

# "THE AWAKENING"

## Preamble

The Seventh of October, 2007 marks the conclusion of "The Awakening", a gathering organized by Merriwolf Productions in Perth, Ontario for the fall Thanksgiving weekend. It was described as follows in the promotional materials:

**Focused on the Future,  
Honouring the Past!  
A Three Day *Circle of All Nations* Celebration  
of the  
Waterways of North America, and the  
175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rideau Canal  
(*newest Unesco World Heritage Site!*),**

In fact, the special event was a microcosmic expression of the realities of our times.

In this report on "The Awakening", we shall share with you some thoughts about the event. Much talked about for months, it raised many expectations, and there were many disappointments; all in all, however, it reflected the core elements of Algonquin Elder William Commanda's tireless efforts to advance a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*.

The Thanksgiving Gathering was about the season of seeding - and the tireless *Ojigkwanong, Morning Star*, of the *Ojjiway Squirrel Clan*, worked with love and determination to inspire all who would listen with his passionate appeal for respect for Mother Earth and for all her children. The essential elements of his multifaceted work had been knitting together over the course of the past year, ignited by his November 2006 Water Life Workshop. As with all seeds, the entire vision for a Turtle Island as dreamed by ancestral energies of centuries past, packaged densely in the miniscule moment, was planted with a deep prayer and promise for tremendous hope and revitalization of life for all.

The seed was planted in a hard, hostile, and seemingly barren, landscape - but in soil that also holds the bones, blood, sweat, and yes, tears, of William's own direct ancestors. It faces a bleak winter, the environment laced with unexpected land mines at every turn, but a privileged few know

something very real and beautiful happened over the course of the weekend, and its birthing is imminent. We hope it will support the larger world in time.

Some would say, three hundred and forty four years after the signing of the Royal Proclamation of the October 7, 1763, it is surely about time. You see, we also found our activity happening against the backdrop of a nation that has chosen from its conception to make the First Peoples of the land invisible, and that has subsequently evolved far below its potential, shrouded by many falsehoods, misconceptions, misunderstandings and much self-deception. Many feel we need a new blueprint for the future, and perhaps for that we have to reexamine the old. We reflect on a few key paragraphs from the Royal Proclamation here, for this is the history William holds in his head:

And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds.--We do therefore, with the Advice of our Privy Council, declare it to be our Royal Will and Pleasure, that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of our Colonies of Quebec, East Florida, or West Florida, do presume, upon any Pretence whatever, to grant Warrants of Survey, or pass any Patents for Lands beyond the Bounds of their respective Governments, as described in their Commissions: as also that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of our other Colonies or Plantations in America do presume for the present, and until our further Pleasure be known, to grant Warrants of Survey;

And We do further declare it to be Our Royal Will and Pleasure, for the present as aforesaid, to reserve under our Sovereignty, Protection, and Dominion, for the use of the said Indians, all the Lands and Territories not included within the Limits of Our said Three new Governments, or within the Limits of the Territory granted to the Hudson's Bay Company, as also all the Lands and Territories lying to the Westward of the Sources of the Rivers which fall into the Sea from the West and North West as aforesaid.

And We do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the Lands above reserved without our especial leave and Licence for that Purpose first obtained.

And We do further strictly enjoin and require all Persons whatever who have either wilfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands within the Countries above described or upon any other Lands which, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements.

And whereas great Frauds and Abuses have been committed in purchasing Lands of the Indians, to the great Prejudice of our Interests and to the great Dissatisfaction of the said Indians: In order, therefore, to prevent such Irregularities for the future, and to the end that the Indians may be convinced of our Justice and determined Resolution to remove all reasonable Cause of Discontent, We do with the Advice of our Privy Council strictly enjoin and require that no private Person do presume to make any purchase from the said Indians of any Lands reserved to the said Indians, within those parts of our Colonies where, We have thought proper to allow Settlement: but that if at any Time any of the Said Indians should be inclined to dispose of the said Lands, the same shall be Purchased only for Us, in our Name, at some public Meeting or Assembly of the said Indians, to be held for that Purpose by the Governor or Commander in Chief of our Colony respectively within which they shall lie.

You may know this was signed after Pontiac had destroyed nine of the eleven British Forts, and the Indian's bargaining power was strong; and at this point General Amherst raised the idea about germ warfare - smallpox blankets.)

## **Background**

Well over a year ago, William's friend, Michael Swinwood, accompanied by another colleague, Judy Brown, approached him about organizing a country fair under the *Circle of All Nations* umbrella. Next they brought Brent Ringer, the CEO of Merriwolf Productions and his colleagues, Tip the Clown and Shelley Moore, to discuss the idea further. This was not your typical conference organizing team of the National Capital Region, nor a group deeply integrated with Aboriginal communities - rather, shall I say, they were people at the fringes. Brent is an old time country music concert organizer, Tip, well a Clown, Judy a psychic healer, Shelley an Algonquin recovering her heritage, and Michael an unlikely looking lawyer.

Brent arrived with a gift for William - a painting from the early 1900s - in retrospect, it was a propitious image - William and his vision, reflected in the nomadic canoe spirit, being pushed along by Brent, Tip the Clown, Shelley, and Michael, then Judy and Ken, with Romola at the tail. That in the end was more or less what happened - a small band of seven had to push the vision of "The Awakening", as they called it, to the finish line, against the greater odds of it sinking in the morass into oblivion.

Michael and Judy were long time friends of William's; Brent was an acquaintance of Judy's. They were planning an event to commemorate the

175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rideau Canal over the course of the Thanksgiving Weekend - a country fair with music, arts and crafts, food and people. Differently impacted by William's work and love, they wanted to organize the event to celebrate his *Circle of All Nations*, advance his vision for a *Culture of Peace*, and support his project to develop *Asinabka*, the Indigenous Centre at the sacred Chaudière Site within the heart of the capital city; and perhaps also associate their own aspirations with the reputation and network William had developed over the decades. In essence, they wanted to put *Elders* front and centre within a mainstream event. They thought William's name would draw crowds and support to the event.

We were not accustomed to associating William's *Circle of All Nations* work with other causes, it being a delicate enough effort to encourage and balance diverse issues and peoples judiciously in an uncompromising world. However, we also wanted our ideas to reach and impassion others, and of course, William always does his utmost to support everybody's journey too.

