

Asinabka – A Place of Peace

I wish to be absolutely clear regarding my views on the following issue. It is my understanding that Asinabka (Victoria and Chaudiere Islands) is unceded Algonquin territory. For that reason I would be obliged to support any claim the Algonquins might make to that land. That seems only right to me. However, there is another consideration to which I wish to draw your attention, that is, in my opinion, even more compelling.

Central to the discussion of any proposal for Asinabka (Victoria and Chaudiere Islands) must be the vision of the esteemed Algonquin elder, Grandfather William Commanda.

Why is that?

Consider, please, the significance and scope of this extraordinary vision:

1. It came in direct response to a prayer by a dying man to his Creator

“If there is anything that I can do for you, let me live....”

2. This man was completely healed in answer to that prayer – a medical miracle!

3. He was a fundamentally changed man, transformed from an inebriate who cursed and swore, a man filled with bitterness and hatred towards white people, (justifiably I might add), to a man who advocated tirelessly for peace and practiced forgiveness towards all.

1. **4. This man dedicatd the remaining 40 Years of his life to the realization of this vision** which included Respect for Mother Earth, Racial Harmony and Peace Building.

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3. 5. This vision was not only for First Nations but for all peoples

The vision that came to him included the creation of a “Circle of All Nations”, and people from all walks of life thronged to him. Many of us, native and non-native, have extraordinary stories to tell of how we were called to this Circle.

With no corporate funding, no advertising, no board of directors, the Circle grew to encompass the globe. A vision of Peace for all of us. A vision that refuses to die.

1. **6. This vision carried him to many unusual places and peoples.** It gave this humble man the authority to meet on an equal footing with royalty, government, spiritual leaders, leading academics. He met 4 times with the Dalai Lama, presented an eagle feather to Nelson Mandela, canoed with Prime minister Trudeau, was hosted for a month in Denmark while he built a canoe for Queen Margrethe. The list goes on.....and on....and on...
2. **7. This vision brought him the highest honours of both the indigenous and white cultures.** With no formal education, this man received Honorary Doctorates from Universities in Ontario and Quebec, was given the Key to the City of Ottawa and was made an Officer of the Order of Canada. He was the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Association, as well as many, many other awards and honours. This is no ordinary man!
- 3.

8. This man was also honoured as the Carrier of three traditional wampum belts. The significance of two of them is important here: One was referred to as the **Sharing or Friendship Belt**. It originated with his ancestors in the 1700's and dealt with the equal relationship of the French, the English and the Algonquin Nations, existing pre-Confederation. The second was the **Seven Fires Prophecy Belt** which recorded the history of the Anishinabe from the 1400's to the present day. These belts were not merely decorations. They carried the historical records, treaties, and prophecies of the Algonquin people, and it was entrusted to the Carrier to diligently learn and pass on the intricacies of meaning which they contain. This man was the custodian of sacred texts, a living historical record.

What significance do these things have today and what relevance do they have for this project?

The Seven Fires Prophecy is not a frivolous legend. It accurately documents the migratory history of the Anishinabe people, even predicting the arrival of Europeans and their desecration of the Indigenous culture. It describes a time, known as the Seventh Fire, when mankind must make a choice between materialism and spirituality: If we choose poorly, we will destroy the earth as we know it; if we choose well, the Eighth and final Fire will be lit and the Nations will come together to form one mighty nation in peace

and harmony. Grandfather William Commanda was vitally aware that we are living in the time of the Seventh fire. That knowledge passionately informed every activity he undertook. He knew that this is a time unlike any other in our world history. His vision is a vision specifically for our time. A vital vision for today!

I believe you may have been drawn to this particular project for a reason far more significant than you know. To develop much more than stone and wood. There is an opportunity here to influence Canada's history, even World History, in a significant and powerful way. To be a co-creator with destiny. A chance to build bridges of trust and friendship in the heart of this Capital City, in the heart of this Country, that will span cultures and generations, to heal wounds that lie deep in our collective consciousness. To make Our Capital a model for Peace in the world, with the Isles as its nucleus.

I travelled for six hours just to attend your public input meeting. I came not so much to evaluate your plans as to evaluate you and your team. I left with some degree of hope.

