

Grandfather William Commanda

Date of Birth 11 November, 1913

In Commemoration of his 98th Year of Birth
November 11, 2011



Grandfather William Commanda

It Takes a Long Time to Die: Commemorating the Life of Grandfather William Commanda, on the eve of the ninety-eight year of his birth.



As we have written before, William Commanda was born under the bright light of the Morning Star, and his mother named his Ojigkwanong; and thus was marked his purpose in life: to bring light into a world of increasing global darkness. He was born on the eve of the first world war, on this date, that has become a symbol for war and peace, the eleventh of November,

Whether well understood by others or not, he single-mindedly followed the unique pathway etched out for him, in order to offer his particular vision for animating the heritage of his ancestors, the energy of Ginawaydaganuc. Gradually, many began to understand.

His life evolved to demonstrate the affirmation of our deep interconnection with each other and the world of nature – integrating in his prayer the larger universe, the animate and inanimate gifts of Mother Earth, and the dignity and sacredness of our individual pathways into our collective reality as children of Mother Earth – and thus he animated and co-created The Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace.

Countless people around the world are deeply grateful for his vision, his wisdom, his courage and above all, his love and acceptance, and we are grateful for how much he taught us. We pray that his energy will support, sustain and guide us on this special 11.11.11 as we step into the future anticipated by the ancient Prophecy of the Seven Fires that he carried for forty years.

As he wished, I share these reflections about his death and dying at this special moment in time.

Grandfather William Commanda lived his death as actively and passionately as he lived his life. The last phase of his earthly life began on May 19, 2011. It was the time of the monthly blood tests that we had been doing faithfully over the three years (almost to the day – we had started at the Nephrology Clinic on May 7, 2008); this time, we were called immediately for a review of the results – this time for sure, he was really living on borrowed time, our Elder of ninety seven and a half years. We were sent home to prepare for the end, which, as the medical teams tell you, could come today, or tomorrow, once you integrate such news of finality, or that catch-all, *later*. Palliative care was our next step.

It was our friend Sue who raised the question of dialysis – had Grandfather been offered a choice in his health care? No, I had to realize – I, like the others, was seeing him as an old man whose time was up.

But this particular old man had lived a life where his time seemed to have been up on several other occasions. As I pieced together Grandfather’s life, I saw that there were seven critical life and death experiences that he had shared with me. I remember him now on what would have been his ninety eighth birthday, and it is the moment to share some of his memories.



When he was very young, about eight, he had small pox – he recalled till he died the dreadful pain of his wounds, as his mother pulled the dressings off each day; in the summer, as his body browned, the scars were more visible - reminders that we can heal from wounds, even if they are never entirely forgotten. He recalled the deep loneliness, watching his sister Judy and brother Alex playing outside in the snow – he was a child; he wanted to play, he wanted to live; instead, he was fighting one of the most dreadful diseases imaginable; and *Death* was knocking on his window.

I have imagined this disease myself – my own great grandmother died from small pox, when my grandmother was only nine, and *her* angst at being separated from her mother, and her childhood vigils alone at the graveyard impacted the lives of her children and their offspring for sure.

Many times, Grandfather and I watched Bill Moyer’s Television Interview Series with Joseph Campbell, at the tale end of his life, when he talks about the significance of the near-death of a child in traditional Indigenous society: it marks the child a potential *Shaman*. The forces of life and the unknown were already interfacing with the life, body, spirit and psyche of William the child and imprinting deep knowledge, understandings, messages and responsibilities – ones that his people were no longer really able to interpret, in this age that he was growing up in, under the

rule of the Catholic church and state governance. They were being immersed in the reality of new world order. We all have been, and our minds are dominated by a certain way of thinking. For example, as I write this I reflect on how profoundly the words of the great German philosopher Kirkegarde, impacted me when I read, *We have to live life forwards, but can only understand it backwards*. I even used those words when we created the *Correctional Services of Canada's* Millennium calendar.

