

An Officer and a Gentleman – What a Lifetime Achiever!

A snap shot look at the life of William Commanda during this very special month of November, 2009 – when he turned 96!

Indeed this has been a heady month for the many friends of William Commanda – we have always known just how important he is; this month, many others joined us in celebrating this special individual!

The special period began, as they all generally do, with Grandmother Moon.

As we prepared for his Full Moon Pipe ceremony on the Sunday evening of November 2nd, others joined us quite unexpectedly. Brad Henry, William's Tlingit artist friend brought his friend Adam Beach and his two young sons – yes, *that Adam Beach!* And, as with William, his birthday falls on November 11! Elena came with carrot cake, and we had our first pre-birthday celebration after the Pipe Ceremony. Kirk Wipper, our old friend in from Peterborough, joined us with Mike Greco; and November was properly welcomed with friends and good hope.

THE VISION FOR VICTORIA ISLAND

At William Commanda's birthday a year ago, CEO Maria Lemay, National Capital Commission (NCC) had suggested that it would be helpful to have a champion for the the vision for Victoria Island.

On November 3, 2009, Elder Commanda was able to report

that local MPs Paul Dewar, NDP, and Mauril Bélanger, Liberal, were on board with their support and willingness to advance the effort with government.

Kirk Wipper, Founder of the Canadian Canoe Museum, almost eighty six, and still recovering from a stroke and heart surgery, made the long trip to Ottawa to join us for the meeting. Others beside Kirk had also travelled long distances, illustrating that the passion for the project reaches well beyond Ottawa – Elder Dominique (T8aminik) Rankin, Algonquin from Pikogan, Quebec, Bryan Bowers from Kingston Chris Craig from South Nation, and Chief Patrick Glassford, Algonquins of Greater Golden Lake, First Nations, Ontario. Then there was also Douglas Cardinal, Mike Greco, Theo Geraets, Phil Weir – NCC seemed a bit surprised to see so many folk there; Ms. Lemay assured us that this was a project ready to go – but the magic button GO! is still as elusive as ever, so we will have to work harder to see the vision realized.

So your ongoing expressions of interest and support are as important as ever!

There is no doubt the momentum is moving towards the proper end – but sadly, still not at the urgent pace Elder Commanda would like to see. Still, you will recall that our Elder was presented with the Key to the City on Victoria Island in 2006; for his birthday, Sylvia Harvey presented him with a giant door handle and a petition signed by a huge number of people in the London, Ontario area! Few in Ottawa really realize quite how many folk across the country and beyond believe the vision for the Indigenous Centre is not only important for the First Peoples of Canada, but also for the rest of us, nationally and internationally. But the larger universe is drawing more and more folk together in this profound and singular vision of hope and inspiration, and William, always ahead of the pack, will keep pressing forward and marking the trail for us.

And, you read it here – our hearts and heads are focused on braiding all the strands together and tying a significant bow – or cutting one! – on 11/11/11!

11/11/11!

OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF CANADA

You will remember that it was at this time last year that the Governor General announced that William Commanda was being appointed Officer of the Order of Canada – well, he managed to keep this energy alive a whole year by being sick in the middle of the year and missing the planned May Investiture Ceremony and celebrations, (but keeping his presence at Rideau Hall felt by sending a well received greeting to fellow recipients:

Kwey Kwey:

My greetings to Your Excellencies, and Honoured Guests:

I send my deep regrets that I am not able to be with you all on this special occasion. At ninety five, your body does not always allow you do all the things you might wish.

When I look back at history over the years, I continue to be inspired by those who have contributed to strengthening respect for Mother Earth, promoting harmony amongst peoples and nations, and building a strong social safety net for all. These were the fundamental values of my ancestors, and I bring their dreams for a better world for all to this prayer at the May 2009 *Order of Canada* Investiture Ceremony.

I am glad to be the face of the First Peoples amongst so many who serve society with passion and commitment. I offer my congratulations to them and wish them well in the effort to secure a better future for all.

Our ancestral prophecies foretold the day when all the peoples of the world would unite in Turtle Island to create such a world, and on a day like today, despite the darkness that surrounds us, I feel the strength of their conviction that a better world will emerge with the efforts of individuals. Megwetch to you all for this hope. Merci. *Ginawaydaganuc - We Are All Connected,*

Kwey Kwey, Bonjour!

Vos Excellences et distingués invités :

Je suis heureux d'être avec vous aujourd'hui et de vous accueillir sur le territoire de mes ancêtres, les Algonquins du bassin de la rivière des Outaouais.

