse into the unique style and warm heart of the man as he moved into his

position as a statesman in his homeland. It also served as an educational opportunity to apprise the many groups who feel marginalized within the nation's capital of the much deeper isolation, alienation and racism directed against the First Peoples of this country that the world now calls home.

This message was not lost on the Mayor and the Inter Faith Committee of Ottawa. In September, they organized a tree planting ceremony at City Hall, and they invited Elder Commanda to do the Opening and Closing Prayer, cementing a recognition of the special place of his spiritual ceremony on the unsundered territory of his ancestors. The Mayor himself acknowledged this fact, and William was moved as, for

the first time, he began to feel an awakening regarding indigenous peoples stirring within the heart of the country.

His formal remarks were as follows:

I am pleased to participate in the Interfaith Tree Planting Ceremony to commemorate



150 years since the establishment of the City of Ottawa, on this fourth annual United Nations International Day of Peace, when we also honour the Autumn Equinox.

From time immemorial, this area where the three rivers meet served as the spiritual meeting grounds of my ancestors. Now the world is here. The Seven Fires Prophecy of my ancestors foretold the coming of the new peoples to our land and held a promise for the strengthening of the human race; so far, though there have been many advances, we have not really realized this dream

collectively, and the indigenous peoples have carried a deep pain. But now as I turn ninety-two, I am encouraged to see the indigenous voice gradually finding a place of respect on Turtle Island.

It is fitting that we gather to plant a tree. When my ancestors welcomed the new comers, we committed to sharing the grand natural resources of this land with them, and a short two hundred years ago there were

pine trees up to thirteen feet in diameter in the Ottawa River Valley; they are now gone, and with the passing of the trees across the Mother Earth, we have seen the pollution in the air, the flooding of the lands and the uncontrollable fires transform our lives dramatically.

In 2000, I photographed a seventy-five foot spruce tree for the logo for my work, the Circle of All Nations. With its four trunks, it represented the four symbolic races,

united in recognition of our relationship with each other.

Sadly, the eastern tree fell in 2001, foretelling the events of September 11; the rest of the great tree fell in November 2003, before the war on Iraq. In 2000, the United Nations declared this the Decade for a Culture of Peace, but we have only seen a great increase in racism, violence, war and fear. Mother Earth's turmoil has only added to our struggles.

Efforts such as this tree planting by a multi

cultural community offers a path to healing our relationship with Mother Earth and each other. I commend the Mayor and Interfaith Ottawa for taking this step forward. It is a good way to energize the International Day of Peace. I would like to present Mayor Chiarelli with this gift (his book) in appreciation of his efforts to celebrate diversity and peace building in Ottawa.

This was not the only Tree Planting Ceremony our Elder participated in. He performed a Smudging Ceremony when the South African High Commission planted a tree at the site which commemorates the coming together of the nations of the world, where the Rideau River falls dramatically over the escarpment to join the Gatineau and Ottawa Rivers. A magnificent spot with its

commanding view of the features of the land his ancestors revered: waterfall, river, mountain it was symbolically fitting that the indigenous elder sanctified the gesture of nation to nation relationship-building made by South Africa, the land that suffered racial oppression of the worst type, and that has nonetheless broken through centuries of barriers to proclaim a Rainbow Nation.

HEALTH AND HEALING Thunderbird Energy

We are always amazed by Grandfather's seemingly endless energy, stamina, strength and general good health, despite the ailments that come with the aging process.

But this summer, he sustained a serious heart attack, just before his annual August Gathering. Thanks to the efficient and speedy attention by the Ambulance Paramedics and the team at the Ottawa Heart Institute, early intervention was possible; and despite some complications with internal bleeding, he made good recovery; no doubt his good medical care was supported by the outpouring of prayers, love and good wishes of his friends from across the world. A scant few weeks after his heart attack, he hosted twenty five hundred people at his home; his personal nurse and long time friend Susan Hagar had to be very firm with him to limit his activities a trifle!

