

## **Striving to Remain a Native American in America: Resistance to Past and Present Injustices (Letter to My Son on the Day of His Second Piercing)**

**Rockey Robbins – Cherokee / Choctaw**

University of Oklahoma

### **Abstract**

*As a Native American, I wrote a letter to my grown son, recalling the onslaught of overt and subtle prejudices he endured as a direct result of his honoring traditional Native American ways. I focus primarily on my son's unique heroic struggle in an oppressive and highly racialized society, but make glancing references throughout about Native Americans' current intolerable predicament in the United States. I remind my son of lessons taught in tribal ceremonies about transforming the passionate aggressiveness of the warrior into a compassion that accomplishes lasting change. I write these things with my son's permission.*

We are just past the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of James Baldwin's "Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," found in his book, *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin inspired me to write a letter to my son, with some of the same concerns relating to current predicaments of Native Americans. For instance, Baldwin writes about how conservatives and liberals deal with African Americans philosophically as symbols or victims but have no sense of who they are as real human beings, the hard facts never impinging upon their daily lives. He scoffs at their soft pity and self-gratifying indignation and sees it as the height of absurdity for Bobby Kennedy to speak in naïve, warm assurances that African Americans would one day be considered equal to white

Americans.<sup>1</sup> Much of the same absurdity can be applied to the white majority's diminutive and dismissive view of Native Americans in America.

The use of the epistolary style helps by offering a more personal perspective that may come closer to the lived experience of Native Americans than theoretical formulations and empirical studies. Too many of the more general studies designed to inform us about Native Americans often reify the stereotypical neocolonial gazes. While theory and group research studies provide vital information about Native Americans, they have an inherent tendency toward universalism, which ineluctably erases within-group diversity. But before we can truly appreciate our tribal commonalities, it is necessary that we appreciate our tribal, family, and individual differences. By offering this personal glimpse of the relationship between my son and me, it is hoped readers will see Native Americans as real people involved in real day-to-day cultural conflicts. By putting this letter in the public domain (with his permission), I hope readers pause and learn from Native American traditions so we might all progress toward greater social justice.

June 2010

Dear Red Eagle,

This morning while anticipating your second piercing at Sun Dance, which I expect will occur this afternoon, I recall the vision I had during your first piercing at Sun Dance at this time last year.<sup>2</sup> At that time, as I was praying for your protection and making entreaties for gifts of humility and human expansion for you, I had a vision that united past, present, and future. Last year, as you were lying on the buffalo blanket passively awaiting your piercings, I thought how your eyes were the same as the ones I had seen when you were lying on the floor of the Kickapoo Reservation house 23 years ago when you were an infant.

The day of your first piercing the Heyoka [Lakota contrary medicine man] had suddenly rushed to your side and got in your face to tell you that it was going to "hurt bad" and to "pray in Choctaw." During the piercing, as the blood trickled down your chest, I thought of the blood shed by our ancestors as they tried to preserve our land and ways. I was inspired by your sacrifice that day. Because of you and a few others, our ancestors' hopes for the world will not perish; their travail and offerings will not have been forever forgotten for at least another generation.

As I write this morning, I also remember rushing to snatch you from the floor as a baby before the fiddleback spider crawled on you. Safe from the fiddleback, I walked you

---

<sup>1</sup> Baldwin, James. (1962). "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind." In *The Fire Next Time* (127). New York: Dell Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> "The Sundance is a way of sacrificing for the privilege of having a direct connection with the Creator. It is one of the seven special ceremonies brought to the Plains Tribes by the White Buffalo Calf Woman to allow a way to give thanks and show gratitude. It is a way to humble ourselves, pray for the healing of others, and ask for a better way of life for everyone." [Two Feathers, Manny. (1994). *The Road to the Sundance*. (1). New York: Hyperion.]

around the room, your little Native American nose nudging into my chest. You sang your first Sun Dance song that day, a purring "ooooo" that sounded like a dove. I wanted to protect you from all the cruelty, but I knew I could not, no matter how tightly I held you.

