

JANICE WILSEY

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On Sept. 23, 1949 I was born in a very small town in Northern Ca. I spent the first seven years of my life on an Indian reservation called Round Valley in Mendocino County, Calif. My people had been relocated in this area at the time of the California Gold Rush. They were herded like cattle by the soldiers, 2,000 survivors of several tribes were put into this stockade in remote Round Valley.

My grandmother told me stories of how her mother, as a little girl, made the long walk. She said that the nights were cold and the mountains were high. The older people who could not make it or just needed to sit for a minute or two along the path were shot and left to die. This was only the beginning of much suffering. Another story told to me by my grandmother was how a young girl from the Wylackie tribe watched as her father, brother and all the men of the tribe were lined up and shot all at once. The people built a fire with the trees and bush that these men had been cutting for days, not knowing that it was their own funeral pyre they were fixing. She said the fire was big and the smell of the burning bodies made your hair rise on the back of your neck and the smell made you sick to your stomach.

It did not take the white man long before he moved into this valley and formed a town called Covelo. Along with the town he built five bar rooms to sell the alcohol that he brought with him. I will always remember the five bar rooms and two stories that made up this town. What a place to grow up!

Both my mother and father were born and grew up on the reservation and like every child they were taken away, I call it kidnapped- from their parents and sent away to an Indian boarding school. They could not speak their own language and they only saw their parents on holidays and the summer time; now this is very hard on a young child. In fact there are many cases of children who ran away time after time, sometimes traveling many miles over many states only to be returned once again to the boarding school. A lot of times there were as many as 5-6 suicides during a school term. This was the life on an Indian confined to a plot of land with nothing to look forward to. Even at the boarding school there were guards to keep you within the school.

I will always remember the look on my mom's face when I said I wanted to spend a couple of summer months at an Indian boarding school called Sherman Institute in Southern Calif. She made it clear that she did not want me to go, because the thought of it only brought her pain. In the early '50's a law was passed that Calif. Indian children did not have to go away to boarding school but would go to the public school system. To this day Indian children in many states are forcefully taken away from their parents and sent to these schools. My mom let me go after my dad spoke up and said I should be able to go if that was what I wanted.

Sherman Institute was named after General Sherman who went through Southern Calif. killing off any Indian tribe that got in his way. What an insult to name the school after such a man. This to me only added more salt to the wound. The two months that I spent at this school I will never forget. We were all given a talk as to what time we were to be in the dorm, for bed checks were at 9 o'clock. It had been some time since my bedtime had been that early! I hated the rules and you can bet I broke many of them while there those two months.

It was sad. In fact I cried many times when I thought of the other Indian children, all my age, who never had a water fight or even thought of staying up after the lights were to be out, running up and down the halls yelling and screaming. To me it was what any young person would do to have fun. But I soon found out that these young people my own race and age were so much oppressed that they did not know how to express themselves. I was withdrawn to a great extent, but to find other Indian children who were far more withdrawn than I was heartbreaking.

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I went home from this summer a little more aware of the world around me. I also had another burden of guilt that I did not want to deal with. My dad was put in a Vet hospital because the alcohol he had been drinking for years was beginning to have its effect. One morning he woke up to discover that he could not get out of bed, he was paralyzed in his lower part of his body and he had no use of his hands. I don't think I can ever tell the pain I had to endure watching my dad who once was a very proud man, deteriorate day by day.

It was not long after my dad became paralyzed that both my brothers started to drink heavily at a very young age. They both came to the conclusion that there was nothing in this world that they wanted and no one that gave a damn about them. By the time I was 16 my mom had tried suicide because she could not cope with the pressure of trying to keep our family together. She had been the sole supporter of the family ever since we moved off the reservation, because my dad could not get a job or keep the job- which was no fault of his own. I remember one time he said to me how proud he was of me that I could stand up in front of people and speak my mind. He always had to have a drink before he could walk into a place and ask for a job.

By the time I was 14 years old I was using drugs to escape from the unreality of life. I was told by a high school teacher that I might as well take a typing class and office machine classes because I would never achieve in college. I had a limit place on my life, I was told to forget it and don't try. Well, for the next four years I did cop out by escaping into the world of hard line drugs. Within these years I had tried suicide more than once. I felt that no one cared and if there was hope, I would never find it.

One day I heard of Jim Jones. Christine Lucientes, a friend of mine, said he as different than any teacher she had ever had and she wanted me to come with her to a night class. I went, but before I went I indulged myself with some opium which had become a daily thing with me, sometimes 4-5 times a day. At 17 years of age it helped me to forget the hurt and pain of life. I will never forget that scene as I walked into the class room that night. An Indian lady that I had known all of my life was up in front of the class leading the discussion about the life of the Indian people. She set at ease enough to get up in front of this group of people and express herself. I could not believe it and I must have stood there looking shocked for some time. Jim Jones looked my way and showed more concern for me than I could ever remember anyone showing. He said he was glad to see me and he found a seat for me to sit up front. This may seem like a small gesture to most but to me it was not. I would remember this and other things, like the fact that he made sure my friend Christine and I had a ride home after the class at night, when I was at my lowest moments a year later.

I was 18 years old and alone in the city of San Francisco, a very lonely and depressed person. It was the last part of December and a very cold day in my apartment on the fifth floor. That day I had reached a very low point. There seemed to be nothing in the way of drugs to bring me out of it. I had taken four tabs of acid and I had no relief, so then I tried some speed, which only depressed me more and I felt the only way to solve the problem was to jump out of the window. Just as I was ready to jump, I remembered the concern that had been shown to me by Jim Jones and I stopped, made a phone call to my parents who came right down to the city to pick me up. A week later I joined People's Temple.

I was at the point that I could not speak one complete sentence without forgetting what I was talking about right in the middle of what I was saying. The drugs most definitely had there effect on my brain. I was one of the first to go through the drug rehabilitation program. What a job the people had on their hands as they stayed by my side around the clock. They tried to get me to talk but I would not do it. In fact Christine, for the first few months after I had joined People's Temple, did the talking for both herself and me. Jim said that he knew I would not talk but I could sing, so the first song I sang was "My country tis of they people you're dying" in front of the whole group. It was the first time I had sung before thousands of people. At first I could never make it through the song without crying, then as time went on I was able to sing the song of my people the whole way through. Time was taken with me to guide me along, it was no easy process to bring me out of the shell that I had around me.

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Next came the fully paid college education; I had never given a thought

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to even try to go to college, for I had been told years earlier to "Forget it," in so many words. Jim encouraged me to go to college, he said I had a good mind and I could achieve. I went although I really didn't believe I could do it. I had been in school a few days when I decided that this was not what I wanted, but Jim stepped in again and wrote letters to all my professor's asking them to give me all the assistance that they could. He also told them about my life, with this I got the extra attention that I needed. I came out with a straight B average that term.

It was Dec. 1974 when I was asked if I would want to go to Guyana in South America to help build a community out of the jungle. My answer was yes I would go, I would love to go, and I must say to this day I will never regret my choice. Today almost four years later we have a city, that was once nothing but jungle and for those of us who were her first to see the jungle be cleared and the roads put in and the buildings go up one by one, there is a sense of pride that can never be replaced.

I cannot begin to tell the opportunities that this community has afforded me. One thing very important to me is the fact that 10 years ago I could not even express myself, think one clear thought much less make decisions. Today I am a coordinator and supervisor of the livestock and agricultural Dept. of Jonestown. This includes the responsibility of the orchards, bananas, nursery, field crops, chickens, pigs, cows, horses and small animals.

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