

My Spirit

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In following the traditional ways of my Algonquian ancestors, this embodied spirit knowledge should be shared as an oral story. But since I wish to share it with others who are outside that tradition, I do so in writing.

In this paper I will attempt to describe the largeness of the reality that lives in my blood- both the scale of the genocide that I carry in the cells of my Native blood and the atrocious deeds of the perpetrators of this genocide that I carry in my white, European Christian blood. My small body, my embodied spirit, has to carry and hold a very large, painful herstory in its bloodstream. My herstory-which is all part of, not apart from, my spiritual life - carries a rich, earthbound spirituality accompanied by rage and humiliation, a European (French) Christian invasion and genocide devoid of conscience. Added to that is the subsequent subjugation and denigration of the French culture by the English in Quebec. This work will allow me to examine the contents of my story and its effects on my present spiritual life. Most of all it will demonstrate how my spirit knowledge was always way ahead of my conscious historical knowledge. The great mystery is that my spiritual life was always guided by my Native blood cells without any understanding of why this was happening until recently, by way of research, I discovered the link to my Native ancestors and the roots of my inner conflict. This deep personal examination hopefully will "empower my descendants, through the great knowledge of my ancestors" (Caitlin Matthews, p.125).

Jo-Anne Corbeil

Birth: 1665

Height: 5'2"

Weight: 129 lbs.

Since this essay is an attempt at an embodied telling of a story, I include my weight and height. It is important for the reader to carry in her/his heartview the size of the body container that holds such a large spirit story. To create a context for this embodied spirit story, I chose 1665 as my birth date - the year that my French European ancestors arrived in Hochelagua. I am aware that my European and Native blood ancestry is much older than this. I choose this date in order to be able to put my story in the historical context of the land which my feet touch on a daily basis. All of my life, even after my repeated inquiries, my French forefathers denied the Native blood that flowed inside me. Its presence was personally confirmed in the year 2003.

My sister and I always believed that our family must carry Native blood. The first of our French family members settled into the Hochelagua/ Montreal area in 1665. It seemed to us that it only stood to reason that we carried Native blood. My father and his mother had facial characteristics that would indicate that they were descendants of indigenous people. During our childhood, both

my sister and I had recurring dreams which had a feeling sense of past life experiences. One dream, the first recurring dream described in this paper, was shared by both of us with the exception of a few details. My father would fly into a rage, whenever we were curious about our heritage. For example, he would shout ' Qui vous plante des idées dans tête comme ça?' (Who is planting such ideas in your head?)

Dream #1 (1955-2003)

I have had a repetitive dream that started when I was about five years old. I am a young Native woman of about 17. I am swimming away from my community; there is blood in the river. My body and heart are filled with bone-knitting terror. I am out of my mind because the only way to save my life is to try escaping by the river. It is the only way out of the massacre. My heart is filled with guilt because I have left my three-year-old twin sons behind. They cannot swim. I swim away and I abandon them because I am too scared to die. I want to live.

June 2004 Découverte /discovery

Searching the Internet for the history of my family in Canada, my first discovery is of Catherine Nachita (1654-1676). This particular Native ancestor was of the Poteouatamis nation. The Poteouatamis were known as the Fire nation, living between Lake Erie and Lake Michigan. Tim McNeese writes, "The peoples who occupied the Great Lakes region and the lands north of the Ohio River are generally known today as those belonging to the Algonquian group" (McNeese, p.89). They were French allies and fur traders. Catherine Nachita lived through the Lachine Massacre. She married a man by the name of Pierre Hogues in Montreal, who was born in Picardy, France. She bore two sons in Montreal and one died by drowning. It is through her line and her sons that we come to Charlotte Corbeil, who was born in 1709 in Rivière-des-Prairies.

Dream #2 (1955-1958)

From the age of four to seven I had a repetitive dream. It woke me up most nights and I had to go to my parents' room and sleep with them. In this dream I am a white male child. I am running in a panic down a slippery, snow-covered hill. Iroquois Indians are running after me. If they capture me, they will torture and scalp me. The dream was always the same and I would wake up before being caught.

My Catholic schooling with nuns started at the age of five, which coincides with the beginning of this dream. The nuns and the priests at this time in Montreal had been educated in a "classical French European" manner. The nuns taught us as children that the "savages" had captured some

of the priests who had come to the shores of North America to bring Christianity. The priests who were captured were scalped, tortured and then boiled in hot oil. In my childlike memories, history classes and catechism classes were blurred into one.

