Thanksgiving from an Indigenous Perspective

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Bozho, dear listeners. I greet you in Potawatomi, the language of my tribe. I am Randy Kritkausky, an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. I am the host of this show, Indigenous Perspectives.

This episode of Indigenous Perspectives originates, not from my tribal homelands, but from N'dakinna, the un-ceded traditional territory of the Abenaki people who for thousands of years were, and still continue to be, stewards of these lands in the State of Vermont in the northeastern United States and across the Canadian border in southern Quebec Province.

I begin this show, and will begin future shows, with a territorial acknowledgement because it is important to understand where we come from, both culturally and geographically, and also because this program focuses on understanding our roots in Mother Earth and connections with our ancestors.

It is fitting that the first edition of this show appears on Thanksgiving Day, a major holiday in the United States. Today we are going to explore Native American perspectives on Thanksgiving, and more generally on *giving thanks*. By reflecting on how we give thanks, and by considering how to do this in the

spirit of Native American culture, we can share in a message of healing, as individuals and as a society.

Traditional American Thanksgiving is a time when families participate collectively in the Creation Story of the United States. This story has often been about Europeans "discovering" the New World and then heroically settling in an "*untamed"* wilderness.

Here to help us put that traditional, or mainstream, Creation Story of the United States in a new frame is today's guest on our program, Carolyn Schmidt. Welcome, Bozho, Carolyn.

Carolyn: Hello everyone. I am glad to have the opportunity to introduce you to the story of Turtle Island and Sky Woman . This creation story is part of the spiritual and cultural traditions of many Haudenosaunee and Aninishinaabe - indigenous peoples of the Eastern United States and Canada - including Randy's tribe, the Potawatomi. Randy married "out" of his tribe, as I do not have any Native American ancestry myself. However, Native American stories like this have helped me to find new perspectives on my own connection with the world of nature.

So, the story starts like this:

"A long time ago, the Sky People lived on an island that floated in the sky. One day, Sky Woman was hungry, and started digging around a good tree, looking for roots to eat. But that tree was the Tree of Life. The animals warned her not to dig around it, but she did not listen, being really hungry. Though she did not know it at the time, she was pregnant with twins. She kept on digging until she had dug a hole deep enough that it opened up into a large open space; as she leaned over to look through it, she fell through the hole.

"She fell down, down, into another world, full of water and water dwellers. The water dwellers looked up, and saw Sky Woman falling toward them. They had a consultation to decide how to respond; the geese volunteered to catch her, and they linked up their wings and caught Sky Woman gently before she hit the water. But the water creatures knew that Sky Woman could not live in their world; she needed land and earth. One of the small water creatures – in some

versions, it is a muskrat – finally succeeded in diving down to the bottom of the water and brought up some earth in her paws. Turtle offered to have this earth placed on her back; where it grew larger until it became the whole world (that is, the North American continent). We today are Sky Woman's descendants. We live on Turtle Island, the gift to us of Turtle, Muskrat, Geese and all the other creatures who helped Sky Woman to survive."

That's the end of this brief version of the story.

There are lovely maps of North American re-drawn in the form of a Turtle. For me, the wisdom of this creation story is that it shows, dramatically, how we two-legged are connected with, and depend on, the good will of our non-human kin. It also highlights the respect paid to women as the carriers of life.

Randy: Isn't the story of Turtle Island's creation about interdependence? Is it also a call for gratitude? If so, how do Native Americans acknowledge the gift of this creation?

Carolyn: Gratitude and thankfulness for what Turtle Island provides us are not acts reserved for once a year celebration on a "Thanksgiving Day".