So, with an unlikely combination of activities and characters, but one entirely reflective of William's growing global odd-ball *Circle of All Nations* team, we decided to let them organize the event under the *Circle of All Nations* umbrella. We wanted to see Indigenous Peoples and perspectives included, integrated and respected in mainstream activities, and this was one avenue to advance this effort.

Over the course of the year, the team engaged enthusiastically in this challenge. They attended William's Annual Pipe Ceremony at Victoria Island, and his Spiritual Gathering at his home in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. They developed their plans around the Aboriginal theme - and Spiritual Elders and Pow Wow drummers, dancers and singers were integrated throughout. Reknowned Aboriginal actress Tantoo Cardinal came on board to serve as MC and Good Will Ambassador. They invited musicians from different countries, and planned variety show activities. We helped develop the agenda for a range of impressive presentations on William's priority - *Mother Earth: Respect for the Environment*, to ensure the *Circle of All Nations* stamp was present. They promoted the event by paper and media. They anticipated thousands of participants. It looked very promising.

## **Backdrop**

Of course, William continued with his other demanding work. One segment is consistently focused on Mother Earth. We have been saying of late that William's prayer for Mother Earth has centred around the Medicine Wheel on four symbolic issues.

Some of his recent work has been in support of efforts to protest Uranium Test Drilling in the Ardoch/Sharbot Lake area - that is, on the outskirts of Perth. Therein lies the crux of a battle for the environment - the demands of corporation, supported by centuries old legislation created by colonizing rule bent on commodifying the resources of nature versus the voices of the indigenous peoples more deeply cognizant of the precarious balance of the relationship with Mother Earth, and these now joined by growing numbers of "settlers" as they call themselves, who are beginning to see how deeply their lives, the land and their health are impacted by the relentless assault on the Earth.

With the Uranium issue, we say the Elder is praying for the Spirit of Fire. On this file, first the "settlers" were galvanized into action when, entirely by chance, they discovered drilling efforts underway on their land; Algonquins then mobilized to protest the test drilling on unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered territory that is now a part of a land claims process, drilling that impacts the environment and traditional hunting, fishing, and wild rice harvesting activities, and the Rideau and Ottawa River Watersheds; and environmental organizations like Mining Watch Canada and Ottawa River Keepers have also lent their voices of support to the cause. William Commanda has conducted Pipe Ceremonies in support of this peaceful protest, in his words to pray for the land and waters and to maintain the peace - and to date, this has been a remarkable integration of the efforts of Aboriginal, settlers and experts on behalf of Mother Earth, and they have maintained positive relationships with police. However, the court was lining up on the sides of the corporation - and so the tension was high over the summer. Of course, there are differing opinions on this crisis in the Perth area, (and elsewhere,) and I elaborate on this issue here because its complexities may very well have had significant ramifications for support for "The Awakening".

To return to the prayer around the Medicine Wheel, with respect to the Earth Spirit, William added his voice to the protest against the proposed Danford Lake land fill mega dump, with its potential disastrous ramifications for the Picanoc and Kazabazua Rivers and then the Gatineau and Ottawa. A few weeks ago, we learned that the Consultative Commission had recommended the project be dropped, and the Aboriginal position was noted in the commentary. Thus we know William's engagement had some significant impact.

With respect to the Spirit of Water, William has been working tirelessly for many years to restore the Chaudière Falls to their earlier state as a sacred site and meeting grounds, and his vision for the *Asinabka* area includes an Aboriginal Centre, a Peace Building Meeting Site, a City Park and Historic Interpretive Centre and Freeing the Chaudière Falls. While there is growing support for the vision, things move ahead as quickly as anything else does on the Aboriginal file, that is slower than molasses. This effort also includes (since November 2006), protesting Domtar Incorporated's project to expand hydro electric power development at the Sacred Chaudière Falls, and entrench industrial exploitation into future centuries - ironically enough, we have just learned that Domtar leases Chaudière Island for \$100 a year - this again being the unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered territory of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River watershed. William would like to see broad public consultation, with Algonquins as well as citizens of Ottawa/Hull and indeed the country at large - with respect to the development in this "Jewel in the Crown" - the beautiful sacred site in the Nation's capital; and he believes that a special historic site in this unique location would be of interest to many.

Finally, William has also conducted a pipe ceremony for the protection of the mountain outcrop near Madoc, Ontario from highway expansion, this being a major resting place in the migratory route of the oldest bird on the planet, the Loon, the quintessential symbol of Canada, and this effort is reflective of his prayer for the Spirit of Air.

These then are the tiny symbolic prayers this ninety three year old spiritual warrior carries for the Law of Nature, the Four Key Elements and the Circle of Life.

Forgive me for this long parenthesis, but I believe it is important to set the context for this reflection on "The Awakening" - some of William's work challenges established patterns of political and corporate control, and this has also presented challenges in pulling off "The Awakening" on the scale originally planned.

### **The Weeks Preceding "The Awakening"**

As I have said, William and I were busy with many demanding and draining efforts over the course of the summer, including his Annual International *Circle of All Nations* Spiritual Gathering and a family tragedy. We devoted what time we could to supporting the Merriwolf Team and refining the Presentations portion of the Agenda; and, we were pleased to see the front page of the June 20, 2007 local newspaper, "The Perth Courier" - with the headliner "First Nations gathering planned for Perth this fall". The article by Ian Gray showed interest in Indigenous ideology, and stated, "The motivation for the gathering is that humanity is in crisis." It quoted Brent Ringer as saying "Time is short and we must awaken our sleeping consciousness in order to turn crisis into opportunity. We must all come together, all colours of humanity, in order to heal ourselves and heal Mother Nature ... It is proposed that traditional elders will gather ... to share their wisdom with all others to assist humanity in this time of crisis." Plans were underway to use the Perth Fairgrounds for a pow wow, the Crystal Palace for concerts and shows, and Stewart Park in downtown Perth for presentations. The newspaper article concluded by stating that following the Merriwolf Presentation, "Mayor John Fenik said the Town of Perth 'will welcome any such endeavour,' adding that town staff will be available to assist however possible."

We thought things were well in line, on this eve of National Aboriginal Day and the Summer Solstice. William's decades long passionate concern for the environment was striking cords in the mainstream world, and the respect with which he is generally received everywhere was being extended to First Nations - remember he is the Elder who conducted the opening prayer at the recent Sustainable Communities Conference organized by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in Ottawa; the one who was presented with the *Key to the City of Ottawa* exactly a year ago by former Mayor Bob Chiarelli; who was presented with a Peace Award by the Mayor of Montreal in

acknowledgement of the United Nations International Peace Day in September 2006; and who had even been presented with a book on the History of Smith Falls by the Mayor of that town, Dennis Staples, at the Annual Chocolate Festival.