What I saw was a vibrant and creative company that wants to create something of significance and beauty, to turn the Isles into an engaging and vibrant community. Similar to the ingenious Brewery District in Toronto where my friend was married, or Vancouver's Granville Island which I have heard so much about. Truly a good vision I think. But I invite you to expand that vision. To make it truly visionary on a global scale.

How do I see this vision being realized?

The Vision of Grandfather William Commanda becomes the very template of your development, its very heart and soul. Peace is its signature. By working with Douglas Cardinal and his plans for The National Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, you will make a coherent statement of that vision throughout the Isles; it will become the very Spirit of the Isles. By respecting the requirements of The Vision regarding a public eco-park, a historical interpretive centre, and free and open access to the sacred Chaudiere Falls, by advocating that the Falls be set free to be the dynamic spiritual force that it was intended to be. A place where the world will again come to be awed by its spender.

By inviting First Nations to be involved in the reclamation of Chaudiere Island and the restoration of a sacred white pine forest there, you will create

a climate for reconciliation with Mother Earth and green space for all peoples. A strong foundation of Peace.

I see housing and commercial development restricted to the mainland areas. Chaudiere Island is reserved for public use. By consultation with the Algonquins it could be developed in ways compatible with elder Commanda's vision.

I offer the following as suggestions only:

I envision an urban park covering approximately 8 acres of Chaudiere Island, with walking paths winding through it. Possibly with plaques narrating the stories of the Algonquin people, or maybe even an APP describing the rich history of the island. I envision a beach or walkway near the Chaudiere rapids with a place designated for ceremonial offerings. An informal teaching place where the public is invited to join First Nations in making sacred tobacco offerings to the great falls as in the past. Possibly a nature interpretive centre nestled among the trees. A place for all to learn and enjoy!

The ceremonial area could be known as “Algonquin Shores” or “The Algonquin Way”.

On the remaining 4 acres, I envision a “village commons”, a “gathering place” of the four directions, A Circle to represent All Nations. I see it incorporating some of the existing buildings if possible, showcasing the history of the pulp and paper industry, intermingled with authentic ethnic shops, unique artist studios and possibly a small community theatre\ film\ dance centre showcasing our own local ethnic talent.

(This is where your company really shines!)

Each venue is chosen to celebrate the rich diversity of Canada and the Capital Region and to make it a world class example of a Culture of Peace .

In each of the “four directions” of this circle I envision a truly authentic ethnic restaurant, one for each of the Red, White, Yellow and Black races of people. Creative in design, owned and operated by peoples of that race, these venues would provide a distinctive culinary experience for both visitors and residents of Ottawa and Gatineau.

At the very heart of the circle, and as the Focal Point of the Isles, I envision an everlasting flame, the Eighth Fire. Here, at the apex of the circle, the world is invited to offer prayers and ceremonies for peace and reconciliation for all – for all of us!

In the large, communal circle surrounding the Eighth Fire, I see us all coming together as One, to dance and sing and laugh and play, sharing and celebrating our diversity.

Hosting ethnic festivals such as the Peace Festival here would include our more recent immigrants and cultures. (I note the many peace initiatives already in progress that complement this venture.) Concerts! Health fairs! Art and craft festivals! Flea markets!

On Albert Island I envision a World Class Hostel \ Hotel to accommodate elders, and National and International visitors to the Peace Building Centre on Victoria Island, and the healing and cultural activities of the National Indigenous Center. Led by First Nations, Canada would regain its place as a peacemaker on the world stage.

The following ideas are offered to show consistency with the Vision:

On Victoria Island, of course, the focus is on the National Indigenous Centre - an architectural and cultural masterpiece, designed by eminent Architect Douglas Cardinal. I see it as a place to regenerate and strengthen aboriginal cultures, a place where the best practices from all the Nations in counselling, in traditional healing, in teaching traditional language and culture, etc. can be brought together and shared.

And I see it as a place where the rest of us can sit at the feet of the elders and learn.

I envision the Powwow Grounds as a place to experience Indigenous pride in dances, songs and ceremony, and to share that pride with the rest of the Country and the World. I envision it surrounded by a little grove of white pine trees, The Grove of the Little Spirits, to commemorate the children that were lost in the Residential Schools. A place where those little lost spirits can dance with the rest of us, and not be forgotten.

