



Oceti Sakowin camp near Standing Rock Reservation



World Wheel Newsletter

Global Peace Through the Arts

Spirit of Standing Rock A Model for Our Lives and World

November, 2016
Vijali Hamilton, MFA

Beloved World Family,

I drove two days from Santa Fe, New Mexico to the Oceti Shakowin camp near the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota and am filled with inspiration for what is possible at this time on our planet. Perhaps I had a glimpse of what life was like among the Lakota (Sioux), and other original peoples in North America before the European invasion and their colonization.

The effort to protect the Lakota way of life and our shared waters: “Water is Life” being the common refrain by the NO DAPL (“NO Dakota Access Pipe Line”) protesters, has brought over 200 Indian nations together at the Standing Rock camps. People of all nationalities, red, white, yellow and black have arrived from the four quarters of the world to join the Lakotas in their effort to protect their sacred sites and waters, not as protesters, but as *Water Protectors*. It has awakened the common cord that links the hearts in many contemporary social and environmental movements.



Evening at Oceti Sakowin camp

I arrived late at night thinking that the late hour might be an inconvenience for the people of the camp, but was greeted with great warmth by a young Lakota man at the entrance to the main camp. Ocheti Shakowin is situated not far from the location where DAPL is poised to sink their pipeline, carrying the dirtiest of fracked crude oil under the Missouri River, which serves millions of people with clean water. The Lakota people remember a prophecy that was handed down through generations regarding a giant black snake that would slither across their lands and threaten Mother Earth. They feel certain that this pipeline is that endangering black snake. For there is always that possibility that the pipeline could break, destroying life in the environment and making the water undrinkable.

Driving into camp I found a space to park between tents and tipis angled so as not to look directly into the glaring spot lights that DAPL had installed on the hillside in order to separate us from their work at the river. It reminded me of prison lights for readily spotting a truant inmate. Crawling into my double sleeping bags laid out in the back of my car, it didn't take me long to be cradled asleep by the aromas of burning sage and cedar, and the cooking woodsmoke from the many campfires.

The next morning I awoke at 5 AM by Lakota morning chants for greeting the sun and imbuing the day with its sacredness. Within the hour a large crowd had gathered around

the sacred fire with more chanting and prayers for all people, yes, even for the police and the men working bulldozers. A Lakota man in his sixties, announcing himself not to be an elder but a pipe carrier from the age of 27 drew the men closer to the sacred fire for the pipe ceremony while women gathered for their water ceremony at the river.



Chopping wood for cooking and sacred fire



Warm clothes donations



Mongolian yurt for healing



Tipi school for children 8 to 14 years old

The morning was filled with wood chopping, cooking, erecting many Mongolian yurts and the building of permanent simple structures for the large number of people who planned to live through the very cold winter by way of a permanent life style. I brought along donations provided by Santa Fe friends consisting of warm clothes and a container of food for the main volunteer kitchen. Art supplies which I had also brought, I later took to the children's school being held in a tipi and gave money (again through donations) for the legal group, media program, food, building supplies, and medical supplies - all provided to a designated representative in a tent behind the gathering circle and sacred fire.

At noon I visiting with Winona, a large Lakota mama who loves to cook for people, and gave her a large basket of potatoes zucchinis and carrots. Afterwards I had a delicious traditional meal of bison/cabbage soup and frybread.



"Mother and Child"



Vijali at camp Oceti Sakowin

In the afternoon I climbed the so called “media hill” rising above the camp to the west where a wind turbine generates electricity for people to charge their cellphones, and to also charge my video camera. I found the media tent and went through the orientation to receive a press pass that was to be worn at all times. Although most media people represented a network, I presented my NGO, *World Wheel, Global Peace Through the Arts* credentials (which I started in 1986) in order to create a documentary film. My intention for the film is to show the spiritual wisdom and dynamics underlying the movement at the Standing Rock camps. Also, I wanted to explore women’s roles and energies in this spiritual revival.



Water is Life poster on side of Van at camp

In the afternoon of the next day I attended the orientation for “peaceful direct action,” which prepares one to join in as a “peaceful water protector.” We were told how to attempt to protect ourselves from mace and tear gas with glasses and mask, and how to not ultimately resist the police and drilling company security. But what was most impressive for me was that these acts were fully informed by ceremony and prayer. Prayer for the police, prayer for the Army Corp of Engineers who control Lakota land that was designated for them through the 1851 treaty of Fort Laramie. Certainly this movement is the Native American’s Gandhian salt march for our times!

After this orientation I interviewed a young Cherokee girl, Olive who had been twice arrested and thrown into a wire dog kennel for hours without knowing the charges, and held until the next day. Then she was released by the wonderful group of lawyers who have raised money exactly for this purpose. She spoke with much passion, “Water is our own body, 75 percent, and is life itself which we must protect. I will let myself be put in jail as many times as it takes to stop this desecration of our Mother Earth.” As we talked I heard the loud buzz of a helicopter and we looked up as it circled overhead. She continued, “This is a daily occurrence. They come many times, day and night.”