C'est un jour très special pour moi, de me retrouver parmi des gens qui déploient autant d'efforts pour créer un monde meilleur pour tous. C'est aussi très significatif pour moi, à titre de membre des Premières nations, d'être témoin de la reconnaissance des contributions d'une personne autochtone par un représentant de la Reine.

En ce jour historique, à l'aube de mon quatre-vingt-seizième anniversaire de naissance, le 11 novembre, Jour du souvenir, je prie pour que tous se joignent au Cercle de toutes les nations, une culture de Paix, et transmettent à nos enfants un message de respect pour notre Mère la Terre et pour toute la Création.

La prière par laquelle mes ancêtres ont accueilli les nouveaux arrivants était importante il y a 400 ans et elle requise de façon encore plus urgente aujourd'hui - Ginawaydaganuc, nous sommes tous parents.

Megwetch. Merci

... and keeping us on tenterhooks and health watch, till the better moment for such an honouring would present – and indeed it did – the 5th of November.

Well, this was so special because, after almost a year with blistered and painful feet, our Grandfather was fitted with new shoes, and thus fittingly prepared for the next episode in his colourful life; it was also the week of his 96th birthday, and other celebrations were on the horizon.

But those gods that be made this a significant day in yet another energetic way – because this was also **Guy Fawkes Day** – you know, *Guy Fawkes Guy, Shoot him in the Eye, Hang him on the Lamppost, and let the B---ger die!* Google tells me that it is chiefly South Africans who remember this piece of British history from the early 1600s – when, in view of the oppression of the Catholics by the Protestants (Henry V's legacy, you Tudor buffs), Guy Fawkes and friends decided to blow up the Parliament Building in the famous Gunpowder Plot – they were discovered, then hanged and quartered, and this incident ushered in a century of ever more oppressive treatment of the Catholics in England. In South Africa, I learned to damn our straw Guy Fawkes to his hell every year with a few *Diwali* crackers, both special dates of different orientations generally occurring around the same time. But William Commanda of course wants it all different – he wants us to resolve our differences and our hostilities of the past amicably, with forgiveness and compassion, and he released a big prayer into the universe. Does this work? Well, we hear the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury are now putting in a patch! Not only that, but the latest

revelations of abuse in Ireland are undoubtedly going to be cause for more soul searching in Europe on the path to the kind of forgiveness William talks about.

Asides aside, November 5 was a special day for us because William Commanda, the oldest First Peoples representative in the National Capital Region of Canada, was being acknowledged and honoured by the representative of the Crown in view of the relevance of his lifetime of contributions to all in his homeland.

We awakened to a beautiful sunny morning; *It looks like snow*, said William. It was so mild that morning, one did not even need a coat. We were warmly welcomed by the gracious staff at Rideau Hall, and later, by many of the fellow recipients and guests. Looking entirely special in his leather vest upon which his wife Mary had beaded images relevant to him and his history decades ago, pushing his walker around independently, our ninety six year old cut a moving and unforgettable picture for many. You should have seen him walking down the aisle after the ceremony, graciously nodding his head in greeting to each side, row after row – he simply does not tire of connecting with people!

But before that, he had his own special moment – the Governor General had invited him to offer the opening prayer and welcome to Algonquin Territory. In addition to his words in Algonquin and English, he offered these formal remarks:

Kwey Kwey, Bonjour!

Greetings to Your Excellencies, and Honoured Guests:

I am happy to be with you today and to welcome you to the territory of my ancestors, the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed.

This is a very special moment for me, to be amongst people who do so much to create a better world for all. As a First Nations person, it is also very meaningful to witness the contributions of an Indigenous person acknowledged by the representative of the Queen.

On this historic day, when I also await my ninety sixth birthday on November 11th, Remembrance Day, I pray for us all to become a part of a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*, and leave message of respect for Mother Earth and all her creation to our children.

The prayer with which my ancestors greeted the newcomers was important 400 hundred years ago, and is even more urgently needed today - *Ginawaydaganuc, We Are All Connected. Megwetch. Merci.*

Kwey Kwey, Bonjour!

Vos Excellences et distingués invités,

Je suis honoré de faire une prière tandis que nous somme rassemblés ici pour ce banquet, et de rendre hommage à notre Mère la Terre pour tout ce qu'elle nous offre – le poisson, la viande et les baies qui nous ont soutenu pendant des centaines; à une certaine époque, ces provisions étaient partout à notre portée – nous offrions notre tabac et l'original se présentait; nous étions forts et en santé dans ces temps-là.