This morning you dance four times back and forth from the sacred cottonwood tree whose leaves twinkle like stars under the hot June sun. At last your skin stretches so far that it can hold no more, and you break free. I look at the tree and all of its leaves explode into fire cinders in all directions into the hearts of all the people in the world. The Heyoka hooks your arm to fly you around the Sun Dance grounds at top speed. My heart is bleeding, but I am proud of you. Fly high my son. Your Mafo [grandfather] named you well, Onlahoma, Red Eagle.

We lived on the Kickapoo Reservation for the first few years of your life, but then moved to a less Indian-populated area. But you continued to dance to the drum just as you had from the first moment you heard it on the reservation. You rooted yourself in our tribal-cultural ways and that caused a lot of problems for you when you were apart from traditionalists. In the first grade, your teacher called me in to talk about your problems. You did not want to participate in the Oklahoma Land Run celebrations, even after she had told you that you could "dress up like an Indian." Notwithstanding, you explained that you still wanted to eat the cookies and milk after the "celebration."

The next year, when your teacher asked if anyone could speak a language other than English, you had said, in Choctaw, "Nahola honkso." When she asked what it meant you translated, "White people fart." When I asked you why you had made such a comment, you explained that the other children made fun of your long hair and said that Indians kill people with tomahawks. I remember the mythology class that covered Greek, Roman, and Nordic myths. You made the request to cover American Indian myths, but your teacher added her contribution to the negation of American Indian culture as she flatly refused. You learned early that knowledge has to conform to Western paradigms in order to be regarded as legitimate.

As a Native American traditionalist in our country, you had no choice but to see and to run headlong into oppressive structures that many people are never aware of as you progressed on your path in the direction of liberation. Too often, the dominant culture simply holds assumptions that it never questions. Whenever we express our beliefs and perspectives to them, instead of grafting them into their own so they might expand as human beings, they suspect our capacity for reality testing. I remember going into the principal's office at your high school to sit in the corner to wait on you. I heard one of the office staff speaking loudly and openly, telling a parent that "they" had decided not to send the cheerleaders to Riverside Indian School for the basketball game because, "It would be dangerous. You know how they are toward white girls."<sup>3</sup> I thought of all the

---

<sup>3</sup> In reality, Native American women are two and a half times more likely to be victims of sexually violent crimes than women of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. The crimes typically go unprosecuted [Amnesty International Report. (2007). *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*. New York: NY Amnesty International USA.]. The majority of the attackers are non-Native Americans [Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Full report of the prevalence*,

trouble you had had at the school and wondered how the Indian students who made up 20 percent of your school felt in a place that did so little to even hide their white supremacist feelings and ideas.<sup>4</sup> Let us hope the Resolution of Apology to the Native Peoples of the United States just passed will at least become a fragment of truth that can begin honest, authentic dialogues about these issues and other aspects of the current Native American predicament.

But from early in your life, you had the courage to shine a light on false appearances. You learned how threatened many Euro-Americans are whenever a Native American refuses to accept the larger society's definitions of who we are. I remember when we told a person living on our block that we were Native American, and he corrected us saying, "No, I am talking about the real Indians back in the old days."

You know how perilous the path is when it is not undergirded with Euro-American assumptions. Many of our people have come to accept lies about this life we lead and have forgotten the power and spirit of the old ways. Because of the unremitting lies and deceit Native Americans have been bombarded with, the question of reality is central for us. Everything in our socially constructed experience conspires to forcibly transform our very concept of who we are as a people and as individuals, to bring us to the point of accepting the rightness of the force used to abuse us. To maintain who we are we have to resist the seductive messages of what they tell us is reality and see through its superficial appearance. To be real, we have to penetrate through false appearances to the truths.

You witnessed how so many of your Native American friends uncritically accepted the Western assumptions they were fed but then found that they were not fully accepted anyway. Many of your Native American classmates grew to obesity.<sup>5</sup> Others became cynical about learning and were part of the more than 30 percent high school dropout rate Native Americans experience nationally.<sup>6</sup> Many could not have cared less about what they did with their lives, choosing alcohol and drugs.<sup>7</sup> Others were constantly fighting and abandoned their tribal ways, unable to articulate their oppression except through destructive acts.<sup>8</sup>

---

*incidence, and consequences of violence against women: Research report.* (NIJ Rept. No. NCJ 183781). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.]