We were pleased - and relieved; as you know, William is now almost 94, and we wanted other folk, inspired by his passions, to take his ideas forward into the larger world. What better spot to launch such an effort than on what was the historic portage route of his very own direct ancestors - after all, that is how the family acquired the *Commanda* name! During the War of 1812, William's great, great grandfather himself transported goods to Kingston, along the Rideau Portage Route, avoiding the dangers of the St. Lawrence, in order to help protect the North from the American settlers who were colonizing and terrorizing the southern portion of Turtle Island. Following the seeds planted by William's ancestors, the much-celebrated Colonel By later developed this strategic portage route into the Rideau Canal System for future wars - fortunately, that never happened and now this special area, unravaged by war, is proclaimed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Also, with respect to Perth, William has up on his bedroom wall a certificate of appreciation from the Perth High School, from the early 1990s, for having made a cross cultural presentation there!

Anyway, back to the main story. Unfortunately, things began to fall apart, and, to our surprise, in September, we found ourselves called to fighting fires that suddenly started to threaten "The Awakening". We began to receive calls and emails from acquaintances and strangers, and we began to realize fears, apprehensions, antagonisms and hostilities were developing within and around the community of Perth. At first, we thought that folk might be struggling to understand the complicated challenge of combining elements of a fair, concerts, variety shows, food fairs, crafts, spiritual ceremony, presentations and idea, dance and drum, and participation of elders as the wisdom keepers - these were all the diverse elements that we hoped to incorporate into the weekend's activity, but that would be foreign to regular fair goers. There also seemed to be some misgivings about the organization. Well, there were these elements, and sadly, more. Rather than supporting its manifestation as a glorious celebration, community energies

were drawn to fear and reaction and then, it seemed, active demolition of the planned event.

The confusion that emerged within the last few weeks of the event presented our organizers with even more challenges than merely reconciling Indigenous and mainstream notions of a public, community event, and creating a space for acceptance and interest in Aboriginal Peoples in the town full of crafts peoples and farmers, and frankly, people who know very little really about the original peoples of the area, or the history of this country. They were stretched to their capacity. The local folks meanwhile feared their town and its sewer system would be overwhelmed by the anticipated numbers of participants; they apparently also feared the arrival of "The Natives"; media portrayal of any community encounters with "The Natives", particularly over the past year, had apparently entrenched fear and hostility in many hearts.

Merriwolf Productions asked to be present at a meeting of the Perth Town Council but the request was declined because they were not on the docket for discussion; however, the event was discussed; and the new Radio Station, Lake 88 FM, which was celebrated in the June Perth paper on the same front page as "The Awakening" as having with aspirations of reaching beyond Perth to the Rideau Lakes area, was there; and they now announced repeatedly over the airwaves that the event was in jeopardy because the organizers had failed to meet financial commitments - and this struck a decisive note of doom over the event. They even wrote to Circle of All Nations about this. The organizers had apparently learned at some late juncture about costs to rent the public park in the town; first there were struggles to set a fair date for payment; then somehow, some time later, a cheque bounced. They were not permitted adequate time to rectify matters - and were informed by the Town of Perth that the event was off, this during the actual week of the event.

Brent Ringer called William Commanda in Maniwaki, to report the dismal news. We brainstormed and decided to see if we could move the entire event over to the Perth Fairgrounds. At the eleventh hour, this was agreed to by the town, and the Mayor and his staff facilitated the last minute changes - and the event was moved from the palace to the horse barn, as it were; we were also allowed to have use of the site that had been chosen for

the Sacred Fire and ceremonial activity; with that deep, unconscious irony of life, this was at the location of a sad, neglected cemetery, and, believe it or not, the site was called Last Duel Park.

In addition to these pressures, Brent Ringer also discovered, that contrary to his expectations of what support Grandfather William Commanda's good name would garner with potential sponsors, in fact, no big sponsors were willing to come on board in the end to support "a bunch of Natives" - not the airlines, not the organic food vendors, nor the RV company. Now he had anticipated support from each of these, and others - to fly elders and entertainers in from BC and elsewhere; to have local organic farmers providing meals for the Elders and volunteers; to provide trailers for Elders to use at Last Duel Park, the site for the ceremonial activity (in fact, William himself and I were very much looking forward to an adventure in a trailer ourselves, to relive a semblance of the nomad's experience on the portage route); and so on.

You will understand that with events such as this, one anticipates making money from ticket sales - from the over all event and from the concerts, to cover the costs for travel, guests, performers etc. The negative publicity had already dealt a death blow to these expectations, and many performers had to be cancelled or would no longer show up to the event. Ditto with the planned fund-raiser opening banquet. And of course the change in locations meant we could not reach the regular downtown weekend crowds.

Did all of this fall through because the organizers were totally incompetent? Or had totally unrealistic expectations? Or was something much darker revealed in the course of this experience?

Maybe a mix of this and more.

What we saw was the Merriwolf team working constantly over the course of the weekend to make something positive happen with "The Awakening". Exhausted, disappointed, cold and hungry, with major financial losses staring them in the face, they kept resolving one crisis after another - from the refusal to open the gates at the Perth Fairgrounds without \$8,000, worked down to \$2,500, which one of our guests actually helped cover; to the portable toilets and threats to remove them; to day one problems with the

sound people, till Bev and the Tito Medina team took it all over; there were no donations of the food anticipated for the Elders and volunteers from the local organic gardeners, with the exception of the Westport Bread store; (we were grateful that The Algonquin Tea company kept Grandfather warm with hot tea throughout the weekend! And that our friend Liz, who carries the fridge in her car, was available to feed diabetic grandmothers and others on the turn!); the trailer company whose original restrictions on the use of the trailers pertained to pets, now informed that they would not allow them to be used by "? natives".

