CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Dreams as Guiding Stories Among Central Alberta Cree

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Storytelling as a teaching vehicle has a long history among aboriginal peoples. Although there is very little on storytelling in the psychological literature in the last 30 years (Trimble & Bagwell, 1995), similar to anthropologists, psychologists have noted its primacy:

> Stories and legends, long part of the oral tradition of aboriginal people in North America, are an important source of information and medium of exchange … There is respect for the wisdom of native stories. These stories reflect the values of those who carry and honor them. (Duryea & Potts, 1993; p. 387).

This sentiment is echoed in empirical research on storytelling among Natives. John-Steiner and Panofsky (1992) found that in the retelling of stories, "Native-American subjects … revealed strong cultural and tribal variations in their narratives" (p. 219). The purpose of storytelling is further brought out from a literary analysis perspective of Native written versus oral traditions. Hirsch (1988) pointed out from Silko's "Storyteller" that the trouble with writing is, "you can't go on and on the way we do when we tell stories around here" (p. 1). In his analysis of her book, he notes that writing freezes words in time and space and "does not allow the living story to change and grow" (p. 1). In another analysis of Silko's work on Native storytelling, Brown (1995) points out that these stories evolved out of a "richly textured oral tradition" and that she learned from Silko that "the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listener" (p. 174) and thus it is teaching. Native American stories essentially maintain community. "They have little of what we would call character development. Their purpose is to explain a world, not an ego" (Brown, 1995, p. 176).

Cognitive psychology has also acknowledged the primacy of storytelling, recognizing that basic cognitive representations are structured in terms of narratives. The role of stories in teaching and learning as integral to the

psychotherapeutic exchange has been receiving increasing attention. In fact, "narrative" psychotherapy can be seen as a life-story modification process:

> Order is imposed upon life by fitting experience into meaningful patterns. This is accomplished by seeing one's life and actions as part of a coherent story. Thus, therapists often involve themselves in helping clients to revise their stories about their lives (Howard, 1990; p. 199).

The concept of personal mythology extends the definition of narrative psychotherapy, bringing it closer to Aboriginal formulations of the role of story (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). According to Feinstein (1990), personal myths explain the world as well as guide the individual in their personal development and spiritual growth in the context of their culture. This combination of both culture and transcendent experience and personal history and biology as sources of such myths provides an excellent framework from which to understand the role of dreams as guiding stories among Native North Americans. According to Feinstein and Krippner, dreams are a crucial ingredient to mythological development. Among Native peoples, "dreaming is given a strong ontological priority and is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and power" (Irwin, 1994; p. 236).

Involvement with Central Alberta Cree

Before I go further in my discussion of dreams as storytelling devices among the Cree, I should explain my relationship to them. As is their custom, my academic credentials do not offer sufficient justification for such commentary. Thus I will provide this brief history of my involvement with central Alberta Cree (Gackenbach, 1992–93; Gackenbach, 1998).

My professional area of inquiry for the past twenty years has been relating the personally meaningful elements of our lives to what has been called the "transpersonal" or "spiritual" aspect. That is, to that aspect of life which somehow seems to "transcend" our daily lives yet is intimately interwoven with them. The major way in which I have approached this work is through dreams. I facilitate workshops and teach classes on dreams, do research on dreams, write books and articles on dreams, as well as work on a regular basis with my own dreams. Thus when I moved with my family to Canada it was with eager anticipation that I took a job teaching two psychology classes at a nearby Native college. I knew little about Natives but I had heard about the deep reverence with which they held dreams and the spirit. Although I was right in general in my assumption about their attitude towards dreams it has been a long haul to this validation. Simply put, being *around* Natives is not being *with* Natives.

On the first day of class at Yellowhead Tribal Council, my introduction to these remarkable people began. Normally, students try to size up the new

professor but their nervousness easily gives way to a quick, almost giddy laughter. Not so at Yellowhead Tribal Council that fall morning, about five years ago. Thirty somber faces greeted me. I would NOT say they were rejecting or angry so much as withdrawn into a firm "we'll see" stance. After two solid hours I finally got a hardy belly laugh from them. Never has the laughter of a group of students been so appreciated by me.

