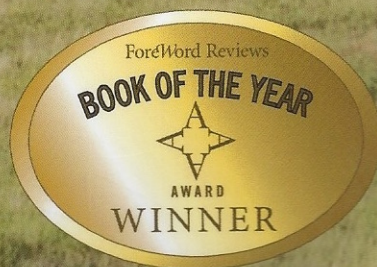


LIFE'S JOURNEY ZUYA

Oral Teachings from Rosebud

ALBERT
WHITE HAT SR.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY *John Cunningham*



Copyright © 2012 by The University of Utah Press. All rights reserved.



The Defiance House Man colophon is a registered trademark of the University of Utah Press. It is based upon a four-foot-tall, Ancient Puebloan pictograph (late PIII) near Glen Canyon, Utah.

17 16 15 14 3 4 5 6

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

White Hat, Albert.

Life's journey—Zuya : oral teachings from Rosebud / Albert White Hat Sr. ; compiled and edited by John Cunningham.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60781-177-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-60781-184-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-60781-216-9 (ebook)

1. Teton Indians—History. 2. Teton Indians—Folklore.

3. Teton Indians—Social life and customs. 4. White Hat, Albert—Anecdotes. I. Cunningham, John, 1948 Feb. 17- II. Title.

E99.T34W489 2012

978.004'975244—dc23

2011047654

Index by Andrew L. Christenson.

Drawings by Dave Delgarito.

Frontispiece and color photographs courtesy Jim Cortez.

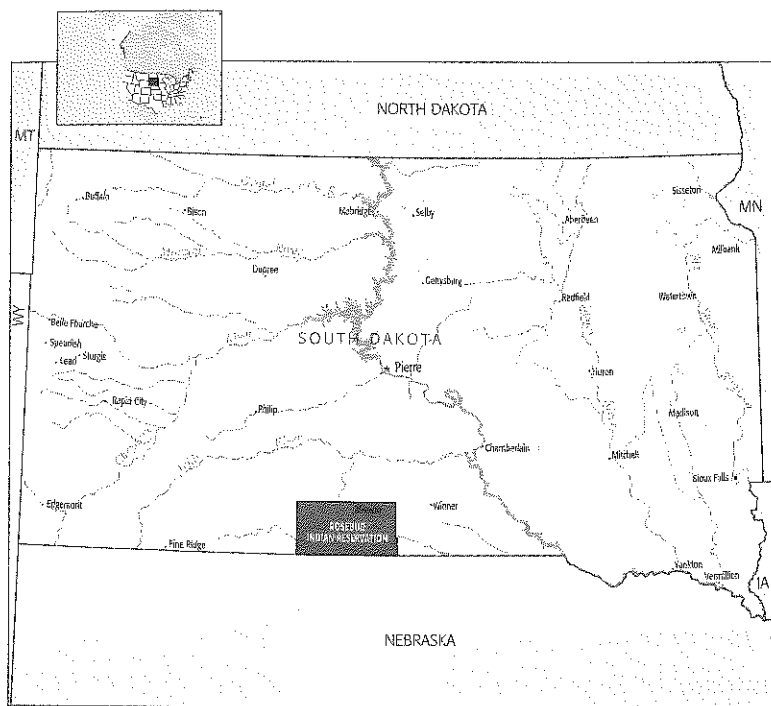
Printed and bound by Sheridan Books, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan.



INTRODUCTION

My name is Albert White Hat. I was born and grew up on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, and except for a brief period in my early twenties have lived there all my life. In 2009 I retired after thirty-four years of teaching in the Lakota Studies Department at Sinte Gleska University in Mission, South Dakota.

In the early 1970s, when Sinte Gleska was founded, we had a nurse-training program and saw a need for our nursing students to know something about traditional Lakota culture in order to connect with and properly treat people who held those beliefs. We asked our local medicine men if they would come in and teach this material to our students, and, surprisingly, they agreed to do so. They even formed an organization called the Medicine Men & Associates to administer this work. In doing this, these men became resources, not just to students at the college, but also to the public. Along with their teaching at the college, they also began a dialogue with the Jesuit community on Rosebud. These discussions took place in a public forum where they shared their visions and how they received



Mapping the roads or path,
writing down the roads (to
Sičanġu Oyaŋke, the place
of the Burnt-Thigh people)

their instructions. They talked about the spirits they worked with and clearly presented how they fixed their altars. They began to help our people understand who they were.

At that time I was teaching school in St. Francis, South Dakota, and was approached by the university to translate for our medicine men. I was fluent in Lakota and spoke pretty good English, and the idea was that they or their helpers (singers and others) would make a presentation to the class in Lakota and I would translate. Some of these men spoke fluent English, others less so, and some spoke only Lakota, but all of them were most comfortable speaking about our culture in our own language. Over the next ten years, many of these men passed away and others moved on to other activities or felt they no longer wanted to teach, and finally, in the early 1980s, the nursing program ended. Our Human Services Department wanted to keep the course that up to then had been taught by the medicine men as

a requirement for a degree at Siŋte Gleśka and hired me to teach the curriculum they had developed.

That course, and the inspiration for this book, was called Lakota Teachings and Health. It was unique in that at least 90 percent of the material was based on oral history. My resources were not books, but what I learned in my time as a translator and from watching videotapes of our medicine men teaching (most of which are now archived in our library). In general, I don't rely on historical documents unless I can work from the original in Lakota. Also, my entire life I have learned, and continue to do so, from conversations with our elders. While these are my own words unless otherwise noted, what I share with you I learned from these sources.

When our medicine men began to teach this material, probably 90 percent of our people were deathly afraid of it. For nearly one hundred years we had been taught to believe our traditional ways were evil, that we worshiped the devil and were pagans. This was the message we received in our education, and it became the predominant feeling among our people. It was also the reason the medicine men agreed to teach. They were not public people, and most had never spoken openly about themselves or their visions. They held extensive discussions about whether to teach or not, finally deciding to do so. One of them expressed their reasoning when he said, "If we do this, we want our people to understand what Lakota spirituality is and what the ceremonies are about. We want them to understand who our spirits are. If they understand all this, they won't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of in Lakota philosophy and rituals."

My goal is that at the end of this book, you'll have a better understanding of Lakota philosophy and of our rituals and traditions. I hope you will see that ours is a very simple philosophy. It's a very simple story. I am not trying to convince anybody of anything, only to give a better, clearer understanding of our people and the traditional beliefs and systems that are in place in our culture. Hopefully,

and importantly, you will see that there is no mystery in our philosophy, that everything we do is reality based. Because of consistent errors in the history written about us over the years and also because of our own cultural sensitivity, I will try to be as careful as possible with the information I have learned from our medicine men and women, from their helpers, and from what I have learned from our elders and experienced myself. There has been so much mistranslation, misinterpretation, mystery, and romance written about us.

I am going to present our rituals to give an understanding of their basic purpose, the essence of which can be expressed most clearly in the phrase *Miṭākūye Oyas'īṇ*. This translates as "all my relatives" or "we are all related." It is an often-used phrase in our culture. Our philosophy and way of life are based on it, and I hope you will give it some thought.

Also, consider phrases like *Miṭākūye Oyas'īṇ* and the meaning of Lakota terminology in contrast to Western terminology. That is one focus I'd like you to keep in reading this book. Another is the difference between religion and spirituality. Today there is the term *Wakāṇ Ṭaṇkā*, which translates as "powerful being." It's widely used, and I think it's a recent term that came out of the church, a description of the Christian God. Our *Miṭākūye Oyas'īṇ* phrase means something much different; it describes our relationship with all of creation, that we are all relatives. When the church arrived, we were taught that *Miṭākūye Oyas'īṇ* was evil, a pagan belief, so over the past few hundred years we began to rely on *Wakāṇ Ṭaṇkā*. Some might disagree with me on this, but I hope you'll think about it. So the difference between religion and spirituality is very central to these teachings. We do not have religion, at least as I understand it. We have spirituality. See what you think of this.

This material is mostly the stories of the *Sicāṅgu Oyaṭe*, the Burnt-Thigh nation, the people of the Rosebud Reservation. That's who I am. Most of the medicine men that developed this course were

Sícaṅgu as well. I think that if you come to understand us, you'll be able to understand other cultures and philosophies, however different they might be from your own.

Years ago I went to an Indian conference, and one of the presenters, a Hopi, got up to speak. He looked at all of us and said, "There are some Sioux here, Crow, Onondaga, Hopi, Navajo, Ojibwa... and we all know the educational and administrative policies of this country. We've lived under them for years, we've worked under them, and we know that system well. So I'm not going to waste my time talking about any of that; today I'm going to talk Hopi." As he began to explain the childhood development of the Hopi boy into adulthood and the rituals that go along with that, I began to notice that what he was describing was pretty familiar. He was describing rituals that were just like our sweat ceremony, our vision quest, and our sun dance. They were not the same rituals, but they had the same purpose as ours. So I'm hoping that you will experience something similar in reading this book, that in understanding the Lakota people, you will recognize similarities with other nations and come to understand the concept of Míḡakuye Oyas'íṇ.

LIFE'S JOURNEY

•

ZUYA



chapter one

I GREW UP IN THE '40S

1940S HEHAŋ IMAČAĞE

I was born in 1938 and grew up in the 1940s in a little community on Rosebud called Spring Creek. It was pretty neat. At that time our transportation was horseback or team and wagon. There weren't many cars on Rosebud back then, and they were all owned by the government and the missionaries. The missionary for our community would come once a month for mass. Our community was very close, and it was a big occasion. We liked any occasion to gather, and even for mass we would all come out. More important, however, we would gather to hear our storytellers.

We had no modern technology in our homes in those days, not even electricity or indoor plumbing, so in the evenings, especially in winter, we'd come back from school and select our storyteller. We had five in our community of around two hundred people. We'd choose which one we wanted to hear that night and go to their home to chop wood, stockpile it, and haul water for the night ahead. Then we'd go to our homes to eat supper and afterward gather at the storyteller's home. By then a space would have been cleared for us,

1. Wounded Knee Massacre, December 29, 1890.

and someone would bring out a sack of Bull Durham tobacco, roll and light a cigarette, and offer it to the storyteller, who would then begin to tell his or her stories. Each storyteller had different stories. My mother was a storyteller, and hers were mostly historical: what happened at Wounded Knee, the Battle of Little Bighorn, and stories of our movement westward over the years.¹ Also, she had stories of our ceremonies and what various medicine men did in them and some others of our Heyokas, or contraries.