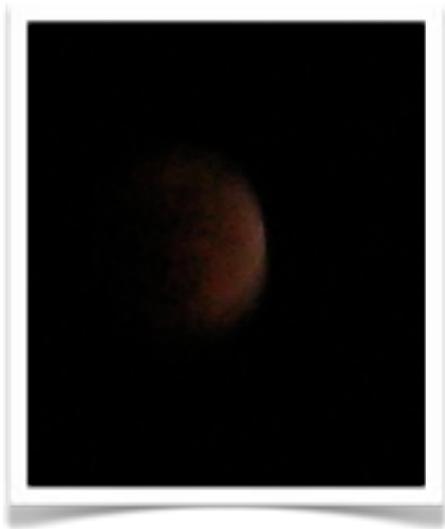
After a decade with William Commanda, I begin to see things differently. Indeed, for the spokesman of the ancient Indigenous *Sacred Seven Fires Prophecy*, which he was destined to carry during the unfolding of the critical seventh fire, he was already being indoctrinated in the ways of understanding the past, present and future, the voice of the ancestors and of the unborn, at another level. And that first lesson about the multifold dimensions of existence burned deep at a level that was going to transform him critically at other life and death moments of his long life. It is no wonder *Hummingbird* was his helper - flying forwards and backwards, up and down, hovering apparently motionless, it was the symbolic teacher of the sacred intersect of time and space with the real sweetness and joy of life.

Anyway, it was Pete Dube – old Pierre Dube, the medicine man from Manuan who married William's great aunt – who brought him through his illness. He was a medicine man of the old order – and he retained his healing gifts into the new era of western medicine and doctors. When Doctor Mulligan was not able to help people on the reserve in Maniwaki, he would say, well, Pierre Dube is your only hope now; and the sick people would live to tell the tales of his miraculous massages, sweat tents and herbal brews. In fact Pierre Dube's healing abilities are a story unto themselves.

The second experience with the larger forces of life also came in his childhood – and this one was also about seeing, about near death, about almost blowing one's brains off - of blindness and sight, I guess.



A rascal of a child, William and his siblings found his father's muzzle loader one day when his parents were out, and they, led by William, the oldest of the boys, decided to light the gun powder and create a bang. Well, the powder would not ignite. William, never one to be defeated, blew on the powder and match, and yes, they responded to his command, and ignited, right in his face with that thunderous bang. Ever resourceful, he dove headfirst into a barrel of rainwater; it cooled him off, yes, but he came out of the water and found he could not see. He spent the next terrifying hours in the dark. His parents came home to this next crisis in the life of their oldest son (You know, Alonzo, William's father was a trapper and a guide – the best according to American writer Jim Durand and the *Saturday Post* – and what else was there for the Indigenous Peoples of North America to do in their changing world? What would the world hold for a blind native boy?) This time, William was taken to Dr. Mulligan, who initially held out little hope for his vision returning – but he bandaged up his eyes and William was embraced by darkness for the next interminable weeks. What thoughts interfaced with the conscious reality of the little boy at this time? Eventually, the bandages were removed, and he found he could see again.



Then next came the near-fatal nose bleed. At this time William was barely 15, and he went up with his older relatives, Joe and Xavier Commanda, to Mont Laurier to work for CIP (Canadian International Paper Company), tree cutting. He apparently concealed his age when he secured the job – and who was checking carefully in those days anyway? Well, his blood, his life force, was to stop him sharply from felling trees. He woke up in camp with a nose-bleed that would not cease – and there was nothing any officials or medical staff at the lumber camp could do to stop it. He was literally bleeding to death. Eventually, they sent him back to Maniwaki by taxi. This time, it was his great aunt who worked on him. She warned him that his blood would present as his life threat.

In fact, it was heavy bleeding that provoked the December 2007 two week stay in hospital, that lead to the diagnosis of accelerating kidney disease; and it was heavy bleeding that took him back to hospital in 2009 and thereafter really impacted his walking and fast forwarded his aging; and indeed, it was his blood and kidney disease that eventually did take his life.

(We are what we eat and drink - William has drunk water out of plastic bottles the past fourteen years I knew him - apparently the water supply was contaminated by deep drilling that reached uranium deposits: who knows when, or over how long a period it was drunk; I was told that government paid engineers for drilling by the foot, so they went deeper, into the sulphur beds. Kidney disease is a big problem in William's home town - they have even had to open a dialysis unit there. Many have had their eyes opened by William's statement that *Rivers are the Veins of Mother Earth* - if we pollute her waters everywhere, her body will become sick. His own illness was a reflection of this truth.)