In the ensuing years I have become increasingly involved with Canadian Aboriginal people. My first contact was as teacher. Over the last five years I have taught primarily Cree, but also Ojibway and Blackfoot, in two all Native settings: Yellowhead Tribal Council and Blue Quills Native Colleges, in central Alberta. Each serves as an educational setting for treaty status Native peoples from the dozen surrounding reservations. Dreams play a central role in all of my relationships with these people.

I have also become involved with Natives in Alberta, as a dreamworker and personally. As a dreamworker I conduct workshops on dreams with a Cree dream counselor/shaman. I am also conducting research on various cultural differences related to dreams. Furthermore, I have recently finished a book about the death of a Cree woman for whom dreams played an important role. Personally I have become deeply involved with the extended family of the Cree woman with whom I do workshops and I am living with a Cree man. Finally, on a deeply personal level my own dreams have shown a marked increase in animal, Native, and elder imagery.

Over the past five years I have been increasingly developing range and depth in my involvement with Natives and dreams. This also has a social action aspect. On the surface, helping to educate Natives to better their life circumstances and/or more personally helping Native friends certainly "count" as social action, but I have two specific social action goals in my professional and personal involvements.

First, I am aware that I am in a position to reaffirm the value of the dream and indeed the value of many of the traditional spiritual teachings for the Natives with whom I come into contact. In my role as teacher, with a doctorate in psychology, they listen to me when I talk about the science of dreams, and about altered and higher states of consciousness which I integrate with standard psychological concepts. My teaching often serves as a stamp of approval from the white society which encourages them to appreciate some of the truly beautiful traditional teachings. I do not presume to tell them anything about the specifics of their traditions. Rather I speak simply of the scientific and clinical work on these states of being, emphasizing my belief that my culture was, and is, simply wrong in dismissing or minimizing them.

Secondly, in "hanging out" with Indians I have realized that the naive idealism of spiritual seekers is as one-sided and prejudiced as the "dirty drunk" stereotypes which are quite alive in Canada. Thus, in my writing about Native peoples and in my work with them I strive for a middle ground integrating their peaks and

pains. Another aspect of this middle ground goal is to demystify whites in their eyes, again from the same extreme stereotypes. Before I return to my discussion of dreams as storytelling devices among the Cree: I want to be very clear that although this work is extremely gratifying it has also been quite painful. Living and working with peoples who are in the midst of a culture-wide recovery from the prejudice, addiction, violence, and abuse which has come to characterize too much of their existence takes its toll on the friend/helper. But perhaps as a Cree elder once told me, "We can only teach through our suffering." The bottom line is I am not Native American, rather I am a participant/observer of contemporary Native American life in Alberta.

In this paper I will first talk about how differences in ontologies can account for the storytelling/guiding differences that dreams hold for Native peoples. I will then review empirical research supporting the observations I have made, and finally, consider the clinical implications.

Cultural Distinctions in the Nature of Reality

Distinctions between dream and waking realities held in the dominant culture of North America are not accurate nor productive when trying to fathom Native American dreaming. Irwin (1994) points out that for the Plains Indian:

> … the distinction between waking and dreaming is dissolved and, in the developed dreamer, becomes an awareness of conscious merging with the visionary realm. The visionary experiences the world as a radically transformed environment whose ecological structures become wholly mythic and superordinate. Reasoning may be regarded as a spiritual activity, thought and analysis as creative efforts; but to epitomize reason as expressive of the highest or best in human functioning is a culturally defined bias (p. 237).

It isn't just that Native peoples use dreams more as stories than non-Natives, rather it is that dreams for them are more present as lived experiences in another realm which then serve to guide. Let me further illustrate from part of a story I have just completed telling in book form (Gackenbach, 1996) about a Canadian Native woman who died four years ago at age forty-nine.

Raised in a dysfunctional family and repeating the pattern in her adult life, Crow Woman became involved in the recovery movement through individual and group work and successfully recovered from alcoholism and drug addiction. She herself became a counselor to other Natives. The hundreds of people at her funeral and the constant stream of visitors during her last weeks attested to the success of her personal efforts at helping other Natives to recover from their own histories of addiction, violence, and abuse.