<sup>4</sup> Some radical psychoanalytic historians argue that the beginnings of exclusionary practices are rooted in the Euro-American beliefs about Native American's ever-present sexual appetites. [Hurtado, A.L. (1999). *Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.]

<sup>5</sup> Balderas, J.B. (2001, August 12). American Indians' Enemy: Diabetes, lifestyle, diets blamed as 50% of Native Americans over 45 are affected. *The Washington Post*, p. A2.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005a). *We the People: American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>7</sup> Native Americans are six times more likely to die of alcohol-related causes than the general U.S. population. [Frank, J.W., Moore, R.S., & Ames, G.M. (2000). Historical and cultural roots of drinking problems among American Indians. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 344-351.]

<sup>8</sup> Native Americans report experiencing and engaging in significantly higher rates of physical and emotional violence than other races in the U.S. [Robbins, R., Stoltenberg, C. Robbins, S. & Ross, M. (2002). Marital satisfaction and Cherokee language fluency. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 35, 27-34.]

But let us be careful not to stereotype any one race or sex in our search for our oppressors. There is really no such a thing as a monolithic race or sex that oppresses us. Some of our own tribal people seem to be more passionate about the necessity of our assimilation than Euro-Americans. I recall the argument you had with other Native Americans about Indian mascots. They called you various off-color names, and you called them "apples." The situation escalated to the point that you were sent to the principal's office for punishment. The first question the principal asked me was about what an "apple" was (red on the outside and white on the inside). I was fairly harsh with you about participating in lateral oppression and for blaming the victims. But I can tell you now that I was happy that you had somehow kept enough pride and autonomy not to be among the Native Americans who are brainwashed into feeling pride for being ridiculed with Indian mascots. Through colonial force and aggression over several generations our tribal people have accepted life-denying perspectives. I was happy with your resistance in the face of the general ignorance, unconcern, apathy, and hostility you encountered. You worked to undermine the biased education system to assert your cultural identity, and you suffered social, cultural, and psychological isolation for it. But you unmasked it for your own liberation, even if you did not see an immediate impact on those around you.

Many of the minds and emotions of our tribal people are co-opted as colonial and neocolonial ideas are poured into their consciousnesses. I have witnessed firsthand how many indoctrinated tribal people become offended by your "radical" comments. I remember the summer before your tenth grade year when you were told how fun it would be to attend the annual Southern Baptist Indian conference where there would be thousands of Native Americans with whom to interact. I remember telling you that I too thought it would be fun and that they had prayed there for many years and that there were overlaps between our beliefs and theirs. At the camp, the campers were encouraged not to call home, so you had to wait until you returned to tell me how they tried to "save" you day and night. You said that each night "white preachers claiming to be part Indian" preached ineffectively to the audiences consisting of thousands of Native American adolescents. But "the last night the preacher was good." You told me how he talked about how our ancestors did not have the chance of salvation through Jesus Christ, but today Native Americans do. You told me how he carefully chose the phrase, "We shall mount up on wings of eagles" and all the audience understood that. But then you said that he explained that it was just a metaphor; that an eagle was just an animal, but that Jesus could fly us out of hell into heaven. You told me everybody from your cabin, the entire seating section "went down to be saved," except you. You sat there crying. Two preachers came out to sit with you and told you the Holy Spirit was working on you. They kept trying to get you to just start a prayer and the Holy Spirit would "take over." You prayed, "Hashtahli, please help these people see through these lies, and let my new friend continue his traditional dancing even though he is now a Christian."

