

## MARK LIPMAN's 2016 REFLECTION ON THE CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS AND GRANDFATHER WILLIAM COMMANDA

In 2005, a young man called us from Boston, querying whether we had a hospital nearby the site of Grandfather Commanda's annual Circle of All Nations Gathering – I learned that he had a serious leg ailment, and I discouraged him from coming to our remote location to camp out on the land. Nonetheless, he arrived, determined to follow the energy that was driving his quest for life and meaning – he was only 23 then. He engaged, played guitar for the elders, and returned home, strengthened by his experiences at our most unusual gatherings. His health permitted or drove him to return again in 2010.



Over the years, he kept me posted on his life and creativity, and he sent us his music and art work.



In November 2016, Mark sent me this message, to share with Circle of All Nations:  
*Hi all, I wanted to share this story that I wrote about my time in Maniwaki in 2010 and the lessons I learned from my journey there and back. It's been a long time coming, but writing this was really helpful for me, and I hope that helpfulness is conveyed to the reader in some way or another. I don't consider myself a wordsmith, but I tried to do my best to capture the story. I'm happy to hear any reflections. MARK LIPMAN*

**Reflections:**

Circle of All Nations Gathering  
Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg  
Maniwaki, Quebec  
August, 2010

When I woke up that morning  
In a tent I had borrowed  
And would never give back  
It was as if I had crossed over  
The threshold, my body  
Still whole,  
And, remarkably,  
still.

The drumming—

**Thoom thoom thoom**  
**Thoom thoom thoom**

--a call to the feast of this new life  
I was beginning.  
As my new body rose from my  
second-hand chrysalis,  
A memory began to forge *itself* in the silken flames  
Of *my* self.  
It pierced me, carving out a petroglyph  
Of a butterfly  
Black with crescent moon eye-wings  
Delicately treading the ashy remnants of a fire

I have never been happier to start the day.

The fog was rolling in over the lake, just as I had remembered--  
Like residue on cheeks and backs of hands after the mourning  
Of a past that we left behind somewhere in last night's sleep.  
The man was warming his buffalo skin drum over the fire  
Speaking with words he had caught in the silent, cool respirations of Dawn  
He then sang in a voice I could not have imagined, because it was free

**Meegwe-eh-eh-eh-eh-etch**  
**Heya heya he-eya hey hey-ya heya ho**

Later, I waited in a line to meet the one  
For whom everyone came  
The man who had taken on the seemingly unbearable task  
Of welcoming to his own home the descendants  
Of the people who had committed such atrocities  
on the bodies, hearts and spirits of his ancestors that to witness them  
would split the souls of the descendants of  
those white men in two, permanently.

I waited in line to meet the one who welcomed us,  
called us forward, and gave us what he coined  
“Lessons from a kindergarten drop-out”

I remember being tired to the point of feeling  
Worried about waiting so long.  
In my turn, I sat on the folding chair provided  
I customarily offered things I hoped he would like  
Jasmine tea  
Fresh, ripe peaches  
To which he giggled and oo-ed like a little child  
It was a moment I almost missed,  
Soaked in the burden I had also carried  
a thousand miles and twenty-five relatively short years  
To drop at his old, tired feet

With all my lack of understanding,  
Grandfather took me seriously  
In my desire for a second chance  
And, breaking our gaze,  
looking somewhere off to the horizon  
For longer than I was comfortable  
Then speaking as if it were one of the hardest lessons there was  
For a Grandfather such as himself to bestow

### **Sometimes the journey is the healing**

I gathered up my burden and walked away,  
Spilling it along the reservation dirt and grass  
Trying to recalibrate my desires  
As of then, unaware of the gift he had given me

In the afternoon, he spoke to the gathering  
Of the imminence of now  
Of responsibility, possibility  
The role of us all in the Seventh Fire  
At the end of his address, he asked us,

### **How will you treat the Earth when I am gone?**

The butterfly leapt from the ashes and circled around me,  
I heard a question that he never spoke out loud.

### **How will you treat me when I am gone?**

Now 35, Mark does some amazing art and music therapy work with folk coping with severe mental health challenges. They are inpatient psychiatric patients with eating and personality disorders, substance abuse, mood disorders, trauma, suicidality, and psychosis; as he puts it, the people are basically dealing with a good amount of spiritual and physical suffering. He works as an Expressive Therapist and Licensed Mental Health Clinician; he teaches songwriting to patients, and has a small private practice with elders in dementia care using music therapy. He told me about the use of psycho drama to address suicidal and homicidal ideation; and he told me how much he was learning from a Cherokee Indigenous healer/medical doctor/storyteller therapist, Lewis Mehl-Meldrona, founder of the Coyote Institute. In just a few conversations, I have learned so much from him!

Mark Lipman, like our other young gathering friend, Adrian Esposito, a young man with Aspergers Syndrome, searched out Indigenous peoples on their challenging journeys – Adrian is now an award winning documentary producer, and his video, *Inner Healing: Journey with Native Trees of Knowledge*, is a remarkable testament to the power of Indigenous healing strategies. ([www.espocinema.com](http://www.espocinema.com)). Circle of All Nations conducted a workshop based on this documentary in 2015. His work is the subject of a separate report.

You may recall that over the past few years, *Circle of All Nations* has been talking about the mental health challenges, post traumatic stress disorder, suicide, hatred etc that are besetting us at every turn: amongst public school kids, public servants, emergency interveners (ambulance drivers, police), armed forces, old age homes (staff and patients), prisoners, politicians - the list goes on. Thank goodness Grandfather Commanda inspired our young friends to forge their own unique healing journeys – they have broken new trails for us, to a future of hope.

And as our friends share their stories with us, they assert that Grandfather Commanda's work and inspiration is still relevant to them – and they keep his global eco peace community “encore vivant!” and EVOLVING!

So proud of you, Mark Lipman, and thanks for reminding us that, indeed, sometimes, as Grandfather Commanada pointed out, *The Journey is the Healing* [marklipmanmusic.com](http://marklipmanmusic.com)