As for feeling connected more deeply to the world of nature, the Potawatomi, Randy's tribe, have a "Song of Gratitude to the Morning" that can be sung every morning, facing the East as the sun comes up. I'm going to read you a few of the phrases that show the degree to which Native Americans continually remind themselves to express gratitude: in the first phrase, listen for the root "migwetch" which means "give thanks"

And I quote:

"emigwetchyan ngom; emigwetchyan ngom; emigwetchyan, emigwetchyan" - *"as I give thanks today, as I give thanks"*

"ebgednegadeyan ngom, ebgedneegadeyan ngom, ebgednegadeyan, ebgednegadeyan," "as I offer this song today, as I offer this song"

For the song and the translation, I give credit to Justin Nealy of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, who has been working for years to learn, teach and revive Potawatomi language use.

I want to point out that the "Morning Song" not only expresses gratitude, it positions the singer to have a positive attitude as they start their new day. This kind of celebration, connecting with the natural world and the present moment, is woven into the fabric of daily life in many indigenous worldviews.

Randy: How prevalent is such ceremonial gratitude among Native Americans?

Carolyn: In another example, the Haudenosaunee have their "Thanksgiving Address", offered before every ceremony or gathering, that offers thanks for all creation on Turtle Island, who are viewed as our kin – I'm going to read part of it now:

GREETINGS AND THANKS

to each other as people,

to the earth

mother of all

greetings and thanks,

to all the waters

waterfalls and rain

rivers and oceans

greetings and thanks,

to all the

fish life

greetings and thanks,

to the grains and greens

beans and berries

as one we send thanks

to food plants,

to medicine herbs

of the world

and their keepers

greetings and thanks,

to all animals

and their teachings

greetings and thanks,

to the trees

for shelter and shade

fruit and beauty

greetings and thanks,

to all birds

large and small

joyful greetings and thanks….

I'd like to credit Syracuse Cultural Workers and the Onondaga Nation for the version I just read from.

Randy: So, were the prayers your first introduction to feeling a sense of kinship with nature?

Carolyn: I remember some of this feeling of the animals, trees and insects as being my "kin", back to when I was a child, before I learned not to express it to

others. For me, learning about the Indian beliefs is helping me to re-connect to that part of myself that I had thought I had lost.

Randy: Thanks for illustrating what is really the core of Native American spiritual connections with Mother Earth, with the Natural World. Are there contrasting images of nature and humans role in the natural world that you grew up with, and bring into your adult life?

Carolyn: As a child growing up in a family of mixed English-Scots-German descent, we celebrated the traditional American Thanksgiving every year. In addition to the turkey, cranberries and pumpkin pie, our family had a rather unique tradition of our own, that made Thanksgiving quite special to me. Every Thanksgiving, just before the Thanksgiving feast, my father would read aloud an excerpt from Pilgrim William Bradford's journal of the events of 1620, called "The Desolate Wilderness", which The Wall Street Journal, my father's favorite newspaper, prints every year as its lead editorial for Thanksgiving Day. Even today, I can still hear my father's voice reading it.

So when our own daughter was about 8 years old, I decided it was time to introduce "The Desolate Wilderness" to her, to share part of my heritage from my birth family.

So, here is a part of "The Desolate Wilderness" for you, today, in the context of this program, starting from when the English Pilgrims left Holland in their little ship, for the ocean voyage to the "New World" that none of them had ever seen.

- and I quote:

" Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation, they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor. It is recorded as a mercy to the shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them, were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise.

"And for the season, it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast.

"Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men – and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not….If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world."

End of quotation!

What was my husband's and daughter's reaction when I was well into reading "The Desolate Wilderness to them, with the candles burning on the table next to the turkey waiting to be carved? They progressed from grimaces and head-shakes to finally saying, "STOP!!! THIS IS AWFUL!!!!" So I stopped. It was quite a memorable Thanksgiving moment.

I realized that over the years, I had been so accustomed to empathizing with the story from the European settlers' perspective that I had also been accustomed to pushing aside consideration of the Indians' viewpoint, let alone the consequences that the European view of North America as "a hideous and desolate wilderness" would have for the treatment of the environment.

This was an early step in my "awakening" to how much the mainstream perspective I grew up with had left out all the viewpoints and civilization of the people already living on "Turtle Island".