You were so angry and sad at school and sometimes at home. I remember you told me one day that you had not sat with anyone at lunch break for two months. You said you did not like anyone there, and they did not like you. You said you wished we could just live with Native American traditionalists and "live the old way." You told me that

sometimes you wished you were dead.<sup>9</sup> You were happiest at any tribal and cultural function such as pow wows, stomp dances, sweats, feasts, and Native American Church. When we brought you to a medicine woman, we were told that in a past life you had been regarded as a prophet. You had told everyone that things were going to return as they once were before Whites came. But then you had been shot through the stomach by a cavalry soldier. As you had died, you were very ashamed for having misled your people. She said the experience explained the heavy burden of loneliness and anger you carried now.

As an immature young father I often indulged in fear and worry, knowing I could not protect you from the affronts that I knew you would encounter because you are Native American. And I watched the inevitable occur, but you survived. James Baldwin argues that when a person survives abuse by a group of people who think they are superior because of their race or because they were born with more advantages, that person achieves his own unshakeable validation of himself.<sup>10</sup> You have survived such abuse, and now you know that no one can control you with cruelty. More than that, you can grow even more as a human being if you can somehow identify with your oppressors and truly wish the best for them without ever expecting that they will love you in return. Loving your enemy in America is a way not easily traversed while aggressive competition rules the day. Nonetheless, as Native Americans we are blessed with purification ceremonies and the pipe that remind us that we live in an interdependent world and that every living thing is holy.

You, Red Eagle, internalized fewer of the dominant culture lies. But there has been a high cost. I knew you were fighting desperately against the disturbing dreams that haunted you for years. Two or three times per month, for about four years between ages six and eleven, you would wake up, knock on my bedroom door, and pace up and down the hall, into and around the living room, dilated pupils, breathing rapidly, and crying. After five or ten minutes, you would walk slowly from the corner you would always end up in, sit in my lap, and I would carry you back to bed. You were aware at an early age of the suffocating spiritual void that exists in our oppressive society, and you were suffering from emotional isolation. The sleep terrors came to a stop when we put you in the half-moon dugout in the center of the sacred teepee during the Native American Church meeting. The roadman explained that "White man's medicine could not help" you. Eleven years old, you swallowed the peyote and stepped into the half-moon and put your hands into the fire and the elders prayed. You never suffered from another sleep terror episode, and you knew that Indian medicine was good.

For so long you fought like a warrior to resist complete assimilation, to keep even fragments of our tribal ways. As an urban Indian, there were only a few tribal persons in our small city who even attempted to practice tribal rituals, ceremonial practices, and speak their native languages. But you traveled hundreds of miles, often by yourself as a

---

<sup>9</sup> Adolescent and young adult Native Americans are at the greatest risk for suicide of any group. [Middlebrook, D.L., LeMaster, P.L., Beals, J., Novins, D.K., & Manson, S.M. (2001). Suicide prevention in American Indian and Alaska Native communities: A critical review of programs. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 31*, 132-149.]

<sup>10</sup> Baldwin, James. (1962). "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind." *The Fire Next Time* (133). New York: Dell Publishing.

teenager, to meet elders, and you learned the Choctaw language, and dozens of dances and songs. But out of high school, you became even angrier. You made it clear to me that you did not want to be a "suck up" by preparing yourself for the means and modes of Euro-American capitalist mainstream society by going to college.

To some extent, I understood your perspective, but you betrayed the old ways when as an alternative you chose the criminal world of drug distribution, which is capitalism on steroids.<sup>11</sup> While there are no words in any language to describe the truth about the degradations committed against you personally and Native Americans in general and you are right to be angry, to choose such a destructive path degraded you and us as tribal people. Though it broke my heart, I was proud of your honesty and courage. You accepted your just punishment instead of struggling against it, and you accepted it as good. And you became a more mature person for it.

But you did more than simply accept it with ironic resignation. You had prepared yourself for jail and punishment. While attending sweat lodge, you calmed your mind and focused on accepting without vindictiveness the sentence you had been given. You had ingested Indian medicine and remembered the true intelligence of our ceremonies and rituals. We were fortunate to have had these ways to teach us not only to accept our life circumstances with an awareness beyond cognition and self-absorbed emotion, but to let go of our self-centered judgments about what we think life should be like. This is the wisdom of our traditional people, who learned it over the past 500 years after having been in the grip of death, despair, oppression, and genocide.