Yes, other than William being disappointed by not having a trailer, the absence of trailers at Last Duel Park meant that Elders could not be a full presence at this designated ceremonial site. Now Elder Peter Decontie, Sacred Fire Keeper at William's annual gatherings, and else where, guide for Archaeologist Bill Allen's recent work in Algonquin Park, and referenced in his publications, himself in his seventies, and suffering over the summer with a bad shoulder, had made a trip from Maniwaki to Perth a week or so in advance, to select the proper location for the Sacred Fire with Brent; he too had anticipated having a camper for himself and his key helper for the four days, to oversee the Sacred Fire for the duration of the event, day and night; this did not materialize; in the absence of the presence of Elders and campers, he chose, on the first night, not to go to a hotel and leave his fire or his helper alone - instead, he slept in his truck. Of course, Friday night was wet, and this only served to aggravate his physical difficulties. The next night, he did take a room in an inn - we were grateful to Bill Sluiman from the Indigenous Cooperative of the Environment for taking care of this, (and for the tents to provide some protection from the elements for participants, and for the tea and tobacco pouch gifts for the presenters) - sadly, by this time, Merriwolf Productions' credit was stretched to the limit.

So anyway, yes, Merriwolf Productions were fighting off another fire - this one in an inn in the neighbouring town. But first: another preamble - Ninom Rouze, originally from Brazil, together with her Canadian husband Peter was spending the summer learning about the Indigenous Peoples of Canada - and at the Pow Wow in Curve Lake, she had met fellow South Americans - Aztek dancers now living in Toronto. Unfortunately, they had not been able to dance at that pow wow as planned, and, realizing how important the dancing was for them, Ninom was hoping they would be able to perform at our event,

and so she linked them with our organizers. We were all excited to have them join us - we had steadily been losing our international flavour with our organizational struggles. William especially was pleased - he is really an admirer of the powerful Aztek dances.

Now, might I say something about Indigenous dance - for most native people the drum song, the dance and the prayer were interconnected; dance was a profound form of spiritual expression; despite the centuries of religious and cultural oppression, and recent popularization and commercialization of dance, the spiritual threads of connection to Mother Earth and all her creation are indelibly marked. Imagine if dance was the way you expressed your prayer; imagine if this prayer had to happen on a scale that required earth and space for expression; imagine if you lived in Toronto, and found few outlets for such spiritual expression; imagine how much you might want to seize an opportunity to express yourself in dance, barefooted dance on the land, at the end of the summer, when time for such dance is running out. I discovered that even preparing the feather head-dress for the dance was an expression of prayer for the Aztek dancers.

Well, these dancers were to stay at a nearby inn over the course of the weekend. The head dancer, his pregnant wife and baby from Toronto, and his brother and mother from Mexico City were our invited guests. Unfortunately, on the Saturday, the inn keeper padlocked the room, demanding payment before he would let them back in the room. He did not trust these "Natives" and felt fully justified in abusing and embarrassing them. Their costumes were locked in; even worse, so was the baby's food. Brent had to make a trip to his son in Cornwall to secure money to get us out of this bind - so much of his resources being held elsewhere. Technically, they may have been within their rights - but, we don't all have credit cards.

I was given to understand that this place was operated by one of the newer Canadians - consistent with the overt and indirect racist messages they receive concerning the First Peoples of this continent, they seemed to follow suit and box them into the lowest level of the proverbial totem pole. So now, William's peoples are being abused by a whole new group of people - I know William himself has experienced racism at hotels and restaurants across eastern Canada in his working years from representatives of both the "founding nations", and the lump rushes to both his throat and mine when

such memories surface. Still that was decades ago. Then, friends staying at another inn operated by another group of new Canadian - ones they developed a pleasant relationship with - informed us that these innkeepers had been aware of the racial tensions brewing around Perth - and of course, as is the case with that kind of attitude and energy, they themselves were not immune to its negative impact. This cycle constitutes such a deep and dark irony, since we all know that every group that has come to William's land to make their home here, have escaped from worse conditions elsewhere. We only live a good life here because we are living off the grand natural resources of William's homeland, supported by the safety net of the deep, underlying values of the original peoples, and primarily by the one that reminds us that *We Are All Related*. Further, because we have arrogantly and aggressively refused to be guided by the original caretakers of this land, we have always struggled to come to terms with different cultures - and the struggle is only increasing in intensity. Also, in discarding the stewardship of Mother Earth ideology and replacing it with one of unbridled commodification, in a few short hundred years we have desecrated her body irrevocably. We are only barely beginning to see the implications of this abuse in our crumbling health and social structure and in our environment. Our Aztek dancer was to say something to deepen my understanding of this truth - but more of that later. Here, suffice it to say that this expression of suspicion and hostility, marking the racial divides now openly and heatedly debated in our media, showing the chips in the mosaic, are indeed a far cry from the prayer for "All My Relations" that William and his ancestors hold in their hearts for the newcomers.

Also, suffice it to say that as "The Awakening" commenced, we were all disillusioned, disappointed and worried, even, - but, not defeated. Brent, the master of many one-liners, much like Jack Lemmon in 'Weekend in the Country' now armed with the line, *A Winner Never Quits and a Quitter Never Wins*, pulled his team together for the task ahead. And William likes to say, with Johnny Cash, 'I Won't Back Down' - the show indeed went on, and now I shall provide you with an overview of the actual event. An *awakening* did indeed happen in many hearts and minds, and perhaps you will find this part of the story lighter.

### **The Actual Event - "The Awakening"**

On the afternoon of October 4, 2007, accompanied by William's long time friend Liz McLean, we raced from Maniwaki to Ottawa, and then later in the evening went on to Smith Falls, where William's friend from Woodstock New York had taken it upon herself to book a room for him in a local inn - just as well, since his on-site trailer did not materialize. We ended up staying there three nights to be close to the event, and ease the driving for William, though we regularly thought of returning each day to the comforts of our beds in Ottawa. You remember, he is almost 94. Still, we paid our hundred dollars a night and made the best of things.

We left the early morning activities to William's younger friends - Elders mostly in their sixties and seventies.

### Spiritual Ceremonies

Elder Peter Decontie, Sacred Fire Keeper, lighted the Sacred Fire on the banks of the river on Last Duel Park - later, I was told a heron, the bird who teaches self-reflection and patience, returned to watch regularly throughout the three days of the event, while the fire was kept alive faithfully. Here the spiritual energies of Mother Earth and the other elements, the ancestors and all creation were invited to support the effort underway, and indeed, they ushered in a very special experience for all who availed themselves of it. Elders, Pipe Carriers and Fire Keepers from near and far - from Northern Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and the United States (Dominic Rankin, Michel Brazeau, John Joe Sanipass, Bert and Jeorgina Larocque and Jeorgina's ninety three year old mother who braved the road trip from Nova Scotia, Eddie Stevens, Faye Hollywood, Lygia-Maciel DeCaspero, Gray Hawk, Hugh and Heather Dickey, Evan Pritchard and Monique Renaud, Paul Boisvert, Brian Martin, Peter Cocoo, Vera Martin, amongst others) conducted early morning pipe ceremonies and offered prayers, drum songs and teachings, and thus each day laid a strong spiritual foundation for the activities, and for the safety of the participants. William Commanda added his tobacco and prayer to the fire each day as well.

