

REFLECTIONS ON THE PASSING OF THE HONOURABLE JACK LAYTON

A Circle of All Nations Tribute



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

As I think about Grandfather William Commanda, I also reflect briefly on the passing of The Honourable Jack Layton. I do not do this lightly – as my father would say, *You did not play marbles with him, Romola!*

I am thinking right now about the last time Grandfather saw Jack Layton – at the Queen’s garden party at Rideau Hall – when we had the opportunity to tell him that Grandfather had smoked his pipe in prayer for his health, though we had not particularly told anybody about that (that was how Grandfather Commanda prayed for countless folk, unbeknownst to them); and of course, despite his failing health, news junkie that he was, Grandfather kept on top of the New Democratic Party’s and Jack’s personal news, and continued to remember him till the end.



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So it is intriguing to me that these two inspiring leadership voices in this country both died at dawn under the August Moon of 2011. It is also intriguing to know Jack grew up in the Hudson/Oka area, the site of the Oka struggle, and also the ancestral homeland of William Commanda's own people of the Lake of the Two Mountains, the heart of Algonquin Territory, where the Ottawa and the St Lawrence rivers meet. William, for whom, as you may know, his Indigenous language was so important, often pointed out to me that Oka, really Oga, in Algonquin, referred to the golden fish, the D'Ore, the *walleye* his people liked. (For the American link to that anecdotal fish and language thread, tune in next time!)

Jack Layton first showed up on our personal horizon at Grandfather Commanda's ninety fifth birthday celebration at the Museum of Civilization. At this point, we were pleased to introduce him to Ms. Marie Lemay, the then relatively new CEO of the National Capital Commission, and of course, we talked about the Vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island.



Jack Layton said he thought that MPP Paul Dewar would be the best person to help advance the project – and, taking the assignment on, *he* has done his bit admirably, participating in several *Circle of All Nations* activities (to better understand the implications of the vision, and reading about Tecumseh, maybe the better to understand Grandfather!) at Victoria Island, which is also in his riding, and making statements in the House of Commons to press for federal support - see

[Dewar-VI Note.htm](#)



Within his own personal circuit, Jack Layton already understood the sentiments behind *Circle of All Nations*, and its broad racial harmony and environmental stewardship tenets, but in his engagement in the First Nations National *Day of Action* in 2007 (and later, in the unified federal *Residential School Apology*), his embracing of Indigenous values was also apparent to many,

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- it was Jack Layton who first saw and pointed out the Eagles flying above the Indian Affairs concave!



Jack Layton has accomplished many agenda shifting things in his passionate career. I want to reflect for a moment on his last great accomplishment by first going back to something Grandfather Commanda noted in 2005 at a Conference with First Peoples hosted by then Prime Minister Paul Martin – He said *“We accept as a governing principle that one out of four key federal voices in this land can represent only its one constituency, and not the federation, and we have seen how dangerously close to dissolution this has drawn us, right here my doorstep. I have not been happy to see this strife and turmoil. ... In my mind, it is the Indigenous Peoples who hold the seeds for a vision of inclusion and collective sharing, respect and responsibility, and in our very existence, we serve as the glue to bond a fragile federation together. We must work together collectively for a strengthened nation.”* (Learning From A Kindergarten Dropout Book Two.)

Of course, William Commanda, not relying entirely on others, continued his own work to advance this vision. Those of you who have come to his annual *Circle of All Nations* Gatherings over the years know how many folk from all over Quebec gather there each year. Grandfather has said, *I do not vote; I never have* – I think he told Prime Minister Trudeau that; but it is noted that many of his friends do. And they have been making *his* presence known and felt in his home province; thanks to the unceasing efforts of Daniel Gagne, William’s Uncle Gabriel, the founder of Val d’Or, is now known by the accepted family name, Commanda; the University du Quebec/Outaouais is presenting Grandfather with his second honorary doctorate degree – *docteur*

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honoris causa; and Ota Hora, Mayor of Kazabajou, and long time friend of Grandfather's, told me NDP MP Matthew Ravnat, and maybe others, were at the June 21 Pipe Ceremony at Victoria Island this year; and apparently several NDP representatives were at his funeral too.

No direct connect, perhaps, but a definite energy shift in Quebec politics was achieved by the Honourable Jack Layton, not inconsistent with the seeds planted by Grandfather.



Many will note that we are living in times of prophecy and unprecedented change; *Beacoup Megwetch* inspirational, hard working leaders like Jack Layton and William Commanda, who motivate us and convince us we can attain both personal heights and great depths to our souls by embracing Mother Earth and the communal good.

On behalf of Grandfather William Commanda's *Circle of All Nations*, we extend our deep sympathy and respect to the family, friends and colleagues of a truly remarkable Canadian leader, the Honourable Jack Layton.

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