It appeared for a while that all your dreams had been stripped away, but we had the courage to get up the next day and face the challenges the day brought, knowing the power of being itself was effective in us. We had the courage to encounter the despair of that time, and we survived. The circumstances gave us an opportunity to actualize the teachings we had been given by our elders. During the hundreds of purification ceremonies we had attended together, we had learned from our ancestors that the power to face hardships emerges naturally from our deep awareness of our unitary awareness. Attuning ourselves to this awareness helped us to move through difficult times with less anxiety. Awaiting the court sentence, we had already yielded to something beyond ourselves. We were able to practice letting go of expectations about the end results of our endeavors because we knew that we were ultimately not in control. While your punishment was not pleasant, we were able to accept it humbly.

I hope that as you begin to assume tribal, spiritual, and occupational leadership positions, you do not forget the lessons you have learned from this ordeal and from your spiritual experiences. Remember how during the last night of your Humblecha [vision quest], you were so angry as the rain poured down on you. You began axing Mother Earth. With the aftermath of the torrential storm, a stillness surrounded and filled you. As you waited for the sun to rise, and you considered all your private visions, you said that you felt healed. Let that memory help you stay as calm as possible in any given

---

<sup>11</sup> Native Americans are 30 percent more likely than the general population to go to prison. [U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2000). *Race and Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.]

situation. Know that peaceful and torrential times come and go as long as you live in this world, but that you can remain adaptable and centered no matter what the outside conditions. You can always go to your silent depths to stabilize yourself during the times of strife.

Last year, when you went to Sun Dance, the leader asked you if you intended to dance as a "warrior." When you answered in the affirmative, he said he did not need warriors, but rather needed people of peace. He said that the time of gaining power and glory had passed and now was the time for peace, balance, and harmony. What wisdom! You had supposed for a long time that justice necessarily implies something harsh and vindictive. But justice begins only when you find well-being within. You cannot hope to bring justice to your community, tribe, country, or the world until you become still within yourself. It is important that before you begin actions toward justice that you find your center where there is calmness. The warrior is not as courageous as the one who cleanses the face of his spirit by self-examination. This is the great work, to recklessly explore the depths of your own soul. Your inner calmness can then be connected with helping people harmonize their efforts to direct their energies toward a goal.

Some of your deepest anger has been directed toward Euro-Americans. But when you do to Euro-Americans what many have done to you, you debase yourself. Remember the spiritual power you called upon when you remained in that first very hot sweat, when you thought you were going to die of thirst during your vision quest, and the restraint you displayed as they pushed the rods through your chest during the Sun Dance. You have the spiritual resilience not to hate the person who hates you or totally ignores our people's needs. You have already demonstrated that you can exercise self-control. Hatred and aggression make trust, love, and joy impossible. You have been blessed to have been schooled about what reality is at a deeper level. Yes, assert the claims of humanity of Native Americans but also work to restore our oppressors to a truer state of being. Sometimes this entails gently and patiently helping them to understand the bitter realities Native Americans have and continue to endure.

As you know all too well, your conflicts will not only be with Euro-Americans but with traditional Native Americans over the ways rituals and ceremonies are to be carried out. It is better if you can ignore these conflicts as much as possible and respect the ways of whatever ceremonial grounds you are on. As you revive some of the ones that have almost been lost in our tribe, begin by gaining support from elders you trust and begin your work slowly. Some people spend their entire lives in conflict, being always critical about whether someone is doing things the right way. Do not be enticed into their dramas. Know that the ceremonies some tribal members are most rigid about were not practiced exactly the way they are now even a few generations ago. These conflicts keep the Native American world in constant division and keep us from creative spiritual endeavors. To the combative ones, simply explain that you are trying to keep the traditional ways as best as you can while addressing peoples' contemporary needs.

