

No fat lifestyle for most on planet

Congratulations to ten-year-old Ben Bartlett of the George O'Neill Public School in Nipigon who won the Dr. Suzuki Award in a recent Recycling Contest. His ideas were super and commendable and so perfectly reasonable, that it makes one wonder why we couldn't all think of them for ourselves. Or, if you're an old-fashioned saving and recycling type already like yer ole Baba, it's still good to be reminded of them.

But more commendable is the young man's energy and perseverance in pursuing his objectives, especially re the pop cans. Whoeee, wish I had that much drive and push! But not only is he a most enterprising and energetic young fellow, but also an up-and-coming writer of some note. As a long time scribbler of words, was quite taken by his short essay on Born to be an Ice Cream Container." In his own vernacular, neat, very neat. At this rate we should expect to see him having his first book published at the tender age of.....?

But surely behind every gung-ho young man like this, must be a most helping, encouraging and sympathetic family in the background. One does not arrive at

Olga Landiak Kennedy

Life, According to Baba

such mature and responsible attitudes all by one's self. So, congrats. to them too for having taught him so much so far.

Now if only we could all carry on this recycling and caring-for-the-environment business a step further, and really make more of an effort in our personal lives to reduce consumption of all energy and natural resources, we'd be a long way down the road to maybe turning around our prolifigate use of such resources. I would suggest to young Ben that his next project be to see how much he could persuade his family and family friends alike to restrict the use of their cars (sing, or plural), snow machines and motor boats. And all such things which eat up gas and oil and are the greatest polluters of all.

And what about the over-use of electrical gadgets in the household? Are they all really necessary? What about a little, no, a lot more elbow grease and arm-

and-hand power? And food. Do we really need to eat so much food, and then have to diet like crazy? Doesn't make a whole lot of sense, does it? And what about all those silly fashions and fads in clothing, footwear, toys and gadgets? Do we really have to follow like unthinking sheep? What about buying to last (if anybody's making such stuff these days), and then only buying what's absolutely necessary? In fact, what about having a good hard look at our whole Canadian life-style which is gobbling and polluting like crazy.

Oh, young Ben, you've got a lifetime of projects to tackle yet. I'm afraid even Dr. Suzuki hasn't changed his life-style one twit despite his media hyped-up concern for the environment and diminishing resources. When he comes half-way down to living sans electricity, telephone, running water, furnace, inside amenities and personal transportation (Like yer ole Baba and friend-husband do here in our wilderness), then I'll really believe that

he, and all others mouthing it up out there in the media, are truly concerned.

I know, I know, everybody can't and wouldn't like to live like this, but we can sure make an effort to reduce, or completely take out, the 'fat' in our North American fat style of living. There are a heck of a lot of other people on this planet who haven't a hope in hell of coming anywhere near our affluence either in their lifetime or the lifetime of their children's children.

See how lucky you've been so far, young Ben, to live in such a country where you only have to think of reducing' instead of doing without. That's why I was



so pleased to read of your ten-year-old concern. Carry on, MacDuff!

P.S: To Editor - Dr. Suzuki has NOT been the host of "Quirks and Quarks" for quite a number of years. Jay Ingram is. Suzuki hosts "Nature of Things" on T.V.

About this column

'Baba' Olga Landiak Kennedy is an almost senior, living on 400 acres of Northwestern Ontario bushland, in McTavish Township, 35 miles east of Thunder Bay.

Olga has worked on stage, films and television, and is the author of nine adult novels, four childrens books much poetry and twenty four plays, five of which have been produced on CKPR television and one on CBC radio.

She has been writing this column for the past six months in the Nipigon-Red Rock Gazette, and looks forward to gaining many new fans in the Terrace Bay-Schreiber area, through the 'News.'

'Baba's' hard hitting writing style and "almost senior" perspective, will surely entertain you each week.

Guardian of the 'Wampum Belts'

Nelson Mandela is free. Like millions of others around the world, I watched the compelling television pictures of Mandela walking slowly from the prison in South Africa, fist raised above his head, free after being imprisoned for 26 and a half years. He's now working as a political moderate, trying to find peaceful solutions to achieving real democracy in a country poised on the brink of civil war, if the moderate solutions fail.

Half a world away, in northern Ontario, native people watched Mandela's release with pleasure. Their leaders are not behind bars, but the gulf of misunderstanding between brown and white in this country is no less as wide as the gulf between white and black in South Africa. Native people tell me the only way to bridge that gulf is to understand native history--how its not recorded in a neat book we can check out of the public library, read, and understand. Its an oral history, passed down from generation to generation.

William Commanda is the living embodiment of that oral tradition. He spoke recently at "Native History Day" at Lakehead University here in Thunder Bay. Let me take you with me to that day.