I guess there are two "take-aways" that I want to share with you from all this. First, is the beauty of the story of Sky Woman and Turtle Island, reminding us to be grateful to and care for our kin in the natural world. Second is the reality that mainstream society does not emphasize this awareness, or these responsibilities. We have to re-learn them.

Randy: So, here we are in 2020, one year away from marking the 400th anniversary of the event that Thanksgiving commemorates, a feast in 1621, and there is real confusion, as well as opportunities to start anew.

Here is what we do know about the history. The first, 1621 Thanksgiving was a gathering of colonists who arrived in New England in 1620 and Native Americans, the Wampanoag, who occupied the land settlers essentially squatted on. The feast was a harvest festival organized by English colonists. From the colonists perspective the celebration was one of expressing unusual gratitude as their first year in the New World had been very difficult. Many colonists had died of hunger and disease. More would have perished, perhaps the entire colony, had not the Wampanoag shown the settlers how to grow food in the new land and how to hunt and gather wild edibles. The traditional story describes a one day feast to which the Wampanoag were invited as thanks for their assistance. There is no mention of the settlers expressing gratitude to Mother Earth for the bounty she provided.

The Desolate Wilderness and Sky Women and Turtle Island stories that Carolyn told document how very different the world views were for all gathered at the first Thanksgiving in 1621.

For today's program, we are going to stay focused on a theme of giving thanks, connecting with kin, and healing. These are themes that resonate round the world struggling with Covid-19 and as so many of us socially distance and are unable to gather, face to face. Under such circumstances, it is truly ironic that you, our listeners, have invited a complete stranger, an Indian, into your homes, when you may be unable to gather with all of your own family members.

As your guest on this day, I bring a humble gift. It is not a traditional bottle of wine or some home-made pie created for the occasion. I bring, or more accurately pass along a gift of understanding that was recently given to me. I pass that gift along in the spirit of "pay it forward".

So, let me try to share with you an indigenous perspective on re-connecting with kin, which may be especially important in times of Covid-19 social distancing. I will begin by referring to the prayers that Carolyn read.

They reflect a view of creatures in the natural world as our kin. We Native Americans refer to birds as "the winged ones", plants as "the rooted ones", animals as "the four legged" and ourselves as "the two legged". For Native Americans there is no hierarchy of living creatures. We are all equals on Turtle Island. And we are all interdependent.

Consequently, we have obligations to respect and provide for one another: the two legged and the four legged, and winged and rooted ones. Even if we hunt one another, we do so with respect, and take only what we need, always offering gratitude for a life given so that we may survive. We also pause to express gratitude to the rooted ones for the bounty they give when we go into the vegetable garden. That is the essence of this Thanksgiving day, and it is a point where both indigenous and mainstream culture share a common value. At least on one day.

Carolyn, you are actually better at this than I. Can you explain what you do when you go into the garden?

Carolyn: Well, I try to be aware that I'm doing something that involves other living beings that are my rooted kin, and I usually say, I'll sing very quietly to myself or under my breath, some phrases of the morning song, or sometimes I say part of an Ojibwe prayer I learned, which is

Boozhoo, ,n'dinawae maganog - That's "greetings, all my relatives," stressing that those plants are also my relatives just to show them I'm appreciative of what they're sharing with me. That's it.

Randy: Thanks, I'm often really grateful to you for reminding me what I should be doing sometimes more diligently, and it's a mindset that we have to be very self conscious about.

So, there's more here going on than just showing gratitude toward nature.

Not only is our spiritual health at stake, but also our physical health. There is a growing body of research documenting the psychological and physiological benefits of being more “nature connected”.

We humans have an innate desire to maintain nature connectedness. The term “biophilia” refers to this need. In the absence of opportunities to feel connections with nature, we may suffer “nature deficit disorders”, including anxiety and depression. In Japan, treatment for Nature Deficit Disorders in highly urbanized areas includes “forest bathing”, encouraging urban residents to take extended walks in or meditate in parks or more remote wild areas.