On the Saturday morning, we arrived at the Sacred Fire in the middle of a rainstorm. Monique Renaud, who organizes annual water ceremonies at Victoria Island with Aboriginal and non Aboriginal women, brought the Water

Ceremony to Perth, and indeed, the water spirits responded. The rain fell, the fire burned, and the group circled around the sacred spot were transported to a deeper understanding of the meaning of things and the power of nature. Minnie Matoush brought a basket of strawberries, and in the pouring rain, related the story of the heart berry, reminding us of why it is so sacred to the original peoples of the land, with its message of love and especially the *forgiveness* that can only come from a strong heart. It was a fitting message for all of us to hear during this gathering. A local resident then said a few words - she talked about her apprehensions about "The Awakening", about coming to the realization that she herself was being awakened to something larger, and she expressed her gratitude to the Indigenous Peoples for their efforts and sharing. We hope she will write about this experience, and commence a process of dialogue within the community. (A reporter from the local paper also attended the event - she seemed very impressed. We hope she too reports about the gathering.)

On the Sunday morning when we arrived, there were only three people left at the fire after the morning ceremonies. One was a Mi'qMaq woman from Maine who remembered William from years ago. Even more interesting, he remembered her. I had never seen her in the past dozen years. He has this amazing way of knowing everybody intimately, it seems. I say it is the spirit of *UBUNTU* at its deepest level that finds expression in William - *The I am because you are thing*. The threads of connection to him are vibrant and compelling. She wanted to sing for him. Shy and hesitant at first, she drew out her drum and then sang the Mi'qMaq Honour song. Nobody who has heard that song is not moved by it - I remember it being sung in the Senate Chambers on Parliament Hill one Remembrance Day and it left the people and hall vibrating differently, and lining up endlessly to be smudged by our Elder. As this woman sang, her voice took on a deepening strength and power - even now, it gives me shivers to write about it, and I am sure the river and the leaves and the wind and the fire reverberated differently. This is what it means, when Indigenous Peoples take their prayers to Earth - She knows them and listens in ways that I, of East Indian roots, born in South Africa, who has lived in Canada all my adult life, can never quite emulate. My threads of connection have been severed, and it is only by becoming related to her direct children that I can find my way to the heart of Earth. This, I think, is partly what William and other Indigenous Peoples are trying to

teach us, and what we do not have the language yet to hear. We still see Earth as commodity.

### Day One Presentations

A beautiful sunny day emerged on Friday, and we arrived at the Perth Fairgrounds to find things a bit disorganized. Our team was overwhelmed with so many tasks and challenges created by the last minute changes and hostility that it was a little difficult not to feel overwhelmed and bow our heads.

But we saw a group of high school students sitting on the bleachers, and so we spun into action.

The stage and sound system were not yet set up, the sun was beating down harshly on the field, and we looked around for hope. It was offered by a giant Oak Tree in front of the Green Horse Barn - they say that great Algonquin orators were buried with an acorn in their mouths; perhaps William's ancestors were with us - certainly our prayers acknowledged them. We gathered our students, and set up a circle on the grass, and plunged into our agenda - a discussion about Doctor/Elder/Grandfather William Commanda's *Circle of All Nations* work. Poor Brent was dealing with other pressing matters, and so was not able to offer the opening welcome.

We were very impressed with the Smith Falls High School Teacher for organizing this field trip to "The Awakening". We found that practically nobody knew very much about the First Peoples of the land, and in fact only one student had heard something about Aboriginal peoples in her Religious Studies course. This was not surprising to William or the other native people - their history is not taught in schools, nor the true history of their land. I could not help thinking about students from Smith Falls and their exciting field research on Veterans, locally and abroad - and I wonder what it might do for this country if the young people of this country were to devote a similar energy to uncovering the true history of the land we call home - a great project idea we shall try to pass on to that teacher. (Actually, I believe some students have started doing this in Newfoundland - where the story of the Beothuks will not be silenced - you will recall they took honourable mention in the great effort to identify the Seven Wonders

of Canada. You may recall earlier that I said the values of the original peoples constitute the safety net of Canada; if you reflect on these Seven Wonders, you will find they have also invaded our psyches - six are about reverence for the spirit of the land; the seventh for "All My Relations"; and the one not chosen, but which received the largest number of votes was a mountain - yes, The Sleeping Giant! - You see now how important the seed planted by "The Awakening" is, right?).

We were glad to have our presentations commence with young people - somehow, it seemed consistent with the seeding theme. They were polite and attentive and we hoped that they were inspired to learn more about William's people by the end of the afternoon. We had a surprise presentation on the work of one remarkable young man from the area - Ryan Hreljac from Ryan's Well Foundation in Kempville. Ryan started his work to build wells for people in dire need of water in Africa when he was 6; and he made a presentation at *Grandfather's Circle of All Nations Gathering* when he was 9, saying if a little kid could do these things, just imagine what grownups could do; now 16 and having an educational adventure on the high seas, his mother Susan came to bring us his greetings. We hope his story, relayed in part in a beautiful book by Herb Shoveller, *Ryan and Jimmy And the Well in Africa That Brought Them Together*, will inspire our young students to do remarkable things themselves, locally and globally.

What a dismal world we see emerging for so many young people these days - bullying, bomb threats, rape and murder have been on the agenda repeatedly as this school year has commenced. Surely we have to look at the ramifications of the lifestyles and ideologies we are evolving with greater care and insight? Our children are already demonstrating the strain of the erosion of childhood. Indigenous philosophy focuses the attention on the seventh generation, and there is much in that thought to provoke deep contemplation.