Many of us think that the heart attack was a message for us that we need to listen more carefully and animate within our own lives the core messages of love, forgiveness, respect and responsibility we hear repeatedly from our Elder; indeed, this shift did happen for many folk at this year's Gathering, and we settled, individually and communally, into a deeper level of mindful peacefulness.

Unfortunately, later in the fall, he sustained an attack of shingles, and the recovery is a slow one. It has slowed him

down a bit, but this is good: we are now gearing our energies for his really important work and priorities.

As an aside, given our national pre-occupation with health care at this moment, I thought I would give you an outline of the sequencing of William's health concerns over the past year. Now, I must add that we have received nothing but attentive, courteous medical service; still, I think there is something to be examined here in our collective reliance on the medical system to keep us safe and healthy.

In April, William experienced some pain in a toe, but despite repeated trips to the Emergency Ward (with those long waits), and reasonable attention, the problem continued; it interrupted his work in Algonquin Park, such that he headed directly into an Emergency Ward in Ottawa from Huntsville, waited seven hours in pain, and again the problem was not identified. A couple of months later, he picked up Aleve, an over the counter drug in the US (but not in Canada) to help with the pain; but a few weeks later ended up in hospital with kidney problems. At this point, he was taken off all his medication, including the coated aspirin he had been taking for years for his angina condition. Then he underwent a colonoscopy; the doctor wanted to do a biopsy on his intestine; I recall William being reluctant to submit to this, saying, "I don't want to awaken anything!" - but he was persuaded to proceed with it. A short while after this, he sustained the



serious heart attack. Was there some blood clot moving around his blood vessels, after the biopsy, not dissolved by the aspirin blood thinner, which then clogged the artery?

Oh, the original problem turned out to be gout, though it was not recognized by many medical professionals. Had it been properly diagnosed, might the whole string of developments and associated expenses been averted?

Anyway, we were fortunate that William was in Ottawa when the heart attack happened the immediate intervention saved his life, and a lurking health problem was identified and addressed.

Now, our battle is focused on fighting for the continuation of one medical prescription that has finally contributed to a balance in William's overall health, but that Indian Affairs/Health Canada does not wish to cover.

THE 2005 CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS GATHERING

Everyone's Grandfather

Although Grandfather William Commanda sustained his first serious heart attack on July 21, 2005, his Annual Circle of All Nations Gathering of August 4th, 5th and 6th went off without a hitch!

This is of course in large measure courtesy of the tremendous commitment and hard work of his many friends who gathered to initiate the preparations; it rather reminded us of the remark in the movie, Gandhi There go my people; I must hurry to catch up with them!

Thanks especially to the efforts of Tommy, Evelyn and Johnny Dewache, Gaston Lavoie, Tennessee Mike, Peter Decontie, Fran Denis, Three Rivers, Josie Whiteduck, Wayne Boucher, Luc Fournier, Gerry, and Roy Barnes' team, as well as the Kitigan Zibi Summer Yard Crew, the land was prepared, parking lots and campsites laid out, the yard cleaned, a new arbour built, tipis and tents and meeting spaces set up, food purchased and prepared, grandfathers (rocks) for sweat lodges collected, and communication items organized well in advance of the actual arrival of our guests on the Thursday afternoon.

In fact, we had our first formal team meeting late on Thursday afternoon that is how well Grandfather's team of volunteer workers anticipate and

undertake their individual tasks and ensure that year after year, we have the most unique international gathering imaginable! It's that indigenous thing of how, as an individual develops and expresses his or her own unique gifts, skills and talents, the individual becomes a corner stone of the community. It is not that we have not

efforts, and then calmly announced, in the middle of the storm that was erupting, that we would have four days of beautiful weather; he had asked Grand-mother Moon for this when he had smoked his pipe for the New Moon she had never refused him his requests before, and he had no reason to anticipate otherwise this time. Sure enough, before the meeting was over, the sun shone brightly at us, the oppressive humidity had snapped, and we had glorious weather for the entire Gathering. Another huge message about his absolute faith in and interface with the powers of Nature!