Even having accepted part of the traditional teachings above, you counter my guidance with the fact that some people are so manipulative and deceptive that they are impossible to interact with in a cooperative way. You may think you should enter into arguments with them. The impulse of warriors is to show their strength when there is



conflict, which blocks the influences of the spirit world. Even if you defeat your foe, you have situated yourself in a place where you inevitably will have to fight again and again. But you counter these ideas with the point that many people are stuck in their self-satisfied uncritical assumptions and will never change without harsh challenges. I tell you to be careful not to judge them. Look through the mystifications that may fill their brains to the common spirit they share with you. As long as possible, follow their reasoning, even supporting them in their own investigations into their opinions, helping them see the ramifications of their lines of thinking. Then offer your reasoning in a non-combative way, showing how your view coincides and differs from theirs. Sometimes you will not be able to counsel with a person or group and nothing will be left but to cease to work with them. But stay in your goodness, sincerity, and honesty, and do not judge them. If you must fight, take care not to transform them in your mind into ugly people that deserve to be verbally or physically attacked with hatred. Contrast yourself from those who delight in the fires of hatred. They will eventually be consumed by their own hatred. To walk in beauty is to be free of rancor and bitterness and to have solicitude for the fates of those who oppose you.

You, lately, have talked to me incessantly about legislation dealing with tribal self-governance, your aspiration to protect water resources in our state (as when we rallied with other tribal people against companies polluting our water), and your work to bring back the Green Corn Ceremonies and the Eagle Dance. This causes me to have great hope for our future. And I am glad you are researching your ideas, talking to elders, and carefully making plans. Success depends on slowly and carefully thinking things through from the beginning with a relaxed and quiet mind. If you make hurried decisions without an understanding of the complexity of the situation or the deeper meanings of your goals, your accomplishments will be like writing in the water. Our Iroquois relatives tell us to consider the effects of our actions unto the seventh generation that will follow us. We should consider the effects for at least this long.

In order to progress toward a worthwhile goal, it is vital that you take time to build cohesion in your group, working hard to unite the hearts and minds of those in your group toward a common general purpose as well as for specific goals. As one of the leaders of the group, your most important work is to be humble. If you are proud, displaying cockiness or boasting, you will annoy group members. If you display obsessiveness about what you want, they will withdraw. If you are perfectionistic, you will take the joy out of the process. If you offend others by contradicting their ideas, they will not cooperate with you. People give themselves unconditionally to anyone or any cause only when they feel emotionally connected. As a leader, your gentleness can help to create this harmonious and fruitful situation. If you proudly try to impose your strong opinions, you will divide people and injure yourself. Take a detached position to the opinions and arguments of others. Humility will not only connect you with your inner self, put you into a situation to work on your own faults, but help you to avoid many conflicts and connect with people who disagree with you. Humility and gentleness allows us to adapt when circumstances change and to respond to the needs of every new situation.

Whenever you feel aggressive toward anyone, remember that person, and indeed all people and all living creatures have the same mother. The Choctaw word for this is

"kanohmi mohma." We are all relatives, born of Mother Earth. Across the world, among our politicians and tribal leaders, we see people who do not see the kinship they share with those whom they oppose. They speak of change without having the deep wisdom to understand that all of us are a part of the problem as long as we see ourselves as separate entities acting upon the world and making bold delineations between ourselves and others. Many have developed their technocratic knowledge and appear to sometimes solve problems that exist in the outside world but have not paused to look deeply within themselves and at their relationships to others. While we may witness outer change, if we do not experience an inner transformation of consciousness, the change is hollow and will be blown away with the next storm. If you are to engage in justice work that has long-lasting effects, be cognizant that while different groups have constructed different realities with different centers, we can share this world and be tolerant and supportive of each other if we remember there is a common divine reality that belongs to every living thing upon the earth.

As you grow older, aggressive, uncompromising, militant stances start to take on more of a narcissistic hue. Our elders teach us that there is great wisdom in finding and appreciating small victories, even if they are fragmented and tarnished, while maintaining clear perceptions to see through and eventually courageously uncover mystifications. This cannot be accomplished thoroughly until you have opened up to the spirit world and had enough experiences to learn their lessons deeply. If you cannot develop this awareness, you will never really stabilize your own affective life and unmask your own pretensions. We accept life as it is, with a deep sense that all that is good cannot be utterly destroyed, but will come back again, possibly in a different form, but it will return as the ever-changing seasons return.

