

Eulogy for Harriet Nahanee - 25 February 2007

O'Siyo Shekoli

I am writing from London, Ontario in Canada where I am a professor at the University of Western Ontario. I am of Tsalagi /Aniyunwiya [Cherokee] ancestry. I met Harriet Nahanee in 2000 when I was part of an Annual Vision Quest and Fast done in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (DTES) to bring into awareness the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the poverty, homelessness, violence, drugs and the social conditions which breeds this situation. In fact I have one Vision Quest film out and a short on another film that was presented at a conference at the University of British Columbia in October 2006. I also have footage of an interview with Harriet Nahanee at Vision Quest 2005.

In 2000 I was a Research Scholar at the University of British Columbia and met Edna Brass a Cree/Ojibwa DTES activist who introduced me to Harriet. It is with enormous sadness that we experience this loss of one of our knowledge holders, grandmothers, original speakers and women leaders.

It is outrageous that a 71 year old Aboriginal woman was arrested and sentenced to two weeks in jail for not apologising to Judge Brown for protesting the destroying of a wetlands habitat at Eagleridge Bluffs in Coast Salish territory -- she was protecting our land, our animals, our air, and our capacity to survive. This action was taken by a Judge who saw this sentence as being commensurate with other crimes when in fact Harriet was protecting the land against corporate structures that will benefit economically from the building of a grand road to the 2010 Winter Olympics. One of our important Elders and leaders from the Squamish Nation has needlessly been killed -- a 71 year old woman who had the strength to protect and to not apologize for protecting what she understands is necessary for sustaining all life and it is Aboriginal Land that was being protected.

I am writing to you because I want to emphasize that it is important at an international level and in our places where "knowledge is honoured" that we take action against such acts of genocide and colonization. The legal system must be decolonized and we must decolonize our minds so that we can save the trees, forests, plants, animals, air, water and mother earth from continued destruction.

I would be happy to send along information from Vancouver as I receive it from colleagues and friends who are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals in support of protesting against harming the land, the disrespect and violence against our Original People and the needless loss of Harriet Nahanee -- a friend, a DTES activist against the violence and murder of our sisters, a Vision Quest supporter, a protestor against harming Mother Earth.

Nykiwah

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