This year, Grandfather's theme was Celebrating Culture. Over twenty five hundred people from many locations across the globe journeyed to his home to celebrate the marvelous diversity

of the human family, and we had the most peaceful gathering ever. Now this may sound like a large number of people to you still it was a thousand less than we had the year before; we could feel the impact of 9/11 on travel from the United States and Europe in the diminished numbers, and in this a reflection of the narrowing of our global horizons, and an increase in fear and insecurity in our world.

The 2005 Gathering was indeed an extraordinary experience that again left participants transformed, and marking down the dates for the next year's event. We have a tremendous diversity



had to work through issues of competition, insecurity, perceived inadequacies, egos etc. over the years. But Grandfather's willingness and, indeed, insistence on seeing the best in each of us as we have grown has resulted in us uncovering and revealing more and more of our beautiful selves, and this year, his team did him proud!

Everyone's energy was at a pitch by the time of the Thursday meeting, because we had all also been worrying about Grandfather's health. The air was heavy with humidity, and the thunder started to boom and lightning o flash. Grandfather thanked everyone for their

of participants, from young to old; representing many races, languages and cultures; academics, artists, writers, parolees, bureaucrats, religious leaders, etc. at our Gatherings. Increasingly, we see more and more children at the Gatherings in fact, for many families, it has become the annual reunion and family holiday. Interestingly enough, we interrupted this writing session and went to Tim Hortons in Kanata for coffee, today being the day we ended all our formal activities for the year. (I said to William, this could be fun, just going out and actually sitting in a coffee shop, as compared to having Tim Hortons on the run, en route to yet another of his meetings!) At the coffee shop, I noticed someone looking at us, and I felt a bit strange; eventually, the man, now accompanied by his wife, came over to our table, and asked if this was Grandfather Commanda. It worked out

that the blond haired, blue-eyed Adam had come to the 2005 Gathering; his wife had been there two years in a row. He said he had had a rough day, and he felt lighter, having just seen Grandfather.

And that sums up the core element of the Gathering people come back to the realization that we are all related and we can all support each other.

When I first met William Commanda, I wondered why so many people called him Grandfather; that is not necessarily the Aboriginal style of greeting; now I know it is because of the love and warmth that emanates from his very being; in his very person, he makes us realize the profound message of relationship held by his ancestors.

Also, at an even deeper, Ubuntu level, here is something Valerie Pouyanne wrote in the message for his Ninetieth

Birthday Gift Book:

At one moment, I realized that William's face was reminding me of my father; my neighbour said William was reminding him of his mother; a few minutes later a woman took the microphone and said that when she was looking at William she was seeing her grandmother. Suddenly, it was all a family gathered in William's face. Maybe it is the face of universal and unconditional love that everyone recognizes in William.

What an incredibly generous gift he offers us all in this annual Gathering at his home it is an incarnation of the vision of the Seven Fires Prophecy the vision for the lighting of the eight fire of peace and brotherhood and sisterhood.



A GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH SOUTH AFRICA

Global consciousness

For eight years now, Elder Commanda has nurtured a special relationship with South Africa. He welcomed President Nelson Mandela to this country in 1998; he brought five South Africans, including three youth, to participate in his Millennium Peace Gathering at Nepean Point (incidentally, another sacred site of his ancestors, again consecrated by his prayer and ceremony); the then High Commissioner of South Africa, Andre Jacquet, participated in his August 2001 Gathering; and he himself visited South Africa in 2001, and participated in workshops and offered sacred ceremonies on the Indian Ocean, in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and in a former concentration camp, as requested.



He was invited to welcome the current High Commissioner Theresa Soloman, as she assumed her responsibilities, and to join in celebrations of South Africa's Freedom Day, and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund activities. Ever gracious, he won the hearts of many young and old; but, as he reminded us, while he celebrates the freedom of South Africans on his land, so too he prays that his own people will soon have their freedom on this land of their ancestors, and not have their spirits and aspirations chained to the oppression of colonialism. He also participated in the Tree Planting ceremony and the High Commissioner's farewell reception.