By contrast, Native American societies evolved for millennia, perhaps 30 thousand years, in a context of unspoiled nature. We were born connected to and embedded in nature.

That began to come to an end when European settlers forced indigenous people off of their lands and relocated them. My own tribe originally occupied woodlands of the upper Midwest, specifically near Chicago, which is by the way a Potawatomi word for wild onions. We were then forced to move to prairie lands, and then some of us were relocated again onto Oklahoma desert and arid grasslands. I am sure that my ancestors experienced nature deficit disorders as their entire culture and survival skill set had developed over eons in woodlands and near lakes and rivers.

This program and my future program guests are going to examine how our indigenous cultures have struggled to hold onto our nature connectedness and how we are working to recover it where it was nearly extinguished. I think that such experience may help us in contemporary mainstream societies to find our way back home, to being more nature connected. And in so doing we may be able to heal the planet by healing ourselves.

After our first break I will give you one example of how becoming reconnected happens. It is a story from my own life. I will share with you my tale of connecting with Coy-Wolf, a very special hybrid inhabiting the meadowlands and forests near our home here in Vermont.

Segment 2

In this segment of the program I'm going to pick up on the theme of intimate and grateful connections with our cousins - our kin in the natural world

For many in the mainstream this is both intriguing and perplexing.

It's intriguing I think because many of us like to imagine having a spiritual experience like an Indian. On the other hand, the topic is perplexing because while such experiences are acknowledged as a normal part of the lives of indigenous people, connecting with the spirits of the four-legged or the winged ones is a topic that's sometimes almost taboo in mainstream life.

For example we find ourselves asking questions like, how will family members, friends and colleagues at work react if you tell them that you just connected with the spirit of a wolf!

So it turns out I wrote my book, "Without Reservation", in large part to give people permission to have such experiences and to share such experiences. Let me dig a little deeper into this and explain with a personal story.

What I'm about to tell you is how one event became an important chapter in my recent life and how that became an important chapter in my book and indeed is the cover on the book, with a Coy-Wolf. So when I wrote the chapter in the book called "What Coy-Wolf Taught Me", I was recording an encounter that literally had just happened in my brain - in my mind - as I was dreaming and woke up in the middle of the night.

Carolyn and I had been watching a TV program on Native Americans and it was an educational program but it was in many ways really quite stressful for me because it was about Native American history which is sometimes sad and gloomy, and it was about Native Americans struggling for resilience and to hanging on to parts of their culture and I kept asking myself, "Are we really disappearing or are we hanging on?"

And it got to the point when it was so stressful we decided to go downstairs, play some cards and get away from the TV.

And no sooner had we dealt out the cards, then all of a sudden we heard howls. I mean wolf-type howls and this is the middle of the winter and the

house is buttoned up but the sound is coming in through the walls and the windows.

And it really, I have to say, shocked me.

And I went to bed thinking , "what's going on, like the coy-wolves around the house are trying to tell me something." But I didn't know what.

In the middle of the night I woke up- it was one of those wonderful aha moments - and I realized that the Coy-Wolf - which in this part of Vermont is a hybrid, half coyote and half wolf - was reminding me that it is OK to be a hybrid.

It's OK to be part something and part something else. It's OK to be part English - French, and part Native American.

But most importantly what Coy-Wolf was bringing to me was a message of how we can find strength in being hybrids and not being "a pureblood something " - which is pretty much an illusion in most cases anyway.

So what I felt comfortable with is literally my own skin and recognizing that my mixed blood, my mixed genetics, my mixed culture is a gift, and it's also a powerful survival strategy not just for the Coy-Wolf, who's an incredible survivor, but for me and my people and maybe for all of us as we struggle to find our way to protecting this planet.

So I wondered if the visitation of the Coy-Wolf was just a coincidence? and I went outside and sure enough, in the snow there were tracks all around the house, circling the house, closer than I'd ever seen before.