But to go back to this first grown up job – of course, working in the lumber industry, especially in the Ottawa River Watershed, was one of the very few options for making a living available to the Native Peoples. As with the beaver industry, they were again trapped into a position of violating their ancient fundamental values of living in balance with nature, and not commodifying her every resource and gift. At some level, William’s spirit prevented him from cutting trees in Mont Laurier. Intriguingly enough, this took place on the threshold of the ancient spirit mountain of his ancestors, which, thanks to the priests, had acquired the name Montagne d’Diable. Likely this early experience impacted his own later years in a lumber industry that proved incorrigible and incapable of learning about the balance he tried to impart to her, this even in his earliest years being the way William sought to engage with the “other” – engaging, sharing, trying to teach. To the end of his life, as he watched the logging trucks devastate his homeland, on every trip between Ottawa and Maniwaki, he would say, *It feels like a needle piercing my eye*. Can you just imagine that kind of excruciating pain, and especially if you really believe you too are just another child of Mother Earth?

The next pivotal moment came when he was a young man. Those who have followed his words closely will remember him telling us that he was only eight when he “had” his first drunk. Well, by the time he was in his twenties, he was, as he put it, likely the biggest drunk on the reserve. Its funny, but when he was out in the bush, trapping or hunting or guiding, embraced by nature, there was no drinking, no sneaking of bottles into the wild; but when he returned to Maniwaki and the reserve, the only way to manage the devastatingly profound pain that life had become for him, as for so many other Native People, was to obscure it, to deaden it, by drinking. He used to think it was a shame to be born an Indian, and with such a burdensome load to integrate, indeed, he came close to wanting to end his life; other than the devastation of lifestyle and homeland, social and spiritual disintegration, oppression and abuse, racism and poverty, there were also the singular painful dynamics within his own family to bear. He woke up one morning, drunk out of his skull, lying in the rain, in a stream, his head bleeding where it had been cut by the rock he had fallen upon. Into his ninety seventh year, that spot on his skull would still hurt, reminding *me* of what deep pain he was conscious of as he nonetheless-embraced us all in his bigger responsibility to life itself.



Yes, he might have died there, but perhaps the rain cleansed him, and perhaps the rock knocked some sense into him; certainly, an energy shift transpired, and he persevered with the challenges of his life.

His biggest health crisis was yet to claim him. It struck when he was forty-nine. The decades of angst, anger, frustration, pain, bitterness, not uncommon to most Indigenous Peoples, had come to roost with vengeance in his life. He had intestinal cancer. His body was killing itself. His body of two hundred plus pounds had withered away to ninety-eight. The resources provided by Mother Earth for his sustenance, which had sustained him even through those childhood years of gnawing poverty, (including the barks and inner flesh of trees he know how to find in times of greatest need), had been transformed into another kind of food – and his gut rejected this food. There was nothing that was nourishing him in his life. Three doctors examined him and then told him his cancer was so advanced that they had to operate immediately, and put a bag under his arm for his body's wastes, and attach another for his water. *Is that temporary*, he asked. No, it was permanent. *That is not how my Creator made me*, he said. He refused the operation; they shook their heads sadly, and predicted that he would be dead in two weeks.

Grandfather has shared his story about his encounter with *A bird that was not just a bird*, with countless peoples at his annual *Circle of All Nations* Gatherings and elsewhere. In his moment of deepest despair and greatest pain, while he lay in his sofa, his wife and daughter Evelyn asleep in the adjoining bedroom, he heard a bird at his window – *We call it Rossignol in French*, he said; *It sang so beautifully, my tears just poured; I cried like I had never cried before. I knew it was not just a bird. I said, I am in so much pain, I want to go now; take me now. Only let me stay if you have something you want me to do.* It was a spiritual encounter of an extraordinary nature, and its transformative effect on his life was immediately apparent. What's happened to you, his wife asked – *I used to swear and curse the people who had destroyed my ancestors; I was full of anger and despair.* This life-inhibiting anger, grief, frustration, impotence and self-hatred had transformed to life affirmation, and commitment to a greater cause, the embracing of a fragile humanity, with all its flaws and imperfections, with all its horrors and destructiveness: he had reclaimed the fundamental prayer, understanding and way of life of his ancestral heritage, the spirit of *Ginawaydaganuc*. It is a huge concept of, orientation into, and experience of the essence of life, that over countless centuries, philosophers, theologians, scientists, environmentalists, (and now quantum physicists) have grappled to comprehend and integrate – Grandfather, having reached the level of deepest loss, having reached the level of deepest humility, had engaged with the core of the experience of *Ginawaydaganuc*. He knew we were all connected, peoples, animals, plants, stones – all the equal children of Mother Earth and the universe and the unseen world; and he knew we impacted each other profoundly all the time; integrated in this experience were his understanding of creation, co-creation and evolution. So as I said earlier, Grandfather's understanding of existence embraced the zone of connection of time and space, of the past, present and the future, and so rather than being an outdated concept, his expression of reality is indeed totally contemporary, and simultaneously oriented to the past, present and future. Over the past forty years, countless people, young, old, of all races, colours and cultures, of all sorts of religious orientations, of all levels of education and absence thereof, of all professions and levels of government and bureaucracy, from all countries and lands, have come to find this simple old man – guided on their journeys to him by word of mouth introductions – he had no organization, no staff, no formal communications team, no program,