At the time she was diagnosed with cancer, she was deeply committed to her culture's traditional beliefs and practices. Despite a grim prognosis, she rejected surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy as culturally inconsistent. Instead she immediately turned to the "Old Man," an eighty-two-year-old shaman who speaks six Native languages. She lived with his family, fasting, using poultices and herbal/root remedies the Old Man prepared, and taking sweats to purge the cancer from her body.

The paradox of her finally attaining psychological health along with profound spiritual transcendence experiences at the time her physical body disintegrated was the ground work for a powerful teaching story among the family, which they agreed to share with me and readers of my book.

Because of the sensitivity of the Cree for dreams and their belief that dreams are the "place" where one receives "visits" from those who have passed on, Crow Woman has continued to be a major influence in the lives of those close to her. Her messages are not always welcome or immediately understood but their impact is clearly due to the beliefs of those who experience these dreams. Here are two examples of how the Native episteme around dreams of Crow Woman drove subsequent action.

When Crow Woman's cousin, Jessy, went to sleep she was feverish to the point of being almost delirious. When she woke the dream was vivid and compelling. In it Crow Woman told her distant cousin to sit down, "There are some messages I have to tell you that you have to pass on to people." Jessy was reluctant but Crow Woman insisted. When Jessy woke she thought, "I am not doing this." When I asked this young Native woman what her was resistance was about, Jessy said the messages were like Crow Woman, straight forward and direct. Jessy also felt, why me? She and Crow Woman did not get along well before Crow Woman died, and despite being a family member, Jessy was new to the family dynamics, having been raised in another province. So when she asked Crow Woman in the dream, "why me" it was "because I know you will tell them."

Then Crow Woman told her cousin the messages. One was for the Old Man's Wife, who was an elder herself to which this heavy-set Cree woman, replied, "There is no way I can tell Jen that." The grandfathers were telling Crow Woman that Jen had to heal her psychological garbage before she could represent them in the teachings. If she didn't, the people would have a hard time hearing the true teachings. It was a lot for a young Native woman to pass on to an elder.

Then Crow Woman told Jessy, "You know you've got one coming too." Jessy mumbled, "Yea, I kind of figured I did." Her message was that Jessy had to get over her pettiness. "You have a lot of work to do and we don't have time for you to be petty." "It just hit me like a sledge hammer" Jessy said. Although she knew she was capable of being petty, she had worked very hard to hide those inner thoughts from others. It was a deeply secret part of herself. In fact, when Jessy told me I too was surprised, as I had known her well for almost four years and

pettiness was the last thing I would have thought about Jessy. It was indeed well hidden.

Jessy's reaction to what Crow Woman said is indicative of the perception that is widely spread in Crow Woman's family. The dream comes from out there and is NOT simply internal unresolved personal issues. With my western scientific hat, I might say, "Of course Crow Woman knew about your pettiness because it was your dream thus it was simply you telling yourself about yourself." But to say that to Jessy or to any of the family members about many, if not all, of their dream experiences of Crow Woman would be to strip them of their meaning, source, and importance. As I conducted the interviews for this book I gradually found it easier to think of their experiences as somehow "other-worldly." It is clear to me that this view of "reality" is one that I struggle with sharing, yet deeply respect.

About three years after Crow Woman died her eldest son, Wil, and his common-law wife Carla separated. Carla and their children had moved to a downstairs apartment. At twenty-eight-years of age, this tall young man is not only good looking and well built but he has a personal presence that makes many a woman's head turn, which may have been instrumental in their separation.

A day after the separation Wil had a powerful dream of his mother. The room where Wil slept seemed so empty without the baby's crib and the other things that make a home with children seem so much like a home. He had taken in a roommate who slept in the same room. The roommate liked to sleep with the window open and Wil felt quite cold that night as he fell asleep.

He dreamed that he was with his mother and his older sister, Shelly. There "was only us three through that whole dream and we were quite simply having fun." He continued, "I can remember us joking around, having fun, actually being happy. It's nothing I felt before." He wished he had written it down but the thing that stood out the most for him was how "happy, really, really, happy" they were. "It was like she was alive, it wasn't now, it wasn't like it was before. It was like it [would have been] now [and Mom and] Shelly were with me and we were having fun. It wasn't something that has to be explained. We were close." It was a "sign for me that that is how it would be if she was here." Then he awoke.