To view Olive and have a glimpse of my film that will be out soon, *Spirit of Standing Rock*, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8J3Lo6pjpi4>



Camp Oceti Sakowin



Apolousa horse of Lakota boy

Signs were everywhere: “No drugs or alcohol, no guns or weapons” and “This is a camp of prayer, ceremony and healing.” From morning to late at night a loudspeaker rang out sacred songs and welcoming wishes to new guests as more and more people arrived. I heard the count was now up to 2,000 people camping at the Oceti Sakowin camp alone and all were working together in ceremony and in the most beautiful harmony. One woman had her radiator damaged by a deer. Immediately a call went out on the loudspeaker for a mechanic to come and help her.

In the afternoons and evenings there were Inipi (Sweat Lodge) ceremonies being conducted; some for women, some for two-spirit people, some for men. All people were honored no matter their color of skin, sexual orientation or gender; everyone was friendly, ready to smile or answer questions, or simply get to know you.



Rosebud Camp on Standing Rock Reservation along the Cannon Ball River at dusk

I felt so happy at the camp and saw the joy on the faces of everyone, especially the young people. A joy knowing that divinity is not just in the Creator, but also in the sky, within every person, every tree, every animal, every stone and in water herself. A joy with a purpose, creating community and a new kind of family—something that our materialistic society does not offer our young people.

The next morning at our collective breakfast gathering there was a rumble through the crowd with news that 500 National Guard troops would descend on the camp in December, and that the Lakota Elders were going to send all women and children out of the camp. Is this all a voice from the past, when the Ghost Dance was held on Lakota land, drawing together the original peoples in a spiritual revival of hope after the brutal years of reservation life? Was and is this the ghost dance that panicked the government on seeing its massive gathering which in 1890 prompted the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's reconstructed regiment, to massacre almost every single person, even babes still nursing at the breast of their dead mother as the snow covered them and froze them both in her own blood?

News went out through the camp that President Obama and the Army Corp of Engineers have placed a hold on the pipeline construction stopping the work, at least for now, to research its environmental impact, and hope against hope, to find an alternate route. But here at the camp we know that these are just words, amid the on going work we still hear rising over the hill.

I remember years ago being taken by the 103 year old Hopi sage, Grandfather David Monongye to their "Prophecy Rock." He explained to me, running his aged finger along a weathered line carved into the sandstone boulder leading to a fork in the carving: "here is where we have a choice, a choice to either completely destroy ourselves or to effect the renewal of our way of life." Could today's many crises be bringing us to that fork in the road of life, that moment and choice between death or the renewal of life?



Indigeno women leading us to the river for their water ceremony

Each day a new group of people would arrive. One day it was a group of indigenous peoples from Alaska represented by women. They entered our circle at the sacred fire singing and presented the camp a gift of a banner that the women had created. Each woman spoke to us in their native languages about women as water and the importance of water on our Mother Earth and in our lives. An eagle circled above us, certainly a blessing from our winged relatives. They led us to the river for a water ceremony where each of us made a prayer to the river with tobacco and cedar offerings and to deposit sacred water which they carried with them from their sacred rivers and which we each were blessed to drink.

On another day, indigenous women arrived from Saskatchewan, Canada, and again sang and spoke in their native languages. In the evening an aboriginal man from Australia danced his people's traditional dance around our sacred fire. The next day was Veteran's Day and 700 veterans arrived and we held a ceremony together. Another day elders from many Native American communities arrived and spoke of the meaning for all indigenous peoples of working together, of their own problems such as deforestation of their lands, mining and oil exploitation, and of letting go of their past differences in order to come together in unity.



Black Elk

As I witnessed these happening, I remembered reading in the classic Lakota book *Black Elk Speaks* of the great sadness that this Oglala Sioux holy man, Black Elk had carried into his old age regarding his great vision (which came to him when he was only nine years of age) and which had not come to pass:

And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth,—you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

Here at the camp, as this gathering grows larger and larger many Lakotas feel that Black Elk's vision is now coming to pass. It was much like Black Elk had spoken, regarding a renewed and harmonious hoop of the world in which many hoops of peoples would come together as one:

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.

After a week's stay I drove out of the camp through the main dirt road as lovely appaloosa horses ridden by Lakota boys from the Standing Rock Reservation galloped past me. The road was lined with hundreds and hundreds of flags from all over the world representing many indigenous nations, and organizations of healing and sustainability.



Flag of San Felipe Pueblo



Main road into Oceti Sakowin camp

As I started the two and a half days' drive back to New Mexico, my body was filled with spirit and my heart with joy, beauty and hope for the future of the Standing Rock Lakota camps as a model community for all beings on Mother Earth.

Peace and Blessings,

P.S.

To make donations for the *Water is Life* movement, go to: SacredStoneCamp.org

Vijali Hamilton, MFA

www.worldwheel.org

vijali@worldwheel.org

cell: 202 492 4899

YouTube Channel: Vijali's World Wheel

all photos and videos by Vijali Hamilton (except Black Elk)