no projects. But they all knew he held the seed to something big. I called him the *DC Elder – the Direct Connect Elder* – plugging into him or one iota of his energy connected all who were searching into the great mystery, the great unknowns of life.

To return briefly to the story line, William now began to retrace again a pathway to healing. He began to use medicines and herbal remedies prepared by his wife Mary and their friend Marguerite Budge; and Peter Decontie's parents provided him with many pumpkins, one of the key foods that helped him regain his strength. But there was another critical element on his journey to fight his cancer - his friend Jim Brascoupe told him about a Belgium naturopath and faith healer, Dr. Philipott, working in Val d'or; Grandfather went to see him in this far northern reach of his ancestral lands (last year, on its 75 anniversary, that city celebrated Uncle Gabriel Commanda as its founder, at *Source Gabriel*); Grandfather has described to us how Dr. Philipott had him lie down on his table, then held a ball on a string over his belly, while he touched one bottle after another on his tray of herbal tinctures, each time shaking his head. One can only imagine how William felt as he shook his head over the last bottle. None of these can help you, he said; but if you are willing to take injections, we will use that. William went on this treatment program over many months. Then he reached a stage when his body started to pass a rubber-like substance; then, it would not pass out its wastes. Dr. Philipott examined him and said, it is all dead now; you can go back to the hospital and tell them you are ready for the operation. He did; the cancer, now a dead ball, was removed, a portion of his large intestine with it, and he grew strong again.

The Indian Affairs doctor on the reserve, I think his name was Dr. Lecuyier (I am writing in South Africa – I shall have to check my records when I get back to Canada!) and the Nurse Grondin wanted to examine the fluid he was injecting into his body, and William gave them a sample for testing. Oh, that is nothing, the doctor came to tell him; its only *tears!* You should stop taking it. The hospital team were interested to know what medicines and herbs he had taken – but his two Medicine Healers, knowing that it was not just the chemical compounds in the plants that contributed to healing, but the prayer, the respect, the trust, and the spiritual and energetic relationship that extracted the proper support and healing from Mother Earth, did not betray the secrets they were empowered and privileged to access. (We know since the time of the big advance of Bayer's Aspirin in the thirties, western medicine has extracted knowledge of medicine plants from Indigenous Peoples all over the world, and aspects of this western medicine has advanced to incredible, sometimes mind boggling levels; and so has the power, influence and dominance of the pharmaceutical industry in our health care. Yet at the same time, health issues are the dramatic concerns preoccupying the world, and, ironically, in such highly developed countries as Canada, has become our critical worry. Grandfather's last teaching occurred within the framework of the health care system, and taught me much about an integrated, wholistic pathway to health, healing and life – but more about that another time.)

Thus far we have described three elements of this journey to healing. First there was the spiritual encounter, humility and submission, and awakening to the larger dimensions, commitment and responsibility to life; then there was the deeper healing that came through embracing the

essential and transformative energies from the medicine plants of Mother Earth, and the psychic transmutative capacity garnered from the essence of tears; then there was also the dimension of physical healing from chemical properties of Mother Earth's medicines, the physical operation, proper food and healing.

But there was also something else. We have a photograph on his wall of a William Commanda weighing those 98 pounds; he is being visited by the RCMP, accompanied by some police guests from Scotland. They are looking at some snow-shoes he is making in his shop. Who are they for, they ask. For me, he answers. They shake their heads sadly – they are looking at a shell of a man, a dying man. But it was a man who already had conceived a big dream, a big vision, of a tiny seed that he would nurture and co-create with us, and see manifested in *A Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*, and it was the *dream* that was to energize his life.

