

HONOR DAY Annually August 20 A GIFT FROM NATIVE AMERICA
"Transforming the world, by invitation, to the Honor Way"



The Story of Honor Day and the Honor Way by Silversong

In my birthplace of Alberta, Canada in 1944, there was only one minority group - Native Indians. We were expected to assimilate into the white culture and abandon our origins and our people in order to succeed. When quite young I became aware of two distinctive aspects of life - the physical world we see, and the creative power of unseen forces: love, thought, intent, and vision. I saw that Native awareness of the unseen forces could be lost through assimilation, so I committed to learning and applying the Native's way to keep the two worlds in balance. I did not want to lose the Native tradition, but to find out how to do all I could to preserve the Natural Way.

Some of the primary traditions of North American Native Indians are honoring, humility, giving, gratitude, and having a vision for future generations. This is a way of life that is in harmony with all forms of life: other people, future generations, animals, birds, insects, trees and plants, rocks and the earth, sky, sun and moon. We are connected to all these other aspects of Creation. All of Creation are worthy of Honor because we all share a common kinship within the Hoop of Life.

Honoring, is acting with deep caring, respect and compassion toward our selves and for all other beings on the planet, for future generations, and for the earth. We are a part of it all. For Native peoples honoring is central to our way of life and our ceremonies. We have traditions, prophecies, stories and songs about the Honor Way and honoring.

My research has been through oral tradition with Elders, Medicine People, teachers, leaders and artists for over 45 years. Since I was a child, I was always asking them questions like, *Why aren't people nice to each other?* and *What's missing to build a life we love in a world we love to live in?*: In almost every conversation that I remember, HONOR was mentioned as what was missing.

The Elders said that in the modern world they noticed that the Honor Way was not used. They noticed a lack of Honor for our selves, for women, for Mother Earth, for animals, for plants, for each other, for Elders, for relationships and for treaties and promises. There is a lack of Honor when personal, political, and business decisions are made that do not consider the well being of present and future generations. There is a lack of Honor for individual and religious rights of others. It has been said that this country was formed to allow people to worship in their own ways without persecution, yet the right to openly practice Native spirituality and ways only came in 1976, with the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

For Native people one of the deepest wounds is lack of Honor. Having experienced the devastation of Native peoples first hand, I saw how often we implode rather than explode. Rather than attack another, in our humiliation and shame we tend to destroy ourselves. I have been told that since Honor has been missing for our people, that drugs and alcohol are being used to fill the void.

I was taught that one way to live the Honor Way is through living your passion, and that the door to your spirit is through your deepest pain or your greatest joy. One way to know your life's purpose is to find your deepest pain, or your greatest joy, and there you will find what is missing for the world... this can become your purpose and passion. This Lack of Honor in the world is the source of my deepest pain, so following the Honor Way became my focus, my mission and passion, and is my joy.

I practice bringing Honor back to All My Relations, to myself, to my dreams and my visions. Yet, Honor and honoring is such an intangible formless concept, that I wondered for a long time, *How could this Honoring Way be returned to all people?* Then I remembered, and many will still remember the prophecy, *One day there will be a generation that will see mother earth suffering but especially when they see their children suffering. It is that generation that will return honor; not just for the Native peoples but also for all two-legged.* It was evident to all of us that the Mother Earth needed our help, and we could see the suffering of our children. This made me think that maybe WE are the generation that the ones of long ago spoke about, who will return to the Honor Way.

Eventually the idea of having Honor Day as a recognized holiday came into focus. Honor Day preserves the Native American Indian value of Honor, inviting all people, faiths, cultures and traditions to share the Honor Way. A holiday that includes the Native American Indian Way of Honoring would inspire all people in the same way as holidays of Martin Luther King Day, Kwanza and Christmas do. Many efforts over the years have been made to have a recognized National Native Indian day with no lasting results from the federal government. When I asked the elders about how best to make this happen they advised me, *The government is not the nation, the people are. Go to the people.* That is why we are asking people to sign petitions to make Honor Day a recognized annual holiday.

I thought it would take a powerful Indian leader to lead the way to restoring honor. I spoke with many highly prominent Indian leaders about creating Honor Day. They encouraged me to lead the way. This is where I pondered my plight. I did not see myself as a powerful person. I am an artist and it is the job of the artist to articulate what is in the soul. I pressed on. I took comparative religions classes and noticed how often God speaks to the people who are not in positions of power- like the shepherd in the field. I could see that regular people with powerful ideas can make big changes in the world. I began to see my lack of a powerful position was an obstacle only if I allowed it to be. So I followed my dream.

Native tradition taught me that a dream is transformed into physical reality by speaking it to the hearts of others in a large gathering, meeting or event. If the dream is meant to have wings it will fly. On January 22, 2000 there was a Treaty Day play held at the Lummi Indian Nation near Bellingham, Washington, USA. There were hundreds of people present. Gathering all the courage I could, I stood before the people and delivered my message suggesting, Maybe WE are the generation that the ones of long ago talked about, who would return the Honor Way to Humanity! I proposed that we hold an annual Honor Day Circle Ceremony, which would be *A gift from Native America, transforming the world, by invitation, through the Honor Way*. This was the first step toward a federally recognized Holiday.

The first Honor Day was held at the Lummi Nation in 2000 on August 20; the date chosen because it is the birthday of the "Miracle", the sacred White Buffalo Calf. Honoring circles can be created any day of the year. Everyone's support of Honor Day and the Honor Way is awe-inspiring. It is so strong that today many, many people now observe it, and are honoring everyday. Individuals, families, groups, and communities are joining us in making history by making their circles and reporting back to us. We have reports of Honor Day circles being observed in Poland, England, France, Greece, Sweden, Russia, and Canada. We vision 10,000 circles around the world. People tell us that have been deeply moved and strengthened by Honor Day and the act of honoring.

By sharing the Honor Way through ceremonies, we are bringing best traditions and values from the ancient ones of Native America for present and future generations. Together we are changing the dynamics of the world - bringing positive actions, values, and inspiration.

When we Honor the Spirit of Place of Mother Earth, and each other, then we can use the skills, gifts, and talents of humanity in a good way to solve the many tasks needed to give our children a safe future that they will love.

Written by Kathryn Donald as told by Silversong Belcourt, Honor Day Founder
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Silversong writes: Dedicated to my mother, Anne Larson, nee Desjarlais, (1921- 2005) who was of Cree, Blackfoot, and Scottish heritage. She is the inspiration for, and source of my work. Her deeply held feeling was that the highest calling and the best education a human being could get is through caring. Even though she had lived in boarding schools and foster homes she found and maintained a keen sense of herself. She told me, "The only opinion you need to fear is the one YOU have of yourself." She was Native, and that made her different, she saw uniqueness as holy, something that she could share with humankind. Together, as mother and daughter, the love we carried is the source of my inspiration. We shared the most intimate conversations two people can have. She had a perspective on the past, was spontaneous in the moment, while visioning that which she chose to make manifest. She was a remarkable and wise woman who gave shelter, food and clothing to many people, and gave them a reason to smile and to hope. She is always just a thought away, where expansion and creativity begin. She is reminding me that nothing is written in stone, that we all are learning about life together.