And Coy-Wolf continues to return. We sleep on a screened-in porch here in Vermont most of the year and the Coy-Wolves howl wonderfully at night. And not just Coy-Wolf, but Owl. And the word we have for Owl is Koo-koo-o-koo, because the sound the owl makes is "Koo-koo-o-koo."

So these visitations have occurred when I needed affirmation of an insight or a thought that I was wrestling with.

But the main point I think of my story at this moment is how others reacted to my telling them this tale.

And the first moment came at a gathering, sort of a dinner party, and people said, "So Randy what are you doing?" And I volunteered that I was writing a book, and they said, "what about", and I told them the Coy-Wolf story that I just told you , wondering if people were going to step back thinking I'm slightly crazy, or wondering what was going on.

It was wonderful, they leaned in, and they smiled, their body language got comfortable, they were spellbound. And then they began to volunteer – some of them – that they too had such an experience once or twice or occasionally and then they said very often to me, "I wish I could allow myself to have such experiences more" Or, "I wish I had them often".

And then I began to realize why I needed to write a book, why I needed to put this down on paper.

I wanted to give people permission to go there where I was going

I wanted to give them permission to feel what I was feeling, to have those intimate connections with our kin - the wild creatures in the forests and the meadows.

And I now write and I now speak hoping that I can be an advocate for people getting comfortable doing exactly that.

I'll give you just one more brief anecdote to show you that it isn't just me.

In a meeting here in Vermont just a couple of years ago, over lunch I met a farmer, who I'd never met before, who was one of the speakers, and out of the clear blue he volunteered that the previous day he had been bringing in firewood to do as we do in Vermont, get it under cover, and he said to me, holding his cup of coffee with his jaw hanging open, he said

"I don't know what happened yesterday but I was standing there with this armload of wood and all of a sudden, I was seeing the world through the eyes of the tree. This had never happened before. I don't know how long I was

standing there, maybe it was a split second or maybe it was a minute or several minutes, but I saw the world through the eyes of a tree." And we had a brief discussion about trying to hold on to such experiences, but he was still staggering the day after, trying to come to terms with his intimate connection with nature.

So I think the take-away from this, and this little segment of our program, is that unlike the "Desolate Wilderness", the wilderness is not desolate. You know, it's a rich source of inspiration awaiting our embrace and if we have the courage and conviction and desire it will embrace us in return.

That's what I think Native Americans have to offer and I think that's a great Thanksgiving gift of Native Americans for this day.

In the next segment we'll actually return to this question of how we might begin to come to terms with our own issues and our own challenges of spiritual awakening to our kin.

Segment 3

Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives, I am your host Randy Kritkausky, and if at some point you're interested in further exploring the issues we're discussing here today, you can always go to my website which is randykritkausky.com, and you'll find information there on these very topics following up on today's program.

So we're going to get back with our guest, Carolyn Schmidt, today and try to share with you some of the issues and challenges and rewards we've confronted in our own awakening to spiritual connections with the forest that's here around our house.

So we thought it would be nice to give some very clear guidance on takeaways that are practical, so one of the things I want to suggest is that listeners might consider coming up with their own territorial acknowledgment as part of a Thanksgiving Day celebration? Your school, your church, your organization, your government body might want to do the same thing.

It's common across many parts of Canada and becoming common in many universities here in the United States, and it should not be intimidating. I'm going to leave some guidance about how to find out who the indigenous people were in your land, on my website, and you can always log on and get a little how-to for this particular step. But what a neat way of, I think, kind of reconfiguring Thanksgiving celebration, beginning it with a territorial acknowledgment.

So, that's one suggestion. And Carolyn I think is going to help give her perspective on feeling comfortable with opening up to what's going on out there in the garden and in the forest. So Carolyn, why don't you help us out here?

Carolyn: OK, well I've really made a conscious effort over the last couple of years to try to incorporate on a daily basis, just for my own sort of centering and emotional well being, a sense of connection with the world of nature in particular, instead of feeling disconnected.

