

Forging a path that cuts through the pain...Justice John Higgerty - July 2022



Hau Kola, Waste elo, Tansi, My Relatives....

A month ago, we gathered together for our 2nd Annual Transformative Reconciliation. We had folks from First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities come together from the 4 directions of Turtle Island; and it *was good*. Our gathering was on the heels of many deaths; experienced by Attendees, Facilitators, Elders, Chiefs, Ceremonialists, and Dignitaries alike. No one is immune to the fall out from the Opioid and Covid pandemics. These

losses; together with the ongoing revelation of the cultural genocide experienced in residential schools; makes gatherings like these; on the Indigenous issues of; *youth suicide, homelessness of our Indigenous babies abandoned at birth, and the need for a sovereign Indigenous law bundle for Turtle Island*; that much more; *significant, relevant, requisite and timely* in this calendar year of 2022.

We started off once again by Wiping the Tears of our People. Intercessor, Keith Ryder, had tears in his own family to wipe in Winnipeg; aside from Wiping the Tears the week before, for all the 10 First Responders at James Smith First Nations. Knowing the ceremony was crucial at this time; and upon the subsequent request and blessing from our 19th Generation Pte San Winyan Bundle Keeper, Ceremonial Chief Arvol Looking Horse.; our *present* Lakotah, Dakotah, Nakotah, Dene' tah, & Nehawin Ceremonialists and Elders, went ahead and shared the rituals and songs that could assist in wiping the tears of the people; simultaneously, insisting that no one record the event. We *really* cried

and let go...little did we know *at that moment*, there were 23 participants from James Smith First Nations in attendance.

Creator works in mysterious ways.

Upon learning this, all our Elders, Facilitators, Chiefs, Dignitaries, and Participants re-orientated themselves, *and the gathering*, towards what the James Smith folks had recently experienced and were *enduring*. The tragedy and



loss of so many of their Akicita, (First Responders); tribal members, was unprecedented. With the focus of the gathering shifted, as was always done traditionally, at any gathering or ceremony years ago; when there was an emergent situation; we could then help one another, *the Indian way*. And forgive me for using that term...not disrespectfully, it is just how we referred to each other years ago. In the States, it was the term *Skins*. I later found out this morning, that apparently the James Smith people had registered for the gathering before the incident of losing 10 of their first responders had taken place. They almost did not attend, after the incident had happened. Then they gathered and decided together, as band members and a pastor, that this was indeed, exactly what they needed. We are so blessed in being there for them.

Following the Wiping of the Tears, there were further sharings with respect to losses at various First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities; and collectively, the gathering decided, then and there, to create a *memorial/rock* for those who had passed during the Covid times. This was something the Dakota 38 +2 did with respect to the ride from Rosebud and Fort Thompson (Lower Brule, Crow Creek) First Nations to Mankato Minnesota; where the 38 Sioux Chiefs were hung in the 1800's; who had the fortitude to sing before hand; further exemplifying their courage; and the continued miscarriage of justice, that had taken place at that time. From this 2nd Annual Transformative Reconciliation Gathering, 58

names have already been put forward for our Memorial Rock. This could be at the entrance to River Cree; where these solution focused discussions are taking place. This is a 4 year commitment; so more names will surface by 2024.

It needs to be known, that these kind of memorial rides, (walks, runs), have been going on before and since that first *forma*/wiping of the tears at Wounded Knee in 1990. The Sacred Hoop Run with the youth and Elderlies around the Black Hills, has taken place for many decades now. The Unity Ride at Alexis, happened in the year 2000. The difference today, is that we can record all these wonderful events. The other reminder, is that most of the events came about through a vision or dream. The Dakota 38+2 vision was through Jim Miller, a Lakota Vietnam Veteran. Together with Belinda Joe, an Elder from Crow Creek (my relative); they practiced this ride for 4 years before the *forma*/ride in 2008. Throughout those 4 years, relationships are continually being made with everyone involved; whether it's a farm family that assists the riders for an evening to stable their horses, provide a camp area and some food; or young people sharing with Elderlies their concerns, hopes and dreams. AND; it also needs to be recalled, that those initial rides, only had a few participants to begin with; often the grandchildren of the initial riders...

Henceforth; upon reflection, and some further information gathered recently; there is a run for youth December 24, 2022 in South Dakota. Since many of our ceremonial people celebrate give-away during the sundance season; rather than at Christmas....this may be something to consider in our own communities. It gets equally cold, if not colder, in the great basin area as it does in Alberta. You have to prepare yourself for these feats of endurance; while remaining in a 'one day at a time' framework. If one is fortunate, the *little blue lights* from the spirit world will surround those participants, on their horses.