In mentioning Ryan, I am reminded of the Wolf Project. This is a grass roots initiative that honours people who promote racial harmony. School Social Worker Ray Sunstrum, himself a recipient of a Wolf Award, nominated William Commanda for this honour several years ago - and now William sits as Special Advisor to this group. Ryan Hreljac at age 9 was our youngest recipient of a Wolf. During the weekend gathering, we were also

joined by another special Wolf recipient, Donald Marshall Junior, who when he was barely seventeen was incarcerated in a federal prison for a crime he had not committed - because of the overt and systemic racism inherent in the criminal justice system. Oh, he is Mi'qMaq. More about him later; at this point, suffice it to say wolf spirit was howling under the Oak Tree, where later, Ray deposited the ashes from William's smudge bowl! Another spot in Perth made sacred by the prayer of its peoples.

William's friends are nothing if not an amazingly diverse group of individuals, and he was pleased to welcome someone who has known him the longest of all - Kirk Wipper, Founder of the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough. Kirk, a remarkable Canadian of the highest order, a tireless worker even now in his eighties, Patron of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, had been searching around Perth, looking for "The Awakening" action from Thursday evening, since we had not reached him with the news of the changes in our program. Enroute to China, he spent the afternoon with us, sharing canoe stories and messages about water conservation, and then took his tired body to the airport, all with good grace.

We followed our agenda as best we could, and amazingly, most of our remarkable speakers were with us each day. We had presentations on environmental stewardship by Will Amos, Lawyer with Eco Justice Canada, associated with the University of Ottawa - one of the leading challengers of corporations and governments on behalf of environment. Grey Hawk, a Social Worker from The United States, talked about Indigenous approaches to working with troubled youth. Ana-Karyn Garcia, International shaman and spiritual teacher from Columbia brought forward new perspectives on spiritual development, meditation and healing.

William invited the Elders to share their thoughts and they added great depth and wisdom to the discussions. It was rather amazing to wonder about the fear and hostility that had hit Perth regarding "The Awakening" - here were remarkable senior citizens, one ninety three, another ninety two, William himself almost ninety four, traveling across the country to meet with others and share; another special grandmother, healing from breast cancer; several who travel great distances to attend every one of William's activities because they know something important is always happening there; Algonquin, Mi'qMaq, Cree, Mohawk, Ojibwe - sitting in rickety chairs on

uneven ground in the heat, and later rain - how could they have raised such fear? Of course, when you listen to the news about seniors and nursing homes in Canada, it seems like deeper problems are brewing with and for mainstream older folk. Despite all the rights and programs in this affluent country, things are just not falling into place. I know what access to services my senior immigrant aunt is receiving, and quite frankly, I don't see the old folk in William's community, let alone William himself, accessing the same. I think we need to go back and try to understand what the concept of balance and sharing meant to William's ancestors.

Interesting to reflect that the word Elder really takes its context in the Indigenous world, where the older folk are respected for the wisdom they have gained from hard lives and sought out to help younger folk on their journeys. When I see the number of non-Aboriginal young people swarm the elders at William's annual gatherings, it seems obvious that there is a dearth of support for them in that world out there.

Surely someone will awaken to the realities facing children, youth and elders, let alone Mother Earth soon? Someone other than William, that is. Many believe like us that the answers lie in the wisdom of the people of the land. When will the others understand?

We must end our segment on the agenda for the first day with mention of Marlo Easter Bunny. Very sadly indeed, he passed away a few days before the event, and so we had no presentation on "End War with Laughter". Our prayers remain with his family. Indigenous Peoples always remember the spirits of their ancestors. We will remember him too, since he too is now a part of our world.

At the field, Tito Medina and his family kept the sound system going for the drummers and dancers, who were surrounded by the vendors and food booths. Because we had a small turn out, it was a disappointing day for many of them, and expensive too, for the small scale craftspeople. Again because of the small crowd, and the cold and imminent rains the large outside concert activities were cancelled; however there were several special performances that still went on: by Michael Coda, Sisa Pacari and Young Guns; our very special guests, Native Nations Dance Theatre with Vaughnda Hilton, Stephen Wise-Katriel and many others: the group who drove the

great distance from Philadelphia and indeed reflected great grace and forbearance with the last minute adjustments to the program; and there was Junkyard Jon and his Junkyard Symphony team, whose theme of reduce, recycle and rock sent the mood for a fun and personal approach to help heal Mother Earth. So, all in all, despite all the odds, we wrapped up the first day more or less as planned.

### Day Two Presentations

Saturday presented itself with heavy rain, and, as I suggested earlier, mirrored the Water Ceremony and the spirit of the water bird itself. So, for us, the opening commenced in as special a way as ever.

Then we headed to the Perth Fairgrounds. On this wet morning, our Oak Tree at the Green Horse Barn was no longer an answer. So, we decided to set ourselves up, elders, special presenters and guests all on the stage. We rigged ourselves a shelter with some tarps and the many bungy cords William and I keep handy in the car; Beverly Hitchins, now also on board with the Merriwolf team, working on the website and the sound system, got the mikes up; we shared our camp chairs, and began this day's round of presentations.

Unfortunately, our friend Betsy Stang, who supported Indigenous participation at United Nations events was not able to make the trip from Woodstock, New York, after all, so I took the opportunity to set the stage for the discussions by reflecting on William's own engagement with environmental issues over the past two decades, consistent with the topic of *"From the 1993 UN Cry of the Earth Conference and earlier: the Indigenous Voice in Global Environmental Stewardship and Peace Building"*. I am attaching an outline of his efforts for your information.

WILLIAM COMMANDA

Chronology of Key Activities in support of Mother Earth

- 1945 - Precursor - Hopi Petition to the UN
- 1967- First Gathering - at Eganville, Ont
- 1967 - Gathering of Nations in Maniwaki
- 1987 - Presentation of Wampum Belts at Constitutional Talks
- 1991 - Pipe Ceremony at Pre Rio Preparations in France
- 1992 - Message to Earth Summit in Rio - Agenda 21
- 1993 - Cry of the Earth Conference at UN
- 1995 - Spiritual Guide of the Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth

1996 - RCAP - at VI - Would you drink the water?  
2004 - Honorary Elder - Boreal Rendezvous  
2004 - Heritage Rivers Bill Mason Conservation Award  
2006 - Honorary Chair - Ottawa Heritage River Designation  
2006 - WaterLife Workshop  
Annual Circle of All Nations Gatherings Promote Environmental Stewardship  
2004 - Focus on Water  
Annual Gathering of Nations Pipe Ceremonies at Victoria Island

We were then ready to welcome our Special Guest, Donald Marshall Junior. A messenger of the ilk of the Phoenix, he has risen now for the fourth time, to create his life anew - first there was the Marshall Inquiry, then the challenge of the Fisheries Act and the reinstatement of Aboriginal fishing rights consistent with the Royal Proclamation of 1763, then the double lung surgery; now he was joining us with his pregnant wife, excited about a miracle baby not deemed possible earlier, with his transplant medication.