Commanda prepares for his presentation by opening up a small brown battered suitcase. He carefully unfolds a beautiful blue woven blanket. His helper for the last 23 years, Peter Decontie, spreads the blanket across the long table in front of the audience. Like priests preparing for a mass, they take out of the suitcase a large seashell, an eagle feather, and several knotted roots. Then, with great care, three beaded belts are unfolded



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by Larry Sanders



from inside protective wrapping in the suitcase, and lifted gently to a prominent place in the centre of the blanket. Once everything is ready, the purification ritual begins. Tobacco is placed inside the large seashell, and lit. Using the eagle feather as a fan, William Commanda first waves the smoke over the table, then over himself and his helper. His helper does the same to Commanda. As the smoke comes in contact with their faces, they take it in their hands like they're scooping water from a brook, and splash the smoke over their faces. Together, the two men solemnly walk around the blue cloth, purifying the table, and the audience, with the smoke waved by an eagle feather.

William Commanda has travelled from his home in Maniwaki, Quebec, to make this presentation. He's gone all over North America, whenever he's asked. But he doesn't do it for money--only travel expenses. "I don't ask for no pay whatsoever", he says, "as long as I get there, one way or the other."

William Commanda is 77 years old. His great grandparents chose him many years ago to be the guardian of the wampum belts--symbols to some, actual historical records to others--of the promises and treaties made between aboriginal people in North America and "the visitors", as Commanda calls the non-native people. The belts, according to Commanda, "have never experienced the museum. They

have always been in Indian hands". They are remarkably preserved, given their age.

The first belt Commanda displays was made in 1400--nearly a century before Christopher Columbus came to the shores of North America. It's the longest of the three, narrow, mainly purple, with beaded shapes on it that could be people or flames from a campfire. Commanda calls it "the Seven Fire belt"--portraying the history of the aboriginal people, as foretold by Commanda's ancestors nearly 500 years ago. People moving from east to west. At least two aboriginal nations wiped off the map, by the time of the arrival of the Seventh Fire. Those two nations, according to Commanda, are the Beouthuks, last seen alive in Newfoundland in the early 1800's, and the Mahicans, who disappeared from New York State by the end of the 19th century. Ominously, Commanda says the belt foretells the coming of the Eighth Fire--by the time it comes, perhaps when his grandchildren are adults--two thirds of the aboriginal people of North America will be destroyed.

The second belt was carefully woven in the 1600's with the same fire wampum beads, made from clam shells, like the other two belts. It's also purple, with three white stick figures holding hands on the right side of the belt, and a white object that looks like a cross on the left end. Because the belt pre-dates the arrival of Christian missionaries,

Commanda's helper, Peter, says the white cross-like object could be a sword, or a tree. Commanda says the three figures represent his ancestors predictions about the situation of the aboriginal people in Canada, "with French on one side, English on the other, and the Indian in between." The three figures also portray the Creator, giving life to man, and woman, and giving them instructions "how to live on this continent."

The third belt Commanda calls "the youngest of the three." It was started in 1793, and completed in 1796--the same three year period it took the British and the Americans to negotiate the Jay Treaty--drawing the line across North America to divide the United States from Canada. This third belt has the simplest design of the three--mostly purple, with a thin white line down the middle. Commanda says his ancestors designed the belt to record how the Jay Treaty promised aboriginal people "that we would pass and repass the border without any molestation whatsoever, without searches."

Commanda speaks softly, carefully choosing his words. He speaks of aboriginal nations being wiped out, promise after promise being broken, and the natural environment being despoiled. But there is no anger in his voice. Absolutely none. Speaking of all the harm done to aboriginal people over the centuries, Commanda says "All we do is ask the Creator

to forgive these people. We don't have no grudge against nobody. We still love."

Commanda spoke of the destruction of forests by hungry paper mills, and the weakening by acid rain of the power of natural medicines he makes from the roots of trees--both violations of what Commanda calls the Creator's instructions for looking after this continent. Commanda speaks of the bond that should exist between humans and the natural environment, or between the aboriginal people and the rest of North America. Those bonds are founded in the belief that we are all creatures of the same Creator--whatever we call Him or Her.

Commanda concluded his presentation with an apology. "If I have hurt any of you, whatever I have said, I didn't do it intentionally, and I ask for every forgiveness. I love every one of you." The power of Commanda's love flows out in the richness of his voice, in his smile when he greets and old friend, and in the grandfatherly manner he uses with an inquisitive young person. A very powerful kind of love, the same kind practised by Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela.

Commanda is the guardian of those three wampum belts, a shaman, and the embodiment of an oral tradition in aboriginal history which cannot be translated to paper, without losing something in the translation. I tape recorded his presentation, transcribed it, yet I still feel words alone fall hopelessly short of conveying the power of his message. Yet, if native and non-native people in this country are ever going to build bridges of love and understanding across the gulf that now divides us, we will all have to find ways to make that translation.