



We are all Indigenous to Mother Earth

by Belinda Brown, Monday, March 8th 2021

Born in a small hospital in the northeastern California county of Modoc, I was destined to be an orphan for a short period of time.

My parents were Wauseka Brown and Julia Ann Forrest, citizens of the Ajumawi-Atsuge Nation of the Hewise, Kosealekte, Astarawi and Atwamsini Bands, and my father was also Gidutikad. My mother's mother, Manuelita Griego, was Isleta Pueblo.

Landing in an amazing home with loving adopted parents in 1960, seven days after I was born, my life has been greatly blessed. I was raised in Alturas, California. My father and my real grandfather, my mother's father, were close friends who worked and hunted together.

My living environment as a child was an oasis and refuge for what my life could have been had I not been adopted and protected from the multi-generational trauma of my parents, who suffered from separation of families in the boarding-school era.

Struggling with my aboriginal roots has always been a challenge regarding my genetic memories and DNA. Those dreams and visions and understanding of how to respond to what was in my soul and spirit was a real great mystery to me until I came in contact with a family of Christians who assisted me in understanding what emotional and spiritual awareness was. This awakening came to me in my late teens, and a reckoning with my responsibility as a human being to love, honor and respect others began a lifetime of public service. This included raising eight children.

Many times I responded to the discrimination of my children in the public school and other systems of coercion of the mind, soul and spirit. Harmful policies and overt and covert racism exist, and especially against the aboriginal people.

Even in the recent emergence of Black, Indigenous and people of color, and recognition of atrocities committed against people who are different, it is still hard for the dominant government and populations to admit "America's family secret," which is the active

domestic terrorism and genocide still being enacted on the original aborigines of "America."

I am enrolled as a member of the Kosealekte Band of the Ajumawi-Atsuge Nation, otherwise known as the Pit River Tribe. The name Pit River comes as a derogatory name from the pits our people dug to capture big game coming to the river for a drink. We are also called the "digger" Indians, because our women dug roots for subsistence. There are currently 79 adult members in our band. This constitutes an endangered species in biological terms.

We are still entrenched in battle against the federal government and their attacks on our air, water, groundwater, minerals, fish, wildlife and our sacred sites. Our people, who are called "Iss" in our language, which means "the people," are suffering chronic diseases due to the impact of removing us from a nomadic and subsistence lifestyle where we could gather, grow and live off the land and drink the water. Our river, which is called "Ah Joom," is one of the source water systems in California that has been under "attack" since European contact and impact. The only arena we have left to fight for our people and our way of life is in the courts. Thus it is now important to hire lawyers who know how to win our water, mineral, air, sacred site and land cases for jurisdictional preferences and cultural beneficial and subsistence uses for our people.

"Healing of the nations for the hearts of the people" has been my mantra, and I believe that we are all indigenous to a part of land on the globe, and we all have our songs, stories, drumming and dancing societies. Mik Jun Ah Wee Hah Dah Chee Tih Kah Dee Dut ee (We are the children of the heart of Mother Earth).

The current land acknowledgment adopted by the city of Ashland is a necessary step in respecting the ancestors whose blood and bones we walk on, and whose prayers cover us in our time on this Earth, and for the generations coming. Hats off to Ashland leadership and the support of the community in Ashland to enact healing and reconciliation on behalf of the aboriginal and Indigenous relatives who are still here.

Belinda Brown is Lomakatsi's tribal partnership director, working closely with Lomakatsi's executive director and staff leadership to serve tribal communities in their efforts to restore forests and watersheds on tribal trust and ancestral lands. She serves as a community liaison, engaging with tribal elders, tribal councils, cultural resource monitors and tribal department staff. She also works to establish and promote effective working relationships among the tribal community. See <https://lomakatsi.org/belinda-read-more/>