Aujourd'hui, nous ne sommes plus aussi proches de ces sources de vie, et nombreux sont ceux qui commencent à s'inquiéter de notre approvisionnement futur d'aliments sains. Nous semblons vivre dans l'abondance, mais partout, les gens s'inquiètent de

l'obésité, du diabète, du cancer et d'autres maladies.

Je prie que nous puissions tous renouveler notre relation avec notre Mère la Terre, l'ultime pourvoyeuse, dans un esprit de respect, de responsabilité et de vénération, et que naisse une grande passion pour la culture de relations durables avec toute la Création. Cela contribuera à notre santé, à notre force et à notre guérison collectives.

Je profite aussi de cette occasion pour féliciter tous les récipiendaires de l'Ordre du Canada ainsi que les participants au programme de mentorat pour leurs efforts et leurs réalisations considérables. Vous représentez notre espoir pour l'avenir.

Ginawaydaganuc – Nous sommes tous parents

It was quite a moving experience watching him against the backdrop of the giant Norval Morriseau painting that dominates the ceremonial room at Rideau Hall with the indelible, vibrating presence of First Peoples energy, this tiny old man keeping that spirit alive in his quiet, gracious and commanding presence. He was later interviewed by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) – and it was touching to hear the tail end of fellow recipient Victor Buffalo's interview, when he talked with pride about our Elder's traditional dress and his honouring of his heritage. William Commanda relayed his core messages to APTN – that while he was welcoming people to his traditional territory, he did not own his Mother, and so, naturally enough, could not sell her - his relationship was one of responsibility for her well being, since she owned him, since he owed all in his life to her; that he did not vote or pay taxes or subscribe to activities that eroded his identity as First Person of the land; and that he honoured the commitment of his ancestors to welcoming and sharing with

the new people by remaining ever open to them all. So, he clearly defined his honouring of his special appointment as Officer of the Order of Canada in his own inimitable style.

He was pleased to socialize with his granddaughter Christine, there to represent his daughter Evelyn, and his old friends Kirk and Ann Wipper, and the many other special guests, including the young people involved in the innovative Awards Mentorship Program.

Then we raced back to Kanata to rest before the evening dinner.

Well, as he had anticipated, his snow arrived for our evening's rush hour traffic drive through downtown Ottawa to Rideau Hall. As some of you know, William drives with me every minute, so it was a stressful experience for both of us – still, we arrived on talking terms!

At the reception we chatted with several other recipients. Unfortunately, there was an energy of reserve around fellow Officer, Peter Mansbridge, so William did not have a chance to tell him he was already worrying about whether we would be home by ten, since he never misses Peter on the evening news. I wonder if Peter Mansbridge remembers that he, a young reporter then, first heard this Elder speak in 1987, at the Constitutional Meetings with First Peoples organized by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, to honour the commitments of the Constitution of 1982. Of course Indigenous issues remain unresolved, and likely many other constitutional matters too (you will recall the very recent debate about who is the head of state of Canada); but on this occasion, as indeed always, amidst talk about Indigenous Rights, William Commanda's focus was environmental stewardship – he reminded the federal and provincial/territorial ministers who had assumed responsibility for his natural resources that the earth, the air and the waters were polluted everywhere – and instructed

them that "*we depend on you to remedy this before the end of time*" – This was one early telling statement about William's deep understanding of the Indigenous person's indelible connection with land, such that his rights were inextricably linked with hers – over the years, realizing those ministers did not understand many things as clearly as he did, he has continued to reiterate this message of environmental crisis linked with the crises in First Peoples communities, which then extend to all, in that *We Are All Connected Way*; and you will undoubtedly recall that it was only after his November 2006 WaterLife Workshop that Ottawa awakened to the appalling condition of the Mighty River it drinks from, and only after his prayer at the Species at Risk Roundtable in December 2006 that Canada finally awakened to the urgency of the environmental issues. Well, maybe awakened - many are waiting to see what role we will play in Copenhagen - (You can imagine Williams thoughts about that - When he met Queen Margurita of Denmark, he asked her how many colonies she had - none whatsoever, she replied, we gave the last one back - maybe this is why William likes this queen!) Anyway, you get it – if the Indigenous Peoples don't get strong and healthy, the land won't either; and then, what is left to the rest of us? Is it any wonder that health care is our predominant concern today? What comes closer to Life itself?

He chatted with the famous Buzz Hargrove, another newly appointed Officer. He has been an active supporter of the national *Make First Nations Poverty History* campaigns, and we intend to share with him William's remarks about the fair sharing of his grand natural resources consistent with the promise of the *Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt* with him (see *Kindergarten Book Two*).

