



## **Two Worldviews of Anishinaabewin Philosophy My Truth & Reconciliation Square Piece By Shirley Ida Williams, 2010**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed two years ago in Canada to respond to the Residential School Apology. After we heard a lecture by Professor John Milloy and the story of the National Crime that his research documents, we talked about what Peterborough could do to support the commission. A group of us gathered together. Our question was, "What are we going to do about it? How can we help?"

So a group of all denominations, including clergy, came to a meeting to see what we could do to address this wrong doing. As an elder and a Residential School Survivor in the group, it was decided that the public would benefit from the knowledge of the Residential School issues as many people do not know the kind of education that Aboriginal children were exposed to. Our group decided to make a quilt, a square to tell the stories of our experiences what we have learnt from our group in coming together in relation to the stories we shared. Some of these are my teachings that came from my father, the Midewiwin teachings and some Cree teachings that I picked up from other tribes to try to understand the life as an Aboriginal person growing up in two worldviews of Anishinaabewin Philosophy and Epistemology according to my own understanding.

The first square piece is a story of my traditional way of life and this is the first square piece which I called the Truth. Although I did not learn all of it in my first ten years of my life at home, my parents instilled some of the Anishinaabewin teachings which I used as I grew to an adult. One of the things that I always remembered my father saying to me was, "This is our way, but for a time we must follow their way. Maybe in your time you will see our way being done and will no longer have to hide." He was offering a tobacco at the time when he said this, for we were picking medicinal plants.

I am a survivor of St. Joseph's Residential School, in Spanish, Ontario. This is my story as I saw and experienced it. Our group comes together to learn from each other and to try to

understand each other so we began unraveling our past. There people are coming to reach out to each other as a sign of peace, in friendship and balancing in hope, peace, joy and love. This story came to me upon considering that the original white people came with different ideas of what they understood compared to what they saw in the new country. They saw no particular, recognizable structures or systems that they were used to. As time went by the Aboriginal people saw some of what was happening, so they made a treaty with the white people and their Great Father or Mother, meaning their King or Queen, who they talked about in the old country.

### **The Two Row Wampum Treaty**

For my quilt square I decided to include that Treaty Belt, replicated by Jake Thames and called, The Two Row Wampum Treaty. Chief Thomas said:

The Two Row Wampum Belt symbolizes the relationship of the native people of North America, Onkwehñwe, Mo., with the Whiteman, Raserñnni, Mo., and Ca.

One purple row of beads represents the path of the natives' canoe which contains their customs and laws. The other row represents the path of the Whiteman's vessel, the sailing ship, which contains his customs and laws. The meaning of the parallel paths is that neither boat should outpace the other, and the paths should remain separate and parallel forever, that is, as long as the grass grows, the rivers flow, the sun shines, and will be everlasting, and they shall always renew their treaties.

And another explanation which says about the two row wampum:

In our canoe we have all our laws, culture, and beliefs and in your vessel you shall have all your laws, culture, and beliefs, travelling side by side through life as equals never enforcing or interfering in each others affairs as long as the sun shall shine, the grass shall grow, and the rivers flow this will be everlasting. Mohawk Nation Press.

### **Colors: treaty Belt**

Treaty Belt, I decided to use the red and white yarn to symbolize the Red and White people instead of the purple beads that are normally used. It is just my interpretation of the same idea that we have laws, customs, and beliefs in the systems. They are woven together and cannot be broken unless one cuts the yarn, therefore they are intertwined together. This is what Anishinaabe Nations wanted without interferences, so that they could live together and would not destroy or interfere with one another. To this day they believe this treaty with the Crown as a sign of peace, friendship and relationship in the new world. According to them when something as important as this as the signing of the treaty, a pipe was smoked as a binding word between the men and the Creator, for the pipe is a symbol of truth. However, in 1894, Canada passed a law in the legislature to ban all Native ceremonies. Their sacred bundles that the spiritual men possessed were taken away, burned or put in the museums all over the world to be displayed to the public with no regard of the sacredness of

these bundles. In fact, tribes who resisted this injunction and continued to practice their rituals, were slaughtered, removed from their homelands in such historic evictions as the trail of tears in the United States in 1832.