An interesting thing has developed in this fledgling relationship with South Africa. William Commanda has become recognized as indigenous, and not just as this warm and loving old man who promotes racial harmony. As foreign embassies come to acknowledge the indigenous peoples of Canada, they can serve to raise the awareness and sensitivity of the Canadians at large.

A point of interest to us: Harold Head, a Canadian of South African origins, who can be seen in the photo of the Elder with President Mandela, has attended activities organized by the Elder in Ottawa faithfully over the years; we value this acknowledgement of the indigenous peoples of this land by the newcomer. Healing on this land will increase, as other newcomers emulate this respect.

THE HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE

The Wisdom Holder

On October 30, 2005, William Commanda was presented with an Honorary Doctorate Degree by the University of Ottawa! Interestingly enough, the announcement came shortly after we had written the book *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*.

The Elder's relationship with the University had been forged many years earlier. In the early 2000s, he offered the opening prayer at the launch of the Aboriginal Legal Studies Unit, and in 2002, he was presented with the first Justice Award by the Aboriginal Legal Studies branch of the University of Ottawa. He attended open houses of the Aboriginal Resources Centre. He served as guest lecturer at many classes over the years, and students have been genuinely moved by his teachings.

In 2004, the University's Aboriginal Studies Program was launched from his Lodge at his home in Kitigan Zibi, at a very special community-based ceremony, feast and celebration.

It was indeed meaningful to have these efforts, and his lifetime of work to promote a Circle of All Nations, acknowledged by the presentation of the Honorary Doctorate Degree.

He expressed his gratitude for the gracious manner in which the University, through a very special lady, Caroline Tremblay, worked with us to facilitate his participation in the convocation in a letter to the President

Patry:

"I am writing to thank you formally for the warm and inclusive manner in which the University of Ottawa accommodated the investiture of my Honorary Doctorate Degree in the Fall Convocation. I was honoured to offer the Opening Prayer, and to have the opportunity to share some of my thoughts. I am also grateful that you



were able to invite so many of my friends to the convocation and reception."

Indeed, it was quite obvious that the University was pleased to be honouring this indigenous person, and in fact, through this gesture, was also pleased to be acknowledging indigenous peoples in general.

But, as many of the participants commented after the event, William pulled the carpet from under everyone's feet in his quiet, unassuming manner, and in the end, I am sure that it was the University that

felt honoured to be associated with him.

As many of you know, our elder was in the midst of a painful case of shingles at the time of the Convocation, and as I drove him to the luncheon, he was in such discomfort that I was wondering quite seriously whether it was right that the energy of the ninety two year old be expended on this half day event.

Surely, I thought, his friends would understand if we cancelled, in order to preserve his strength. But, the ultimate symbol of UBUNTU, the South African belief that I am because you are, he was energized by the interest and enthusiasm of the people at the Chancellor's luncheon, and he began to talk with animation in both English and French to his table partners, including Chancellor Hugette Labelle. Later, we wheeled him onto the stage in his wheelchair, and we worried about him sitting through the long ceremony. Senior University officials

hovered and fussed over him, in a touching manner.

He launched the convocation with the opening prayer, moving forward to offer the benediction without introduction, thus, quite seamlessly, becoming a part of the agenda. This was a special moment, which illustrated one of the lessons of the indigenous Medicine Wheel the integration of the spiritual in all activities. His trilingual address carried overtones of the sacred Three Figure Wampum Belt of the 1700s, the Welcoming Belt, which incorporates



the message of his ancestors welcoming the newcomers, then the French and the English, to their land, in the spirit of sharing; here, even his approach to language was generous: he commenced his prayer in Algonquin, the language of his ancestors of the unsundered Algonquin territory, then translated himself into English and French; the ninety-two year old kindergarten dropout put took the spirit of federal bilingualism from its politically correct disjointedness to a heart inspired effort to communicate with all, including to the ancestral spirits of the land. This latter is an intriguing point, for in the environment where the focus is on preparation for the future, he took time to integrate the past.