And I've tried different things, some sort of like a more scheduled process. For quite a while I was singing the Morning Song every morning right after I had my first cup of coffee, and that was working wonderfully for me. I even did that, I was in a hotel in New York City and I even did it quietly to myself at the breakfast buffet early in the morning. Unfortunately I fell out of that habit, and it started seeming a little bit artificial, I don't know - frankly I'd like to get back into it.

Also to me anything being outdoors, just trying to look and appreciate whatever is out there, whether it's a leaf or a caterpillar or you know, just whatever of our natural kin happens to be there - just to sort of stop and be aware of their presence and their value. And I've found that if I can feel safe - as in nobody's judging me, and also nobody's – I'm not feeling pressured to respond to anybody else's emotional worries - if I can sort of focus on how I can establish a feeling of connection with these other beings. It's comforting to me. I don't know if they feel anything, I'd like to think they feel something, I don't know, but it definitely has been helpful for me.

I've had to be very conscious and aware, because this is not something I grew up with, it's something I grew up having sort of squashed out of me, and trying to recover as an adult. It's a bit of a longer haul. I don't know, Randy, how much that answered your question?

Randy I think it begins to and I've always valued and appreciated your honesty on this, because one of the issues that we're dealing with here is enabling people to go there.

And it's easy for a Native American to talk about these experiences, but it's just so much harder for someone in the mainstream, and one of my worst fears is that listeners and people who read my book and people who read about Native Americans will say that it's really cool that Native Americans can do that, have the experiences with nature, and go on vision quests, but it's not for me. And that puts Native Americans on a pedestal, and it's dangerous being on a pedestal.

And although I don't expect everyone who's not a Native American to have the kind of experiences I've had, and certainly not to connect with my ancestors, I do feel that we all have this capacity to connect very deeply and intimately with nature, and you mentioned reaching out and not knowing if they're responding, but you and I have seen people on our own lands who will touch a tree and feel very very strongly that the tree is saying "It's maple sap time; I'm good for it", or " it's maple sap time, and not this year for me."

We don't hear voices, we don't understand tree talk, it's just a feeling, a deep feeling and a conviction

So, are you there yet or are you moving in that direction?

Carolyn Well, sometimes I feel that, and when I feel it, I really know it. And other times I feel like I'm doing my best and that's all I can do. But every now and then there does feel - I do feel a sense of kinship coming at me, usually more from a tree than from any other life-form, to be honest.

Another thing that I'm trying to do which may seem like a very circuitous path, but I figured partly because of the Covid restrictions on - can't travel

anyplace, can't interact with people in a normal way - I signed up for an online course through the University of Alberta, it's called Bugs 101. I always loved insects, and if you grow up in a large city, insects are one of the life-forms you're most likely to see up close.

I'm learning a lot about insects – I mean, it's a fantastic course. And I'm so - because so much of it is videos and pictures, there's no human scale, so you're seeing these – they're looking huge. I'm learning not only respect and awe and appreciation for our insect kin, but also a certain amount of trepidation. I mean, I wouldn't want to come face to face with a praying mantis that was my own size.

So it is a bit of a re-think as to the role of humans, the two-legged, on the planet. So I think –respecting other creatures, - of course - intellectually is one thing, and the emotions are something else, but for me, they link up and they get connected, so that's been an exciting side-line for me.

Randy - Thanks. Thanks for being open about it, and on future programs I think we'll have guests who will explore this topic – it's sometimes called de-gating - taking down the gates, fences and boundaries to entering that spiritual world.

But right now we'll take a break and after the break I'm going to try to introduce myself so that people who visit this show and listen to it will have some sense of who the host is.

We'll be back in a moment.

Segment 4

Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives. I'm your host, Randy Kritkausky, and if you've been listening you might begin to wonder at some point, so, who is he, and why did he write a book and why is he talking about this?

So, let me try to fill you in a little bit.

My name, for those who are listening, is a Lithuanian name and I was adopted into a Lithuanian family. I grew up in a middle-class white suburb, so white

that I never saw people of color or Asians until my latter days in high school. I grew up in a classic middle America white suburb.