Elder Commanda was invited to offer the prayer for dinner, and he offered his words in Algonquin, English, French, included some formal remarks, and closed in Algonquin.

We include his formal words here:

Your Excellencies and Special Guests,

I am honoured to say a prayer as we gather together for this banquet, and to acknowledge what Mother Earth provides for us – the fish, the meat, the berries that have sustained us over centuries; at one time, these were there just for the asking – we put down our tobacco and the moose presented itself; and we were all strong and healthy then.

Today, we are no longer so close to these sources of life, and many are beginning to worry about our future supplies of healthy food. We seem to have so much, yet everywhere, we worry about obesity, diabetes, cancer and other diseases.

I pray that we all renew our relationship with Mother Earth, the ultimate provider, in the spirit of respect, responsibility and reverence, and ignite a passion for *sustainable relationships* with all her creation. This will contribute to our collective healing, health and strength.

May I also congratulate the Order of Canada recipients as well as the participants in the Mentorship program on their great efforts and accomplishments. You represent our hope for the future.

Ginawaydaganuc – We Are All Related

Vos Excellences et distingués invités,

Je suis honoré de faire une prière tandis que nous somme rassemblés ici pour ce banquet, et de rendre hommage à notre Mère la Terre pour tout ce qu'elle

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Ginawaydaganuc – Nous sommes tous parents.

We think it was his multilingual greeting that touched the heart of the Governor General, she being in the communications business too.

The Elder received a very warm letter of congratulations from Ms Stéphanie Vallée, la députée de Gatineau, Assemblée National, Quebec, and the paper *Le Gatineau* was pleased to do a story on his Award. Now you know Wiliam’s

appointment to the Order of Canada was announced at the same time Celine Dion became Companion to the Order. We know William's *Circle of All Nations* work has put Maniwaki on the global map; now, I was beginning to think, he is becoming, like Celine Dion, the Quebec face on the map of Canada; staunch Indigenous spirit, he is beyond the limitations of any prescribed identity – intriguing! Valerie Pouyanne wrote about that strange phenomena of everybody finding family in William in his first birthday book. *Ubuntu* indeed!

The latest edition of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council newsletter and the special letter from its Chief Lucien Wabononik, and correspondence from the Algonquin team from the Ontario communities indicate with what pride and regard his people on both sides of the Mighty River hold him, and that is fitting reward for his years of tireless effort on behalf of all, making Algonquins from both sides of the Ottawa River visible in their ancestral land. This message was reiterated on behalf of all First Nations in a gracious congratulatory letter from the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

Our photographs will tell you the rest of the story; suffice it here to say, our Elder took it in good stride, this being made an *Officer*.

But a Gentleman?

Well, about that, *later!*

First we had to celebrate the ninety sixth birthday!

THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

We hosted the first party on Sunday, November 8, at the

Odawa Native Friendship Centre, where Executive Director Alison Benedict, Brian Martin and other staff helped us welcome Grandfather's friendS from Ottawa, and Rigaud, and Kingston and elsewhere. Many thanks to Elena and her girls Veronica and Nadia for organizing the birthday cakes and being on duty all afternoon; to Tito and Sandra and their girls Ixchel and Tikal for setting up and managing the sound; to Douglas Cardinal, for ensuring that William's vision for Victoria Island remains alive in all our hearts and minds; and to the many other folk for their help and friendship – and for the gifts! Grandfather, as many of you know, takes great pleasure in presents – you would think he is a kid!

The next party was planned for the actual birthdate – 11 November, 2009 – a banquet (William loves that word) in his lodge in Kitigan Zibi. The weather was glorious, and again hundreds of friends, old and new, young and old, poured in to celebrate with him. Indeed an eclectic mix – how does William manage to bind us all together? Evelyn offered a prayer and a greeting for her father; Firekeeper Peter Decontie lit the fire, as he has at countless gatherings, and his family, Marianne and Albert Miller, and Edmond and Pauline Decontie, were there in affirmation of their years of support of the Elder; as were Bernice Wagoush McGreggor and Fred and Valerie and Verna; and Josie and Ronald Whiteduck; Chief Gilbert Whiteduck offered greetings; young people from the community drummed honour songs; Gaston and Fran as always did all the to dos and prep; Liz McLean brought her wildflowers and ongoing love and commitment to William and his people, spawned over a half a century in her summers in his ancestral lands at Lac Desert, her tragic loss reminding us of the ever urgent need for the Indigenous Centre; we prayed for the safe arrival of Claudette's grandchild, expected on this special date, (but with a mind of his own, like the great great grandfather, selecting his own special date, the 19th!); we remembered Donald Marshall Junior who had brought his two year old son to celebrate the