June 2004 Découverte / discovery

My first French-European ancestors arrived in Canada in 1665. My first family ancestor on record is André Corbeil, a Carignan soldier from France. André Corbeil sailed to the shores of Quebec on the "Brèze". This ship, 'a royal man-of-war' of 800 tons, was built in 1663 with a total of 80 cannons on three decks. The soldiers of Carignan - Saleires regiment came in 1665 in answer to a plea of the people of New France. These soldiers were answering a call to assist the colonizers in fighting the Iroquois. This was the main mission of the regiment.

André Corbeil stayed on in Hochelagua (Montreal) and married a "Filles du Roi" named Françoise Baiselal. Françoise was one of 770 single women, most of whom were orphans sent by King Louis XIV to marry the male colonists. These women arrived in New France between 1663 and 1673. Some 737 of them married, giving rise to a population explosion that resulted in the expropriation of more land and resources.

As André and Françoise were settling, Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, the first Mother Superior of the Ursulines nuns, was also settling in Quebec. Mère Marie had a huge influence on the history of Quebec. She came from France, alone, in answer to a call from God to bring Christianity to the 'savages.' "'Enfin,' ajoute la Mère de l'Incarnation, 'il fallut se séparer avec bien de la douleur, et quitter notre ange gardien pour toujours. On étend les voiles, le vent nous emporte, et je quitte la France pour n'y plus retourner jamais, et dans une ferme résolution de consacrer ma vie au service des nations sauvages pour les assujétir a leur Roi legitime, mon celeste et divin Epoux'" (Imprimerie de Léger Brousseau, 1882, p.22).

This translates into "'At last,' adds Mother de L'Incarnation, 'we had to separate ourselves with much pain and suffering and leave our guardian angel forever. We spread our sails, the wind carries us, and I leave France to never return and in a firm resolution to consecrate my life to the service of the nations of savages to subjugate them to the legitimate King, my celestial and Divine Husband.'"

Montreal 1951

My French Canadian grandpapa, Jules Corbeil, turns his emotional back on me at my birth because I am born with freckles on my nose; this indicates I have probably more Shanahan Irish blood in me than French. For this reason, he treats me differently than he treats my sister and his

other grandchildren. My maternal grandmother was Irish; her parents came to Montreal when she was very young. She herself married a French Canadian whose surname was Brais. These beliefs and behaviours of my grandpapa Jules filled me with sweaty shame. Whenever I was attending a large family gathering, I wanted desperately to hide my body. This, too, is part of the history that I carry in my blood.

From the age of three, the adoration of trees was what consoled me through those huge feelings of isolation and humiliation. The 'bon Dieu' of my early Catholic upbringing offered me no solace. As a matter of fact, when I visualized God in my young mind, I saw the admonishing face of Grandpapa Jules.

Westmount 1968

I am sitting in our large dining room with my mother, my stepfather, my sister and three of my stepbrothers. My stepfather, who is Anglo and a medical professor at McGill University, is telling my sister and me to understand it is a fact that French Canadians, being shorter than English Canadians, have smaller brains. Consequently, French Canadians cannot be as intelligent. I feel such rage and shame that I cannot move or say anything. I giggle nervously. My solace is to roam Mt. Royal feeling the barks of trees, finding stones to collect and to sit on. They speak to me. I can only take in the sights and the sounds of nature. I pray continuously to the trees and have such unbearable longing in my body and heart for which I have no words or understanding, only a great stretch of loneliness.

From a very young age I experienced my spirituality differently from other people. When brought to church every Sunday as a Catholic girl, I fainted and had to be literally carried out. When I saw a priest, I hid whenever I could. If I was in the car, I would fall to the floor at the sight of a black cassock, crying in complete terror. I hid under the bed (or once, in the fridge) when the priest came for the annual home visitation. In our French Catholic school, catechism classes started in grade one. Every school day began with an hour of memorizing and recitation. I did not feel the dread that the other children did around sin and hell. My body simply did not respond with fear. Trees were my solace in the turbulent chaos of my childhood. It is interesting to note at this point that in the Sacred Medicine of the Anishnabe who mingled and intermarried with the gentle people of the Poteoutamis tribe, trees are referred to as 'Standing People.' The Standing People carry the knowledge of the past into the present and the future.

Past life regression February 2004

My experience of this regression was of my body contorting, shape-shifting into different skeletal forms as I experienced moving rapidly from one life to another. I choose to specifically use the word shape-shifting because this truly was my embodied experience of this particular regression. The regression was different from any other I have experienced in a trance state. Although I had awareness of the room and my colleagues around me, I had absolutely no control of this shape-shifting body. My third eye was roaming my body wondering if others could see my torso changing or if it was just an internal experience. (It turns out they could clearly see it). John Perkins expressed this when he was interviewed for his book, *Shapeshifting*. " Yes, this happens on a physical level. You can definitely see it." He went on to say, "When you shapeshift into what we call 'the other,' you are manifesting that philosophy of oneness on a physical plane. Once you have done it, you never have any doubts again about our true nature as one with everything." (Spirit of Change Magazine).