Lyle Donald with the Metis Dancers and Elder George Saddleback...Red River dancing~ had everyone in stitches...a helpful interlude to all the seriousness of the day....



AND; the new Chief at Enoch, Cody Thomas; and some of his council members, who were also first responders during the pandemic, came and shared their vision (and invite) to their current journey around Enoch Cree First Nations, praying, singing drumming while placing a tobacco perimeter around the whole nation. A few days later, they had a Horse Dance Ceremony. We hope to work with them in the next while, to have the 2023 Transformative Reconciliation Gathering *participate* in that ceremony.

Rob Louie our Kootenai Lawyer with BMAAP gave some insight into how to legally clear away some of the corruption that is existing on reserve. For instance, if someone makes a request and the band council denies it; and then that someone, later appeals that decision...the same band council members cannot be adjudicating the appeal. Sounds simple; however, many of our communities are still very isolated.

On that first day, since we did not have the Dakota 38+2, partly due to the ArrivCan expectations at the border; (that were still operative during that 4th week in September); as well as the cumulative tasks placed on our ceremonial people, after the 2 year hiatus with Covid. Our ceremonial Chief, Arvol Looking Horse; still, kindly, came on, through ZOOM, *whilst in transit to another ceremony*, and spoke to us about the various healing practices and events, taking place for our youth; all over Turtle Island; as well as spoke about the misuse of ceremonial culture.

Our Indigenous students and Alumni of Yellowhead Tribal College,

then spoke of the next steps that need to be taken amongst our Indigenous; on and off reserve, in Alberta and the NWT. They were inspirational and *full of solutions*.

This is transformative; and reconciliatory.

In fact, as many noted, our transformative reconciliation, occurs every time we have ceremony. That is; ceremony that is done in a good way. It is our *Indian*



Magic...in a way...not woo woo or hollywood romantic Indian portrayals...it is the stuff that takes the heaviness off the spirit...the fact that we have endured...in spite of...and despite of; the collective hate and discrimination that has been projected onto our people for hundreds of years...being able to LET GO is magical...and what I like to call ceremonial resilience.



With Elders; Dr Tom Porter (Haudenosaunee), Dr Clifford Cardinal and George and Salina Saddleback (Cree), Fred Kelini, Frank MacDonald and Vern Rowe, (Dene) and Lyndon Aginas (Stoney Nakota); sharing their creation stories, trickster stories, drums, songs and dancing; a healing event took place; and *ceremonial*

resilience was felt by one and all. It filled the room. The gathering took on a life of its own. The James Smith people found the courage to share; and asked for a circle of healing...singing and drumming. Sweetgrass encircled the group that filled the circumference of the Enoch room...it was good...everyone needed *to let go of the pain of the past...the fear of the future...and be together...let go and let Creator into their lives...none of this was planned....which in turn ruffled the feathers of a few; who were quite vocal about a certain schedule and agenda needing to be adhered to...and followed. We will always try to do the best we can, to follow a format that took months to create; simultaneously, change is the only constant; and we had to make a number of last minute adjustments, due to changes in peoples lives...and the other aforementioned critical factors our ceremonial people have had to face recently.*

Iktomi (our cultural hero and trickster), was once again, *bizzy*, and had fun with us. We had a few hurdles to overcome; prior to the gathering.... people were miffed because the poster did not state *exactly* what was taking place (that is some had to present on ZOOM); and, we had to make last minute alterations with Performance Graphics; brakes failed on a vehicle that was to haul the tipi poles (fortunately we had some native jungian mechanics lol...that could fix them on the spot)...The building our agency is housed in could not be accessed Saturday, (day before the event); due to imminent electrical dangers, that required

immediate evacuation. That is; we found out, *the day of* the building had to be vacated; September 23rd 2022. Subsequently, we had to have everything out of the building that night, for this upcoming 4 day event ...taking place in 2 days time... plus... the cable for the Director's home internet (a substitute work station) had been cut during construction. A critical proposal for spring 2023; had to be in...*this week thence*; and, discrepancies over audits submitted 7 years earlier, required immediate review and clarification. Security from last year was absent (though River Cree has its own *fortunately*); AND; the planned singers and alternate intercessor could not make it...as was communicated, the night before. The lady with the starblankets for our guests, called Monday and could not get out of Manitoba till other arrangements were made. Finally, the artists for the artists showcase were not able to be present. Additional trauma for others, we needed to be aware of...and conscious of going forward. However; in the long run, nothing happened that could not be shifted; and dealt with in a good way...as long as we remained *attentive*, to the *spiritual flow* of the gathering...nothing certainly, that was as devastating as the losses endured by those at James Smith First Nations...or in Ukraine...we can always have a plan...Creator also has a plan...