birthday a short year ago; and talking about babies, the baby of our new friend with the Dalai Lama Foundation arrived at 11.58 pm on the 11th!; Monique Renaud, who keeps the Water prayer and song alive at all our events, and sings Happy Birthday to William in Algonquin and French was there; Ray Sunstrum of the Wolf Project brought Minnie Matoush from the Cree School Board, and Kibego Nabuvira, a writer originally from Congo, who, inspired by William, invokes the Seven Fires Prophecy in his new book, *Yate*; Lucie Ouimet brought her husband Alain from France, and copies of her NFB documentary on William, launched at his 90th birthday party at the Museum of Civilizations (where, I might add we unveiled William's birthday posters on 9-11, {09 Nov} each carefully inscribed with a special prayer for peace to transform the pain of that date – and my sister Beulah reminded me that we were now at another 9-11 {Nov 09} – and ironically enough, W5 aired a show last night transforming the Conspiracy Theorists language to 9/11 Truth Activists – check out William's interview with the Citizen in 2002 for his thoughts); Patrick Gravel, Jolyane and baby conducted environmental business with Chief Whiteduck, and brought a friend, a researcher, Jean Guy Paquin, who brought a book he had written about the Algonquins at Commanda Lake and Papineauville; Roy and Susan Barnes brought stew and ongoing warrior energy commitment to William's vision for Victoria Island; Madeline brought White Wolf who brought sweet grass braids and pie; Brian Sawyer-Foner, a rainbow warrior environmentalist, video taped; Jean Trudel brought the energy of the *Cercle de Paix* from Montreal, (William was presented with the first Pacifist of the Year Award in Montreal in 2006 by Mayor Tremblay and Jean, the *Cercle de Paix* having been inspired by William), and his young mural artist friends took the revitalized peace energy from Kitigan Zibi on to Chili; Marc Assiniwi remarked on his father's friendship with William, acknowledged in the presentation of the Bernard Assiniwi Award in 2006 (and that linkage is to be highlighted in a big screen movie based on an Assiniwi story inspired by a tale

from William, to be made in William's community, already blessed by WC!); Stephane Lefebvre brought Auroville Global Peace City energy from India, and Greg Hill, curator from the National Art Gallery brought his Australian friend; Rima Aristocrat and Yves Bordeleau from Willis College and TechKnoWave brought Champlain books and art from Georgia; and Cliff Summers, ever looking out for our backs, drummed his prayer of support for Grandfather.

A meaningful moment came during this party when a young man from the Mohawk Council of Kanhawake, Katsitonseri:io, delivered greetings on behalf of his father, Stewart Mayo; he recalled his participation as a child in the Gathering of 1969 at Bitobi Lake – forty years ago – when the Algonquins and Iroquois began to heal the wounds of enmity ignited by Champlain's musket killing of three Iroquois in 1609 – *I have not come to bring you gifts, he said; rather, we ask of you that you stay with us for many more years and continue to do the work you are doing, to lead and inspire us all!* Over the years, not everybody has understood William's unique peace building effort, but more and more are finding that they can really express their authentic creative individual selves and also contribute to the strengthening of the diverse *Circle of All Nations* within his remarkable and inclusive world view – and young people are understanding faster than ever!

I know it is risky to do the kind of listing of names as above, because I know I am not mentioning many special people who make William's *Circle of All Nations* such a vibrant, meaningful experience – please forgive me, but use this weakness to make this blog really yours too! **Send us your thoughts and messages and we shall expand on this section with your stories!**

In the meanwhile, may this suffice to show why we want the marvelous energy of diversity duplicated and celebrated at Victoria Island, in the heart of the capital city!

William, ever the task master, drew every thing to a close at four – because he had to get ready for work. The *Gentleman* stuff was beginning. He had to go to Government House to offer the prayer for the November 11th State Dinner for Prince Charles!

We scrubbed pots and pans, put on our fineries, packed and headed down the well traveled road back to *The Source*.

AND A GENTLEMAN!

You would not think this man was really 96 – phone calls starting before 8, a whole day of overwhelming busyness and partying, a two hour drive, a stop at a Tim Hortons on King Edward which would not let us use the washroom (despite our years of loyalty to Tim Hortons, as everyone knows), and the strain of preparing oneself for another public moment, while managing an aging body – it is quite incredible how he does it all. He must be fed by energy from some extraordinary source!