"It was dark, it was cold, and it was dead silent. I felt so scared. I couldn't go to sleep. I couldn't move. It was totally different. It was like I was pulled from good to evil." He was so scared that he could not sleep. So he got up and went downstairs to his wife's apartment. "I went into the bedroom and I [picked up] my daughter and hugged her. Everything in that room downstairs was opposite of what it was upstairs. If you can ever understand what love feels like that was it." He cried for about ten or minute minutes while his tiny daughter stroked his head. "It was almost like my mother was saying, 'What are you doing up there, you should be downstairs with your family?' I did not try to understand why that happened or why those emotions were so strong. … It felt like she pushed me, she made me, she was there, I know she was there." He pointed out that

ordinarily he would not have gotten out of bed and sought out his wife and child because of his pride.

As with his cousin Jessy's story of a dream message from Crow Woman, Wil's story can also be easily reduced to internal psychological mechanisms interacting with previous real life events in order to create the dream. As a scientifically trained psychologist it is easy for me to use such reductionistic thinking when faced with such stories, including my own. Not only do I then stay within the accepted limits of my science but also the limits of my culture's view of reality. Yet, I would be doing Wil and Jessy a disservice if I were to approach their dreams in this fashion. Further, I would be doing both my professional and personal self a disservice.

In the case of these young Native people it wasn't the dreams *per se* that caused their actions. Rather, it was their belief about the reality of the source of the dream which resulted in the powerful impact of the dream and the actions that were subsequently taken.

Jessy could be petty and Wil knew he could be filled with too much pride. In Jessy's case it was very well hidden. If she believed that the dream was only her inner self acting on the minds play ground, she may have been impacted by it but I doubt that it would have been to the extent that it was. Jessy only told the messages after struggling for several days with whether she should, and finally, when she lost her voice, she realized she had to tell the tale.

It would have been easy to have contextualized the message of her dream with her waking rational voice in, "Well, there may be truth to these messages but I have no right to say these things to these people. I have no right to represent Crow Woman who I didn't even get along with." So too for Wil. Upon awakening, if he didn't have the belief system he had in the reality of the presence of his mother, his waking pride may have kept him in bed.

But Jessy's belief that Crow Woman came from the spirit world to deliver these messages from the grandfathers via Jessy was so deep, that by not doing it she lost her voice. Only when she began to deliver the messages did her voice return. So too, Wil's belief in the reality of the visitation caused him to take an action which resulted in the purging of some deeply held hurts as his daughter and wife looked on.

It seems to me that the power of the dream to act as a guiding story for the Cree is dependent on their beliefs in its separate ontology. In the next section I will briefly review some of the empirical research on the dream perspectives of the central Alberta Cree.

Empirical Evidence of Cree Dream Attitudes as Storytelling in Nature

Similar to Irwin, through various forms of involvement with Central Alberta Cree, several impressions concerning the orientation of these Native peoples toward dream experience have emerged. One is similar to the argument made by Irwin: Cree dreamers seem more likely than Euro-Canadians dreamers to experience their dreams as originating from other-worldly, transpersonal sources. The converse of this, which may be less familiar, is that Cree dreamers seem less likely than non-Natives to regard their dreams as providing affectively significant personal insights. If one views these as opposing domains, it might seem obvious that, if Cree dreamers often experience transpersonal dreams, they will less often experience personally insightful ones. However, as Irwin (1994) and Krippner (1990) point out, such distinctions are not consistent with Native episteme but are with Euro-North Americans. It has been shown empirically shown by Kuiken and Sikora (1993), that the reported frequency of transpersonal dreams was factorially independent of the frequency of personally significant dreams.