In Canada the law was lifted from the legislation in 1951.

### **Four Sacred Elements: Sun, Earth, Moon and Fire**

In 1950, I was already in the Residential School and we found out about the change in those laws through hear-say from the girls who knew about these things. Word was out that we would be treated better than before. We even wished that we would be able to talk about our native things in the school without being reprimanded for talking about witch craft ways which the Misses teachers called the traditional practices.

I learned some of these cultural ways from my parents when they talked about them as we trapped, hunted or fished. We believe that there are four sacred elements in the world and that is the sun, the earth, moon and fire. These are sacred elements of Creation. These are the Creation stories, when the Creator made the earth, he created four great races and these are stitched in colors of the yellow, red, black and white dots.

We have teachings the four sacred elements must be looked after.

### **Moon**

The moon is woman because it represents the four kinds of woman in this world. The young who become young women and there are puberty rites. Next are mothers to be, then adult mothers and finally the grandmothers. We celebrate our menses and we do not teach them negatively about these things for they are part of life and physiological laws of Creation. For me, I just knew that being a woman was something beautiful but I didn't quite understand it. But I learned from the School that woman was dirty at that time and that we should be ashamed of it. Yet these teachings become important on full moon ceremonies, for they teach about respect of being a woman. We have followed the 13 moon calendar teachings for the woman as to how to respect herself as a woman of a creation. It is considered that it is when woman become their most sacred time and that there is nothing to be ashamed in that. In it are the thirteen symbols to the thirteen moons of each month which is the life cycle of a woman.

### **Pipe**

Next is the symbol of a pipe and the pipe is the truth in the same way a Bible is seen in the society. The pipe is peace, reconciliation, conciliation, humility and purification. When we smoke it we are giving a pledge to the Creator that we are telling truth. The pipe constitutes a human kind and the Spirit and it has the seven teachings of the Grandfathers, values that we live by.

They are:

Wisdom, love, bravery, honesty, humbleness, respect, and truth. E. Benton.

These are code of behaviours we must live by and follow in the same way of the ten commandments of God. The blue represents the smoke of our thoughts that goes up to the Creator to hear when we send up our prayers to request or thanksgiving or for healing.

### **Bear Spirit**

The animal of a bear is highly regarded among Anishinaabeg as it is a symbol of a spirit guide and powerful animal that brings healing and medicine to people. It is an animal guardian that sits in the north of the universe that guards the season. Since it brings healing we feel at peace when we know we are well.

### **Sweat Lodge**

Our sweat lodge is a structure where ceremonies are done for purification purposes. The sweat lodge keepers go through training and an initiation ceremony through the Midewiwin Initiation Lodge in the same way as the Catholic or Anglican goes through initiations to become a priest in order to say Mass or give communion. I say this because of the people who just take these ceremonies and mis-appropriate ceremonies in the culture. It takes years and knowledge of training to learn about doing ceremonies in the same way Holy men, Priests and Ministers do their training in their Holy Orders. For example not just anyone can give communion or say Mass in this same way, our sacred Anishinaabe Midewiwin Orders must be respected. Yet other people misuse these, in fact not too long ago a person who was not trained that we know of did a sweat ceremony and some people died while being in the sweat.

### **Teepee**

Next are the teepee teachings by Mary Lee. These are Cree teachings that I have learnt when I went to a traditional teaching camp and a fasting camp but are similar to Anishinaabe teachings. Each pole represents:

#### **Obedience**

Obedience means to accept help and use good judgement.

#### **Respect**

Respect means to value Elders and fellow human beings and oneself.

#### **Humility**

We are not any better than anyone else.

#### **Happiness**

Is showing support to others at all times giving and service to others.

**Love**

Love means to be devoted to yourself and others.

**Faith**

Belief in the spirit world and that there is a higher power.

**Kinship**

Means learning about Relationships which bonds parents, siblings and extended family and knowing ones own community.

**Cleanliness**

Means spiritual cleanliness.

**Thankfulness**

To be thankful for life and family.

**Sharing**

Sharing knowledge, stories, traditions, for the future generation.

**Strength**

Is to have Spiritual strength to do things that are most difficult.

**Good Child Rearing**

To guide and protect children.

**Hope**

Means to have to look forward to women that they will continue to teach nurturing carry out the teachings that have been given to us as women to bring healthy spirited human beings into this world.

**Ultimate Protection**

Protection of the mind, body, spirit, emotions and health of the youth.

**Control Flaps**

The control flaps from the wind is to balance in life's journey.

**Conclusion – Poles**

For every time that a pole is added, a rope goes around to bind that pole into its place. One needs to be there as see it to appreciate the teaching; I have seen and have done this, That rope is a sacred bond, binding all the teachings together until they are all connected, In addition to this, it is a woman and a man that do the tying of the poles as a symbol of that unity between people. Mary Lee has shared these teachings with us and hopes that the women will be strong and help the communities to nurture healthy, balanced people.

**Drum**

The drum is the heart beat of mother earth. Our people used the water drum but I have used the hand drum here sewn and hand drum stick to make that sound. Hand drums are used to accompany people while they sing. The drum is to bring joy to the people and healing. It is the sound that awakens the heart. It brings a spiritual awakening within a person.

### **Fire**

Next is the fire, which part of the four sacred elements that the Creator made for man on earth. It has been told to us that fire brings protection and peace of mind. It is the sun that brings all life on earth thru the sun. It once guided the human beings to spiritual awareness and still it brings energy to people. It is a mystery and to us it is a spirit.

### **Water**

Water is also one of the sacred elements we recognize and respect that water is sacred and powerful. It is a gift from the Creator. Water is the first spirit on the earth that gave life to all creation. Our wisdom, our laws and our ways teach us to be aware and be responsible in caring for this sacred gift that connects us to all life and that we must pray to be healed and this earth because the water is the earth's lifeblood.

### **Air**

Air is another important element. Without air we cannot breathe. Air gives and maintains our life. We believe that when creation took place it gave us air and therefore we must always respect the air. Thus we must be thankful for our life.

### **Rock**

The stone is also very important to us. My father once said to me, "My daughter, look into the water and if you see three stones, that is our fishing mark. Always look and if you're ever in need of help use the stone to stand on, for it is the foundation that will give you strength." Thus, stones are sacred to the people and also bring some type of special energy.

### **Tobacco**

One of the sacred plants used for purification smudge, offering to the Creator or smoked for requesting or thanksgiving. It is used for peace of self and to help others for prayers. The other sacred plants we used for purification are sage, sweet grass and cedar which are used to clean the air and to get rid of negative energy.

In the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Christian Church the smoke of the burning incense is interpreted as a symbol of the prayer of the faithful rising to heaven. Psalm 141 (140) On the other hand, my parents were Christianized like the rest of the Aboriginal people in North America. However my father and many others have always talked about the Midewiwin life and teachings that were told them in the past.

In growing up, I learned that I had to go far away to go to school. I was supposed to go at the age of seven but my father did not allow the priest and the Indian Agent to let me go. He promised them that he would teach me the Catechism but did not say in what language. He used the Anishinaabe language to teach me about the traditional life. This was my first home school of three years. However, after three years being home schooled, I went to Residential School. I learned about Catholicism more so.

Here in this second square is what I have learned in the Residential School:

### **Four Elements**

The Catholic life has four elements that they believe. They have elements that they have the sun, the star, the earth and fire. They are sewn in the four directions of the square. Likewise, in the same way that we have four in the world but they are the Creation story for us how the world came to be. But they believe that the earth was created and it is God who created it and the creation took seven days to create.

### **Bible**

A Bible is a book of Christianity, a collection of ancient writings including the books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is what is read every Sunday to remind people of history past of Christianity. Well we have a written bible too but it is written on birch bark scrolls and is read at ceremonies but done on sand teachings sometimes or scrolls are brought.

### **Church**

The church teaches about grace instituted by Christ and it was entrusted to the church by which divine life is dispersing to us. So they brought with them a structure where to go to worship with God for peace of mind. It is the life of the Catholic Church each has seven teachings – the seven sacraments is an outward grace and when participated in them worthily. Each of the sacraments provides us with grace. The seven sacraments of the church are: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Reconciliation, Marriage, Holy Orders which are initiations to the church to perform the duties of the church, and Anointing the sick.

### **Cross**

The cross is the most common symbol of the church, it is the figure of the body of Jesus where he was crucified and died for the sins of the world, and he offered himself to God for the remission for our sins. The cross is one of the most powerful images.

### **Dove**

The symbol of the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It is used to represent our Lord's Baptism and the Pentecost. It symbolizes the release of the soul in death and hope. This is a dove with and olive branch in his mouth which symbolizes peace. Not only has that but the olive branch symbolizes incense for purification purposes.

### **Bell**

A bell is a symbol of a call to the congregation to come when it rings. It is a call of God when one hears the bell to come. When I went to Residential School the bell was used for everything. It told us when to move, when to file in line, when to come from work, when it was time to go

to school. The bell was used for everything and we got used to it, so when we got out, we listen for the bell to tell us when to move to do anything kind of work. I used to wonder what that bell represented, it was not until I saw the movie, Bells of Saint Mary that I understood what that bell meant to Christianity.

### **Sacrament of Communion**

Communion is the host which is the bread of life and the chalice of wine is the blood of Christ. These are considered very sacred for when taken one is in communion with the God. It was considered so sacred that in my time no one could hold it or touch it and had to be put on the tongue. This method has changed now. However when we eat bread like they do, we eat deer, or moose meat as food in the same way. We are in communion with the animal thru a spirit. There is a ceremony in one of the Nations called Mokoshan in Innu which was also practiced in our culture. The inside of the bone is a bone marrow which was spread on a piece of bread and it was eaten without dropping a crumb thus eating was like a communion with the Great Spirit. I saw this done between my parents in the 40s where we were given bread spread with bone marrow and told to eat it without dropping it or dropping a crumb on the table or floor. I did not understand it at the time but now I do after seeing and reading of other tribes as to what they do then it made sense to me.

### **Baptism**

Baptism is one of the three sacraments of the Catholic initiation. Baptism removes the guilt and the effects of Original Sin. It is incorporated the baptized in the church, and the mystical Body of Christ on earth. Water is used to purify the body in the same way Aboriginal people used water as purification purposes to cleanse the body, mind and spirit. The water is sacred to the Aboriginal people because it sustains life and they pray for it in ceremonies in the same way water is blessed in the church before baptism, once a year at Easter time for holy water to be kept at home or used in many of the services in church.

### **Ten Commandments**

The Commandments are principles that bear on the fundamental obligations of religion. It is said that at one time the people became dysfunctional and worshipped many other things and it is God who sent out and spoke to Moses to bring the laws to reorganized order in the society as God wanted us to live in an orderly law way. In the same way, a Spirit was sent a holy woman to bring a pipe to the Anishinaabe people to regain order among the people as they were becoming dysfunctional. These laws are the seven teachings of the pipe a man's duty to the Creator and to his fellow beings.

### **Fish**

The fish is a symbol of Christ to the early Christians. As the story goes it was a miracle of the loaves and fishes that fed the followers of Christ and his disciples. They were the fishermen and when he preached it was a town of fisher village. We are the fish and the big fish is Christ, we begin life in water. Thus when people abide by water the people are safe and sound. Likewise the Aboriginal people believe that the fish is sacred and that we have fish as part of feast food as part of our communion with the Spirit.



## **Organ**

The organ is an instrument that accompanies the people when they sing. They sing for joy and to the people but most important to God in praise of him. As people sing, it gives one a gift of joy and replacement of anxiety and power is returned. In the same way the Anishinaabe people used the drum to sound out to people to call the spirit and to come together in a group so they can sing and enjoy each other. It brings stimulation to one person.

## **Fire**

Fire is a symbol of Trinity and illuminates the darkness. Christ is the light of the world. While the fire is lit it enlightens us, it keeps us warm and it also purifies us. Therefore fire is also sacred in the Native culture.

## **Heart and Thorns**

The heart is a symbol of love and the spirit love that God loves us all. He died for us because of love and the thorns are sewn around the heart to show that it is broken heart as a result of the sins we committed. God died for us and he let men kill him and tormented him while his heart bled. When you love something it is a blessing and it comes from the heart. When the love is broken the heart bleeds because it is broken. In the same Anishinaabe people bled for what was taken from them. The government and the churches took their sacred bundles, their beliefs, the most cherished things, the land that they believe and for that their hearts were torn apart as they saw their people being murdered for the land, and gold to destroy their way of life. In the same Jesus suffered for the sins of the people and his heart was broken so have the Anishinaabe people suffered.

## **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is a symbol of forgiveness. It means settlement, to resolve, reunion, to come together. In the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Penance (commonly called Confession, Reconciliation or Penance) is the method given by Christ to the Church by which individual men and women may be freed from sins committed after receiving Baptism. (It is not necessary to confess sins committed before Baptism, as Baptism itself is considered to remove the guilt of all prior sins,) This sacrament is known by many names, including penance, reconciliation, and confession.

Therefore, when on June 11<sup>th</sup> 2008, an apology was given to the Aboriginal survivors for the destruction of their way of life and the mistreatment they received from the Residential Schools across Canada in the House of Commons, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to help to tell stories and this is to record what affects it had on them. And where do we go from here?

Thus one of the ways was to reach out to the people is to teach and educate one another in order to understand. It is a start of learning of respect and sharing. Here the hand and shoes represent that symbol of reaching out to each others culture and to start all over but in the right way. Perhaps we now need to give an absolution to each other so that we can go on in this world together.

## **Hands and Shoes**

The last one is the hand facing toward Aboriginal symbols. Each reaching out to other Nations to unravel the past and come to some understanding. It is said the eight fires have been lit where finally the white people will accept the Aboriginal people. In the native prophesy, it was predicted that there would be people that will come with a false face. This is what we are trying to do. We have come together to meet and to talk and to understand each other and start a new relationship. The shoes represent the walk; in order to walk then we need to take some small steps to come together to reach out and to talk, and to listen to each other, to reunite, to gain peace and harmony in this world so that we can walk together without interfering with one another. There has been a lot of destruction among the Nations. Aboriginal people have been displaced in the society and have lost their lands, language and culture through the black robes who came here to interfere with the people they met without much thought without thinking of what the consequences would be in the future. The government has broken the treaty that they and the Aboriginal people made by creating institutions called Residential Schools across Canada to assimilate them by taking away the most important values they had in their Midewiwin life.

Midewiwin meaning "Good hearted way of life." Which constitutes their own holy birch bark writings of their history and their lodge, Anishinaabeg have always had a code of ethics of non-interference, with the idea of not judging anyone no matter how they lived. When we were young we were always told that when we are 16 that is when we could choose as to how we would live our life, but the parents were there to care for us when and if we needed help and even to the last day when my father died his last wish was not to fight, but to help one another when we needed help. He said, "Help one another." And in that way we would still carry on the family tradition of helping.

My father never judged anyone as to how anyone lived, but was always there to help when someone needed help, for he always said that it was not our place to judge but there will be a great one who will do that and that we should love with one another, for that is the greatest gift we were given.

### **Sources**

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