

Standing Rock - Beyond Tribalism



By Anna Von Reitz

Picture this. It's evening. I and an Indian Chief are out in the middle of nowhere fifty miles from the nearest cattle crossing. The only sign of civilization in the whole vast landscape is a pair of steel rails on railroad ties and we happen to be standing on them. In the near distance, about three miles away, we can see a train heading toward us and feel the very faint tremble in the rails under our feet.

We've been gossiping about life and weather and the difficulties of men and women we know, commiserating about the hardships of bringing up children, the effort to restore the buffalo herds, the beauty of the landscape in front of us, and we go on discussing these and other topics as the train makes its slow way forward.

A few minutes later the train is coming close enough to start to worry me. The faint tremble in the rails has become something more akin to an electric current, a constant strong vibration, and I can see the engine heading through the final copse of trees before it hits a straightaway stretch coming right for us.

"Ah, Chief, we should move off the tracks," I suggest mildly.

"I love to sit and listen to the birds in the early morning," he says dreamily, back turned toward the train, as if he can't see or hear it.

Okay, I play along--- nervously, one eye on the train, one eye on my friend. We continue to talk about the moon and green cheese.

Finally, the engine has broken through the trees and is headed down the straightaway, coming right toward us.

"Chief, we have to move," I say, reaching for his arm, trying to get his attention.

"We won the Battle of Little Big Horn you know," he says, refusing to look at the train.

"I know that," I say with mounting consternation, "but that doesn't matter now. We have to get off these tracks."

The rails are rumbling, practically jumping beneath our feet. The dust kicked up by the engine is rolling toward us like a cloud.

"I always wanted a Sky Burial," he says with a note of resignation. "But they won't let you do that now."

I finally realize that he isn't going to move off those tracks, so in the final few seconds before perdition, I make a mad rush at his solid bulk, hit him just right, and tumble us both over the grade, down the gravel-covered embankment, where we land with a series of thumps in the bottom of the grassy ditch lining the right -of-way with the train thundering past.

The Chief says nothing, lies there quiet and inert as a fallen log. I am up instantly, like a startled animal, watching the steel wheels meeting the steel rails only a little above my eye-level and feeling the wind and dust passing over us. Finally, after the train is gone, the Chief sits up, looking astonished.

"What did you do that for?" he asks me, half-grumpy.

"To save your life," I answer, shaking my head and examining all my scrapes and bruises.

This is a true story.

In a way, it is "the" story of more than fifty years of my work with the Native Americans--- first as a child growing up with the Winnebago, second as a young woman supporting the American Indian Movement, and now as a full fledged adult. It is still the same.

There is a clear and present problem right here and now---the train, so to speak---- in the modern world, right in front of us, but somehow so many leaders of the Native People seem trapped in a dreamland, half-past, half-vision, and all they do is stand on the train tracks, willing to die but not willing to live. And often, not willing to listen, as if they are in a trance, hearing other voices.

The pipeline coming through Standing Rock has become a symbol for them of something that it isn't. In reality, it's just a pipeline being constructed by men whose only motive is greed and the material advantages of finding the shortest distance between Point A and Point B. Like the railroad barons before them, they have no vision and no religion and no sympathy for those that do. The Natives, for their part, intellectually understand what motivates these other men, but what is really important is so obvious to them that they can't take it seriously.

You are going to destroy what you can never rebuild and never replace for the sake of a pile of paper? Or some digits on a ledger?

And so there is a stand-off: naked greed on one side versus outraged incredulity on the other, and there is absolutely no way for these two viewpoints to communicate with each other, because the pipeline barons don't believe in God or Nature, and the Natives believe in nothing else.

Both sides can speak English now, but it doesn't matter. After 500 years, the problem remains and it is still the same.

So what happens is that the pipeline barons do what the railroad barons did before them. They dance around in their courts and their title companies and they bribe

local officials and politicians, and then they call in their Pinkertons, their for-hire commercial mercenaries, and they just bulldoze through everything and everyone and get what they want at any cost.

And the Natives suffer and bleed and don't understand what is wrong with these people? Are they even people? Why is everyone else just standing deaf, dumb, and blind and not rising up and doing something to oppose this obvious evil?

The railroad men and the pipeline men just carry on. It's just a job to them. Point A to Point B. As long as someone is paying them for it, they'll do it, and they will be proud of "getting the job done"---- regardless of what the "job" costs or what it fails to do or what it destroys.

And here I sit, as I have for fifty years, listening to and hearing both sides, but neither side will listen to me. The pipeline people are blinded by greed and their own desire for whatever is expeditious for them. The Natives are blinded by their own values and refuse to deal with the train coming down on top of them.

After thinking about and dealing with it for five decades I have this to say:

1. The problem, like the train, is here and now and it does no good in this world to talk about the past, the past, the past. Sitting Bull is dead. So is General Custer. Let it go at that.
2. Realize that the Native population makes up only about 12% of the population and there is no way that the Natives are going to rule over the rest of the people. Ever.
3. Realize that the real Enemy and the only one who ever won a war, is Satan. The only way to win a war, is not to have one.

What is possible, if people flip the switch and turn their brains to "on" position, is to outsmart and outmaneuver the forces of evil and ignorance, and some of us have been pursuing that pathway for a long while.

Last November 6, 2015, new rules were established for the playing field. Native Americans can come home to the land jurisdiction of the United States. They no longer have to live or function as "United States Citizens" or "citizens of the United States". They can choose to live as free men and women and be part of the "free, sovereign, and independent people of the United States" --- North Dakotans, Wisconsinites, Texans, and so on.