So you see, in the simple version of the Medicine Wheel as we have expressed it in the *Circle of All Nations* work, Grandfather went through a process of spiritual, physical, emotional/physic and mental strengthening and reframing on his transformative journey of healing.

The spiritual dimension was embraced in his recognition of the deeper voice and message in the song of the *Rossignol*; physical healing came with the medicines, herbs, food and operation; then, with the submission to a life of greater service came the capacity for forgiveness (more about that another time), and emotional healing, reflected and supported by the injections of tears; and with the vision of his future, activated by working on his own snow shoes, came the mental focus and determined march from death to life.

Grandfather went on to live fifty years. Those who helped with his healing passed on to the Spirit World decades ago. I know I, but likely also he, from time to time, watched furtively for the return of the *Spirit Bird Rossignol with the Song of the Universe*; I knew it would come to sing to him when the time was nigh. It arrived last winter in the form of a brooch pin given to me by Monique; I did not show it to Grandfather; I kept it with my special sacred items.

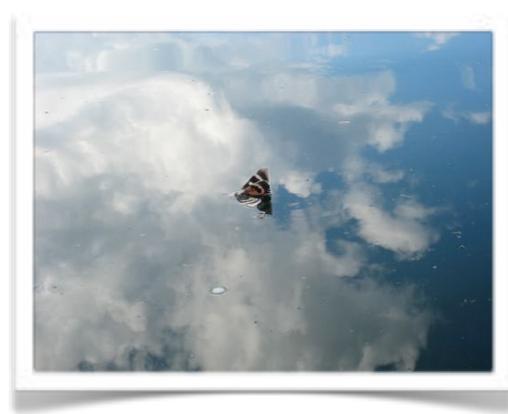


I bought him the past winter's National Geographic's Special Edition publication, *Sacred Journeys*, thinking he might enjoy reviewing the material about sacred sites around the world – he was uncomfortable with the magazine – he said it was a reminder about, an alert to, his last journey. *Rossignol* had whispered to him too.

(But even then, as when he was forty-nine, he negotiated his parting with the larger forces till the very end, actively living and co-creating this reality till it was his right time to die – more about that later.)

Death next came calling seriously during his ninety-first year. It was in July 2005, before his Annual *Circle of All Nations* Gathering, and while we were doing the final edits on our book, *LEARNING FROM A KINDERGARTEN DROPOUT*, that Grandfather Commanda had his first heart attack. Fortunately, we were in Ottawa at the time, and the newly revitalized Heart Clinic commenced its work to heal him even as the ambulance left the condo – and he had a stent inserted successfully in his blocked artery. It is funny, but the attack might have been precipitated by an Sigmoidoscopy procedure – he had had problems with digestion, and the doctor wanted to extract a bit of tissue for testing; I recall Grandfather’s hesitance – he said, *But we might awaken something!* Still, something guided him to continue with the examination. Ironically, he had been taken off the coated aspirin he was taking to manage his angina condition; and some blood clot lodge in his artery, precipitating this first serious heart attack. As I said, *fortunately* we were in Ottawa, and immediate medical intervention was possible. After surgery, he started bleeding – that old threat to his health presenting as an ominous reminder of the old woman’s prediction from his youth. His treatment and hospital care were excellent, and he made good recovery, overseen by his personal health care nurse and friend, Sue; thanks to her interventions, his health was overseen over the following years by a dedicated cardiologist, Dr. Rick Davies, and that enabled him to march into his next phase of work: after the operation, Grandfather was actually healthier and stronger than he had been in years – and thus was able to engage in his next seven years of strenuous work, the impact of which is evident in his influence on so many priority environmental and social justice issues, in his inspiration to so many young and older people and organizations of diverse backgrounds, and in the national media coverage of the eventual death of this remarkable senior in August 2011.

The heart attack was followed by a painful bout of shingles, (the viral infection that can affect people who have had chicken pox, another one of the diseases introduced to North America,) on the eve of his convocation at the University of Ottawa, where he was presented with an Honorary Doctorate Degree. Sometimes illness is a funny thing. He lost a lot of weight during this six month long ordeal – this likely triggered the increased stamina and energy of his following years!