We consider him the single most important living Indigenous voice in Canada, in the fight for justice and recognition, whose unending search for truth and justice ushered in the Aboriginal justice agenda - his story of courage and perseverance has reverberated across Canada and elsewhere, and urges all of us to be dauntless in our pursuit of justice and fairness. Even more remarkable, he moved beyond bitterness at the tremendous cost of his experience of the injustice to himself, his family and community to become an advocate for better cross-cultural understanding and harmony, and in 2000, he was presented with a Wolf Project Award, at Elder William Commanda's International Millennium Peace Gathering. He established a youth cultural camp to promote integration of traditional restorative practices in crime prevention and personal development, and brought many Mi'qMac youth to *Circle of All Nations Gatherings*. We believe the Spirit of the Eel is intrinsic to the Sacred Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt that William Commanda carries, and note that it played a key role in the Donald Marshall Junior struggle for the recognition of indigenous fishing rights.

He talked warmly about his relationship with William over the years. A particularly strong memory was of William's spiritual presence with him while he was on the operating table; intriguingly, William awakened restless at the same moment in his home in Maniwaki, with Junior on his mind and in his prayer. We were pleased to see him growing strong and ready for the challenges and work that still lie ahead of him.

Sadly, because of our confusion, we missed Meredith Brown, Executive Director of Ottawa Riverkeepers; this group had just added their support to the Uranium Protest in Ardoch/Sharbot Lake; and we would have welcomed the input of the experts on this volatile topic.

Our other presenters kept the show moving. Evan Pritchard, researcher, and writer of several books, including *Native New Yorkers*, shared stories about Algonquin history, Indigenous wisdom and environmental challenges; Hugh Dickey, the academic who had served as Cultural Advisor for the documentary on William's 2001 *Circle of All Nations Gathering*, and his wife Heather, talked about spirituality, culture and education. Elena Love brought the conversation to a personal level and shared thoughts about the river as supporter of both deep healing and creative development in her presentation on river craft creativity. Academic and Elder Jim Albert, from Lanark County, had an accident and could not make it - but indeed, with ideas bubbling over from the elders and audience, there was no pause in the sharing of innovative ideas throughout the course of that damp afternoon.

When the presentations ended, we moved on to the drumming and dancing and then the evening performances at the High School - excellent, but poignant in view of the scant attendance.

### Day Three Presentations

On Sunday, the sun returned, and we contemplated the best location for this day's show. Some sun and cloud, but no rain. We decided to go to the Drum Arbour, and inter-space presentations with drumming and dancing, so as not to split our audience, and ensure more relationship-building, consistent with William's *Circle of All Nations* approach. The MC for the drum, Doug Comegan, the three drums, our presenters and I had to learn fast to adjust to each other's styles to keep the show moving on smoothly. Everyone accommodated the changes graciously, even though every one would have loved to have had more time to share their gifts and ideas with the crowd. We did not quite please Mr. Quality Control, William in Command. He was not seated facing East for his presentation on the Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt so he turned around and directed his remarks towards the Sun - not that unusual with his style of communicating about sacred matters - he

generally addresses his prayers to the Creator and then translates for the rest of us. Oh, let me remember to say also that, true to his usual style of communications, throughout the weekend our Statesman translated himself from Algonquin to English to French, to ensure that all his colleagues would understand his key messages - he certainly takes trilingualism and communications to new levels.

Our keynote speaker this day was internationally renowned Metis Architect Douglas J. Cardinal. He is the brilliant creator of the gem in Ottawa, the Museum of Civilization, though you would certainly never know it if you looked at some books about the place. Even worse in that other capital city, Washington, DC, where the undeniable Cardinal Museum of the Native American was snatched from him. You see what I mean about this concerted or unconscious effort to make the First Peoples disappear? As Douglas offered his inspiring presentation on Indigenous world views, the social and environmental crises, the strengths and plight of Aboriginal peoples, art and creativity, art and spirituality and hope, Donald Marshall Junior joined him and William on the field. Wouldn't you know it, three special visitors arrived at that moment, acknowledging the fact that three very remarkable Indigenous People were gathered together at a very special moment of *awakening* on the seventh of October, 2007, three hundred and forty four years after the signing of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 - yes, three eagles appeared in the skies above! It was a propitious sign. Small as the gathering had ended up being, it still nonetheless was managing to hold all the really important 'greater' things. Yes, three internationally renowned Aboriginal people from Canada, who have achieved greater things in their lives than many yet comprehend, and with very little opportunity or support, against the great odds of racism and oppression - men who already leave their indelible mark on human history, despite all the efforts to make them invisible - they were acknowledged by a greater presence, and one they all value above all else, the highest messenger of their Creator. Another sacred moment.

(Now lest you think we are sexist or not fully inclusive, may I hasten to add that Tantoo Cardinal was our scheduled Master of Ceremonies and Goodwill Ambassador, but our smaller scale event meant it was not appropriate to bring her in from across the country; we had also invited Ms. Mary Simon to

reflect an Inuit perspective, but her participation was not possible on the Thanksgiving Weekend).

We then moved on to a local environmentalist who is on the short list for the Gore/Branston prize for environmental innovation, who is already acknowledged for his ground breaking work in the United Kingdom and Africa, but who has difficulty reaching governments here in Canada - Peter Webb, from Kempville, Ontario. His presentation on his years of environmental research consistent with Indigenous ways of understanding the natural world, and programs for *Reducing our Carbon Footprint* inspired participants with many new ideas for environmental stewardship. Next, Joan Kuyek, the hardworking representative of Mining Watch Canada, provided us with factual information about the trigger issue in the area - uranium mining; it seems impossible to imagine the entire town would not want to avail itself of such researched information, as they come to addressing a key controversial issue of our times, one with potential impact on their very own children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, a crisis at the site prevented our Ardoch/Sharbot Lake First Nations and Settler Uranium Protest presenters from joining us, and so we missed out on learning about their dramatic summer of soul searching, struggle and sacrifice, though Larry McDermott, former mayor of Lanark Highlands, and representative of the First Nations of Sharbot Lake provided a brief overview of the protest. A youth representative from Ryan's Well Foundation, Sabrina Rubli, then told us about her work with the Foundation inspired by a child's passionate concern for children dying of thirst a distant continent away - a child, Ryan Hreljac, from the neighbourhood, Kempville. Michael Nickerson, a passionate local environmentalist gave a fascinating presentation on sustainability, and talked about his recently published book, *Life, Money & Illusion; Living on Earth as if we want to stay.* And finally, the international touch - Larry McDermott, from Plenty Canada, and Sandra Hernandez and Tito Medina, our sound specialists and community organizers, talked about Indigenous connections to strengthen global environmental stewardship, and apprised us of Indigenous environmental priorities as identified during their summer trip to Venezuela - another reminder of the inter-relationship and bio-diversity themes William's people talk about to us reductionists.