Being forced to act as citizens of the United States has meant that all the Native people have been subjugated and forced to serve every whim of the federal government. That's why the oil companies and their lapdogs feel so confident in their ability to steamroll right over the Natives at Standing Rock and anyone else who is considered a citizen of the United States.

Changing their political status with respect to the United States does not remove them from the tribal roles or have any impact on their traditional culture at all, but it changes their relationship with the federal government corporations, including the "State of _____" and "County of _____" franchises of those corporations.

They are no longer presumed to be employees or dependents or chattel property belonging to these federal corporations.

So the door at long last is open for Native Americans, along with all other Americans, to take their place and have their say and be treated as people, not persons. Once they declare their political status and expatriate from the presumptions of US citizenship, they are free to stand on the land of their forefathers as free men and women.

They not only get a real say in determining where the railroads run, they get to drive some of the trains. And they can stop standing on the tracks.

The immensity of this change has yet to hit home for many Native Americans, even the top Native American leaders. Many are so indoctrinated into the Federal System they cannot yet grasp that they are heirs along with all the rest of us in something so much greater and better. They keep making reference to Federal Code, not quite understanding yet that Federal Code no longer applies to them, once they step over the line and come home to live as Americans.

I can only hope that this message gets through the fog and confusion and begins to resonate and make sense to everyone.

Many, many American Natives have served this country in time of war and hardship and done so with great gallantry and selflessness. We owe it to these men and women to honor their sacrifices and value what they gave their lives and limbs to save---- America, the actual United States, our states--- Montana State, Nevada State, Arizona State, Michigan State.

These are the states that occupy the land jurisdiction of the United States, which are our mutual beloved homelands, are what matter, what we all care about, and at the end of the day, what we all own as part of One People that belong to the land as much as the land belongs to us.

And as for the oil companies and pipeliners, I have new news for them, too. They don't get to run ramshackle over anyone or anything anymore. They don't get to claim "national security" as an excuse for greed and whatever is expeditious. They don't get to pay off a few corporate officials at the federal, state and county levels and use commercial mercenaries to overpower the will of the people.

Those days are done.

The corporations that the railroad men and the pipelines have been buying off don't actually own the land. They are just property management companies. We are the actual Landlords. All of us. Together. All the free men and women of this country are the only Possessors of the land jurisdiction---- and while oil companies may have cut a deal with our Hired Help, they all still have to answer to us.

Yesterday, Federal Postal Court Judges for the Western Region arrived in Minnesota. They began the process of explaining these facts to the U.S. Marshals, federated "state" and "county" officials, federal agency personnel and everyone else who needs to know.

Please, everyone, begin the process of taking back your own power over your lives and your land. We have forged a pathway through the sea back home again. You aren't "United States Citizens" or "citizens of the United States" and you never really have been. You are American State Nationals, landlords of the states where you

were born. All those federal, state, and county officials work for you. They are your Hired Help. If they don't do the job you require of them----fire them. If they made a deal you don't like -- nix it.

They have no authority that you don't grant to them.

As a quick end run around the whole problem at Standing Rock, let me suggest that you call public meetings in the impacted counties and bring the people who are willing to stand up and renounce "federal citizenship" together. Sign your Acts of Expatriation and renew your allegiance to the actual land and soil of your birth---- the Minnesota State, not the State of Minnesota, for example--- and act as the unincorporated Body Politic of your county on the land.

Acting in that capacity, invoke your power as the actual landlords of Minnesota, and say, "Ah, Mr. Big Oil Company..... we appreciate your position and wish to counter-offer. We need an \$800 million dollar cash bond to be posted to cover initial remediation costs in case there is any damage to our soil or water. Here are the names of the local banks we want you to post the money with, and here are the names of the three people we have directly appointed to oversee all determinations regarding the existence of damage and the deployment of the funds. Also, we will be needing a transfer fee of \$10 per barrel of everything flowing through the pipeline as it enters and leaves our county. Here is the name of the independent Third Party contractor we've selected to monitor the pipeline volumes. That fee will be due and payable at the County Assessor's Office by the last day of every month. Also, we will need a PILT--- Payment in Lieu of other Taxes--- payable to the County Treasurer on the first of every month. The PILT is needed to pay of additional and improved infrastructure---roads and bridges and electrical grid extensions and airfields, as well as programs to train workers and county employees to take on additional duties related to these developments....."

Acting as the actual landlords, as American State Nationals, you can do what you like, demand what you will, for the use of your property--- and your Hired Help have no authority to interfere or contradict.

The above language is language that the railroad barons and pipeline operators understand. They will understand that if they want to cross your land, they will pay through the nose for doing so. They will understand that your right of Eminent Domain guaranteed by Article IV of the actual Constitution trumps theirs. And seeing no profit in the deal you have offered them, they will find places and people that do want to work with them and less ecologically sensitive and less sacred ground to tunnel through.

There is no need for blood to be shed at Standing Rock---no reason to stand in front of the train.

Just renounce "US citizenship" and embrace being American State Nationals. Bring the people living in the impacted counties together-- and for that, it doesn't matter if they are Ojibway or Apache or Irish or Egyptian in heritage---and do what you want to do with your land.

Sorry, Mr. Big Oil. Our employees made a mistake. They signed contracts in our behalf that they didn't really have authority to make.

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