But it was when he moved forward to make his formal acceptance speech that the elder moved into his statesman's persona. He got up from his wheel chair and walked to the podium with his cane. He lit his bowl of sage to invoke the participation of his Creator in the presentation. The smoke rose in a circle of purification and protection around him then diffused into the auditorium to embrace the others in the room. He addressed the crowd in Algonquin, then, as is his style, he translated himself into English and French. His quiet passion was electrifying to many, and many others were moved to tears; many in the audience were aware of a sudden shift in the attention of the University staff on the stage they sat up with growing interest in the profound words of wisdom from the new graduate. He received a standing ovation when he eventually drew to a close, a good twenty-five minutes later. But as he left the podium, he noticed his short prepared notes on the table, and decided he might as well read them as well. They proved to be a précis of his more expansive speech, and are included here. The full transcript of his words will be placed on the Wisdom Page of the website in the near future.

"Today, I become a doctor but really, I don't know if I am that smart. I have been suffering with shingles for the past three weeks, and I still have not been able to cure myself!

But despite the pain, I am very happy to be here with you.

I accept this honour with great gratitude, and really, I accept it on behalf of my indigenous ancestors and children. For a long time we have been ashamed of our heritage; there were dark moments when I myself felt it was a shame to be born Indian and wished I was dead.

But a deeper strength of my ancestors kept me alive, and taught me to work for the two important things they believed in:

First, absolute respect for Mother Earth and the waters, air and fire, and the animal teachers. Today, we see where our collective disrespect for Mother Earth has brought us to the destruction of life as we have known it; today we worry daily about natural disasters, cancers and new diseases.

My ancestors also taught that we were all related, and so we learned to treat everyone and everything on the earth with respect, generosity and love as a relative. As we moved away from those values, exploitation, hatred, violence and crime poisoned our lives and destroyed our world.

As I learned to find my path back to the values of my ancestors, so I gradually built my world around the vision of a Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace.

I am deeply moved that the University of Ottawa recognizes this effort with this Honorary Degree to a kindergarten dropout!

I hope it encourages indigenous peoples to recognize and realize the strengths and wisdom within our heritage, and that it also encourages others to learn and value the teachings of Turtle Island, the place they now all call home.

I thank my many friends who have traveled here to support me today. It is their support that has made this honour possible."



Yes, by the end of the University of Ottawa convocation, it had become William Commanda's convocation, and indeed, everyone wanted to move closer to him. More than his regular friends swarmed him at the evening reception. One very special moment came when Mohawk Elder Ernie Benedict, now in his late eighties, presented him with a commemorative wampum string; he was also moved to see so many friends from near and far (even as far as Japan!), and his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Yes, his Circle of All Nations grew substantially that day.

PRIORITIES FOR 2006 The Tireless Worker

- 1. A William Commanda Biography**
- 2. Advancing the Vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island**

You can help us, first, by sharing your stories about meaningful moments with William Commanda, and second, by expressing your support for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island to the Government of Canada, the media and any others who you think will help us bring it to realization.

Of course, we can also expect William to remind us constantly of his two deepest concerns: the desperate need for respect and protection of Mother Earth, and for the values of love, forgiveness and conciliation to guide our relationships with each other.

Also, please note, generally, special events are organized at regular times each year: March 21, June 21, the beginning of August, November 11 and December 31. Please check the website a few weeks in advance of these dates to see what might be coming up under New Announcements in the Community Page. (Many thanks to Scott Towajj for his ongoing efforts with our website!)

This has been a very special year: we launched two special items to enable us to share William Commanda's messages more broadly than we have been able to in the past, and to support his work: a bilingual video documentary and a book!

