

“What Being Indian Means To Me”
by Corrine Ardoin

Being Indian, Native American, First Nations, whatever label you wish to use, to me, is being a person whose identity, whose sense of place, whose very soulful awareness is derived from the natural landscape, the culture and community, that part of the Earth where I live. It is an awareness that includes the Earth and the Earth's soul and its sense of place, its being within the universe, to the point where the awareness of myself is an awareness of the whole, and to speak of the Earth, its rivers and its trees, its bears, coyotes, birds, and oceans, is to speak of myself. We are inseparable, so that, when I am sad and angry, I am speaking for the Earth. I am its voice. This is the very essence of being human, which is why all the various indigenous clans, tribes, and nations of the world call themselves, “The People.” We are the People of the Earth, one facet of the whole of Creation. We are Creation. We are its voice.

You see bumper stickers that read: “While we have grown in technology, we have not grown in humanity.” From the days of early Romans and Greeks, the seeds of what so-called advanced civilizations call democracy, there arose Western civilization, the conquerors, the invaders, the war machines, the weaponry, the advancements in medicine and science, the consumerism, the freeways, the shopping centers, and housing developments, fashion, celebrity-ism, cars, air pollution, clearing of rainforests, junk food, addiction to sex, to drugs, to alcohol, Christianity, Fundamentalism, stretch limos, billionaires, conglomerates, bankers, housing market collapse, financial collapse, bankruptcy, environmental degradation, pornography, child abuse, sex slave trade, DVD's, MP3's, flat screen, wide screen, high-definition, high-efficiency, global warming, acid rain, climate change, .org, .com, hotmail, hot pants, hotter sex, 5 billion, 6 billion, 6.7 billion, melting polar ice caps. What is the Earth saying now? Western civilization, from its beginnings in Roman and Greek times, is now reaching its end. It is not sustainable. It has become a culture of death, a culture of fear.

What is the Earth saying now? Are people listening? Some have forgotten how. They have lost their way. They have lost their connection to the Earth. They have lost their soul. They have become separate from the Earth. And, in their quest to reconnect, to retrieve their souls, their humanity, they slowly awaken and seek out those who have not forgotten, the clans and the tribes, the nations of the world whose healing ceremonies, songs, dances, wisdom, and prayer are given freely. It has always been free, because *it's not about money*. It has never been. To me, being Indian is about Soul and Spirit, the Earth's soul, my soul, the Earth's spirit, my spirit. One. We are One.

For all people to become One with the Earth, to regain their humanity, their soulfulness, their truth, their true purpose, they must delve within themselves for that place that existed before the seeds of democracy, of the Western World, were planted. It is a place of dreams, caves with painted images, a place where they re-discover the Earth is a living being and that the trees speak and are people, too, the waters speak. The stones, the very stones, the fire they gaze at on the full moon, speak to them, have life, and teach them. That is the place where they must begin, with themselves.

This is what I say to them: “Follow those winding trails within yourself. Listen to the animals that you meet along the way, for they are your guides. Track the luminous threads of your truth to those places within you that have not been conquered and enslaved. Find out why you are who you are and why you were born. This you must do alone. The rest, you have all the People of the Earth to help you with, because, along the way, you will come to realize that you are a person of this Earth, as well. Welcome Home.