William Commanda took his *Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt* to invoke again the spirit of welcome with which his ancestors had greeted the newcomers in 1700, a message reinforced in 1763 in the Royal Proclamation of King George III; this evening, he reiterated its message, promise and commitment to the future King of England, and all the other special guests present, including the Prime Minister, William himself quite mindful of how far his country has yet to go to really honour the sacred agreement, and equally mindful of how costly the failure to do so is not only to the First Peoples, but to the land, and all others in need of a deeper wisdom to ensure *Sustainable Relationships* across the globe. After all, he honours the ancient commitment of his ancestors to welcome the newcomers, and today these others, from far and near,

constitute his *Circle of All Nations*.

He offered his prayer in Algonquin, English and French, delivered a few formal remarks, then closed his prayer in the ancestral language of the territory. These words resonated against the backdrop of the Norval Morriseau painting. (Did you know his brother lived with William for two years? *Ubuntu* indeed!) The Governor General picked up on the energy when she commented on the significance of the Indigenous painting counter balanced by the painting of Queen Elizabeth across the room. It was quite an remarkable thing – the ancestral energies of the First Peoples and the Royal Proclamation of 1763 mingling over the heads of the newcomers seated for dinner, all tied together by the Indigenous Elder – and its impact was certainly apparent at our table. Prince Charles said something very interesting on this Remembrance Day – He said he was most proud of the Turquoise Mountain Cultural Heritage Project in Afganistan, partially supported by Minister Bev Oda’s department and Canadian resources, which he oversees. Now we were familiar with this creative endeavour, because we had read the book *The Places in Between*, by Rory Stewart, years ago, and we knew he understood the reality of the people of that tormented land, and the path to healing, better than most, and we have prayed for others to understand too – and obviously, as our latest deliberations on Afganistan and the continued upheaval there will attest, that is slow in coming. We are encouraged to hear that the Prime Minister wants to *shine the torch on dark corners* – we said as much in our **Kayak Photo Journal, *Passionate Waters, Butterfly Kisses* – “The only way we learn from and transform our dark, hidden spots is by shining the light at them. With the intensity of honest reflection on our own short comings or issues, we find we can actually transform them and, indeed, we find we are lighter.”**

We see parallels in the **Vision for the Indigenous Healing**

and Peace Building Cultural Centre at Victoria Island, in the Turquoise Mountain initiative, and we hope the Prince will offer us some leadership here too. When we left that evening, Prince Charles thanked the Elder for his welcoming greeting.

We attach Elder Commanda's formal remarks here for your information:

I am honoured to offer greetings at this special state dinner, and welcome all, and especially Your Highnesses, with whom Indigenous Peoples share a special relationship, to the traditional territory of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed, the land central to the birth of Canada.

This is a historic day when we remember those whose lives have been ravaged by wars. I myself was born on the eleventh of November, on the eve of the first world war, so a prayer for peace is forever in my heart.

Many years ago Queen Victoria was drawn by the energy of the Sacred Chaudière Falls, at the confluence of three major rivers, to declare this the site of the capital of Canada, bringing the French and English together, with the Indian embracing all - the land, the waters and the people.

This message was already embedded in the 1700s Three Figure Welcoming Wampum Belt, the belt of sharing, friendship and peace, and it also anticipated the time when the Indian in the centre would be the glue holding a land of old settlers and new immigrants together.

I hope one day soon, Indigenous Peoples will welcome you to Victoria Island, to ignite our enduring

vision for *Sustainable Relationships* for all in fulfillment of the promise of the 1700s Wampum Belt.

Tonight, we are grateful for all Mother Earth and her helpers provide in this special celebration. *Ginwaydaganuc: We Are All Related.*

Je suis honoré de vous accueillir à l'occasion de ce diner d'État spécial et de souhaiter à tous la bienvenue, tout particulièrement à vos Altesses, avec qui les peuples autochtones ont une relation particulière, sur le territoire traditionnel des Algonquins du bassin de la rivière des Outaouais, les terres qui sont au cœur de la naissance du Canada.

C'est un jour historique où nous nous souvenons de ceux dont les vies ont été ravagées par les guerres. Je suis moi-même né un onze novembre, la veille de la Première guerre mondiale : c'est pourquoi une prière de paix est gravée à jamais dans mon cœur.

Il y a de nombreuses années, la reine Victoria a été attirée par l'énergie des chutes sacrées de la Chaudière, à la confluence de trois rivières importantes, pour proclamer ce site le site de la capitale du Canada, réunissant les Français et les Anglais, et les Autochtones embrassant tout – la terre, les eaux et les gens.