I had actually been thinking, as I drove him down to the convocation ceremonies, where he also presided as elder and in fact speaker of *key note*, that perhaps it was not right for such a sick and *old* man to be obliged to carry out these tasks he had committed to, given the pain he was so obviously in. Surely, instead, he might wish to be preparing himself for the next life? But what followed was an illustration of the spirit of *Ginawadaganuc* in work – with all the positive energy, interest and support embracing him, our Elder actually became stronger and stronger, outlasting all the other graduating students in his partying into the evening. You will be interested in how he described the event – *they dressed me up and graduated me with the young people!*

Another special acknowledgement is planned for November 13, 2011, when the Université du Québec en Outaouais will be presenting him posthumously with another **doctorate honorific!**. Grandfather was aware of this coming tribute before he died – and he was pleased to know that universities on both sides of his ancestral river so central to the historic development of Canada were now acknowledging the knowledge, wisdom and ideology of his ancestors, such as he had been articulating and animating.

INVITATION

Gatineau-8 novembre 2011 – Le recteur de l'Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), monsieur Jean Vaillancourt a le plaisir de vous inviter à assurer la couverture de la cérémonie de la Collation des grades de l'UQO à Gatineau.

Dans le cadre de deux cérémonies, plus de 2 000 personnes seront réunies pour honorer les étudiants qui recevront un diplôme universitaire des mains de monsieur Vaillancourt. Cette année, 1 225 étudiants obtiennent un diplôme universitaire de l'UQO, à Gatineau.

Un doctorat honorifique sera attribué à titre posthume au grand chef autochtone William Commanda de Kitigan Zibi. Monsieur Commanda laisse dans la mémoire du peuple algonquin le souvenir d'un grand homme voué à la défense des siens, de la protection de l'environnement et du respect des peuples. Il est décédé, le 3 août 2011. Sa fille Evelyne Dewache, sa petite-fille Claudette Commanda ainsi que le chef Gilbert Whiteduck seront présents lors de la cérémonie de même que plusieurs membres de la communauté de Kitigan Zibi.

Une cérémonie traditionnelle autochtone précèdera la remise du doctorat honorifique à 19 h.

Les deux cérémonies de la Collation des grades se dérouleront, le **dimanche 13 novembre à 13 h et à 19 h à l'hôtel Hilton du complexe Lac Leamy**, situé au 1 boulevard du Casino, à Gatineau.

And now we come to the final months of Grandfather Commanda's life, when he danced with death from May 19/20 to August 3, 2011.

I note in my calendar that we went in to do the monthly blood tests on May 19, 2011. (Strangely enough, my sister Camy notes in her journal that on the 19 May, 2011 there was a sharp escalation in the pain my own mother was experiencing with her angina – my mother had been a diabetic for over forty seven years – given my intense post-retirement engagement in Grandfather's life and story, I was not able to be much of a presence or support to her these many past years; but she too was beginning to call into the universe with greater urgency, in telepathic ways if not in words - she died on October 5, 2011).

Then we met with Grandfather's doctor, and, as I said in the beginning, we were told that we were approaching the end: *“This time for sure, he was really living on borrowed time, our Elder of ninety seven and a half years. We were sent home to prepare for the end, which, as the medical teams tell you, could come today, or tomorrow, once you integrate such news of finality, or that catch-all, later. Palliative care was our next step.*

It was our friend Sue who raised the question of dialysis – had Grandfather been offered a choice in his health care? No, I had to realize – I, like the others, was seeing him as an old man whose time was up.”

The next few months of Grandfather's life will be a story unto itself; suffice it at this point to share with you the key elements pertinent to his story of living and dying. We went home to Bitobi Lake, the *Parallel Lake* of our *Passionate Waters, Butterfly Kisses* photo journal about healing with the support of Nature, to psych out what was required of him next.