I envision the Peace-building centre (Tipi Village Conference Centre) as an exciting initiative of our young people who will engage the younger generations of the world in peacemaking discussions and activities. A Circle of All Nations Gathering place. Endless possibilities here! Maybe an International Peace Garden.

The existing "Aboriginal Adventures" could be restructured to provide a genuine Aboriginal Experience to tourists and school children, an authentic

learning experience.

The level of complexity could be geared to the group involved. A genuine First Nations “camping experience” might also be considered.

There could be a forest theatre for historical re-enactments, telling the authentic history of all our peoples, and celebrating the rich legacies of the Couer de Bois, The Metis, and the Indigenous Peoples.

Voyageur and birch bark canoes could ply the river between the Isles, providing transportation and recounting to visitors our rich history. Tourists would love that.

The Isles could be truly a gathering place of all peoples once more – a circle of all nations that is a model for the world and a teaching space that redefines tourism.

In Conclusion:

On the eve of the Federal Apology to First Nations, I was walking back to Ottawa from the Museum of Civilization, across the Alexandra Bridge. My heart was heavy with shame and guilt from the recent knowledge of how my race had treated the First Nations of this land. I was grateful that the rain joined my tears, which refused to stop flowing. No apology would suffice to heal such deep wounds. It just wasn't enough!

Suddenly there appeared in the sky a luminous rainbow, spreading its vibrant colours from Ottawa to Gatineau and directly over Asinabka, over the Isles, spanning the three cultures of the Friendship Wampum belt in a radiant bridge of light.

And I knew that I was being given a promise that right here, in the heart of the Nation's Capital, there would again be a meeting place of healing and brotherhood and peace.

Because you see, it was not merely Grandfather Commanda's vision. It was a vision given by the Creator himself – there is only one Creator God. It was entrusted to this remarkably gifted man because it was so crucial to this time in history, and he was such a faithful carrier of the vision. But the vision is for all of us. And it requires much of us.

The final lighting of the Eighth Fire will only take place by the coming together in peace of a new tribe of people drawn from all the nations who are

committed to healing the earth and restoring peace among all her peoples. They will be called Warriors of the Rainbow and they will require much tenacity, intelligence, creativity, and incredible courage.

On Sept. 22, 2013 I participated in a Walk for Reconciliation in Vancouver envisioned by one enlightened man, Elder Bobby Joseph. I had flown to Vancouver to be part of the National Truth and Reconciliation Event. In honour of Grandfather William Commanda and his luminous vision, I wore a beautiful rainbow shawl.

My lodgings were close to Granville Is. of which I had heard wonderful things, and I intended to visit there. Twice I crossed over Granville Bridge; twice I passed by.

Why? Not because Granville Island was not an intriguing place to visit, but because it was of less relative importance than what I was called there to do. Instead I joined 70,000 people, of all cultures and creeds and religions, who came together for one purpose – Reconciliation! 70,000 people in the pouring rain.

Why? Because it's Canada's time. Vancouver's mayor declared this year the Year of Reconciliation, setting a precedent for Canada. Isn't it time Ottawa took the lead?

Can you see it? Can you taste the significance of this time? Can you grasp it with your mind, work with it, manifest it for the good of all mankind? Can you come together with the First Peoples and with all peoples, with one heart, one mind, one love and one determination, to create something of eternal significance? Can Windmill help fan into flame the sparks of the Eighth Fire Prophecy?

I notice that the Netherlands is celebrating the 100th anniversary of The Hague as an International City of Peace and Justice. Perhaps your ancestors have prepared you well.

Perhaps the winds of peace and justice have followed your people to this land.

If you can see the significance of this time, then I invite you to offer your tobacco to the mighty Chaudiere Falls with humility and deep respect and gratitude. Because if you can, perhaps, just perhaps, you have been chosen to be instrumental in manifesting the Vision of this significant time.

But if you cannot, then please step aside and let the Algonquins show us the way to the Eighth Fire. The ancestors have waited for a very, very long time.....

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