Ce message était déjà inscrit dans la ceinture d'accueil Wampum aux trois figures de 1700, la ceinture du partage, de l'amitié et de la paix qui prévoyait déjà une époque où l'Indien au centre serait la colle qui rassemble les anciens colonisateurs et les nouveaux immigrants.

J'espère que très bientôt, les peuples Autochtones vous accueilleront à l'île Victoria pour donner vie à

notre vision persistante de *Relations durables pour tous* afin de réaliser la promesse de la ceinture Wampum de 1700. Ce soir, nous sommes reconnaissants pour tout ce que notre Mère la Terre et ses aides nous offrent en cette célébration spéciale. *Ginwaydaganuc : nous sommes tous parents.*

It was a most fitting end (yes, at midnight!) for the eleventh of November birthday.

But it was not the end to the November celebrations – we had another surprise awaiting the Elder!

A LIFETIME ACHIEVER!

On the New Moon of November 16, (Louis Riel Day), we headed to Chateau Laurier to join a very special group of Aboriginal Peoples – the recipients of the 2010 National Aboriginal Achievement Awards (NAAA)! And Grandfather William Commanda was the Lifetime Achievement Award winner!

As CEO and President Roberta Jamieson noted, it was the highest honour Aboriginal Peoples themselves can offer to one of their own, and indeed, this was an exciting moment to draw this special year to a close. It is the Chinese Year of the Buffalo, you know, and Elena reminded me of the special New Moon ceremony with which Grandfather had welcomed the year, he himself being an Ox; indeed it has been an extremely hardworking year, and more about that later, but certainly it has also been a year with some remarkably special rewards! (And that year does not draw to a close yet!)

A full day was planned for November 17, 2009 by Roberta,

Andre Morriseau, and the NAAA team. We traveled together to Parliament Hill and sat through Question Period, which was rather a mind blowing experience – but I shall leave it to William to have the last word about that. It was a special moment when the House got up together to salute the recipients of the Achievement Awards, and our Elder, of course, waved like the Queen!

The Speaker of the House hosted a special reception and many of the country's leaders came to offer their congratulations, including Paul Dewar, our ally in bringing the vision for Victoria Island to government's attention. The French leadership love William, it seems, perhaps because he speaks French so easily, and they are quickly drawn to his warmth, and formality eases; he is able to establish a zone of intimacy with both the French and English, and indeed all others, and thus sets everybody at ease. We have a photograph of a special moment with the Hon. Gilles Duceppe. MP Steven Blaney was there, as was Senator Partick Brazeau.

After the reception, we toured the Parliament Buildings, reminiscing, examining the portrait of King George III, remembering where William had lit the Millennium Sacred Fire with the late Jeremy Wright, remembering the first formal acknowledgement of Indigenous Territory at the opening of the Aboriginal Room on Parliament Hill (was that what it was called?) in the late nineties, remembering the Pipe Ceremony William had conducted with several other Pipe Carriers from Saskatchewan, and with former MP Rick Laliberte, in the circular Senate library, the one building spared during the Great Fire of 1916; remembering his launch of Veteran Week activities in the Senate years ago, when people stood in line for ages waiting to be smudged by him; and remembering the ancestral spirits still inhabiting the hill, at the Sacred Site of the Chaudière Rapids, in the heart of the country.

Then it was time for the dinner hosted by the Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Strahl, who remembered William's birthday, and also seemed to be making some apologies for the strange drama of Question Period! After dinner, several recipients thanked Roberta and the NAAAs team for their warmth and support. William had the last word.

For several years, I have been missing the frogs that used to sing so loud at my lake in Kitigan Zibi, he said. I wondered where they all disappeared to and I made many inquiries. (At this point, I was wondering why William was choosing this moment to deliver an environmental stewardship message, but I listened as he continued. Now, I think I have found them. They were all there this afternoon at Question Period. I must give them my Talking Stick!

Indigenous humour always triumphs!

One day we shall move from Debates and Question Period to Talking Circles and Councils, and see whether better communications might not evolve – William talked about this at his *Sustainable Relationships* Workshop on Victoria Island in May, 2009, and you will recall that in view of the disturbing customary manner of communications on the Hill, there is now an effort to reform this!

Well anyway, this Lifetime Achievement Award is another moment William will be able to relish and celebrate for some time – the actual Award ceremonies are scheduled for March 26 in Regina! Maybe we will see you there!

NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH 2009

Well, November has indeed been a special month for William and his friends.