Those are wonderful memories for me, lying there with my friends, listening as our storytellers spoke. In those years we grew up speaking our language and hearing our traditional stories. We were not yet fully conditioned to be afraid of our rituals, and we learned about our way of life from those stories. I feel very fortunate that I was able to experience that way of life, even though it turned out to be for a relatively short time.

In those days many of our people were seasonal field workers and in the spring would move from farm to farm, working the crops. We'd do this from spring to fall and then return to Spring Creek after the harvest. The final job of each year, as I remember, was in October, when trucks would come and haul us, maybe twenty-five or thirty families, to Julesburg, Colorado, to pick potatoes. This was an important time for our community, as we were able to prepare for winter with the money made in the potato fields. That was when we bought our winter clothes, and when we returned home we were prepared for winter. We were self-sufficient and took pride in this. We'd hunt through the winter, and we lived well. The farmer we picked for in Julesburg gave us as many potatoes as we could carry away, and I remember one fall my mother brought back thirty-eight one-hundred-pound bags of potatoes. She would trade the potatoes she brought home to our relatives who would come for them and then bring something else to us in return. One year, after all her trading, we ended up with enough potatoes for one meal, but that was fine

since she regarded it as her contribution to the well-being of the community. My mother didn't set any price for the potatoes; people came and got them and then brought what they had to trade back to us.

We spoke our language nearly all the time. Our community, like many on the reservation, was very isolated. We were barely touched by the outside world. We did have a government day school, but the instruction was poor, and I barely learned anything. We even spoke Lakota to our teacher at school, and this man didn't even speak the language. The school janitor, who was Lakota, would tell us what our teacher was saying and what we were instructed to do. I remember doing a lot of singing; the teacher would play a piano, and we'd sing. Years later when I could read English I had to laugh, because we'd been making up words to the songs, words that sounded like the ones our teacher was singing. Altogether I remember those days as very simple, wonderful, and even exciting times.

This way of life changed in 1953 when we were given the right to buy liquor.² It changed for the worse, and it changed fast. That same year, when we went to Julesburg for the potato harvest, there was a lot of drinking and fighting throughout our time there. People spent all their money on liquor; some got stranded and barely made it back home. People came back home with nothing after a month of work. After that fall in 1953, life on the reservation just got worse and worse.

In 1954, when I was sixteen years old, I went into the boarding-school system on the reservation. I stayed five years and graduated high school at twenty, a very angry young man. Everything I was taught about my people in that school was negative. We were savages and worshiped the devil. Everything I was taught about us was bad. I became angry that I'd been born an Indian, which was confusing because I'd had those earlier experiences, and deep down I knew that what I was learning in school was a lie. I had witnessed our sweat lodges as a child and knew they were not evil.³

2. The sale of alcohol to Indians had been illegal since the early 1800s, and in 1933 the repeal of Prohibition did not apply to them. In 1953, however, President Eisenhower repealed Indian Prohibition laws in the United States. Indian reservations remained dry unless they opted to permit the possession and sale of alcohol.

3. Our ceremonies were illegal from 1880 to 1978. When I was growing up, our parents kept us from participating in them for our own protection.

By the time I went into high school, our ceremonial practices had gone completely underground. People were punished for practicing them, so after a sweat ceremony the lodge would be taken apart and hidden. As kids we'd ride our horses through the canyons on the reservation, and every now and then we'd come upon a place where a sweat lodge had been held, always in a very isolated area. It wasn't until years later that I understood why these lodges were dismantled and hidden.

Growing up with our language and some of our traditional practices helped me to survive in the years after I graduated high school. It's what I eventually returned to: those things I learned from my mother and my community in Spring Creek.

In those days the entire community took care of the children. If I was playing at a friend's house, and we did something wrong, his parents would discipline us. It was the same at my house: my mother would discipline any kids who were there and misbehaving. News traveled fast, and my mom would usually know that I'd behaved badly before I got home. All of the mothers in our community shared the responsibility for discipline and supported each other in that effort. I remember that clearly; we couldn't get away with anything, and whenever we tried, everyone knew about it. As kids we were welcome anywhere. We could stay at any friend's house, and our parents would never worry about us. In the '40s that way of life still existed on the reservation. That way of life was still very strong, and our language was still strong.

Also, I have danced for as long as I can remember. My mother would make me a dance outfit, and I would dance. There were certain times in the year, during Lent, for instance, that we had to dance secretly. We weren't allowed to dance then, so we'd hold our pow wows in secret. Just like with the ceremonies, however, I didn't know why we had to do this until many years later.

After many years of repression, in the late 1950s I began to hear people speaking of our traditional ways as if they were history. People would talk about how it used to be, and it made me sad and also made me wonder why it couldn't be that way again. Over the next two decades or so, I thought about this more and more and wondered why we couldn't do the same things again. I began to ask around about our ceremonies and learn what I could about them, and finally, around 1980, I built a sweat lodge in my backyard.

The community I lived in thought I was trying to be a medicine man, and my relatives were terrified for me. They thought I was doing something evil. I had no intention or desire to be a medicine man—it doesn't happen that way anyway—but I knew I needed that particular ritual for my well-being. I still have that lodge, and today it's nothing unusual, but at that time it was very controversial. There was no encouragement at all; people said not to do it. By then we were powerfully conditioned to believe what the authorities and the church said. Our people were terrified.

In 1968 I had conducted a survey of our language on the reservation and found that nearly 100 percent of our people denied it. These were fluent speakers, people who had grown up speaking Lakota, and they all said to forget about it, to let it go. They were afraid of anything to do with our traditional culture. That's how bad it had become by the 1950s and '60s. The boarding schools and their curricula and the teachings of the church had terrified us and conditioned us to dependence on outside authority.

I still see many traces of that today, but it's slowly changing for the better. One hopeful sign is the little ones who are dancing at our pow wows. They dance in a category we call "Tiny Tots." It's great to see these little ones come out and dance, and it ensures these ways will continue. It's a simple process: introduce a small child to the rhythms, and they naturally want to dance. My children started

when they were young and then stopped for a while, but they've all come back to it.

Children always need our support. They know how they want to look, how they want to make their outfits, but we have to help them get started. It takes time to make these outfits. I have a dance outfit that I change a little bit every year. I add something or take something away, and I find that if I put my mind to it, then the help I need will be there. They always told me that's how it works. Once I had an old bustle and finally retired it and used those feathers for other things in my outfit. I borrowed a bustle from a nephew and used that but no longer had my own. That year I was dancing at our Rosebud Fair, and a friend came up and invited me to join him at his car. We walked over, and he reached in and handed me a beautiful bustle. He said, "I brought this over for you because that one you're using is kind of small and you need one. Keep it. It's yours."

I believe that if you put yourself into your efforts wholeheartedly, then good things will come your way. An elderly man from Pine Ridge approached me at a pow wow and said how good it was to see me out there dancing. Then he told me he didn't dance anymore and gave me his set of bells, a beautiful set of bells that I still use today. So there is something vital and alive in our culture, in our practices and rituals. It's not history. Today we live in frame houses, we drive cars and cook on gas stoves, but the spirituality, the life, is still there. It's up to each individual, though; it's a choice. If you want to do it, our ways are still there. It might be a struggle to come back to them, but if you keep going, that struggle becomes a worthy challenge. That's my experience anyway.

Once I heard a young boy ask an older friend of his why a certain practice was done a particular way, and the older one said, "Because that's the tradition." That statement really struck me, and I wondered why—why is it tradition? If you don't know the history behind a practice, then the living meaning is lost, and it becomes an empty

tradition. There's no feeling or connection except to the form, and it continues only because it's the way it's always been done. It's important to ask why a practice or ritual is done, why it's a tradition, and then to go further and learn how it came to be.

Our people are very lucky to be here. Sometimes I don't know how we survived. After liquor was legalized for us in 1953, within ten years nearly everyone on the reservation was an alcoholic. It happened so quickly that by the late '60s, many people had begun to hemorrhage to death. That illness seemed to come on suddenly, but until some of us went into alcohol treatment programs, we didn't know that it was alcohol that was destroying our health. So much of that addiction and abuse came from a lack of education about alcohol, but all I knew was that it let me be myself. I thought it tasted terrible, but after the third bottle or so, I began to feel really good. Every time I drank, I was able to be myself. I became Lakota and enjoyed speaking my language, singing my songs. Initially, that was the effect alcohol had on me, and on all of us. Very quickly, however, everyone was in terrible shape, and no one knew what to do about it. Alcohol nearly destroyed us all by itself.

My wife is white, and she grew up understanding alcohol. Her father had a small bar cabinet downstairs in his house. My father-in-law would always limit himself, sometimes to two or three beers a year, and that was only on special occasions. He knew about alcohol. He had been educated about alcohol and knew how to work with it, and I admire him for that.

By that time, however, we had so much conflict in our culture, with each other and within each one of us, that we used alcohol as a crutch. We didn't understand what it was doing to us physically. By 1960 we had nearly 100 percent alcoholism among adults on the reservation. Nearly everyone. We're still struggling with alcohol here today, but we have programs now that are available to people if they're willing to use them. I'm just guessing, but I'd say there's maybe 40 percent

4. Alcohol is still a big problem here, even though sobriety has increased somewhat. Without our noticing it, however, drugs came onto our reservation(s), and today they are a bigger problem than alcohol.

sobriety here today.⁴ When I think back on that time and then even further back, on events like Wounded Knee, I wonder how we survived. We've come through so much, yet we are still here.

I think it's important to educate our young people about these things. If they know the history, maybe they won't repeat it. This knowledge can make them strong. They will be more cautious than we were, better educated, and much more able to defend our ways. In the past I used that word, *defend*, all the time, and one day a student asked why I didn't say *fortify* rather than *defend*. That right there is the value of an education; if we can become fluent in English and Western thought, it will help us to fortify our own culture and traditions. I believe this more and more as time goes on.