Most of my Lethbridge (Lakotah) family could not attend either; we lost our brother cousin at the end of July...my relative Calvin Pompana (Dakotah) could not travel at this time; and we had trouble with his ZOOM connection....relative Darcy Demas

(Dakotah) was dealing with leg injuries...good thing his wife is a nurse! Elder Dr Douglas Cardinal (Blackfoot) could not travel at this time, and had a special presentation for our longhouse environment (for our Indigenous babies abandoned at birth)... by ZOOM; and again; timing and connections were not in sync; however, we hope to have all these great ones back next year...|



believe Dr Cardinal is receiving an award from the King of Spain next week...a crowning addition to his lifelong achievements...his Basque wife Idoia is equally remarkable...

Fortunately; our Dene Elders, stepped up. Those that could not be present last year, were front and center this year; together with Elder Dr Clifford Cardinal (who is also one of our Sundance Chiefs at Rosebud). A great discussion ensued within this fellowship, over the cleaning up of the tailings ponds in Fort McMurray; and other places around the world where great water damage has occurred on Indigenous land. We have often happily benefitted, unconsciously, from the great sacrifice that these courageous men have made for our *perpetual safety* in the generations to come. Professor Michael Jackson from UBC and Chief Clarence Louie of Osoyoos First Nation followed with unexpected input to conscious well-being...Michael spoke of the ongoing incarceration of our Indigenous and Chief Louie on the need to have the concerns of our children at the center of all our Indigenous Legal Frameworks. In particular, our upcoming Turtle Island Law Bundle. Further discussions took place on the various UN Declarations; such as, Human Rights,

Rights of Children and Rights of our Indigenous Peoples; to be *sovereign*, *universal law*...rather than a declaration... Elder Dr Tom Porter

(Haudenosaunee) said; UNDRIP is like flowers on our graves...that is; these various *declarations* have no real force and effect...at law.



The solutions that came to Elder Dr Clifford Cardinal (Cree Sioux) came through ceremony; his physical sacrifice; and his

expertise as an Indigenous medical doctor; to clear our waterways, cure cancer and bring sacred vitality back to our Indigenous people His talk was brilliant and illuminating to all who *witnessed* his grace and generosity of spirit...Dene Elders Fred Kellini, Frank MacDonald; a Civil Engineer and Geologist respectively, also contributed greatly to the discussion with their first hand knowledge of how the tailings ponds began; and subsequently had the fortitude to withdraw and not contribute to this billion dollar disaster...Alicia Morin(Cree) shared on the restorative justice work being done at Enoch

First Nations, together with the RCMP and Elders on location. She also spoke about the Indigenous court that is currently operative in Edmonton (January 2022); that NCSA, Enoch, Bissell, Red Road, Poundmakers, Bent Arrow and IAAW currently participate in the case management. Also, with respect to legal issues, transformative legal agreements instead of court, are being encouraged and utilized with respect to family law issues 'on reserve;' as another solution to cut through the headache, heartache, cost and time that the courts tend to invoke; and when Bill C-92, has not been adhered to by the provinces with First Nation, Metis and Inuit Communities...

I mentioned again that at previous Indigenous legal gatherings, many of our Indigenous lawyers, judges and council recommended that we go ahead and DO what needs to be done...we do not have to ask for permission; hence, a number of First Nation communities have gone ahead and installed wind turbines, solar panels and brought in Clifford Cardinal's expertise, to clean up toxic drinking water issues. This in fact, makes perfect sense; however, we still have a number of First Nations unable to make these changes for a number of reasons. Lots of work to be done....

Outside and in the hallways, of this event; electric guitars, drums, ribbon skirts, moss bags and regalia were being made. Weaving was taking place; instructed and constructed by our Pompana sister.



In the Chief's boardroom; there were 12 step meetings; Rachel Jarvis (Blueberry First nations), and sharing circles where Elders, veterans and participants gathered. Counselling and therapy was ongoing.