*Fade into the sunset, with sharply deteriorating physical and mental capacity, since the kidneys were no longer able to circulate strong, clean healthy blood around his body and brain, and then wait till they stopped? Or engage in the somewhat invasive dialysis treatment to help the kidneys with the blood cleaning, much as the stent had helped the artery with the blood flow? It took a few weeks to come to a decision to commence dialysis – I think the decision came out of the energy of *live till you die, live as fully as you can till you die*, life, for Grandfather, despite its undeniable pain over the course of a century, being also the amazing gift directly coming to one from the *Great Mystery*, the creative source and energy of the universe; *live so that you can achieve your potential and realize your unique purpose in the amazing experience of co-creation*. So, on June 8, Grandfather Commanda commenced dialysis treatment.*

Unfortunately, there were problems with the insertion of the catheter required for the dialysis, and Grandfather's blood flowed again, repeatedly, was not properly stopped, and he eventually went to hospital, where he contracted a staff infection, which brought him directly to *Death's*

inner chamber doors. He was in the zone of transition, and he began to communicate in some strange ancient tongue, likely an older version of his Algonquin language; he started to sing his death song; his body began to move in the rhythm of his death dance – he was ready to go, and a few of us were deeply privileged to witness some of these sacred moments. But he was engaged in deep negotiations with the other side, and eventually, he came back. *I came back*, he told me simply, later. We continued with the dialysis, and there were moments when this proved to be an unbearably painful process, aggravated by bed sores and foot blisters caused by inappropriate mattresses and questionable care, and the worst moments brought him back to the *River of Death* – *I came back from the bridge*, he told me the next time. Eventually, we made the decision to suspend treatment and to leave hospital – this was on the 20 June, and the countless folk who visited him could scarcely bear his pain. But then next morning, they witnessed a new man – Grandfather was heading out, and via *ASINABKA*, the ancient sacred meeting grounds of his ancestors at Victoria Island – he entertained fourteen people over breakfast in the hospital, then sat in his car and held court in Algonquin as his friends streamed by the window for two hours, after his annual *Circle of All Nations June 21 Summer Solstice Pipe Ceremony* – where, quite obviously, they had prayed well for his strength; they showed him how they were able to keep the spirit of his efforts alive. The spirit of *Ginawadaganuc* was pulsating with energy.



He ate a toasted tomato sandwich en route to Kitigan Zibi, directed me a few times on the two hour long journey, as he was wont to do – I may have been his designated driver, but, to the end, we both drove! – and he spent a few hours on his porch talking to family and Larry and Nancy.

During this next phase, we introduced many other supports to help with his healing journey. In addition to the countless individual pipe ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies, prayers, and lighting of fires conducted individually and collectively for him, there was the herbal medicines prepared by Edmund, the son of the friends who had provided him with pumpkin during his recovery from cancer; there were the homeopathic medicines provide by Sue; there were the herbal, massage and energetic remedies provided by Jacques; there was ointments and cushions from Evelyn; and there was the help from the local health care teams. These augmented the dialysis interventions commenced on June 8, and he regained strength. Then he was ready to return to the city for more dialysis. Unfortunately, we were not able to negotiate a ‘palliative’ type dialysis treatment program for our ninety seven year old – service near his home in Maniwaki, fewer hours of treatment, fewer sessions: just enough to maintain a quality of life for an old man who still had work to accomplish in his life time – sadly, it was not a reality about life the health care professionals were really able to understand – (but that will be the focus of a separate paper, his exposure to the health care system, and what we learned about it being one of Grandfather’s last jobs for a world preoccupied with health issues) – so they were not able to make his last months easier.

We drove to the city for treatment on July 12 – this was so exhausting and draining to his system that I cancelled the next scheduled session. I wanted to also cancel the next one – scheduled for the 16th, but he woke up that morning, saying we had something important to do. He insisted on dressing up with his usual style – spring pants, shirt and his eagle pin tie – no kidney patient track pants for him! It was another exhausting experience. We wanted to see a doctor to explore next steps – and you will not believe how difficult this was to arrange. Anyway, eventually, several days later, we went back to the clinic, accompanied by Sue, hoping finally to convince them to address his situation differently. We nabbed one of the doctors, and then listened, with some surprise, when Grandfather now said he was terminating his dialysis treatment. The doctor was ready to comply with his decision, the challenges his situation had presented to the clinic being now at an end.

I wish I had taped him – there was such surety with which he expressed his decision both and his conviction that his Indian medicines and other supports would serve him till his end. He knew that *that*, together with whatever other cleansing of the blood had been accomplished by the last treatment of dialysis, would serve him exactly as he required, till his life was to draw to its physical close on his beloved Mother Earth.

As I have written in the note about his passing, Grandfather spent his last few weeks enunciating several key messages. He gave an urgent teaching about Pipe Ceremony. He stated that Tobacco Prayer was very important. He said very passionately, that we must share, and that we are all equal; that we must pray for the medicines; and we must pray for the elders and the children.