Sometimes when we tell our story, in this case from the Lakota point of view, and look at the origins of our problems, we might point to the church or to the federal government. We might point to the tribal government and the policies that come down from the federal institutions, at the laws that come down from those institutions and how they've affected us. When we do that, if we're not careful, we get accused of bashing Christianity or bashing white people. It's touchy, but it's very hard to explain our current situation unless we explain our history, and as I said, I think it's important to know the history. The first time I told a priest no, said that I didn't agree with him, and began to debate him, one of my sisters thought I was committing a major sin. She was terrified that I would dare to question a priest. Many of my relatives were terrified that I would dare to do that.

Shortly after Vine Deloria Jr.'s book *Custer Died for Your Sins* came out, we had a conference here at Rosebud. One of the presenters at the conference was an Apache from the Southwest, and he made copies of some parts of that book. For many of us, the material in this book, which pointed out where our problems actually originated, was a real eye-opener, and some people said that the author must be an angry man to have brought out so many painful facts that resulted

from the government's Indian policies. Many of them took the point of view that Vine was an angry man when all he did was present those policies and their results from an Indian perspective.

Custer Died for Your Sins was published in 1969, and at that time we had a new bowling alley in Mission. It had just been built. Most of us on the reservation thought, automatically, it's not for us. We were conditioned to think like that, but then the organizers of our conference scheduled a lunch for us there. I was scared to go there. As an Indian I felt very intimidated walking into such a nice, new place. I felt like it wasn't for me. It wasn't made for me or any other Indians. So we went there for lunch and ate in a hurry and then left.

When we got back to the college, this Apache man was pacing back and forth outside, muttering, mostly to himself. He said, "I don't understand you people," things like that. I didn't know what was bothering him and asked what he was talking about, and he asked me, "What happened today?" I said, "Well, we had the workshop and we ate." He said, "Where?" And I said, "At the bowling alley." So he asked me what happened there. By then there were others standing around, and none of us could figure out what he was talking about. I didn't know how to reply to him, so he finally said, "At your table, what kind of tablecloth did you have?" Someone answered paper. He asked about the plates, and someone else said we were given paper plates and cups. "Were you given silverware?" "No," I replied. "We used plastic." "Did anyone serve you coffee?" Same answer: "No." He asked if there were whites seated near us, and we said there was a table next to us where maybe ten white people sat. "What kind of service did they have?" I told him they had a nice tablecloth. They had chinaware and silver, and a waiter came to their table frequently to refresh their coffee.

He was pretty worked up and asked us what we were going to do, but not one of us had any response to that. Then he said, "You know, I've heard a lot about the Sioux. I've read about you and know your

history, and you're telling me you're not going to do anything about treatment like that?"

One man in our group said he might lose his job if we protested, and this Apache guy asked, "Is your job more important than your pride?" And this guy wouldn't give up; he kept coming back at us until we agreed that we weren't going to go back there again. We wouldn't eat there again until they gave us better service. Today that might not sound like much of a response, but back then it was a big step, and we were all worried about what might happen.

The next morning at our workshop one of the directors walked in, and every one of us kind of slid down in our seats, thinking we were all about to be fired. Sure enough, the director began to speak about our protest: "I understand you don't want to eat at the bowling alley anymore. Is that right?" Nobody said anything at first, but after a bit we said that was so. Then the director said, "I heard about this and talked to the manager over there. He wants another chance." We couldn't believe it, and when we went back for lunch later that day, we had a nice tablecloth, chinaware, and silver. Our waiter came to our table often to freshen our coffee. And it's funny now, but I never felt so uncomfortable.

This story really expresses the way things were for us in the '60s. Most of us pretty much accepted the racist attitudes and put up with them, but some others decided to speak out and stand up. Since then things have changed a little bit at a time, but this was one of the first times I remember where we made a point about prejudice and racism in our community. We had never pointed out those attitudes before. After that we began to point out racial incidents more often.

So our recent history is painful, and some of our people ask me why I bring it up. I tell them that, in the first place, it's my life. I grew up in the midst of it and saw many relatives dying of alcoholism. I think it's important to see the whole picture. Our traditions

can sustain us, but every now and then it's important to stop and ask why. Why is this tradition done this way, and why is it important? To understand these things is to gain strength. If we understand why we have a naming ceremony, why we have a Huṇka ceremony, an Inīpi, an honoring, a memorial, then we will be more sensitive and respectful people. We will better know who we are and why we're here.

chapter two

I WANT TO BRING YOU UP TO DATE

HEK̄TAK̄IYE WICOUŋ K'Uŋ HET̄TAN
LEHAN̄YAN̄ UŋHI NAJIN̄PI

Now I want to bring you up to date on where we came from and on some specific events that have taken place over time.

According to written records, French trappers entered the Great Lakes area around the early 1600s and began to trap beaver and other fur-bearing animals. Within a few years they had taken most of these animals and tried to move to new territory to the west. On this journey they ran into a group of people they had not previously encountered, and this group stopped them and said they couldn't go any farther. The trappers turned around and went back to the area they'd been in, the territory of the Ojibwa and the Cree, and asked about this new group; who were they? They were told these people were the Nadowessi. As I understand it, in the French language, to make some words plural, -ux or -oux is added as a suffix. The trappers took this name, Nadowessi, added -oux, and called these people the Nadowessioux. Documents from the trappers and the priests that traveled with them indicate that *Nadowessi* means "little snake," or

“poisonous snake,” and that became the first translated name of this new group to the west, who were the Dakota nation.

A few years ago I heard from an anthropologist in California who is part Ojibwa. She had read my book on Lakota language and became intrigued by this particular account. She did some research and found the word doesn't mean “little snake” or “poisonous snake” but means “people from the snakelike river.” There's a river over there that winds around through that country just like a snake, and the Ojibwa called it the Nadowessi River, so the people that lived there, the Dakota, were known as the people from the area of that river. Eventually, the first part of this name, *Nadowes*, was dropped, and we became known as the Sioux. So while the French translation of the Ojibwa name for us was based on a linguistic misunderstanding, the true meaning comes down from Ojibwa oral history. This type of misunderstanding and mistranslation is very common throughout the written records about our people. Most of them were authored by European explorers and priests, and this is one of the main reasons I rely on oral history.

The name Sioux eventually came to describe a group of people living on the plains to the west of the Great Lakes. Under that name are three divisions based on different dialects of the same language, the Dakota, the Nakota, and the Lakota. The only difference among them is in the language spoken by each group: the words used are basically the same, but they are spoken with a *d*, *n*, or *l* as the first letter, depending on the nation. Otherwise, there are really no differences among these groups.

There are four divisions of Dakota: Mde Wakan̄tun̄, Wah̄pekūe, Wah̄petun̄, and Sisītun̄waŋ. They were the easternmost tribes of our nation living in the area east of the Missouri River in what are now Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota. The name of each division is a description of a geographical location; *Wah̄pekūe*,

for instance, is translated as “shooters of the leaves,” as they were a woodland people and hunted in the forests. Today these people retain their original dialect, and their Dakota names are often Anglicized (Sisitunwan as Sisseton, for example), and their reservations are all east of the Missouri River.

Two divisions of our nation spoke the *N*, or Nakota, dialect, the Ihan̄ktunwan and Ihan̄ktunwan̄ni. They also lived east of the Missouri River. Today they are called the Yankton Sioux, and their reservations are in South Dakota, Montana, and Canada.

The Titunwan (which today has been changed to Teton), now known as the Lakota, had seven divisions called the Očeti Šakow̄n, the seven fires or seven council fires. These divisions are the Sičan̄gu, Oglala, Iŋazip̄čo, Oohenupa, Hoŋwoju (Mnīkwoju), Sihasāpa, and Hun̄k̄pāpa. Here the division names describe an incident in a particular group's history: *Sičan̄gu*, for instance, means “burnt thigh” and describes a time when the people had to escape a prairie fire by running through it. *Titunwan* means “people of the prairies,” and this group lived west of the Missouri, from the river to the Rocky Mountains and from North Dakota and Montana south to Nebraska, northeastern Colorado, and eastern Wyoming. The Black Hills in South Dakota were more or less in the center of Lakota territory. Today all Lakota reservations are west of the Missouri River in South Dakota, though Standing Rock Reservation reaches up into North Dakota.

While that's a very brief summary of the historical makeup and territory of all of our people, and where we live today, my focus in this book is on the oral teachings of the Lakota nation and, even more so, on the teachings of the Sičan̄gu division, the group now living mostly on the Rosebud Reservation.

Oral history translates the name Lakota as “to acknowledge a relative or family member.” As I mentioned in my preface, every aspect of our philosophy of life is rooted in the concept of Mītak̄uye Oyas̄'in, “we are all related.” You can see this expressed in the true meaning

of Lakota, and the D and N dialects hold to this meaning as well. Throughout our culture, on every reservation, in every division or dialect, the focus of our philosophy is always on *Mifakuye Oyas'in*.

Our language still exists wherever we live. Our language still exists. What has happened, however, is that it has developed what I call subcultures. For example, in the 1950s Rosebud was pretty much equally divided between the Episcopalians and the Catholics. These churches and their missionaries used our language as a method of acculturation and assimilation into the fold.¹ At the time we had fluent Lakota speakers in both churches, but the Catholics taught and spoke Lakota according to Catholic philosophy, and the Episcopalians did the same for theirs. As these two churches had different beliefs, the converts in them didn't get along very well, but before long they had one thing in common: they were both deathly afraid of traditional Lakota philosophy and ritual. Fluent Lakota speakers in both churches spoke the same words, the same vocabulary, and the same sentence structure as always, but the meanings that were put on the words had been redefined according to these two churches and were now different from our traditional meanings.

Our language was one of the main tools used by the government, the schoolteachers, and the church for acculturation and assimilation. This approach was so successful that by the 1950s and early '60s, most of our people had converted to either Catholicism or Episcopalianism. There were very few who were not in one of these two groups, but then a third subculture emerged. This group spoke what I call reservation language; it is based solely on a culture of alcohol, sex, and violence, all of which had become prevalent on the reservation after the legalization of alcohol for Indians in 1953. Again, there was no difference in the sentence structure used by these three subcultures. They all used the exact same vocabulary, but the meanings of the words varied from group to group. One word could easily have three different meanings. This development in our culture created

1. US government policy intended to transform Indian people and culture into Western European-American people and culture.

confusion that has continued to the present, such that if you don't know our oral history and the way our language has changed, it is very difficult to know the true meaning of our words.