As you complete your second Sun Dance, I consider that you are gaining experience and are moving toward spiritual awakening. You have made a sacrifice that few make. The spirit world will help you because you are making heartfelt sacrifices. But dancing in the Sun Dance will not be sufficient to prepare you for your future. The spirit world waits for you to get to know yourself before it comes to talk to you. Your purifications are cleansing you from seeking personal ambitions and honors that take you off the path of goodness. It is enough to simply do what has to be done. You are learning from experiences about the appropriate times to share your spiritual knowledge. I expect that you will soon be able to help people to unite into common agreement about good goals. I have little doubt that the spirit world is making sure that when you clearly express your truths, their power will influence many people. Do not hurry or force situations, but instead simply stay focused and allow yourself to move with the energy's natural flow. One day, you will be speaking out of your own honesty and with no calculation, and you will realize the spirits are speaking powerfully and gently through your mouth. You will perceive the gifts of every person, which will empower others to express their own uniquenesses. Others will be in the moment with you. In that moment all things can unite, and harmonious relationships emerge. You will be more connected to moments that allow for change and will have the experience to speak the right words to convince others to resist the onslaughts against Native American cultures and be in a place to construct a better world for our people.

You will continue to face adversity and difficulty in your life, just as Native Americans have in the past. Sometimes it will appear that those who have forgotten their relationship to Mother Earth and all her children will have prevailed. In these situations, simply strive to regain your center and be happy in spite of everything that is happening. The use of play and humor will help you remain cheerful and loving despite adversity. Our ancestors cried tears but also laughed at the blood-dimmed tide of colonization. Whenever you feel depressed, remember that there is always joy and happiness within you waiting to be accessed. If you can live without aggression toward anyone, enter easily into the sacred pauses apart from the hurries of life. In not becoming obsessed about attaining anything, you will find contentment, which will naturally lead to harmony in this world.

Forgive me for the times in this letter when I have been patronizing. I recall Sigmund Freud's remarks about sons wanting to beget themselves and believe his words to be true. I do not want my influence to crowd into your unique and creative space or stifle you in any way. If you choose to read this again in the future, I hope you read it under the pure light of the sacred Choctaw sun, out from under my shadow so that you can allow it to influence you in the ways you need it to. The anxiety of influence can be oppressive or it can energize you to follow your unique path. Your unique path lies before you, and you have my blessing to pursue it.

Sincerely,

Inki [Dad]

*Dr. Rockey Robbins and Jesse Robbins are Choctaw/Cherokee Indians who live in Norman, Oklahoma. Dr. Robbins is an associate professor in educational psychology at the University of Oklahoma. Jesse is a student at Oklahoma City Community College. Both are actively involved in tribal ceremonies and concerns.*

Contact information

Email: rockey@ou.edu

## References

- Amnesty International Report. (2007). *Maze of injustice: The failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA*. New York: NY Amnesty International USA.
- Balderas, J.B. (2001, August 12). American Indians' enemy: Diabetes, lifestyle, diets blamed as 50% of Native Americans over 45 are affected. *The Washington Post*, p. A2.
- Baldwin, James. (1962). My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation. In *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Frank, J. W., Moore, R. S., & Ames, G. M. (2000). Historical and cultural roots of drinking problems among American Indians. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 344-351.
- Hurtado, A.L. (1999). *Sex, gender, and culture in old California*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Middlebrook,, D.L., LeMaster, P. L. , Beals, J. Novins, D.K., & Manson, S.M. (2001). Suicide prevention in American Indian and Alaska Native communities: A critical review of programs. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 31, 132-149.
- Robbins, R., Stoltenberg, C., Robbins, S. & Ross, M. (2002). Marital satisfaction and Cherokee language fluency. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 35, 27-34.
- Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women: Research report*. (NIJ Rept. No. NCJ 183781). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2000). *Race and Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2005a). *We the people: American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.