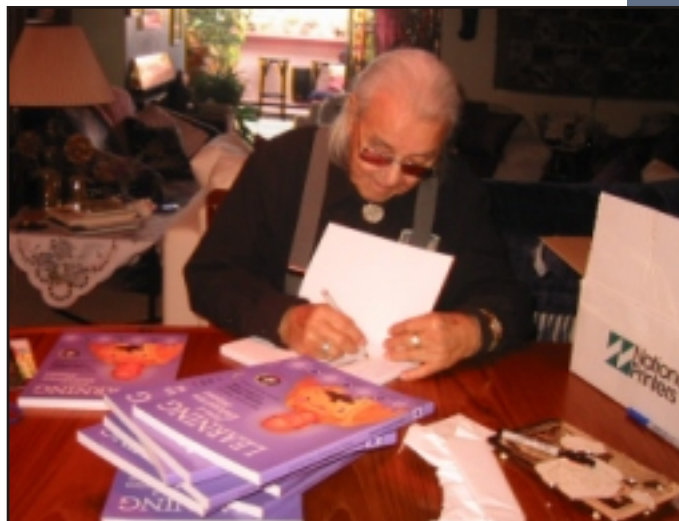
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COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGES

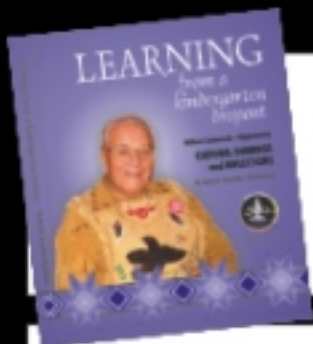
Modern Moccasin Telegraph

Valerie Pouyanne spent many months producing a bilingual dvd on William Commanda's May 2004 canoe-making experience, when the world renowned canoe maker shared his knowledge and unique techniques with Mi'kmaq craftsman Todd Labrador, in a two week experience that went well beyond skills teaching. Todd, Valerie, Maureen Barthelomew, a student from France, and Romola, shared an intimate glimpse into the life and passions of an extraordinary artist, philosopher and philanthropist. Fittingly, she entitled the documentary, *Good Enough for Two*. It was enthusiastically received at its premier screening at the First Peoples Film Festival in Montreal in June, and will undoubtedly be a favourite with canoeists, craftsmen and philosophers alike.



Once William decided he wanted to share his story in written form, he expected it would be done in a couple of weeks; after all, he had shared his story so openly for so long! But, that really being a big job, we worked hard to produce a book on his key teachings for his August Gathering. Thanks to the

generous help from Karen Bisson, we were able to produce a memorable 192 page full colour book, *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*. (Despite her busy schedule, Karen has once again helped us with the graphic layout of this report. Megwetch Karen!)



Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout

An exploration of the history, ideology, work, teachings and vision of a remarkable man whose efforts to promote respect for Mother Earth, indigenous wisdom, racial harmony and peace building are animated within *A Circle of All Nations: A Culture of Peace*. This beautiful 192 page full colour book includes dozens of photos, thought provoking insights and creative teaching materials. Written by Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo.

Good enough for two!

At ninety, world-renowned Algonquin canoe maker and spiritual leader William Commanda builds another birch bark canoe. During the ten days of canoe making at his home on Kitigan Zibi Reserve, we have an intimate glimpse into his daily life, his personality and teachings, as he shares his techniques with Todd Labrador, Mi'kmaq Indian from Nova Scotia. A 54 minute documentary in French and English, in DVD format. By Valerie Pouyanne, Studios Loom. <http://pages.videotron.com/loom/>



"It was prophesied that the time would come when the voice of indigenous peoples would rise again after five hundred years of silence and oppression, to light a path to an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood amongst all nations."

William Commanda, Ojigkwanong, Algonquin Elder, now ninety two years old, and just invested with an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Ottawa on October 30, 2005.

**For more information call (613) 599-8385
or e-mail circleofallnations@sympatico.ca**



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE