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We Will Teach Them to Love

DOUGLAS CARDINAL

WE, THE PEOPLE OF THIS LAND, from the scattered areas of this province, will send our chiefs to virgin land, where we will gather together and sit in deep meditation. We will weep for the lost herds of buffalo. We will weep for the destruction of the animals, the birds and the fish. We will weep for the destruction of the earth, the land which was ours. We will weep for the poisoning of the air which we breathe. We will weep for the poisoning of the waters which we drink. We will weep for the destruction of our spirit and our pride and we will contemplate those people who have controlled our destiny, and the destiny of our lifegivers, for the past few hundred years. We will weep for the destruction of life and the lifegivers, for we are life and when our lifegiver—our environment—is destroyed we, too, are destroyed.

We will give thanks that we have survived, and we will look into each other's eyes and feel the oneness of our people and the oneness of our spirit and we will reflect our heritage. We will stand on the land and feel the roots which reach out from our feet and we will feel the winds across our brow. We will recall our rooted past and will turn to our forefathers and we will look inward to ourselves. Again, we will feel the true meaning of the land. Again, we will feel the true meaning of the animals, the fish, the birds. Again, we will feel the true meaning of the air which we breathe, and we will feel reborn.

We will join together in ceremony around the offering pole and look up to the Great Spirit and relive the ceremonies that grew from our association and love of our land. With the help of our medicine men, we will raise our spirits, for we are burdened with a heavy task.

When we feel the oneness of our total environment, of our brethren and ourselves, we will gather together in council. We, the bands of Alberta, will gather in council around a ceremonial fire. Where there were many bands, there will be eight tongues, but the eight tongues will learn to speak as one tongue, one voice and here we, ourselves, will determine the destiny of our own people.

We will call together, from each band, men to be trained as warriors in the Indian way. We will teach them how we have survived for thousands of years on this land. We will teach them the true meaning of being warriors in spirit. We will give them the pride and self-esteem which we hold here in this sacred place, and we will teach them how to use the old weapons of survival.

But, we have an even greater task in the instruction of our warriors. We will have to teach them how to survive in the world of today. We will equip them well with all of the tools for surviving in the world of today. They will not be dull weapons; they will be sharp and useful. We will improve and hone these weapons for our survival and our stature as a people.

The present educational system creates too many hurdles and pitfalls, leaving too much to chance. Our people need every opportunity in coping with the problems of today. Programs will include analyses of systems, agencies, departments and organizations which serve every Canadian. We must understand those aspects of the dominant society which directly or indirectly serve us. We must know how their society functions, how it serves each of its members and, in turn, we must learn how the dominant society can serve us as individuals. We must learn to work within the culture, yet retain our identity.

If we are to survive in the world of today we must be equipped with proper tools. These involve education to qualify us to obtain food, clothing, shelter and other amenities. Our standard of living will depend on the labels which we are able to obtain for ourselves. Such labels as doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, technicians, teachers, will all have to be attained in order for us not only to survive but to contribute to our own society as well as the dominant society.

The buffalo and the moose have given us food, clothing and shelter in the past. The buffalo is gone, the moose is going. We look to the dominant society for our food, clothing and shelter. When we hunted the moose, we knew the moose. We thought like a moose, indeed, we were the moose. The hunter and the hunted were one. But though we were one, as all life is one, we are still apart—we are men and we respected the moose as a lifegiver of food, clothing and shelter. Now, because of the immigrant culture, our way of life has changed. We look to the dominant society for our food, clothing and shelter.

We must know the ways and the habits of the dominant society, in the same manner in which we learned those of the moose. We must think like them, we must be them, in order to survive. We must become one, but like the moose and the man we have our own identity as men, and as men we are proud of what we are. The same respect we hold for the moose we will hold for the dominant society for they are our new lifegivers, we cannot deny their existence.

They are there.

But, not only will our warriors be dedicated to the survival of our people. They will also be dedicated to teaching the immigrant culture the love the Indian feels for this land. We will teach the immigrant culture to love the animals, the fish, the birds. We will teach the immigrant culture to love the land, the earth, which we love. We will teach the immigrant culture to love the air which we all breathe and the winds we feel across our brow. We will teach him to love the clear waters and the mountain streams. We will teach him to love this land as we love this land. Our very survival depends upon this task.

When we let others destroy our own environment, our own lifegiver, we destroy ourselves. For our own survival, we must teach the immigrant culture to love as we love, for we have been here thousands of years and theirs is but a short time. We have survived great suffering and loss but we are a great people, the true people of this land, and the great suffering and hardships which we have experienced in the last few hundred years and the fact that we have survived will give us great strength, endurance and tolerance, so that we will be an even greater people.

The future achievements of our people will be even greater than the past. ❖

A Red Deer architect, Douglas Cardinal was spokesman for the Indian Association of Alberta at the Canadian Education Association Convention held in Edmonton in 1970. This article is taken from the text of a book, authored by Mr. Cardinal, and produced by the Alberta Indian Education Center.