Chief Clarence Louie's (Osoyoos) new book Rez Rules was sold out (and autographed)...and being from the same generation as self...he has since coined the phrase "*Indian Up*" to keep our people moving forward, reconciling their pasts to the best of their ability and keeping the next generations, the focus of their collective future...Elder Tom Porter (Haudenosaunee) spoke of the CODE we are born with, an invisible bone that has marks on it; delineating our life journey. He spoke of the Faithkeeper of the

Haudenosaunee on the last day, in his fantastic stone canoe. He also shared a Haudenosaunee stick game; and passed this knowledge to one of the participants....we pray his health holds and we will see him next year. Frank Fools Crow, one of our great ceremonial Chiefs, spoke of becoming a hollow bone – so you can be a good instrument for Creator to work through. Our Salish people as Umayaz Dulk'un shared also carried the bones of their ancestors on their back wherever they went-hence; the name *Carrier* Indians...personally a Helen Chaske, approached me, she is from Sioux Valley, yet lived all her life here, her relative Bert Chaske is the Inipi ceremony that my late husband held; and he subsequently passed to me for women....I also need to mention Elder Lynn Lush (Bella Coola) and her veteran husband (who were celebrating their 30th anniversary) who was the first present to jump in and help with the Wiping of the Tears, when there were people who did not show up...and Leona Ferguson (Algonquin) who spoke of the ongoing Indigenous child issues off reserve; and who can attest to the need and being a part of the longhouse framework going forward....

Self pity, isolation, resentment and secrets tend to halt many of us from moving forward...more noticeably after Covid, and the on-going viruses and deaths taking place...

Hard for everyone ...especially in the urban areas, to step out of colonial expectations and live one day at a time....

We concluded the 4th day afternoon with a mini round dance and give away...Kevin Meetoos (Cree Sioux) was the emcee; and Monty Baptiste (Cree) the stick man...a beautiful successful event took place this year... thanks to all who participated, taught, shared, voluntold...already plans are underway for next year...please get involved in any way that you can....mitakuye oyasin...

Some *approximate* numbers were: 170 registered ahead of time-a number registered at the door

30 facilitators

35 youth

16 volunteers

then there were more and less throughout the 4 day period...

Some of the comments made-comraderie developed...

From coffee breaks and door prize announcements to specific smudge times...the main thing people asked *was to stick to the schedule*...we will try harder next year LOL 20 + door prizes went out

What did you like most about the event?

Dr. Tom Porter - Guest Speakers-Dancing- Ribbon Skirt Making I made my First Ribbon Skirt – Proud Moment- workshops- weaving, drum making, guitars, space made for James Smith FN-drum making – wiping of the tears ceremony-seeing Elders- getting together to learn from each other-Elder Calvin Pompana-todays event presentation - I like most was Letticia presentation- the speakers and how they spoke about the way they do things where they come from-hearing stories-information on different topics-food camaraderie-sharing of testimonies (singing)-drum making- James Smith members sharing their experiences and perspectives-lunch-coming together nation to nation

What was your biggest take away from the gathering?

Everything was great-All the knowledge, teaching and storys- there is value in coming together-I made myself a drum-friendship- my biggest is the healing and warmth, feeling of belonging and my Elders teaching and stories shared- knowledge-I got to spend time with my Mother, my nephew is addicted to meth and abuses her everyday-clan's-bear, turtle, deer, eel, wolf-pertains to native tribes in Canada-my healing + all our nations deserve healing-seeing many elders participate I hope + pray they get their healing as well especially if they went to residential school...

People have opted into one of the four different objectives outlined on the first day, to take place over the next four years;

1. Turtle island bundle of laws; create a preamble and definitions
2. a longhouse for homeless abandoned urban Indigenous children; legal framework
3. a youth exchange memorial ride from South Dakota to Arctic Red River; OR? horses at Osoyoos and Maskwicis, stables at Enoch; and finally;
4. keeping the transformative reconciliation gathering alive over the next four years.

If you are reading this for the first time and did not have a chance to sign up for one of these objectives; and still want to...please send an email to myself or Carmen or Everett to get involved...

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We will begin meeting in December 2022, for the 3rd Transformative Reconciliation Gathering September, 2023. Thank you again, to all who participated in making this an awesome gathering of hearts, minds and souls!

Wolakota

Pila Miye...

Niya Pte Win Pejuta Waste Win

Joanne Lethbridge Pompana

www.redroadjourney.ca

Please note: Videos of the gathering will be available soon on You Tube- please keep checking our website for when. JLP

Transformative Reconciliation Gathering

River Cree, Enoch, AB



♦780-471-3220♦
www.redroadjourney.ca



To, Joanne.P

Sept 2002
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Well I'd like to
say thank-you for
all the support that
you have given me
and my family.

You are truly a
remarkable person

With Love

From. Dawn
Cardinal