Today we have a reservation slang based on all of these three subcultures. In linguistic terminology our language has been bastardized, but many of us are trying to launder it and bring back the true meaning of our words. If you pay attention to some of the terms I use in this book and the meanings I give them, you will see they might differ from what you have heard before. This difference is an important point beyond linguistic concerns, because with different meanings to our words a different picture of Lakota philosophy emerges, and it is the true picture of us.

2. St. Francis, South Dakota, is a small town near where I live on Rosebud.

Renamed by the Jesuits, the area was originally called Owl Bonnet. There were always a lot of owls around here, and we have a story of some of our warriors who were coming through this area, pursued by a group from a different tribe. The pursuers were mounted while our warriors were on foot, and it was certain they would be caught. The medicine man traveling with them said to climb to the top of a hill, and he would sing one of his songs and owls would come around. He said that each man should catch an owl and take the *suŋ apa*, a feather from the head, put it into his hair, and let the owl go. He sang, and the owls came, and each man took the feather. The medicine man said to walk quietly toward the safety of the canyons, and as they did this, the pursuers caught up and rode right past them. They didn't see them. From that event this area was called *Hinŋhar suŋ apa*, or Owl Bonnet.

Reservation slang is very strong today. If I say *makuje*, for example, the traditional meaning is that I'm feeling lazy or listless; I don't know why, but I feel listless. *Makuje* is the word for that feeling. If I'm having a hard time, with my health or in finding a job, I would say *Otehi*. Having a hard time is the traditional meaning of *Otehi*. In 1975 I was teaching our language to seventh and eighth graders in St. Francis.² One day I was going over some vocabulary words with them and said *makuje*. One of the kids said that meant a pint. Another said it meant a jug. When I said *Otehi*, another student said it meant that you were in really bad shape. So I asked him what I was saying when I used the word *makuje*, and he said it meant hangover. Now, traditionally *makuje* and *Otehi* used together mean I feel lazy but am not sure why and I'm facing a difficult time, but when I asked my student what the two words meant when used together, he said it meant that you have one hell of a hangover and you've got nothing to sell or hock to get another drink.

That is our reservation slang. Nobody taught those kids those meanings of *makuje* and *Otehi*, but it was what they witnessed, what they saw every day. A parent waking up in the morning with a hangover says, "Boy, *lila* (really, very) *makuje*," and "hangover" becomes

the meaning of that word. When there's nothing left to sell or hock for another bottle, and the child hears *Otehi*, that must be the meaning of *Otehi*. That's how it always happens. Our actions send a strong message. The old saying that actions speak louder than words is true; how we behave and then use language to describe that behavior, that's how our kids come to understand.

So our language went through powerful changes, and this had a correspondingly powerful influence on us. It completely changed our view of ourselves from pre-reservation times. Take a child of four or five out of the home and put him in a boarding school, forbid him to speak his language, and after twelve or fifteen years he will have lost it altogether. He will no longer know who he really is.

Not only did we come close to losing our native language altogether, but our educational system was so inadequate that we were given severely limited educations as well. In fact, the reservation system and the educational system within it were designed to make us totally dependent on authority, secular or religious. A person living in and educated under that system simply couldn't function without outside consent or permission. We were not taught skills to foster independence and self-sufficiency. We were taught to depend on some authorized organization or another.

Our reservation housing program is a good illustration of this dependency.³ It's riddled with strict rules and policies. The housing authorities might have given you a house, but if the window broke, you weren't allowed to fix it yourself. It had to be done by the housing authority. We were not allowed to do any repairs on our homes. Many times I've seen houses with broken windows or doors off hinges, and I knew there were people in there with the capability to make repairs, but they didn't have permission and wouldn't do so without it. To do any work on your house at all meant filling out forms and estimating costs, and many of us didn't know how to do it, or we just didn't bother. We would simply wait for the housing

3. US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

authorities to get around to making the repairs. Also, the housing system put a limit on who could live in our homes. In our culture it's traditional to have elders living in your home, but under the housing authority it wasn't allowed. Only parents and their children could live under one roof.

That's just one example of how our policies were designed to instill dependence. Study the federal, state, or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs, and you'll see they are all designed to foster that dependency. Get a job and no matter how small the salary, you are cut off from any other form of assistance. Often someone on social welfare could be getting three times as much as the salary from an actual job, and as a result many people simply don't even try to work. We weren't prepared for it in any case; we were taught very little in school, and when we graduated our knowledge and our skills were limited.

I graduated from high school in 1959, and my transcript showed me to be an average to above-average student. I had been on the honor roll three times in my last two years in high school, and I thought I was pretty smart. A guidance counselor from the BIA came to our school and asked me what I wanted to do next. I told him I wanted to be an X-ray lab technician. He was really taken aback and suggested I try something like vocational training for car-body repair or house painting. He said, "You people are good with your hands." I held my ground, however, and was given a choice of Los Angeles, Chicago, or Dallas. Now, I had never been off the reservation except a few trips to Valentine, Nebraska, a ranching town about thirty miles away, but I chose Dallas and was sent to Parkland Memorial Hospital, only to find that I could barely speak English, that I knew only the most basic math, and that I had no idea at all of the sciences. I never felt so stupid in my life.

That's how it was for us by the middle of the twentieth century and for any other Indian who went through the boarding-school

system in America. We were cut off from our language and culture, given a limited education, and taught to respond only to outside authority. Coming out of high school on the reservation, you didn't know what to do, so you sat there waiting for something to happen. Eventually, our people just lived from day to day, simply reacting to whatever happened.

Only in the past thirty-five years or so have we begun to address the educational system on the reservation. When we began Sinq̄e Gles̄ka University on Rosebud in 1971, probably 80 percent of the high school graduates from the reservation had to attend remedial classes before beginning college. Today our educational system is far from perfect, but we've been making improvements. As I see it, our job as educators and parents is to help our kids appreciate the value of education and encourage them to learn. This isn't easy because many of us never had that experience in the first place, but in the efforts we're making, in going back to the traditional meaning of our language, in recognizing the value of our traditional culture, and in improving the educational system here on the reservation, I believe we have begun to lay the foundation for a better future for our people.

The dependency that characterized our people in the 1950s was really made possible only by removing our children from their homes and placing them in boarding schools, where they were, by design, cut off from any parental influence or any familiarity with our language and traditions. This was a hard time: other than Wounded Knee and similar historical events, I believe the worst time we've faced, as a people, was during the 1950s and '60s. I mentioned that when I was growing up in the 1940s, although we had no real education, we were still somewhat self-sufficient. Most of us were seasonal workers for farmers and ranchers in the region, and we had land. We had a decent life. My parents had 160 acres east of Spring Creek. We had a log house. We owned horses and built corrals for

them, and when we weren't away working, we lived simply but well.

Then, during World War II, those of us who were left after the adult men went into the armed services were sent to work in the ammunition depots in Hastings, Nebraska, and Igloo, South Dakota. I was too young at the time, but my older brothers and sisters all worked at the depot in Hastings for three years. When the war ended we returned home and set about repairing our cabin and corrals that had been vacant in our absence. There was open range at the time, but we found our horses and set about rebuilding our homes. About two weeks into this, a man drove up in a pickup and told my brother we were trespassing. He said we had to go five miles to the west, where there was a government school and 40 acres of land for us. We didn't question this—we didn't have the education to even consider the legality of it—and so we packed our wagon and moved out. We moved onto a 40-acre plot and lived in a tent while my brothers built a new log home.

It wasn't until 1978 that I finally understood what had happened to us after the war. I was on the tribal council and in doing some research found that when we were all sent to the ammunition depots, the BIA took over our land under their trust authority.⁴ In that authorization there is a provision that if an Indian doesn't utilize his or her land for ninety days, the bureau can decide what to do with it, and during the war, while we were all away, they consolidated our land into range units and leased them to cattle companies with the stipulation that no one live on them. So when we came home from working in the war effort, not only had we lost our homes and our land, but we were forced onto much smaller plots and into much tighter living conditions. This was the beginning of the cluster-housing developments that continue on the reservation to this day.

Cluster areas and cluster housing were not new ideas but simply the last steps in the containment of our people. In 1877, when the boundaries of the Rosebud Reservation were established, it

4. Established March 11, 1824, as the Office of Indian Affairs, this department was renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947.

was made up of the entirety of four counties, Todd, Millet, Tripp, and Gregory, and parts of Lyman County, all of which are in South Dakota. Shortly thereafter, this five-county area was divided into three sections (Okašpe Yamni), as part of the federal government's policy of divide and conquer. First we had been put on reservations, and then the reservations were divided into sections. Evidently, three sections did not provide enough administrative control over Rosebud, because eventually, under the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act, it was further divided into twenty-one communities. All of this was done for the purpose of increasing control over us.

The process of containment began with the reservation system. At that time the missionaries who were sent to the reservations were given the assignment of converting us to Christianity. They were told to convert us, and when they were initially unsuccessful, they appealed for help to the government agent in charge of the reservation. In response, in 1883, the United States Congress passed a law outlawing all Native religious practices. All of our rituals were made illegal. We couldn't do our pipe ceremony, our healing ceremonies, vision quests, or sun dances. We couldn't do our sweat lodge. All of our rituals were made illegal, and we were punished if caught performing them. In Canton, South Dakota, a small town to the east of Rosebud, there was an insane asylum for Indians, and many of the people sent there were those caught practicing traditional ceremonies. There is one story of a man who was institutionalized for "standing on a hill, half-naked, talking to nobody." The authorities said he was crazy and had him put away when what he had been doing was the *hanbleceya* (vision quest). He had been talking to creation. As a result of this law, some of our people took our rituals and ceremonies underground; otherwise, they'd probably be lost to us by now.

In 1968 this law was still on the books, and many of us began a movement to address our educational, political, and spiritual needs.⁵ The boarding schools had cut our hair and forbidden us to speak our

5. This happened all across the United States. The Ojibwa in Minneapolis, for instance, organized to get their people who were alcoholics off the streets, partially in response to police brutality against them.

language, and we let our hair grow and started speaking our language in public. We began to do our rituals openly. This behavior terrified most of our people. My own sisters were terrified of these practices and afraid for me. One day my oldest sister invited me for coffee. She sat me down in her kitchen, gave me a cup of coffee, and said, "You've done some things in your life that could possibly send you to hell. Now you're doing something that will send you there for sure." She said this because I was praying with the pipe and going to sweat ceremonies. I understood why she felt that way, and I didn't try to convince her otherwise, but I didn't stop practicing our rituals, either. Ten years later she showed up to support me at a sun dance, though she still kept some distance from the ceremony. Though I had confidence in what I was doing, I still feel bad that I put her in a position of such fear. She was worried about me and afraid that I would suffer in hell after my death.