Research I have been conducting on the relationship between dreams and waking autobiographical incidents sheds some light on these questions by further delineating the impressions of cultural differences I have been getting as a teacher, writer, and friend (Gackenbach & Prince, 1992; Gackenbach & Kuiken, 1995). The dreams were collected as part of an in-class activity and were factor analyzed separately for Native and non-native students from two classes on developmental psychology. What seemed to distinguish the two cultures was the relationship between transpersonal and emotional/conflictual elements in the dream. Euro-Canadians associated conflicts with thinking about the dream, transpersonal elements, and NOT seeing the dream as real. In contrast the Natives associated transpersonal elements with seeing the dream as real. A *separate,* and thus unrelated factor showed an association between dream conflicts, communication attempts, and emotional expressiveness.

This story of abuse in a Native family illustrates the role of the dream as a transcendent storytelling or teaching device. DM, a middle aged Cree woman, told me of a recurrent dream she had as a child a few days before our class did a dream incubation technique. She wrote:

> The dream I had that always made me wonder is a circle of trees and a little opening where a road comes in and my mother walking on that road towards me inside that circle with a rock in the centre, a bag I put my sweet grass in after I had picked it and braided it. The part I can't understand is she disappears just before she reaches me to hold my hand

> and I wake up. Some day I would like to touch her hand in my dream to see what happens.

DM's mother died three hours after birthing her. DM was raised by her grandparents and physically abused by her grandmother who blamed DM for the death of her mother. DM hated her grandmother and was glad when she died, yet the interference of the grandmother into the connection between DM and her mother continued for DM even after her grandmother's death. She told me of a time after the death of her grandmother when she tried to contact her mother in a ceremony designed specifically for that purpose. DM explained that her grandmother came in spirit and blocked DM yet again from connecting with her mother.

DM told me after class that when she told her grandfather about her dream as a child, he said that if her mother touched her she'd die. The dream in his view represented her mother watching over DM. So because of her death and the grandmother's influence DM was never able to truly connect with or "touch" her own mother.

A few days later we did a dream incubation technique for solving problems. DM wrote:

> Last night I had been thinking and worrying about my daughter who is in an abusive situation and her boyfriend took her to Saskatoon [in a neighboring province]. He is abusing her out there.
>
> I fell asleep and I dreamt about my daughter sitting in that circle I use to sit in my own dream and I was the mother who was reaching for her hand. And when I touched her hand and she smiled, my phone woke me up and it was my daughter and she was at a police station and said she ran away from [him] and the police were going to take her to a WIN house and bring her home to me in the morning.

With my white cultural hat it seems that the recurrent dream of childhood, certainly echoed DM's distance from her mother, due primarily to the mother's death but also to the rejection of her grandmother. Yet her belief that her mother was watching over her can also be seen in this experience, and may have been part of why DM felt she was guided and protected to become the best mother she could be.

The second dream with her own daughter showed what she had achieved in her own family which was denied to her in her family of origin, that is, connection with her daughter. In DM's mind the dream experiences had their own reality, their own firmness that plainly said it all. And the "proof" of the spiritual/transpersonal nature of the experiences was that she touched her daughter's hand at the moment the phone rang. There was certainly no doubt in DM's mind about the transpersonal origin of these dreams prior to the last one with her own

daughter, it was more for my benefit that she told the last dream to me. DM knew the surrounding psychological aspects of the dreams but did *not* conceive of the dream in those terms. She always stayed very firm in her belief in the other worldliness of the source of the dreams and thus that their purpose was for guidance and affirmation.

In an analysis of North American Native dream perspectives, Irwin (1994) points out:

> It is necessary to recognize that the mythic and religious bases of Native American dreaming works through an episteme very different from the present cultural episteme of most Euroamericans and integrates a diversity of altered states into its normative paradigms of consciousness (p. 236).

As in DM's experience, the dream, according to Irwin's analysis, does not require a system of interpretation as is the case in the Euro-American dominant culture. Rather dreams for Natives are "revelatory" and framed as an transpersonal encounter with the full engagement of the senses.

