

## THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES LANGUAGE LESSON

### Our NILI Poem

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are. . .

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are gathered together sharing their languages. Somewhere, they are learning from their elders how to be in the world, playing with their children, shopping for groceries, driving cars, playing basketball—living their lives.

Somewhere, an Indian chief is cutting his braids and attending his aunt's funeral. Indian people are also swimming, laughing and playing in the cool, clear, deep water, escaping the afternoon heat.

In the Americas, we the Tananma "people of this land" cherish this Ticham "land" because the mother earth provides many foods that we use for Traditional Ceremonial Feast. This is my joy of being a Tanan and Food Gatherer for Traditional Ceremonies.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are proud of their heritage because young people are really getting into their lost languages. Some of these languages are returning. They are taught in the Rez, and teachers are learning about how to teach their own languages.

Somewhere Indian people are cramming two weeks of knowledge and learning. Some are teaching their language to the younger generation to carry on.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are running away from guns, begging for work because they are hungry, still strong because they believe in themselves, struggling to save Mother Earth, praying for mankind.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are looking for jobs, sitting in jail, doing homework, eating fry bread, driving rez cars, plowing their fields, waiting for subcomandante Marcos, sitting in the backyard, arguing at council meetings.

Somewhere in America, Indian people are confined to 6 x 15 feet of space. They are wearing prison clothes. Who are these people? They are the Lost people. They don't speak their own language. They have been deprived of their identity and culture. Alcohol and drugs dominate their lives. They are the homeless, the Shadow People you don't notice in the streets in the cities.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are unique because we carry on our culture and traditions, united even though we live miles apart, and rich because we are filled with love!

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are greeting each other with gentle hands, counting young to old in sweat lodges, burning sacred sage, and inhaling peace.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian children are outside swimming in the creek, jumping, laughing, smiling, waiting for their mom who's preparing a barbecue for them all. Dad is at work, working away for them all.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indians are reclaiming the heritage they were deprived of. They are coming together to relearn what has been stolen and to synthesize beliefs. They are de-colonizing their minds!

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are having fun learning. Grandma is tending to her grandchildren, teaching them culture with everyday tasks. Grandma's planting roots for her grandchildren to grow.

Somewhere, Indian people are picking huckleberries and eating more than they pick, cuz their teeth are purple!

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are dancing and singing for a whale whose grease will fill the bellies of children and smooth the hair of elders, whose bones will make the tools of creation, and whose life will breathe life into the songs and dances of the people.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are lost from their culture, do not know what is wrong, are acting out in alcohol and drug abuse.



Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are singing a native love song, cruising to the general store, brushing and braiding their children's hair, respecting elders by letting them be the first to sit or eat, getting older realizing they are the elders, getting younger realizing they can be a child with their children again, sitting on the couch watching Fred Flintstone, eating fish heads and potatoes, preparing food for the winter

Somewhere in the Americas, songs are being sung from the heart, the language is being re-awakened, and the elders are smiling with tears in their eyes. Somewhere close, a man is talking to his children always and their children will talk to their children. Somewhere men and women decide alcohol and drugs are not the Indian way and take a step to teach about true livelihood.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are brilliant—laughing because the dogs are smiling, working to pay the rent, ouching because they stuck their fingers with porcupine quills, eating blackberries, making strategies, hugging their children, imagining a future, singing songs.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are  
Dancing. . . Praying. . . Singing. . . Cooking good foods. . . Mourning the loss of a loved one. . . Learning about who they are. . . Listening to the elders teach about life. . . Loving one another. . . Standing together in solidarity.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people

are dancing to the beat of the drum, preparing to gather for a big feast, a huckleberry or root feast, making beaded outfits, going to some kind of training for their tribe, working hard at their jobs, getting ready to gather foods for the winter, shopping for children's school clothes.

Somewhere in the Americas, a happy face, and I see this every day! People are smiling when they drive their cars. People visit and laugh after they eat. Kids giggle if they are teased. People use the custom to shake the hands of one another to show they respect being together.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are reclaiming the language of grandmothers, singing the songs, greeting the dawn, weaving together the past, the present, the future. . . joyfully!

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are having a feast after ceremony, laughing, talking, eating. Somewhere, Indian people are respectful, listening to a friend, singing to creator, stepping carefully through small plants.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are drumming, breathing, working together, crying, beading, raising children, feeding strangers, laughing, teasing, singing, praying, giving thanks, building a future on today and yesterday.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are gathering plants, speaking their languages, weaving baskets for holding nourishment.

Somewhere in the Americas, Indian people are dancing and sending prayers to the creator to heal their brothers and sisters, dancing to put a smile in the heart of an elder, eating together and sharing stories of life, looking at the sky, making fry bread and laughing.

Nili Class of 2001

### Virginia's Story

At the Northwest Indian Language Institute an elder tells us a story.

I listen to the tones and pace of a language new to me.

In spite of background noise her voice is steady, stately, rhythmic it seems to speak about harmony I sense peace and am hungry for her words.

Virginia repeats the story, now in English, again with gestures to show us the way how to rock a baby close to you how to let the baby hear you ask the Little Dipper to send blessings how to stroke the new head all over, so the baby knows it belongs, knows the people and the stars are joyful for this birth.

If we believe and do these things, our babies can grow free of self-destruction free instead to trust themselves and their world.

This was how Virginia's words reached me. Thank you for sharing your faith in love and your hope for us all. These are powerful gifts.

May everyone hear.

Carol Watt, August 2001