

A Pipe Carrier Betty Laverdure

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Turtle Clan, Mohawk

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I was made judge several times in my life; the last time was in 1996, the first time was in 1962 for a few years in Belcourt, North Dakota, by Chiefs Garden, Turtle Mountain, and Indian Reservation for the Chippewa Tribe. My responsibilities included handling whole court, I was chief judge and I acted as an appeals court judge for the tribe. It was the most important job I ever held for my people, was being their judge in the court house. In 1968 I was involved in writing a code which was later used as a model for ethics in different states, because in 1977 I went to work for the bureau of Indian Affairs and we used that code.

Later I began to write codes for United States Government, I trained judges, monitored courts for three states, worked as a judicial officer, one of three in the United States. In that capacity I trained judges; I trained court staff and continued to write codes for the government and our people.

I have been a pipe carrier all my life, my grandmother was one, she gave me the rights to carry a pipe. I am 80 years old now; I was born on June 6, 1930. Yes, Mother Earth is suffering today and I always say we must start the healing by taking care of our own family. My granddaughter helps me not to use things that will hurt Mother Earth. When we start with our family, it will spread out and then we can work in our communities to make life better and so on. Try to control what you can control and ask the people to do the same thing. My granddaughter and I took the paper towel holders down, now we do not buy paper towels anymore, and we can ask our community to do the same thing. Hopefully, we can set an example by the things we do, and that is one way of making a change.

Today, Mother Earth is suffering. The whole world knows that raping of Mother Earth can not continue. Our people have seen the changes that had happened to Mother Earth. Some of our elders were invited to do ceremonies in Greenland and participate in the Indigenous Climate Change Conference. Inuit elders showed our people where the glaciers were melting and told our elders that 30 years ago the water was melting in



Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth at Turtle Mountain, 2004
photo by Danny Beaton



Laverdure Family Portrait Turtle Mountain North Dakota
photo by Danny Beaton

a trickle. Now it was a river flowing into the ocean. Today we know that the polar bear might become extinct simply because the ice is melting and the polar bear can not travel to its hunting grounds over the hard ice. Our Mother Earth body is also on fire from global warming. Many scientist of the world have shown the facts, but the corporations and many governments will deny proven facts. Even our children can feel stress and turmoil from their families, television and communities. Environmental degradation can be felt in our spirits.

Native people are thanksgiving people, our ancestors only took what they needed from our Sacred Mother Earth, and our culture is one of respect for Mother Earth and North America is a our Sacred home .

My whole family are Sun Dancers, we follow our traditions, but it was not always like that, as my day was a very traditional Indian, but my mother was a staunch Catholic. Our parents really suffered for trying to keep our traditional ceremonies alive in the old days, as so many natives have. My great grandfather is from White Earth

and my maiden name is Wilkie, we originated from Minnesota. Willkies were one of the original signers of the Sweet Corn treaties and that treaty was with Sioux people of Sisseton. When I moved to South Dakota in 1977 and began working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a judicial officer, I found the people living in the area could remember sweet corn treaty and they claimed to be my family. Then I started to go

to traditional ceremonies with them. When you live on the reservation and you end up in the town, you find the first haven you can find and my haven was Sisseton. We began going to ceremonies and dancing the sun dance and doing sweats with the people of the Sweat Corn Treaty.

The ceremonies changed our lives so much that we became different people in so many ways I cannot count the blessings my family received in South Dakota. The ceremonies made me and my family see and feel life and creation in a holistic way. We learned to communicate with the natural world and the spirit world as a way of life; we learned that it was a duty the Great Spirit gave human beings to maintain. When I think back it was such a joy gathering my family together for the Sundance, Sweat Lodge and Vision Quest we were so busy with our friends of the great Sioux Nation that by the time we headed back to North Dakota we were carrying bundles of medicine that would keep our families happy and strong forever. If people want to stay healthy and live a long time, there is a real way to do it. They must give themselves to Wakan-Tanka and live a spiritual life. They will have the peace that frees them from fear. They will know that Wakan-Tanka and the Helpers surround them and that nothing can hurt them that they can't recover from. So there is no fear.



Remain calm and unhurried. Today Mother Earth is suffering so bad that we need our ceremonies to comfort her and to ask forgiveness, we need to give thanks over and over and over again until our Mother can feel our love for her. When my family travelled to Onondaga Syracuse New York back in 1990 there was a great gathering of spiritual elders from across USA and Canada called The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth hosted by the North American Indian Institute. A lot of old elders were

talking about how Mother Earth was suffering and that we must help her. One grandmother stood up and began crying as she spoke of how bad the water is disrespected and that when she was a little girl she could drink it from the stream. At that point one grandmother said we must gather all our sisters in a circle and do a water ceremony so that Mother Earth can feel our thanks. You see our ceremonies are so important now more than ever if we are to make things clean and healthy. We are a healing people so

it is up to us if we are going to make time, to live the life our ancestors did by giving thanks. We are so lucky to have each other and to be still able to gather up and do our ceremonies. As long as we are still lighting our Sacred Fires as long as we are lighting our Sacred Pipes the Great Mystery can hear and feel our Respect for Life and the Universe. All My Relations, Thank you for listening.