The most important event of this experience was the landing into the last of my shape-shifts. I was a Native warrior roaming the land, lost in a rage. The rage I experienced was of losses - the passing away of my people, the dispossession of our land and animals at the hand of conquerors. I was lost in a vapour of alcohol. I carried a knowing of having been taken by firewater and yet needing the firewater to dull the biggest pain possible, the pain of loss, rage and impotence. I see dead people, I feel dead people, where have I gone, where have I gone? I slip from one to the other. I fall into the pain of the Indigenous person. I slip-slide into my French European roots so easily and they themselves feel belittled by the English European. Why are there such small boxes for me to try to find my spirit in? I float along the river of blood encased in my body. That river is flowing with so many ancient cells that call to me and that are conflictual. As if the river of blood flows over sharp rocks. It is hard to find comfort. I am all the blood cells. I feel this on a cellular level.

During this experience, not only was this inner turmoil brought to the surface but the extreme shape-shifting had caused a rib injury. I went to a massage therapist. As the therapist was massaging my neck, out of nowhere, she asked me if I was part Native. Her question surprised me, and I asked why she asked. She explained that she massaged in a women's shelter, and most of the women at the shelter were Native. Apparently, I shared a common characteristic with them; my c7 (an area pertaining to the region of the spinal column between the skull and thoracic vertebrae) had a particular pocket around it. I nearly leapt off the table my body was so energetically electrified and energized in that moment.

Coincidentally, that night I had dinner with new neighbours, who are archaeologists. While having dinner, they shared that they had been written up in a book, because they taken part in an archaeological dig of a sacred Native burial ground. I had not mentioned my earlier experience with the massage therapist. When they finished their story, I asked if they had noticed anything

different in the cervical bones of the neck. The man automatically spoke of the c7 being different in the Native skeletal frame, as well as the nasal cavities. This was enough confirmation for me of something I had known all my life and had been actually living through but only in a spiritual sense. The deep emotional and spiritual stirrings propelled me to go find my ancestors on the Internet and gave birth to this paper.

My spirituality had always been alive, but, locked in my heart, it followed a long winding through my veins up to my brain. To quote Joe Two Trees from Theodore Kazimiroff's stirring book, *The Last Algonquin*, on the making of a simple pot, "He told me that this making must begin first with the heart, or soul, for that was the place that the Maker started all good ideas once the young thought had ripened, like a fruit on its branch, it would follow a natural course to the head. The brain, he said, was the second stopping place for any plan. It was in the brain that the Tchi-Manitou would come during sleep time to help the plan become a workable project. In short, once the new idea had been prayed over, thought about, and then slept on, it was time to bring it into the world, as a reality" (Kazimiroff, p.8). In the world of my dreams and in the expression of my spirituality on a daily basis, I carried my ancestors, their knowledge and their struggles on a cellular level. The Algonquians themselves believed in "out-of-body experiences, which would allow a human being's body and spirit to separate, allowing spiritual adventures in other physical forms" (McNeese, p.21).

Where do I fit in my own blood? The oppressed and the oppressor battle it out in me on a continual basis. It is like roaming the land, not being able to settle anywhere. We work to integrate our psychological lives in therapy but how do we integrate our ancestral lives? Is it possible? The answer I believe for me lies in my spirit, not in my personality or my culture. I know the cells of the Algonquian have had the strongest spiritual force and yet I did not know I was Algonquian. Genetically these cells would be a weak link, and yet from as far back as I can remember, it was the spiritual life of the Algonquian that was leading the way even though my entire childhood was informed by the Catholic religion and I had no information or knowledge of my Native spirituality. I believe for me, as I integrated more feelings and memories, my ego became stronger in my psychological inner work. I became more able to hold all my ancestral memory cells and was then able to claim more. The regression, the finding of my Native roots, the final understanding of my life-long spiritual drive came together under one constellation of time. Exactly because my ego was strong enough to hold all the ancestors- their hardships, their struggles, their own individual rage, grief and pain.

The synchronistic rhythm in which this paper unfolded has always been my way. Like the eagle, my spirit travels through valleys and mountains to arrive at its next landing. This piece of earth where I land to integrate and understand one more of my life cycles is alas but a momentary touchdown in my continual flow of changes. It is never a destination.

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