That fear of burning in hell was held by most of our people at that time, and it was no small thing. If you look at our cemeteries, you'll see there are a lot of graves outside the cemetery boundaries, graves without markings. These are the graves of people caught practicing our rituals, and when they died the church refused to bury them in consecrated ground. They were buried outside as notice that that person was burning in hell, and I can tell you that if you're a young boy or girl and your favorite uncle or aunt is buried outside the cemetery, it will get your attention. It will upset you and make you afraid.

There were many different policies and laws imposed on us to stop our way of life, and they were all in place in the 1960s when we began to challenge the government. In 1973 some of our people took over Wounded Knee, and that drew national attention.⁶ Our situation began to get some notice, and finally, in 1978, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. From 1883 to 1978, however, we were not allowed to practice our true beliefs. Sometimes I have to

6. American Indian Movement occupation of Wounded Knee on Pine Ridge Reservation from February to May 1973.

laugh, even though it's not really funny, but it wasn't until 1924 and the enactment of the Indian Citizenship Act that we were even made citizens of our own homeland. In 1924, after World War I, the government decided we'd sacrificed a great many of our people in the war, so it made us citizens. Again, however, it was the government that told us how much of a citizen we were and what rights we had, and this authority continues today under the BIA.

Throughout all of this history, somehow, we still exist.⁷ First it was physical warfare that was used against us, then psychological, but somehow we survived. Obviously, it hasn't been only the Lakota. At one time there were five hundred different languages spoken on this continent and South America. Today there are only thirty that are still strong. Lakota is one of them, but the bastardized language of the three subcultures I described still holds a powerful influence. Today probably 98 percent of our people are influenced by one of these three subcultures. Maybe 2 percent of our people understand the true Lakota language and philosophy. That's why the medicine men, when asked to teach our students, said yes. They said they would "so that our people, whether they accept our ways or not, will begin to understand and will not be afraid."

A few years ago I was invited to a Jewish community in California. It was an anniversary of the Holocaust, and at a ceremony marking the occasion some children got up one by one and spoke about their grandmothers' and grandfathers' experiences. They talked about what their ancestors had gone through, and how they must never forget. I thought about that in relation to our people. It is important and necessary for us to know our history.

As a linguist I do a lot of translating from Lakota into English. A few years ago a group came from Pine Ridge with some documents for me to work on. These documents described a negotiation team from Washington, DC, and from the Red Cloud Agency meeting in the mid-1880s with our people about the Black Hills.⁸ They

7. Today it's difficult to understand how close we were to the edge as a culture. Acculturation and assimilation, along with alcohol, had decimated our culture. For instance, one man told me that in 1960, there was only one drum group left on all of Rosebud Reservation. Today, as we are bringing back our traditional ways, that seems hard to believe.

8. The Red Cloud Agency eventually became the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1878.

were trying to convince us to sign over the Black Hills, but Chief Red Cloud said, "The Black Hills [Paha Saṇa] are our *Wizipān*." *Wizipān* is a Lakota word meaning "a container for your resources." Today we use that word to describe a suitcase because when you travel, it contains all you need.

In these documents Red Cloud told them that if a man or woman was starving and went into the Paha Saṇa, they would come out fully nourished, physically and spiritually. He said, "We can never sell them, but we will lease them to you for seven generations." When asked what he meant by a generation, he said, "If we agree on this, I will be the first generation until the day I die. My son will be the next until the day he dies, then my grandson. It will go like that." By that count we're now in the third generation. By Western measurement, in which a generation is usually twenty or twenty-five years, we're much further along. Red Cloud said, "We will lease it to you for seven generations, and then we want it back," but the government disregarded that agreement and simply took over the Black Hills. That was the stand we took at the time, however.

So we have overcome many obstacles, and we still have many more to go in order to bring back and retain our traditional ways. We have a tribal government today that's very similar to any city or state government, and we have the same breed of politicians as those in Washington. We have our faults like anyone else, but I think it is only fair for people to hear our side of the story, to know what has happened to us over the years. The cumulative impact of these policies on us was so strong that by the 1950s and '60s, many of our people denied their Indian heritage. Families changed their last names so as not to sound Indian. It's not just the Lakota; this happened across the country. I hear the same stories when I visit other reservations.

A few years ago a number of us came together from many tribes across the country, and we shared stories. A Hopi man spoke up and said, "You know, we come from the reservations, and we all face

common problems, frustrations, and issues. One of the more recent problems we face is tourists. They will come in, and they love to take pictures and ask questions. If you're an Indian, they think you're an expert." He said, "A woman drove into our village and saw a man sitting on the ground, cross-legged, leaning against a wall with his hat pulled down over his eyes. She stopped her car, got out, and walked up close to take a picture. Finally, she stood in front of him and asked, 'Sir, are you brown from the sun?' The man pushed his hat back, looked up, and said, 'No, ma'am, I'm Jim from earth.'"

That's a humorous story, but it's fairly typical of tourists. When I go into the cities, I get asked whether I still live in a Tīpi, whether I still hunt buffalo. When people find I'm from a reservation, they ask questions like that, and I think it's all due to how we're represented in the media. I'm often in Indian conferences or gatherings where we are all fluent speakers of our language(s). We're open with each other and speak with lively humor and expression; if we tell a story, we act it out, but the minute a nonspeaker appears, we quiet down; we lose our enthusiasm and speak in low tones. I saw this happen over and over again, and when I thought about it, I realized I've never seen a picture of a smiling Indian. I think that since that's how we're portrayed, that's how we end up acting. That's the power of the media. That stoic image of us has a lot of power.

If you look at any Indian curriculum being taught today, I don't think you'll get our true story. The situation is not as bad as it once was, but if the sources are books, it will likely be a distorted, if not completely false, story. Our rituals have been dramatized and colored with a mysticism and mystery that are simply false. Our lifestyle has been romanticized, and in many cases we're presented as history. Our cultures are history, and we no longer exist.

Recently, I received a letter from a woman in Denmark asking if she could come and live with us in the Tīpi village and ride our horses across the plains. That sounds like fun, so if anyone reading

this knows about a Tīpi village with horses out here on the plains,
please let me know and I'll put her in touch with you.

OUR ORIGIN STORY

OTOKAHE WICOOYAKE

In the beginning was Inyan, and Inyan was in total darkness. Inyan was soft. Inyan was Wakan. Inyan began creation by draining its¹ blood and from this blood created a huge disk around itself. Inyan called this disk Maka, the earth. Half of the disk was land, and half was water. Inyan called the water Mni. The color of Inyan's blood was blue, and Maka, Mni, and Inyan got together and separated out this color. They threw it up into the air, and it became Mahpiya To, the sky. Then Maka said, "It's dark and I'm cold," and Inyan created Anpētū Wi, the sun and daytime, to give light and warmth. Then Maka said, "It's too bright and too hot," and Inyan created Hanhepi Wi, the moon and nighttime, to balance light and darkness.

Then Inyan created Tate to give breath to life. Today we call the wind Tate. Maka said, "I need a covering. I'm naked and I need a covering." So Inyan got together with the others and talked, and then said to Maka, "If we give you a covering, you must promise to give it life and nourishment." Maka promised to do so, and life began on earth.

1. I use "it" for Inyan because I've never heard anyone address Inyan as male or female.

This life began in the form of grass, plants, flowers, bushes, and trees, and as each new form came in, another need arose. All of creation came together to address each new need and to decide on the next one to come in. As each new being came in, Inyan created the other one, just like it, in the universe. For every blade of grass, there is the other in the universe. For every tree, the other one is in the universe. For every being that came in, Inyan created the other in the universe.

Draining its blood for each new creation, Inyan became weaker and weaker. The last to be created was the Human nation. Inyan created Winyan, woman, to be like the earth, to give life and nourishment to all of her children. Inyan created Wicaša, man, to be like the universe, to provide nourishment and protection. The universe and earth create life together; man and woman create life together.

When creation was complete, Inyan was dry and brittle and broke apart and scattered all over the world.

Our origin story was recorded for the first time by Dr. James Walker, a physician working on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the 1880s.² The medicine men in that area took him under their wings, so to speak, and taught him many of our rituals and healing practices. Eventually, they adopted him as a healer. Throughout this time Dr. Walker kept extensive records of the stories he heard and the rituals he participated in, and then he sent them to the Nebraska Historical Society. The historical society felt that because Walker was not a trained anthropologist, his notes should be edited by someone who was, and that's what happened. Whoever worked on Walker's notes changed much of the content to conform to western European philosophy. This has happened to us repeatedly and is another reason I don't use books for my resources. Lakota philosophy is usually changed in the written record to conform to Western beliefs and understanding.

2. Walker's version of this story can be found in *Lakota Myth*, published by the University of Nebraska Press.

The medicine men told Walker about our relationship with all of creation, and then, in his published work, we have a God, a celestial hierarchy, the basic Christian setup. So if you don't know our oral history, which tells a very different story from Walker's published version, our philosophy is seen as something very similar to Western philosophy. This isn't the case at all. Our traditional philosophy is nothing like western European. As you read these stories, please keep that in mind.

Our origin story begins in darkness. It says, "In the beginning was Inyan. And Inyan was in total darkness. And Inyan was soft. And Inyan was Wakan."³ Today the word *Wakan* is translated as "sacred" or "holy," sometimes as "great mystery." In Lakota understanding, however, Inyan has the power to give life or to take life. Inyan has the power to build or destroy. Inyan possesses both good and evil; both have power within Inyan. In traditional Lakota understanding, *Wakan* means "power," the power I've just described. Think about this: *Wakan* is a common word today, and the generally accepted contemporary meaning is more in line with Christian thought than Lakota.