Some of you will recall how we talk about key phases in the way this man has been viewed over the years – in 1967, during Expo, with disrespect, when he was called a *maudit sauvage*; in 1981, when he built a canoe for Queen Margurita of Denmark and felt acknowledged as a person and respected for what he could do with his hands; in the 1990s, as the *noble savage*; this month, it begins to feel like he is taking his rightful place – as a Indigenous person acknowledged for his vital contributions to a land and peoples no one holds deeper in his heart than he.

And what do you know, it was all there being orchestrated by Grandmother Moon and the gods of the universe! What do I mean, you ask?

Well, on the 27 November, we learned, in the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg community flyer, that President Barack Obama, had declared the month of November *National Native American Heritage Month*, and November 27 was *Native American Heritage Day*!

As you know, Grandfather was the Spiritual Guide for the 1995 Sunbow Five Walk for environmental stewardship and healing – from Cape Cod to Santa Barbara – and his rootedness and prayer embraces the entire continent.

So he was pleased to see President Obama note:

The indigenous peoples of North America – the First Americans- have woven rich and diverse threads into the tapestry of our Nation's heritage. Throughout their long history on this great land, they have faced moments of profound triumph and tragedy alike. During National Native American Heritage Month, we recognize their many accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices, and we pay tribute to their participation in all aspects of American society....

They have guided our land stewardship policies, added immeasurably to our cultural heritage, and demonstrated courage in the face of adversity. ...They have fought valiantly in defence of our Nation as dedicated servicemen and women. (Including Uncle Gabriel Commanda!) Their native languages have also played a pivotal role on the battlefield. During World Wars I and II, Native American code talkers developed unbreakable codes to communicate military messages that saved countless lives. Native Americans have distinguished themselves as inventors, entrepreneurs, spiritual leaders, and scholars. Our debt to our First Americans is immense, as is our responsibility to ensure their fair, equal treatment and honour the commitments we made to their forbears....

My Administration has proposed \$17 billion for ...improving the lives of Native Americans. These programs will increase educational opportunities, address the scourge of alcohol abuse and domestic violence, promote economic development, and provide access to comprehensive, accessible, and affordable health care. While funding increases do not make up for past deficiencies, they do reflect our determination to honour tribal sovereignty and ensure continued progress....

As we seek to build on and strengthen our nation-to-nation relationship, my Administration is committed to ensuring tribal communities have a meaningful voice in our national policy debates as we confront the challenges facing all Americans. We will continue this constructive dialogue. Native American voices have echoed through the mountains, valleys, and plains of our country for thousands of years, and it is now our time to listen.... BARACK OBAMA

After all, it was not for nothing that his first visit as President of the United States of America was to *The Source*

- the site of the Sacred Chaudière Falls, where he came to eat Fried Bread – Beavertail Bannock!!!

Intriguing that we started November with Adam Beach, who travels the continent as readily as William, and lives, as the line goes, *without borders*.

We leave you with our Elder's quip to the Governor General in his May 2009 correspondence: **Your Excellency, may I leave you with my take on the lines of our times, these times of unprecedented change: Black is beautiful, Brown is kinda cute, and, *Its time for the Red Man to Get Ahead, Man!***

KITCHI MEGWETCH TO ALL!

Grandfather Commanda wishes to take this opportunity to thank you for the many birthday gifts and greetings and he looks forward to many more celebrations together. Please excuse us for failing to offer individual thank yous.

Grandfather wishes also to say *Kichi Megwetch* for the many ways you have touched his life and animated his work. It is because of your active engagement in all he believes in that the larger world is beginning to understand and commend his efforts.

So, we are all part and parcel of his honours, and in the heart of all the acknowledgments. It is *our* energy that will continue to transform our world and create that *Circle of All Nations, that Culture of Peace* he insists on!

PS Re: **Languages and Speeches** – Many thanks to Marie-

Claude Charland for translating William Commanda's formal remarks. And on that matter, we know these mini summaries of his thoughts, remarks and prayers do not do adequate service to the depth and complexity of his own spontaneous words, in Algonquin, French and English, and we apologize for that – it is impossible to tape and transcribe them at this time. But in the New Year, we will be embarking on some new communications efforts, and you will be able to hear his words more directly!

PPS Re: **The Snapshot Look** – Well, we have finally learned a new trick, and are able to share photographs of the November moments in our new Photo page! Cheers!! We hope you enjoy them!

PPS - Check back for our year end report in a few weeks - Sick he may have been this year, but our Elder has certainly not been sleeping!