Grandfather illuminated his understanding of the law of life and the key issues for integration:

He affirmed the huge importance of the Pipe Ceremony to him, and this the Full Moon of November, I remember the people who joined him to smoke his pipe, as he was wont to do each Full Moon, honouring Grandmother Moon. In all my years with him, I do not recall one person who asked for his prayers for healing who did not find their health improved and Death delayed from their doorways – he was that DC - Direct Connect - Elder and his pipe and his prayer were powerful beyond comprehension. In his pipe ceremony, with his three pinches of tobacco, he connected the world of the Greater Mystery and the world of our penultimate Mother, with us who navigate between both realities.

The sacred herb of his ancestors, Tobacco, holding male and female energies, integrated with prayer in tobacco ties, ignited with the smoke carrying prayers visibly to the larger universe, placed on the ground in thanks or for support, offered to the waters, prayed upon and tossed to the air or ground before every road trip, offered in respect, the Indigenous gift to the world, so misused and therefore so deadly now – it was a profound part of his daily life: there was tobacco in his pockets, in the car, by his bed, on the bookshelf – and it contributed to making ordinary moments sacred. It affirmed the spiritual dimension of our lives pulsating at every moment.

The powerful messages of Sharing and Equality were deeply etched in the Sacred Three Figure Wampum Belt that Grandfather animated so profoundly throughout his life – the Welcoming and Friendship Belt of the 1700s, when his ancestors, in that deeply entrenched spirit of generosity, agreed to share their land, grand natural resources and values with the newcomers, in the spirit of equality. So the two critical values - sharing and equality!

Fundamental to the values was respect for Mother Earth, the ultimate provide of all our sustenance, nurturance – all our good medicine. She has set guidelines for sharing and balance, and all her children are of equal importance and relevance in the great eco-balance of life – and they all teach us something about the deep purpose, meaning and integration of life – from the rock to the ant to flower or the wind. She is the eternal university. Understanding symbol is the great teaching she offers us: only through symbol can we begin to understand her medicine.

In an age where old people are discarded or seen burdensome, he reminds us to value, respect and honour the lives of the elders, who, as they come to terms with the shortcoming and strengths of their own lives, and have a opportunity to share with us, enrich and strengthen humanity so that it can spiral into greater possibilities. They are entering the zone of the past.

He was ever mindful of the children, the future generations – with no children of his own body, he embraced us all as his children; and his eyes beamed even to see a child on television. But he knew of the hard future facing the children of today, he knew of the diminished world he was leaving them to, and he knew the sacrifices they would be called upon to make in coming to terms with the errors of their parents and ancestors. They constitute the zone of the future.

He left to us who were touched by him the responsibility for the on-going animation of his prayers, and the transformation our individual and collective lives. This is one portion of his tremendous legacy, and I am sure we will be supported by him as we animate his blue print for the good life.

A few days before, I was out kayaking, and then, having lingered there a million times before, I suddenly knew a place where his spirit would be resting on *Parallel Lake*. At the same moment, Fran, sitting with him, was inspired to write her first poem, about his upcoming transiting time. He was beginning his final journey – the doctor did a home visit on the evening of August 2, and assessed that all was well with Grandfather. Physically, he was in good shape for the upcoming annual *Circle of All Nations* Gathering. But his spirit had already begun preparing to depart; it was preparing for its next mission; even that was already in the works.



At 4.40 am, at the time of the rise of the Morning Star, *Ojijkwanong* slipped away.

He left his family and friends with the task he had well prepared them to continue – the animation of his *Circle of All Nations*. Pretty well single-handedly, he had entered the hearts, mind and psyches of people from every walk of life, and shown that there really can be one pathway where we can all find the zone of connection.

This is how the sky lit up after Grandfather died. Someone at the Gathering told me that it is only highly evolved souls who get acknowledged like this by the Universe.



I therefore end with what he said to me before he died – *Romola, You wrote Ginawaydaganuc on my back!* I trust that as I share what I write now with you, we shall all see how he has gone ahead, our path-finder and trail-blazer. We shall see his message on his back as we follow his path, *Ginawaydaganuc! We are all connected – with each other and nature.* And we shall make that road stronger as we all walk it together.

It is *his* message for 11-11-11.

As he would say constantly in the end,

MEGWETCH, MEGWETCH, MEGWETCH, MEGWETCH!

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