

Standing Rock: “No more, no further, without going through us.”

Brian O’Keefe

January 8, 2017

When I pulled into the entrance gate to Oceti Sakowin (Standing Rock camp), I swear something determined my final stop. (I am not spiritual but am seriously into righteousness.) I took an immediate right after clearing camp security (no drugs, alcohol or weapons!) and stopped at the first Army tent that I saw. The stars and stripes flew upside down, a flag of the Cheyenne River Sioux above it. The “right” place.

Each morning, with the sunrise through my little windows, and the Missouri river beyond, a tribal elder and his drum and chant; a song of peace at the sacred fire greeted me. Camp members would attend a prayer circle at the fire and the day would then begin.

Directly opposite the tent that Oscar High Elk of the Cheyenne River Tribe “administered”, for lack of a better term, on November 8th, I decided this was the place to drop the donations of food, clothing, money and gift cards and to offer my services. I would never then nor now question that choice.

The donations were graciously accepted and, as I was to find out later in far greater degree, so was I. Many of the group at the tent were immediate or removed family of Oscar’s but I found out that the idea of family is far different from our traditional “white American” concept.

After a week of helping with material runs, spending the donated gift cards and cash at Lowe’s, Home Depot and Wal-Mart, interacting with the camp at large (including, unfortunately, the incredible medical area, for pneumonia-a very common malady with whispers of aerosols sprayed from the ever present overflight, day and night of an unmarked plane).

The camp was not only an incredible and unprecedented amalgamation of indigenous peoples as has never been seen but also thousands of sympathetic and empathetic non-native persons. Many were young and eager. Something I have witnessed as to be lacking here in Santa Fe. It’s not to say that there are not engaged younger persons in town but they are not nearly as visible in any demonstration I have witnessed. Most supported efforts to stop DAPL but realized that there was a greater cause; the causes of equality, dignity, environment and rights of all as opposed to the rights of the (corporate) few. The rights of all to say to the powers that be, “no more, no further without going through us”.

The camp was an illustration of peaceful anarchy in action. There were few broad organizational efforts. Messages of the day were taped to the doors of the port-a-potties, announced at the

sacred fire or passed on by word of mouth. None were compelled in any way to look for a “job” around camp but all of the niches were filled nonetheless. The Legal Collective “appeared” as did the medical tents and practitioners from MDs, massage therapists, psychologists and more. Water was delivered daily to 2 thousand gallon tanks and was free to all. Donated food was prepared in volunteer facilities hot, free meals prepared daily. Donated firewood was trucked in, bucked and split and stockpiled. A total experience and connection unlike I’d ever known and one that I can see scaled up to larger communities.

After my brutal arrest at an action, Oscar’s clan adopted me as an elder and as a warrior. I was called uncle and grandfather and talking with other elders, such as Vivian High Elk, became much more open and easy. Perhaps that was more me than anything but it did and has stayed with me. It will for the remainder of my life.

I will be returning with very mixed feelings soon to face felony charges that are completely specious but The Legal Collective has been extremely helpful though they are not allowed to practice in North Dakota as they are not barred. They have petitioned the ND Supreme Court for the right to represent arrestees as the state is far overwhelmed and is producing terrible attorneys and the number of unbiased attorneys is few and far between. It seems that a change of venue would be warranted but that is a large legal hurdle. I am still seeking representation.

Over 500 arrestees are in the hands of the state of North Dakota. I am only one. A 63-year-old disabled man with an over developed sense of right and justice in this world. Or is it?

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