I went off to university, grateful for a stepfather who financed my education at an Ivy League university, and I got a very wonderful education. And in that education, I learned to analyze the world in secular rational empirical terms. I came out, you know, kind of white-washed, and for decades viewed everything around me as a sociologist would, that's what I was trained to be.

And then in recent years living here in Vermont things began to change, and it wasn't something that I sought, it wasn't something that I wanted or something that I had been reading about. As I try to explain in my book, it was rather spontaneous and at first kind of perplexing and jarring.

So, as I mentioned in the earlier segments, we sleep on a screened-in porch for much of the year and what I found was I was being awakened in the middle of the night, first by a Firefly - for those of you who don't know what these beautiful creatures are, they're little bugs that have a little green light that's quite bright and they fly around and blink off and on - and I was being awakened by night, I was being awakened by something like the sound of a blinking light - and of course lights don't make sounds, but - and the message I was getting when I opened my eyes was, "Wake up, Randy, we have something to tell you". And then I would hear the Coy-Wolf and then I would hear the owl.

And I started just keeping a diary of these wonderful experiences, and did it for my own self, just to have a record, and as I wrote it became more and more astounding and unbelievable.

And then some rather dramatic things happened in our lives; my mother had a stroke and came to live with us and it became apparent she was dying. And that's when things really intensified, so much so that I began quite frankly, some nights, to wonder about my own sanity. Was I hallucinating or was I suffering from some kind of stress? And I wrote to a wonderful cousin of mine, a Potawatomi elder whom I quote extensively in my book, my cousin

Barb, and said “Barb, this is what happened tonight, do you have any frame of reference for this?”

And she would patiently write back long messages explaining “oh yes, when someone is dying, koo-koo-o-koo the owl comes as a messenger.”

So when I have had these experiences I have asked myself how again I can help others to have similar experiences and to have that kind of awakening and that kind of wonder and richness in their lives. So that’s why I wrote a book, it’s to give you the listener permission and encouragement to go there and we will be having guests on future shows who have their own variations on this story.

Some of them will be Native Americans talking about re-discovering a long-lost heritage; some of them will be people like my wife who know Native Americans; and some may be people who have little or no connection whatsoever with Native American culture but have similar experiences from other spiritual traditions.

In any case, my goal is not to put Native Americans on a pedestal or ask people to awestruck by us, but to feel comfortable in their own skins.

So let me just end with one anecdote of how that message was received. When I was at a pow-wow, I met a young woman who had grown up in a household where she knew she was indigenous but she didn’t explore it with her family because it was a place where it was dangerous to be indigenous.

And she mentioned going to a basket-making class, in order to pick up some skills that are considered essentially Native American, and she had started making the basket and the teacher came over and said, ‘oh, I see you know how to do this.”

And she looked at him and said, “I do, but I don’t know how I know how to do this” And he said, “Maybe it’s an ancestral memory that you have, and that you’ve been gifted with.”

I think we all carry these memories, like Monarch butterflies that fly south and five generations later find their way back home. I think we have a bit of that in our DNA and RNA, and I think we need to and can reactivate it.

So let me sign off by saying *migwetch*, our word for "thank you" , if there's a word for the day or the program that's one you might want to learn, that's "migwetch", thank you.

I hope this broadcast has given you time and space to re-connect with your roots in Mother Earth, and with your ancestral roots. And before your busy day distracts you from this moment, I encourage you to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna, and perhaps even that of an ancestor. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment and hold onto it. And if you would be so kind, you might write to me and let me know about your experience. I'd like to know how I'm reaching people.

I can be reached at: randykritkausky@hushmail.com, that's my e-mail address. Or through my website, at randykritkausky.com, where you can also find information about my book. Thanks for tuning in, and we'll see you again on Christmas Eve.

For audio: (56 minutes)

http://www.ecologia.org/news/1.ThanksgivingNov2020.mp3

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