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Lakota Perspective

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Each time I write December 1999 -- it's a shock! This is my last Lakota Perspective for this century. I thought about this as I came to work around 7:00 am. As I stood outside, I thought of the beautiful songs my Whirlwind Soldier Great grandparents sang in the mornings to greet each new day. I thought of our prayer, "Oyate ki nipi kta ca le camu." I do this so my people will live. What a wonderful way to live, to feel exhilarated and thankful for each new day. To see each other as individuals, yet to remember we are part of the greater picture of an Oyate.

The spectacular view of the beautiful sunrise, a hawk circling overhead, a lone turkey and even a badger hurrying along the road - all make me more optimistic. There seems to be something magic there. How can a person look at the works of nature and not appreciate the greater power that put it there? Our land bears the imprint of chaos, an extraordinary jumble in the history of our people. Yet, the land also possesses our love because it holds the bones of our ancestors. This land is part of us as we are part of it. This makes me even more determined that we must teach our children to love this

land, that we cannot sell the Black Hills or accept the coercive money thrust upon us. It is Unci Maka, our Grandmother.

As I look back to the last 100 years I realize this time is ingrained in us as part of our history. Although it is just a brief flicker of time in the history of man. It corroborates that we have survived a terrible storm as a people. What has carried us through these times? Our humor, our loved ones, knowing that we have a beautiful culture and proud history. So many things. Yes, we have had our share of desperate, disheartening and destructive events, the sorrows of broken families and loss of land, the sadness of seeing our language erode these last 20 to 30 years because of the hypercritical and conformist atmosphere we were placed in as children. We struggle to learn the materialistic and consumeristic teachings as we attempt to adjust our tribal values to modern day America.

But there also has been constructive and productive events that have carried us through this last century. Yes, even the continuing wave of isolation and severe restrictions imposed on many generations in boarding schools made us more determined that we would survive. The melodramatic western movies disguised as entertainment shown to us as children sometimes caused us to cheer for the other side. Yet, in our hearts we knew that once we were taken from the isolation of boarding schools, placed back in the social and symbolic center of our communities we would remember and cherish our culture and language. We did not know that we were poor in our earthly paradise. We just knew that we were back among those who were

generous, genial and gentle, independent and self-reliant - those who loved us. This is what brought us comfort and peace and helped us survive.

Later on that day of quiet and reflective thinking, I thought of what I would say in my last Lakota Perspective for this century. I looked out into the gray overcast sky and listened to the Jay scold. I felt a sense of accomplishment. Yes, we did count coup on those architects of forced assimilation. In the 1930's we were called the "Vanishing Race." Can you imagine the Lakota as a vanishing race?

Now our children are completely at home with the technology age. Many create web-sites and research our great leaders and our history. Many are renewing connections with our ancestors and studying their genealogy through computers. Yes, our children are consumers in the technology age. We are using technology to strengthen and educate our children to survive as Lakota. Our culture has not been static, it has adapted and grown - century upon century this has been the key to our survival.

Our strength has been our Elders and our children. Our Elders for their steadfast fortitude, wisdom and generosity. For their attempts to expand our horizons and widen our awareness and expectations and our children for the faith and hope they bring to us. However, we still have a ways to go in our healing process. Wopila iciciye, Mitakuyepi, you have empowered us with encouragement to build new roads, to look with anticipation and enthusiasm into the future as a people.

These memories and thoughts this last month of the century strengthens me and makes me appreciate that I am alive. Black Elk's vision was fulfilled - that which seemed impossible after Wounded Knee. That vision has been more powerful than might have ever been imagined or foretold. Yes, we can look ahead with optimism we have made it through the worst of our history. We have survived. As we celebrate the new millennium we need to think about getting beyond that survival mode. Let's look at the quality of life for our children, let's revive and restore our values - there is so much to do. We need to devise ways in which to honor those who sacrificed that we may live, ways in which we can preserve and maintain our culture and most of all our language. We must concentrate on preserving our language.

Mitakuyepi, I wish the best for you in the coming new century.

I know that we will survive as Lakota.

Oyate ki nipi kta ca lecamu!

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