Inyan began creation by creating a huge disk around itself and calling it Maka. Half of this disk was land, and half was water. Inyan's first creations were land and water, Maka and Mni. Inyan's blood was blue, and at first all of creation was blue, but then Maka, Mni, and Inyan got together and separated out this color, and it became Mahpiya To, the blue sky. The original term to describe this is *Miye Matokeca*, or "I am different." Today we say *Mahpiya To*, blue sky.

Then Maka said, "It's dark and I'm cold," and in response Inyan created Anpe Wi, which is a shortening of *anpetu wi*. *Anpetu* is daytime and *wi* is the sun, so *anpetu wi* is a description of the sun. It's interesting to me that right from the beginning, we, as creation, complain. We're not satisfied. Then Maka said, "It's too bright and too hot," so Inyan created Hanwe wi (*Hanhepi Wi*), the night and the

3. Inyan was Wakan, and Inyan created everything by draining its blood. Every creation comes from the blood of Inyan and so has the qualities of Wakan, the ability to give life or to take life. Every creation is Wakan.

moon, to bring balance. Next Inyan created Tãfe, to give breath to creation. Today we call the wind Tãfe.

Maka said, "I need a covering. I'm naked and I need a covering." Inyan got together with all of creation on that point, and they decided to give her a cover. First, however, Inyan told Maka, "If we give you a covering, you must promise to give it life and nourishment." Maka promised to do so, and life began on earth, first in the form of grass and plants and trees. As each creation came into being, another need arose, and with each need, all of creation would get together and decide how to fill that need.

Also, with each creation that came into being, Inyan got weaker and weaker. Inyan was draining its blood to make each creation and getting weaker as this went on. Throughout this entire process as each new creation came onto earth, Inyan created another identical one in the universe. For every blade of grass on earth, there is another in the universe; for every tree, there is another in the universe. The day you were born, the other you was born in the universe. For every being on earth, there is an identical other in the universe.

The last to be created were Winyan, woman, and Wicaša, man. Winyan was created first, to be like the earth, to give nourishment to life, and Wicaša was created to be like the universe, to carry the power and energy of the universe that, together with the earth, create life. Man and woman work together just like the universe and the earth. After creating man, Inyan was dry and brittle and broke apart, scattering all over the world.

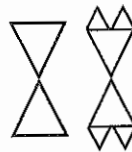
Everything on earth became known as Wamakaškan Oyãfe, the living beings of the earth. Remember, *Maka* means "earth." *Wa* refers to the beings of the earth, and *skan* means "that move," "that have life or spirit." *Oyãfe* simply means "a nation." In the universe there is Wicaḥḥpi Oyãfe, and one interpretation of this term that I've heard is *Wicaša cehḥpi* (man's flesh). So in this particular meaning, *Wicaḥḥpi*

Oyaŕe addresses the Star nation. We don't have a word for star; we call them Wičahŕpi Oyaŕe. These two, Wamakaskān Oyaŕe and Wičahŕpi Oyaŕe, represent the beings of the earth and the beings of the universe. On the day you were born, the other you was born in the universe.⁴ Whatever you are doing on earth, the other you is doing that in the universe. Occasionally, that other one will send some energy down to you, and whatever you are doing at the time will get a little boost.

When creation was complete, the phrase *Miŕakuye Oyas'in* came into being. *Miŕakuye* means "a relative"; in the first-person usage it means "my relative." *Oyas'in* means "everything." So, *Miŕakuye Oyas'in* means "all my relatives" or "we are all related." This is the most fundamental belief in our Lakota philosophy, that we are related to everything on earth and in the universe. We were all formed from the blood of Inyan: humans, animals, trees, water, air, stones.⁵ Everything in the universe, we are all related.

If I have a need or want to give thanks for something good in my life, I will face west and call all the relatives in that direction. I will call them and express my thanks or tell them my need. I'll turn north, east, and south and do the same. Then I will look up and tell the star people and down to tell the earth, our grandmother. If I am asking for help, I will first tell them my problem and then what I am going to do to address it. I will ask them, as relatives, to help me. It's important to tell them what you are going to do to address your need, to take responsibility as you ask for help. I never ask creation to answer my needs or solve my problems; that's for me to do. I simply ask them to help me as I make the effort. If I have a need that can be addressed by another person, that's probably where the help will come from. If it's a medicinal need, help might come from the Plant nation. If I ask a medicine man to help me, a spirit in a ceremony might give it. Help can come from anywhere, but it is important to remember that all beings possess both good and evil, exactly

4. We have an image in our culture, two triangles, one over the other, the top one pointing down, and the two meeting at their apex, like an hourglass. This represents creation into two, one creator into two, male and female. Also, it represents that whatever is on earth, the same thing is in the universe. We use this image all the time in our artwork and our designs. It's a fundamental symbol of our beliefs. The smaller triangles on the top and bottom of the second image are simply an elaboration on the basic hourglass shape. There can be many variations on this, but whatever is on the top will always be on the bottom as well.



5. Our word for stone is *Inyan*. A stone tells me about Inyan, and that spirit of Inyan is in that stone. That spirit or energy in that stone is Inyan. That's my belief. In English when we talk about a rock, pebble, or stone, it describes a lifeless object, so that's what it becomes. It becomes just an object. But to us it's a living relative.

like Inyan, and we must be careful how we ask for help and what we ask for.

. . .

One time in the mid-1970s the medicine men here were talking with members of the Jesuit community. They met twice a month for nearly two years to talk about philosophy and spirituality. Often I would attend these meetings to listen and learn, and in one session a priest who had served on Rosebud and Pine Ridge for more than fifty years stood up and said, "For quite some time you've been telling us you can see and hear spirits. If that's so, tell me then, what does Satan look like?" A medicine man sitting near me nudged his brother-in-law who was sitting next to him and said quietly, in Lakota, "Why don't you tell him? I know he's one of your brothers." Then the medicine men had a discussion among themselves about the priest's question until one of them stood and said, "You really disappoint us with that question. We were hoping you could answer that for us, since you brought him here with you." He continued, "Since I was a child you've taught me about Satan, how evil he is, and you've also taught me about good. Take a look at yourself and at everyone else in this room. In our philosophy everyone has that spirit of good and that spirit of evil in them, and each one of us decides which one we want to develop. It's our decision. It's up to each one of us. There is good and evil in each creation, in the wind, the water, the sky, each one. Look at the water; if we abuse it, it will kill us. Same with the air. Every creation has both good and evil, and if we work with it as a relative, with respect and honor, we get the same back. That's a relative. You know what that's like from working with your friends; you have a wonderful relationship with them. Well, that's what we practice with all creation." That was the explanation our medicine men gave to the Jesuits. Later in that same

meeting, one of them said, "We address our needs to our relatives, but we have to keep good and evil in mind all the time. We can ask for an evil thing and receive that too. It's always there. We have to be careful when we make an appeal."

They said that life was wonderful in the beginning. All of the relatives worked together. As time went on, however, they began to abuse each other. They began to kill each other. They began to abuse the earth. The earth sent out warnings that they should stop this behavior, but no one listened. So the earth cleansed herself by shaking violently, and when she was finished, islands had been created. The land of earth had broken up into islands, separating many of the relatives from each other. The children were given another chance, but as time passed the abusive behavior began again. The same things happened. Again the earth sent out warnings to stop this behavior, and again the warnings were ignored. This time the earth called those closest to her inside. She said, "Come inside," and when they did so she said, "This is the last time." She held them safe inside her and began to shake again—the land opened up and swallowed and closed over, opened up and swallowed and closed over. This went on for a time, this cleansing, and when it was over our people, who were inside, were afraid to come out onto the surface.

In our culture we have a trickster figure called Iktōmi. After the cleansing Iktōmi took the people to the opening that led onto the surface. Three times the people made it to the opening, and each time they were met by a huge buffalo. Three times they got frightened and went back below. Somehow Iktōmi got them to go back a fourth time, and this time the buffalo spoke, saying, "Come out. I want to show you something." The people emerged onto the surface, and that buffalo said, "Look to my right. That nation will feed you, give you shelter, and the tools you need." They looked and saw a herd of brown buffalo. Then the buffalo said, "Look to my left. That nation over there will be your spiritual guides." They looked and saw

6. One of my brothers had some in-laws among the Shoshoni people in Wyoming. One summer he went to visit them and said that one evening he went to visit a neighbor. He said it was a nice evening, and he saw some Shoshoni women were sitting in the shade talking. There was a magpie sitting above them making a lot of noise, and finally one of the women got up and chased the magpie away. My brother asked his friend why she did that, and he said, "That magpie was sitting there calling them names." So the magpie must speak Shoshoni. The meadowlark is the one that speaks Lakota. Different birds can speak different languages.

a herd of white buffalo. Today the spot where our people emerged onto the surface after the second cleansing is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the Black Hills. It's called Wind Cave. We call it *Wasu niye*, "the hole that breathes." It's a national monument.

Other nations had been protected by *Maka* during the cleansing. When all who were left were back out on the surface, there was a need to set life in motion once again. The relatives decided on a race to determine how this would be done. Essentially, the race was twice around the Black Hills, a total distance of about a thousand miles. When the race began the magpie flew up and landed on the back of the buffalo, which it knew to be a strong runner.⁶ Interestingly, even so soon after the cleansing some of the racers cheated, tried to cut across the course, and were disqualified, but the others stayed the course and, with the buffalo in the lead, just before the finish line the magpie flew ahead and crossed first, declaring the race for the *hu nuṗa*, the two-legged. The two-legged the magpie declared for, though, was not the human but the bear, because the bear has wisdom. To this day we receive instructions and guidance from the bear in our ceremonies.

If you think about our concept of *Miṭakūye Oyas'in*, which means "we are all related," it begins to make sense that an animal or bird or plant, as a relative, could help you. That is what we try to practice in our daily lives and in our rituals. *Miṭakūye Oyas'in*—we are relearning this philosophy today, and an essential part of understanding it is that there is no mystery in our philosophy. There is no mystery, and there are no miracles. Everything we do is reality based. We understand what we are doing, and we understand who we are working with every moment. We are working with our relatives. We all go back to *Inyan*.

