

August 8, 2015

To whom it may concern (i.e. every Canadian),

At the heart of our nation's capital, currently buried under mounds of concrete and the debris of an industrial era, lies the symbolic source of Canada's power, and one of the most historically significant locations in the history of Canada. For thousands of years prior to occupation, this area was known as a sacred site by the Indigenous peoples of this land. It is still considered sacred to this day.

The Chaudière Island in downtown Ottawa, Ontario is the heart of this sacred place, known in the Algonquin tongue as Asinabka, place of glare rock, at the site of Akikipautik, the boiling kettle of Chaudière Falls. Chaudière Island is at risk of further desecration and we urgently need your help to protect and restore it for future generations of Canadians. If we do not act now, we may never again have the opportunity to recover and restore this national and global treasure. This is a critical and pivotal moment.

The Chaudière Falls, on the great Kitchissippi (Ottawa) River, has a deep history that stretches far back, long before the industrial era. A century ago, the falls were dammed, and access to the area was completely blocked to the public, both physically and visually.

Many locals, like myself, grew up having no real concept that, at the heart of our home town, there were once magnificent waterfalls, recorded in history as being second only to Niagara in their power and glory.

According to celebrated Algonquin Chief, Elder, and spiritual leader Dr. William (Grandfather) Commanda, Asinabka is extremely significant to the First Nations people of this continent. Grandfather William believed that almost every Indigenous tribe in North America has had some historical knowledge of this very special place, and came there to gather for ceremony, sharing and exchange of goods and ideas.

The islands of Chaudière, Victoria, and Albert, situated on unceded Algonquin territory, cradle the legendary Chaudière Falls. These islands, Chaudière in particular, comprise the land upon which Grandfather William's ancestors stood to view and honour the Great Spirit.

Decades ago, Grandfather William began sharing his vision for the future of these special islands. His bold vision called for freeing the Chaudière Falls, and restoring Chaudière Island to green space by creating a City Park and an Historic Cultural Interpretive Centre for all to enjoy, as well as the construction of a National Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island. He believed that all Aboriginal people of this country deserved to be represented in the Nation's Capital with their own embassy.

Grandfather William also believed that the freeing of the falls and the restoration of Chaudière Island to green space would be a "symbolic gesture of reconciliation with Mother Earth". William's vision has now grown to become THE symbolic gesture of reconciliation with all Aboriginal people at a time when people are asking what Truth and Reconciliation really means.

Chaudière Island is the heart of William's vision. It is the very spot upon which his ancestors stood to view and honour the falls. Samuel de Champlain, the "Father" of New France, witnessed and documented Indigenous people offering tobacco to these falls.

Chaudière Island, currently owned by Domtar Corporation, has been inaccessible to Aboriginal people for well over a century because of its takeover by industrialists. As Aboriginal people began to slowly trickle back to their sacred site over the last few decades, they found that the closest they could get to the severely damaged falls was the site of the old abandoned Carbide Mill building on Victoria Island.

It is important to note that while Victoria Island was also considered sacred, being among the chain of islands that cradled the falls, Victoria Island was never the ultimate goal, it was merely as close as the people were able to get to the falls, due to the barriers of locks and chains.

Grandfather William's work picked up momentum at the turn of this century when he began organizing regular pipe ceremonies on Victoria Island, and large annual gatherings at his home on the Kitigan Zibi reserve in Maniwaki, Quebec. He recorded his vision and efforts on his websites www.asinabka.com, and www.circleofallnations.ca. Two books about William's life and work hold more information: *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout 1 and 2*, published through the efforts of Romola Thumbadoo, his companion and co-director of his organization Circle of All Nations, and many other helpers like me.

During his lifetime, the Elder worked tirelessly to raise awareness about countless issues, all of which were focused on creating a better future for all. He was acclaimed as a remarkable Indigenous leader by many, nationally and internationally, and honoured on numerous occasions. He received two doctoral awards, the Aboriginal Lifetime Achievement award, and was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada. He was also presented with the Key to the City of Ottawa at a ceremony held on Victoria Island in Ottawa.

This Elder was also the carrier of three Sacred Wampum Belts of historical significance: the Seven Fires Prophecy Belt, the Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt, and the 1700's Welcoming Belt. This last belt depicts three figures, representing the English on one side, the French on the other, and the Aboriginal people in the middle. It is both significant and poignant to note that the sacred Aboriginal site at the heart of William's vision is geographically located in between Ontario, which is predominantly English, and Quebec, which is predominantly French.

On December 31, 1857, Queen Victoria chose Ottawa to be the common capital for the Province of Canada (modern Quebec and Ontario). Ottawa was the only settlement of any significant size located right on the border of Canada East and Canada West (Upper and Lower Canada), making it a compromise between the French and English populations.

As Grandfather William described it in his book "*Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*", the 1700's Welcoming belt "is about equitable SHARING" for all Canadians. Thus this belt has become hugely symbolic of Grandfather's vision for Asinabka.

In 2002-3, Grandfather William began a concentrated and successful campaign to enlist the support of Algonquin and other First Nations communities across the country for his vision for Asinabka. He believed that the Algonquins should host the project, since it was located on Algonquin territory, but that the project belonged to ALL nations, that no one party owned or was responsible for it because everyone, especially the government, should step up to the plate. Thus he firmly believed that the restoration of the land and construction of the entire project should be funded by the Government of Canada. This unique perspective caused great confusion. Changes in political leadership have impacted

the advancement of the project, and the project has appeared to stall. All our efforts are now needed to move this work forward.

Grandfather William passed away on the 3rd of August, 2011 at 98 years old. A mere one year later, Windmill Corporation announced their plans to purchase Chaudière Island and Albert Island and use them for private condominium and retail development, which would see even more concrete and commercialism poured onto this sacred spot than ever before. Windmill's efforts have been highly controversial right from the start.

To allow Windmill's development to continue, would be a slap in the face of every Aboriginal person in this country. On the other hand, realizing William's vision will undoubtedly have a huge positive impact, both nationally and globally. William's vision provides education, cultural healing, and peace building. As parkland and unique cultural interpretive centre, Chaudière Island would also be a massive tourist attraction. The financial, spiritual, and humanitarian benefits for each Canadian from Grandfather William's vision would far outweigh the meager profits that Windmill Corporation may or may not decide to share with the rest of Canada, should its own plan succeed.

Canada is fast approaching its 150th birthday and has announced it is looking for a significant project to celebrate this momentous occasion. Could there be anything more significant than the legacy vision of Algonquin Elder William Commanda?

This year Canada has done a lot of talking about "Truth and Reconciliation". Yet truth and reconciliation seems far from a reality while this project hangs precariously in the balance.

Several parties are currently engaged in challenging City of Ottawa decisions of the Ontario Municipal Board to rezone Chaudière Island, an acknowledged sacred site of prehistorical and historical importance, into private lands for condo and commercial development. The next series of hearings with the City are scheduled for August 17-19th, 2015. William's supporters are fighting the re-zoning in an effort to delay Windmill's plans for development and purchase of the Domtar lands, which is contingent on the rezoning.

Note that William's vision does not require re-zoning of the land.

These are but a handful of reasons why supporting William Commanda's vision for Asinabka is the right thing to do. Please do whatever you can to help us recover and restore this global treasure, and make it a proud symbol for ALL Canadians to enjoy for generations to come. Become a very important part of history by taking action today. Please don't delay.

Sincerely,
Karen Bisson
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"We need a noble change for humanity", Grandfather William Commanda once said, as he worried about our darkening global future.