There were two other special moments that afternoon - one, when Jeremy Wright, retired public servant and economist, talk show host, documentary

maker, and representative of Council of Canadians, presented a special video he had prepared for the weekend - entitled "The Awakening"! A regular participant at the *Circle of All Nations Gatherings* and events, he had captured key moments at various events organized by Grandfather, and pulled together an impressive documentary that captured the Elder's passionate concern for Mother Earth, the spirit of harmony of the *Circle of All Nations Gatherings*, the wisdom of the Indigenous ancestors of the land, and the vision for the Indigenous Centre at *Asinabka*.

The other moment came when a special participant in a wheelchair chose to sit next to Grandfather, because he could simply feel the love and good energy coming from him, his mother explained. It was deeply touching.

All in all, another afternoon of powerful ideas and people - it was so stimulating!

Three drums shared the time with the presenters, Golden Eagle, Kichissippi Drum and Young Guns and Doug Comegon provided the pow wow commentary and oversight. Native Nations Dance Theatre, together with Steve Wise-Katriel (who actually played with Stevie Wonder!) gave a special performance; all the way from Pennsylvania, we felt very badly that they were limited to such few hours of show time. But their hearts were aligned with our efforts and constraints and this was reflected in their music.

Now, I had been worried all weekend about our Aztek dancers and their shabby treatment, and late on Sunday afternoon, I tracked them down, to see if they wanted to dance. They welcomed the opportunity and went to prepare. I felt truly moved by their dignity and humility, in the face of the hurtful racism and isolation. Later I realized it took an hour and a half to put the magnificent head-dress together for the dance. The mother started the dance with the burning of Kopal, and the sacred conch shell was blown into the sky, summoning the energies and spirits of the four directions to join in the dance. Barefooted in the late afternoon coolness, the brothers drummed and danced their incredibly powerful prayer to Mother Earth, and it was indeed a precious moment to finish "The Awakening" with. When he offered his final remarks, the head dancer remarked with a deep, poignant dignity that his beautiful homeland of Mexico City was now the most exploited and polluted city in the world. What must it feel like to

Indigenous peoples all over the world to have something they hold so sacred desecrated relentlessly and without remorse by those of us who have long relinquished any ties with any land of our ancestry? We scarcely tried to understand when they traveled long miles to share their thoughts and passions in Perth. Does it make any more difference to us now, late October, 2007, as the fires rage through California? As our children are tormented by bomb threats in their schools? As our seniors fight each other in nursing homes? As people debate tolerance and multiculturalism and racism and war? They know these issues are all inter-related.

Many of us believe more and more every day we need to seek out Grandfather William Commanda's *Circle of All Nations* ideology, to find the true pathway to a *Culture of Peace*. We know that some people awakened to this realization on this special weekend.

We were glad to find the Deputy Mayor of Perth had ridden her bike to our event on the Sunday afternoon, and we invited her to offer a few words of greeting. It rounded off the event nicely.

What more can we say? The core team, comprising Brent Ringer, Tip the Clown, Shelley and Bev, then Judy Brown, her partner Ken, and Michael, worked tirelessly before, during and after the gathering, and we can only express gratitude for their forbearance, courage, goodwill and persistence, ensuring their commitment to Grandfather was honoured, despite all the obstacles and any personal limitations. Judy, Ken and Michael took care of all the Elders they could identify, accommodating them in their home or hotels, feeding them, shuttling them around, and coordinating their talking circles and ceremonies. Brent, Tip, Shelley and Bev raced around all weekend, worrying about a range of big and small details, modifying plans on the fly to respond to every pressure, and in the end, we had in a nutshell, all the elements of a *Circle of All Nations* experience.

Brent had a very special gift to present to Grandfather - another art piece - or rather two - a painting of Grandfather (based on a photograph of the Signing of the Land Mines Agreement) and a painting of the Chaudière Falls, by local artist Craig Campbell. Intriguingly enough, the artist supporting the effort was a former Chair of the Perth Police Services Board, who also describes himself as community volunteer, writer, photographer, raconteur,

and audio/visual type: "A Canadian nostalgic realistic artist who enjoys life". This does seem to imply that our gathering was really not considered any threat in the beginning - as it grew near, it must have seemed very threatening to those who really did not want to see the public at large exposed to the ideas of the Indigenous peoples and other like minded citizens. Hard to believe our ninety three year old was frightening anybody - there is not greater example of a wise, benevolent and loving individual, whose focus is always on the future of "all our children" and the world we leave to them - surely this can be no less important to others?

Craig Campbell's individual original pieces were combined to create a commemorative poster of "The Awakening". It carries the prayer for the materialization of the vision for *Asinabka*, the Indigenous centre at the sacred Chaudière Site in the Nation's capital. We are grateful for his inspired paintings.

From the sacred fire, to the pipe ceremonies, to the water ceremony, to the drumming and dancing, the musicians and artists, to the inspirational presentations by remarkable peoples of all backgrounds, to the craft and food vendors, who kept their good humour despite their extensive work and outlay and the small crowds and returns, "The Awakening" was a remarkable growing experience for all who engaged fully in it. Our oldest participant, almost-95 year old Dorothy Hitchins, from Smith Fall's Dorothy's Dance Studio said "Perth was lucky to have this here!" and we are happy to hear that. In the end, really, our energies were drawn to the many local and visiting participants who braved weather, controversy, Thanksgiving weekend demands and paid to join us - and we remain grateful for their interest and support.

We hope that this report will awaken your heart and draw you on your journey around your personal Medicine Wheel!

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[www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca)  
circleofallnations@sympatico.ca