THE TIOŠPĀYE SYSTEM

TIOŠPĀYE TA WOOPĒ

*T*iošpāye is our word for family. It describes our family system. *Ti* means “he or she lives,” “he or she lives someplace,” and *Ošpāye* means “a piece out of the whole.” So *tiošpāye* means “a small piece out of the whole” or, in this instance, “a smaller group (out of the whole nation) that lives together.” That’s our description of a family, though in this case it describes a larger sense of family than the nuclear family of mother, father, and children.

Membership in a *tiošpāye* is determined by three paths: bloodline, marriage, and adoption. Bloodline is the most important determinant of membership in a *tiošpāye*. This goes back to our origin story, to Inyan, who began creation by draining its blood. Inyan’s blood is in every creation, and this makes us all relatives. Our family system uses this model on a smaller scale. There are no blood-quantum measurements for inclusion in a *tiošpāye*. The idea of mixed blood came into existence when the reservations were established and was made into law at the time of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934. Blood quantum or mixed blood was not an issue for us until

this time, but when the act was adopted, it held that a person had to be at least one-quarter Lakota blood for inclusion in the Rosebud Sioux tribe, or any other tribe. This measurement did not exist for us before this.

Marriage is the second path to membership in a *tiošpaye*. Every *tiošpaye* is unique and has its own personality and characteristics. People cannot marry within a *tiošpaye*. In some instances, historically, matchmaking was done. We're like anybody else; we want our children to marry good mates, someone who shares similar values, and matches would be made between *tiošpayes*. The couple would be told of the differences in the *tiošpayes*. I would tell my son what he could expect if he went into her *tiošpaye*, and her parents would tell her what she could expect if she came into his. After that they would have to decide if they still wanted to marry, knowing that they would have to choose one *tiošpaye* or the other. If they chose hers, then my son would have to adopt their ways. If they chose his, she would have to adopt ours. Occasionally, a couple wouldn't be able to decide and might start a new *tiošpaye*. In that case they would combine customs from both *tiošpayes* and create new ones, and the new *tiošpaye* would be different from the two they were leaving.

Huŋka, adoption, is the third path to membership in a *tiošpaye*. Adoption makes one a full member of that *tiošpaye* and is very important in our culture. We call it *Huŋka* and have a ceremony to make each adoption. If one man adopts another, then the adopted man becomes his *Ķola*. Today this is often translated as "friend," but it means much more than that. They say you are lucky if you have one true *Ķola* in your lifetime. *Ķolas* share with and support each other. If a warrior is wounded in battle, the one who will come back to rescue him will be his *Ķola*. *Ķolas* are committed to the point of giving their lives for each other. It goes that deep. A man may have a male or female *Ķola*; he may call a woman *Ķola* if she is his closest friend. Women have this same type of relationship. When a woman

adopts another woman, the adopted one is called *maške*. The same ceremony is held for a female adoption. A *maške* can be either male or female just like a Kola, but the female term for this type of friend is *maške*. It's the same level of commitment, and if someone adopts you, you become a full member of his or her *tiošpaye*.

A friend of mine told me that one time he went to Minnesota with a friend of his to visit his friend's family. When he was introduced to the family, he met four beautiful sisters, and he was immediately attracted to them. The whole family sat down together for coffee, and my friend said he couldn't take his eyes off those girls. His friend's father was very gracious but kept watching him as he kept his eyes on the sisters. After this went on for a while, the father said, "My son is the only boy I have, and I'm glad he has you as a friend. I'm very happy about this, so I'm going to adopt you as a son." My friend said, "I said, 'Thank you,' but deep inside I was thinking, 'Oh, shit.'" His friend's sisters were to become his sisters as soon as he was adopted. This is a humorous story, but it makes a point. I think that man's father was a pretty wise man.

Each *tiošpaye* had its own system of governance. Customs throughout our *tiošpayes* were usually fairly similar, though each had its own particular qualities. Within each *tiošpaye* there would be several leaders fulfilling different functions. There would be a leader for negotiations and to act as a public spokesperson, a leader for warfare, and a leader for hunting. Each *tiošpaye* had its own medicine men and women, its own midwives. Someone in that *tiošpaye* would occupy every role necessary for it to function as an independent unit. Each one had traders, herbalists, craftspeople, and tool-makers, and they all worked to help each other. If someone wasn't artistic and wanted a well-made dance outfit, they would go to a relative and tell them what they wanted and have it made, and then they would compensate the one who made it according to their skills and strengths.

Our *tiošpāyes* are still here, and they are large, sometimes huge, because of blood relations over the generations. As I have said, each one is set up to provide everything a family member might need, and each one, while slightly different in customs and characteristics, will follow the basic philosophy described in our origin story.

I went to a sweat ceremony in one *tiošpāye*, and the man who led the ceremony, the man who poured the water, said, "Be silent while the first seven rocks come in. Greet each one silently." I went to a sweat in another *tiošpāye*, and the leader said, "It's all right to talk. Go ahead and visit while the stones are brought in." So in each *tiošpāye* things are done a little differently, but the basic customs are the same. In every *tiošpāye*, for instance, we use the pipe. We pray to the four directions. After that there may be slight differences. It's good to know this so that you don't make any assumptions as to how things are done if you go to another *tiošpāye* for a ceremony.

The moment a young boy begins to speak, he's not allowed to converse directly with his sisters or female cousins. A young girl is not allowed to speak to her brothers or male cousins. This avoidance is observed between siblings until they become adults, at which time they may speak directly to each other but always with honor and respect.

A different kind of avoidance is that a girl will never speak her brother's name in public, and a boy will never speak his sister's name in public. You will be teased if you do. In our culture your brothers- and sisters-in-law are allowed to tease and harass you, and they will do so mercilessly if you give them a chance. You are allowed to do the same to them, but everyone is careful about this, as turnabout is fair play. This is the only area where teasing and harassing are allowed in excess, and it has a purpose: it is meant to teach the virtues of fortitude and patience. Later in life you can be sure you will need these virtues in order to survive, and teasing is allowed here to help develop them.

Today there is very little avoidance practiced, though many of us wish we still held to it, particularly among our children. Our kids fight over every little thing that comes up. Brothers and sisters call each other all kinds of names, and our older people wonder what happened to respect between siblings. Traditionally, no one would ever insult a sibling, especially in public.

There is another old story told, and I don't know if it's true or not, about a family that went to a gathering back in the team-and-wagon days. They arrived, set up their camp, and began to settle in when their two children, a boy and a girl, got into a public fight with each other. Without saying a word, the parents broke camp and left the gathering with their children. They felt great shame that their kids behaved in such a way in public. When they got home the boy jumped off the wagon, ran into the house, and came out carrying a rope. He went off down into the canyons while everyone else unpacked. Much later, when he hadn't returned, his parents went looking for him and found he'd hung himself. They say he did that because he brought shame on his parents and sister. I don't know if that actually happened, but the story encourages me to think of respect and to consider just what is respect. Sometimes today you'll hear someone accidentally speak a brother's or sister's name in public, and someone else will say, "Hey, somebody go get a rope," referring to this story and indicating that they broke that rule.

Each *tiošpaye* is a very powerful unit in itself. Each has a lot of pride. If my daughter was marrying and going into another *tiošpaye*, the day she was leaving my wife would sit her down and caution her to remember and observe everything she'd been taught. She would be told to act in such a way as to not bring shame on her parents. A man would do the same with his son. He would caution him to live in such a way that would not bring shame on his parents or the *tiošpaye* he grew up in. Lakota family unity is very strong. There is pride in each family, not so much about being better than others, but in the

ability to live well and demonstrate self-sufficiency. We have a saying, "Nake Nula Waun," which means "I am always prepared." In our culture it is important to demonstrate the quality of self-sufficiency.

In our family system a Lakota child can have many grandfathers and grandmothers. When I taught in St. Francis, we had a small faculty lounge in our school. I was eating my lunch in there one day, and a teacher, a nun, asked me about a student who kept missing class for his grandmother's funeral. She said he'd been out for three funerals that semester, and it seemed to her that he was lying. She thought a child had only two grandmothers. I asked who it was, and when she told me I said, "Well, knowing him, I'd say he's probably got about three or four more grandmothers. Our system works that way." Children are equally close to all of them, since there's no measurement or distance in these relationships, as there is in Western culture. When a wake takes place for an elder on the reservation, there are a lot of students absent from school. The deceased was likely a close relation to most of them.

Marriage is not permitted within the same bloodline. I think this is common in all cultures. You might become a member of a different *tiošpaye* from your own because a sister has married into it, but you could still marry into hers since there is, as yet, no blood relation there. Since our *tiošpaye* system has been around so long, and they have grown so large, there are problems for our young people. Even in the 1950s when I was growing up, my brothers and I would meet a potential girlfriend and more often than not, our mom would tell us she was a cousin and that we'd have to keep looking. Today it's worse; it's nearly impossible to find somebody on the reservation who's not a blood relation.

A child in our culture has many parent and grandparent figures. Grandmothers taught their granddaughters about what it was to be a woman, and the child's mother would be the role model for those teachings. Whatever the grandmothers were teaching would

be modeled by the child's mother. Grandfathers would teach their grandsons the same way, and the child would see his father and uncles living those teachings. Also, we had no word for orphan. A child is never an orphan under this system. There are always other relatives in the *tiošpaye* who will take a child in and give it the same love and care as would have been given by the biological parents. They will teach the same values as the biological parents and will not be regarded by the child or anyone else as any different from the real parents. So a child is never alone under our system. There is no such thing as an only child, either. Any child will have brothers and sisters from other relatives. They are the same as biological brothers and sisters and addressed in exactly the same way. No difference. In the *tiošpaye* system, a child grows up with many brothers and sisters.

Children in a *tiošpaye* are witness to the good and the bad behavior of the members. Children learn about the consequences of mistakes and deliberate acts from this observation. Our children are never punished physically, but adults are, and children learn from witnessing this punishment. Some transgressions carry very severe punishments, and children are told stories of these major crimes as well. Murder is a major crime, as is rape. Lying is also considered a serious offense, usually resulting in the liar being ostracized from the community. We're no different from any other culture in this respect; there are people who commit crimes in every society.