In an effort to further investigate these differing perspectives on the dream as a function of culture, a colleague and I (Gackenbach & Kuiken, 1995) empirically assessed several dimensions of dream experience which differentiated between Cree and Euro-Canadian college students using a version of Kuiken and Miall's (1994) *Dream Response Questionnaire* (DRQ). Responses on the DRQ provided eight factorially independent dimensions: Affective Insight, Transcendent Dreams, Dream Discussion, Leisure Escape, Vivid Imagery, Individual Dream Style, Rejection of Expertise, and Interest in Story-line. They found that compared to Euro-Canadian students, Native students were more likely to report Transcendent Dreams and less likely to report that their dreams provided Affective Insight. The primacy of the storytelling element for Natives also emerged, Native students were more likely to engage in Dream Discussion with friends, family, or respected others and were more likely to express interest in the Story Line of dreams.

The view of dreams as stories is receiving currency in contemporary dream scholarship both in terms of the construction (States, 1994) and use in society (Stefanakis, 1995), even though it has also been pointed out that the "dream experience actually falls short of genuine metaphor and literary narrative" (Hunt, 1991, p. 235). This view has not yet filtered into the wider culture to the degree that it is seems to be present among the Cree.

Psychotherapy and Native Healing

In this section I will discuss the implications of these differing ontologies, and the role of the dream in them, for the helper working with North American Native peoples. Krippner (1990) argues that in more industrialized societies the goal of psychotherapy is to replace dysfunctional myths which are believed to

have originated from dysfunctional biological and/or environmental circumstances:

> Rarely considered are the metaphysical events that often permeate traditional healing systems [and] as a result, some diagnostic categories in other cultures do not interface with those constructed by psychotherapists in industrialized nations. (p. 182)

As Krippner goes on to point out, this clash in cultural perspectives can lead to the pathologizing of behaviors/experiences considered by Native healers to be central to their task. Although he notes that some social scientists understand that such diagnoses are ethnocentric, this type of cultural relativisim remains confined to leading-edge thinkers. Levy (1988) echoes Krippner's observations:

> ... definitions of illness and appropriate behaviors for patients and healers of an American Indian society are so at variance with those of the modern health delivery system that physicians and Indian patients become confused and exasperated. (p. 211)

For those non-Natives who actually work with Native peoples today the ambiguity inherent in diagnosing, teaching, advising, or simply befriending, which results from the clash of cultural myths, remains an ever present problem. It takes years of exposure at all levels of self to begin to appreciate the apparently subtle, yet quite important, distinctions between our different ways of being in the world. It is one thing to give intellectual lip service to the idea that we should all be sensitive to cultural relativity in our work, it is quite another to live it. This problem is made especially relevant for those of us who working with Aboriginal peoples not only because we face a very different ontology, but because we struggle with the pathos of a profoundly abused peoples. Thus, as social scientists and mental health professionals, we face the especially problematic issue of trying to help while using our models of helping which are in so many ways at odds with the basic assumptions, myths, and ontologies of Native peoples. Yet to simply reject out of hand the insights of contemporary psychology in such exchanges would be to throw the baby out with the bath water. Thus I, and so many of my colleagues from the dominant culture who teach, treat, advise, supervise, live with, nurture, and love Aboriginal peoples, struggle (Gackenbach, 1996, 1998).

Let me illustrate our dilemma. Recently a young female Cree student came to class with a black eye. Despite the violence of the night before she was determined to take the test I had scheduled for that day. In addition to admiring her tenacity in showing up despite such formidable obstacles, should I have given her the classic advice given to abused women that is derived from a highly informed body of professional literature based largely on European cultural suppositions such as "leave him and go to a safe house"? This seems too simple

even from the perspective of my own cultural myths surrounding relationship. Such relationships are complex. The bond between these partners can not be easily severed nor healed.

Having been around Native peoples I have come to recognize that the traumatic bond has an added dimension for them, that of the centrality of family and community above the needs of individual. Of course, that in no way excuses what has happened to my student, but I would be naive to underestimate the power of these family community obligations. For instance, I was told on my first day in class at one of the two Native colleges where I teach that if there is a death on the reserve I should expect a large number absence in my classes. I have taught in small communities before but I have never seen such adherence to this sort of community standard. But even to stop here in my analysis would be to reduce her experience.