We have many good stories about relationships. Years ago I was thinking hard about the concept of *Mītakuye Oyas'in*, trying to understand it and what it means to live it. One day we had a gathering and a feast, and I saw a cousin, an elder, sitting by herself. I got some food and went to sit with her, and when I sat down she just started right in with a story. She said that when she and her husband were young they were traveling from Parmalee to St. Francis. In those days it was team-and-wagon travel, and it was a very hot day in July. She said she was so hot and thirsty that sometime in the

afternoon she started complaining loudly, “If I had just one relative, just one, I wouldn’t suffer like this. I wouldn’t be hot, hungry, and thirsty.” She said she went on and on like that until they reached St. Francis. That night, when she went to sleep, a man came to her in her dream and said, “We heard you complaining all afternoon, that you have no relatives to help you. The next time you feel that way, remember that your closest relative was there with you the whole time. That’s your mother, the earth. Talk to her next time.” When my cousin finished relating this story, she told me, “We’re never alone. Look around and you see you always have relatives around you.”

So the focus in our philosophy is always on relationship. Every member of society is addressed with a relative term such as *uncle*, *aunt*, *sister*, *brother*. We have a term, *Wačekiye*, that means to acknowledge or embrace a relative with honor and respect.¹ When someone addresses another using a relative term, that’s *Wačekiye*. A person’s name is never used to address them. Every person is given a name at some point in life, and it has a meaning. That name has a vision. It has a goal, a purpose. The only time a person’s name is used publicly is to acknowledge an honorable achievement marking progress toward the goal of that name. At a gathering a name will be announced and an honoring song sung to mark that progress toward the goal.

When I was in grade school in Spring Creek, my friends and I started carving our initials on trees everywhere we went. We’d scratch our initials or names everywhere. One evening I went home, and my mom—I don’t know how she found out—said, “They always tell us that if you put your name out publicly, it becomes *Hurwinq*.” *Hurwinq* is the smell of rotten meat. They say that’s what happens to a name that is proclaimed publicly. The next day when I went back to school I told my friends about this, and we went around and scratched our names off every surface we could find. Years later I was thinking about this and wondered why she would tell me that

1. Missionaries translated this word as *prayer*. Under that translation it described bowing and kneeling to a supreme power, which is much different from the original meaning of acknowledging or meeting a relative.

story. I decided it's a way of preventing someone from becoming too egotistical, too self-important.

Sharing is very important in our culture. They always say that if you share freely from your heart, the value of that gift will come back to you four times over. We have no concept of a loan. If someone needs something you have and are not using, it is simply given to them. If you do ask for something, and it is given, then you have to return the value of that gift four times. In our philosophy nothing is free. There is always an exchange.

One time I was asked the meaning of *wealth* in Lakota. In English I believe it means rich, materially rich, to have a lot of material things and money in the bank. One elder told me that the word *Wičozani* means "wealth." Today we translate *Wičozani*, somewhat off-handedly, as *health*, but *Wičozani* means to live a happy, well-balanced life. It means a life of physical and mental health, in balance with creation. That's *wealth* in Lakota philosophy, and every person and every *tiošpāye* tries to reach that level by practicing four main virtues. They are courage, generosity, fortitude, and wisdom.

Wo'ohiŋka (wo *ohiŋka*) is courage or bravery. They say the hardest thing to do is to make a decision and then live it, and this word describes the courage to make decisions about your life. Today we think of courage in a more physical sense, like soldiers going off to war, but it's more than that. It's the courage to make a decision about your life, to make decisions on issues confronting you, and then take responsibility for those decisions. It seems like a simple thing, but think about it. It's very difficult.

Wacāŋtognakē is generosity. It means having the ability to put things into your heart because when you do that, you have love and respect for those things. You honor them. Generosity is not just about giving. In Lakota you give to someone because you honor and respect them. Someone is in need, so you help them out of respect. You don't make loans. It's a gift from the heart.

2. When we were moved off our land in the 1940s, we were going down the river road in a packed wagon, and we passed by one of my mother's cousins.

He asked what we were doing, and when we told him, he offered us a cabin to live in until we could build our own. We lived there for nearly a year. My mother was never able to repay him, but a generation later my brothers and I were able to help his sons when they needed it.

3. *Wowaciŋtaŋka* is a noun addressing the mind. *ŋaŋka* means "big" or "strong." So "big mind, strong mind." Today we define *Wowaciŋtaŋka* as "fortitude."

They always said that a sincere gift from the heart comes back to you four times. You might have a need, and suddenly something comes along to address that need, maybe a gift from someone you helped previously. However it comes, if you receive a gift from someone, you will give back to them at some point. It might not even be in your lifetime.² If someone helps me out when I need it, I might not ever be able to repay them, but my kids will know where that gift came from, and help will be returned. This is how it used to work a long time ago.

They say the worst thing you can do to a person is to pity them. It's a way of putting that person down, putting yourself above them. If you've ever been pitied, you know it feels terrible when someone comes along and says, "Oh, you poor thing." It feels bad, and it makes you feel helpless, like you can't do anything for yourself. So in Lakota philosophy we never pity others.

The greatest gift that you can give is time from your own life. Each of us has our own mission in life, our own goals, yet sometimes we put that aside to help someone else. They say that's the greatest gift because you are taking time from your own life. So generosity is measured in the ways of respect and honor, not pity or looking at somebody as being lower. We care, we respect, we honor. Somebody who needs help is helped out of respect for another human being.

Wowaciŋtaŋka is fortitude, having the strength and endurance to stick to your decisions, to withstand pressure.³ A student came into my office and told me he was having a lot of problems with peer pressure. He said all his friends wanted to party all the time, and unless he went with them his life was very lonely. He said the only people he hung out with were the elders. He was complaining about this, it was a very real problem for him, and I asked whether he had activities he liked to do—fishing, camping, whatever. I asked him if he thought about going to the mountains and hiking for a few days or learning to ski. He said no, he hadn't thought of that. I told him

that every summer I have a group of young people, college students, come to my place from the East Coast for a week or two of camping and experiencing our life on the reservation. I told him that some of these kids work and save for two or three years to make this trip, but they want to do it, so they take the time and make the effort for it to happen. Talking to him I realized that we, as Lakota people, need to do more of that.

We have a word, *zuya*, which means "life's journey." It's an old word and describes a time when young men would get together and try to set off alone. The first challenge was getting out of camp without being caught, but if that was successful, they were off on their own, usually with just their weapons. They might be gone for days, weeks, months, or in some cases years. They'd pick a direction, east, west, whatever, and head that way to see what they could find. When they returned home, they would come in as fully mature individuals. Sometimes they might bring gifts or things they had learned on their journey. They would have met other people and survived many challenges and on return would be more responsible and wiser.

I told that student in my office that when those young men left on a *zuya*, there wasn't any way to know when, or even if, they would return, that a *zuya* was a form of education, of learning self-sufficiency and responsibility. I also told him that we don't do that sort of thing anymore; we don't venture out like we used to, but it might be a good thing to do, even for a weekend. So fortitude is to make decisions and to be strong with them. Also, *wowačintaŋka* implies both the physical and the mental: physical conditioning for physical endurance and mental conditioning for psychological endurance. It applies to both aspects of our lives.

We say that if a person practices those three qualities, courage, generosity, and fortitude, they might develop *Woksapē*, the fourth major virtue. *Woksapē* means "wisdom" and is the result of knowledge and experience combined. They say you can have all the

knowledge in the world, but if you have no experience, you really don't know. So experience is a very precious teaching tool for understanding. A person has to experience what is taught and talked about in order to develop wisdom, and there is a lot to learn. Being old doesn't automatically make you a person of wisdom. Someone might be old, but if they haven't lived and experienced a good life, they won't have developed wisdom. Wisdom is in every tradition that we practice. Our people know that and respect a person of wisdom.

4. *Siŋŋe Gleška* (Spotted Tail) was a Brule Lakota tribal leader.

Twenty-two *tiošpayes* came onto Rosebud Reservation when it was established. They were all aligned with Spotted Tail.⁴ In the research I've done going back to that time, I've found that I'm related to nearly half the people here, and that's just on my mother's side. If I consider my father's side, it's many more than that.

5. We had a term, *niġe taŋka*, which meant "big belly." Such a man would be elderly and would have lived a good life, in service to his people, and would be well respected. He would be well cared for by the people and well fed. These people would not tell people what to do but would live as they always had, and the people could follow if they chose.

My name is White Hat, but that's not my father's name. My father's father was named Defying Ears, but the government put it on the books as Deaf Ear. He had two brothers, named Flying Hawk and Flying Eagle. When my father was an infant, his father died in an accident. He was digging a cellar when it caved in, and he suffocated. His wife, my grandmother, remarried a man named Tom White Hat, and he raised my father. On my birth certificate I have two names—Deaf Ear and White Hat. When my father was dying, my brother asked him about the name White Hat, and he said, "That man [Tom White Hat] fed me and clothed me and sheltered me, so I'm trying to keep his name in an honorable position." That's when my brothers and I decided to carry that name.

In 1998 I was made a chief.⁵ I don't know how to define *chief*. It's not a Lakota term, and it's also a very recent term. Traditionally, a man of that stature was called *naċa*, a man of wisdom and achievement. Such a man was said to practice humility to everyone, even to the camp dog, but today *chief* is defined as something like a king or a president. You know, that status is given today because of Western

influences, and now they've become really important figures—"I'm a chief," you know, that sort of thing.

I was given a war bonnet, but I put it away for a year while I called all my relatives on both sides of the family. I asked them to gather and presented the bonnet, asking if I had their support to wear it. They said yes, so I asked the White Hats if I could use that name as chief. They said I could, so, Chief White Hat. It was necessary for me to get permission from my *tiošpāye* for that to happen. That's how it's done. I believe this is an example of the type of tradition we can still practice. We can still follow most of our traditions. They must have meaning, however; we must put meaning on these traditions in the world we live in today. Also, we can do this in any language, Lakota or English. Actually, much of what we do today is done in English. Most of us speak English better than Lakota.

As many of our traditions are returning, and our rituals coming back, we are fortunate that the *tiošpāye* system is still intact. It's a very effective system, and, as I mentioned, it's based on our creation story when Inyan drained its blood to make every creation. All of the love, honor, and respect in a family stems from our creation story. I think that with patience, by my great-grandchildren's time, much of our traditional culture will be back in place. It's a challenge. Many of us alive today are so conditioned by the (recent) past that it's difficult to let it go. Some of us have been able to let go of that, and some haven't. I think that it takes at least two or three generations for a culture to change direction.