There is a strong spiritual component to my student's dilemma which I could easily miss. The Native peoples I have known talk to me about a sense of destiny, of their lives being guided by the Creator, a belief that is strongly reminiscent of eastern philosophical teachings. It seems to me that among the Cree of central Alberta at least, Jung's concept of synchronicity is fully embraced and extended. Their beliefs go beyond his original idea that it is meaningful when personal psychological events occur at the same time as environmental ones. Everything, every thought, event, action, has meaning which is highly interconnected. These interconnections guide the Cree. Native "proof" require such signs of destiny. I have come to appreciate that connectivity is often an element in these personally painful lives. Not a casual aside but a central element in their existence. This is what a Native American scholar called "concentric knowing" (Brown, 1995). From Native American literature she has learned, "that it is the relation between things, between others, that is of critical importance" (p. 174). And strong in this web of relationships is the dream.

Dream Guidance Leads to a Cure

Concentric knowing in which the power of the dream to guide with it's story is illustrated by an experience in which Janet Youngchief had. Just before a diagnosis of a form of lymphoma, Janet had a dream of five heavyset Indian women with long hair. She was trying to get someplace but each stopped her and told her that they could help her. She turned away from all five and finally came to Casey, her old boyfriend. In the dream Casey took her to an elder and said that this elder would help her. When she woke up Janet was surprised by the dream, which she told her mother. A diagnosis had not yet been made.

That summer she found out she had cancer. Although she had some personal problems, Janet was a young woman in her mid-twenties, with two children and everything to look forward to ahead of her. She went to the Western doctors and they told her she needed radiation therapy. Believing in the Western way,

she let them do one round of radiation. They told her things that she could expect and things that would not happen. Apparently, she was one of the very rare individuals who had a horribly negative response to this therapy. Her body bloated and she became extremely ill. She decided she wouldn't do radiation, so she started seeing a healer from her own community. This healer and his wife did sweats and had herbal preparations for her. They tried to work with her as best they could, but finally the healer said, "I don't think that I can help you."

She was panicked because she didn't want to go back to Western medicine. She didn't know what to do when she remembered the dream about Casey. She called him at work and said, "I need to talk to you," but didn't tell him about her illness.

When she saw him, he said, "Here, this is the name of the man that you need to see." Somehow he knew whom she needed to see. The name and his phone number were already written on a piece of paper on the kitchen table.

She called the number. It was Henry, a Cree medicine man from Casey's reserve. He said, "Yes, I can help you, but you must wait." Six weeks passed and she heard nothing from Henry. Janet did nothing else during this period. She didn't go to her old healer nor did she go back to Western medicine. She waited for Henry's call. She knew that he would take care of her. She just knew. When his call finally came Henry took her to the Old Man. Although in his sixties, Henry was also a student of the Old Man's. She was taken to meet the Old Man because he had to approve the healing relationship. Janet recognized the Old Man as the one in her dream. This is an example of Indian proof, or concentric knowing, according to Native anthropologist, Carl Uriah (Personal communication, September, 1993). An element from the dream or vision must appear in waking reality as confirmation of the guidance of the dream/vision.

Henry and Janet became quite close. Henry had no children because of the Cree belief that he could pass on the cancer to them when working with sick people. Henry worked with the Old Man preparing medicines and putting them in gallon jugs. Janet was to drink two gallons a week. She went through fourteen gallons over a three-month period.

At Henry's suggestion Janet went back to her Western doctor. The doctor said there were no traces of the cancer. All of her blood counts were within normal range. He spread out her last results on the examining table and said, "See, this is where you were before, all your blood counts were way off the chart. Now look, they're all in the normal range." He advised, "I don't know what you're doing, but keep doing it." It was a scientific confirmation of the success of her therapy.

The young Aboriginal woman was totally devoted to Henry and did whatever he told her. Their special relationship was highlighted by a dream of Henry's that she should be a pipe holder, one of the highest honors given by her people. Henry cured her, although he told her: "You have to be careful. There is a weakness in your constitution and the cancer can recur."

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show through empirical research and several case examples that the dream is an important part of the storytelling tradition of central Alberta Cree. Although Kuiken and I found that the dream did not show as much affective insight among the Cree as among the Euro-Canadians, we did find that the dream offers strong personal guidance for the Cree in the form of the story it tells. The elements of storytelling, the dream, and it's separate reality were poignantly brought together with the story of Janet Youngchief.

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