



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

Carl Brave Rock
Blood Reserve
Standoff, Alberta
Age 25

Blockade

In the summer of 1990, I was still getting up early Saturday mornings to watch cartoons and eat Cheerios – I was nine. The holidays had just begun and the days were beginning to get lazy. So, I just lay in bed looking up at the ceiling. *What to do on a boring July morning, or on a boring July day?* I had a lot of thinking to do.

It was only my mother and I living in a two-bedroom rez-style “Leggo” house. So, breakfast was probably waiting with mom sitting at the other end of the table, eyes closed, savoring that sip of coffee.

BOOM!

My bedroom door burst open with a rush of cold air and panic. Of all people to see on a boring morning! In rushed my agitated dad!

“Dad!” I shouted, then, “Dad?”

Excitement, then confusion overwhelmed me. I hadn’t seen this guy for about a year. What was he doing here? Did mom know about this?

“Son”, he said without looking at me, but looking about like a twitching cat. “Good to see you. Get up! I need to look under your mattress.”

“What?” I asked, “My Mattress?”

“Yes, son, hurry!”

So, I slowly got out of bed, staring at this crazy man. He flipped my mattress over and to my amazement, there lay six rifles! I knew my bed was a bit lumpy, but, then again, it was old. There were springs sticking out ready to draw blood, but guns!

“Son, I put these here yesterday, in hopes I wouldn’t have to use them. But I need them now and you’re coming with me. It’s time you became a warrior, son.”

“A warrior?” I wondered out loud.

“A warrior, son. Don’t you know what a warrior is? Goodness sakes boy, I think I’ve been gone for too long. Let’s go, your mom already knows.”

Mom already knows? That was my *day pass* to go anywhere in the world and back. I really didn’t know what this crazy man meant by *warrior*, but it sounded pretty cool when he said it, so I went.

I rode in the back of his rusty old truck, down our prairie dirt road. The air smelled fresh and the dirt smelled clean and as I looked to the right of me, there sat the rifles wrapped in an old Pendleton blanket. I couldn’t believe I slept on them and I couldn’t believe he actually put them under my mattress! To the left of me were empty beer cans with no label except for the word “beer”. I had no idea where we were going. Suddenly, after twenty minutes of dusty suspense, we came to a stop. It was the highway that leads into town.

July 11, 1990. “The Oka Crisis”. The standoff between the Native people of the Kanesatake reservation and the Québec police force erupts into gunfire and the SWAT team’s deployment of tear gas.



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The police unsuccessfully attempted to forcefully break-up the blockade, under orders of the mayor and provincial government. In the midst of the chaos, a police officer is shot in the mouth, and later dies. Both sides claim the other is responsible.

There are elders, women and children behind the stormed blockade protecting their people's sacred burial grounds.

The Québec police are fighting for the town of Oka's plan to build an 18-hole gold course on a sacred Mohawk burial site.

The town by our reserve is a small prairie town with a main street, a Dairy Queen, two banks and an old hotel with no tavern. There's a grocery store that overcharges and doesn't sell hairspray to Natives – it's just a locally – local, folksy place. The highway into and out of town was never busy at all. I guess people just didn't go anywhere.

I jumped out of the back of the pick-up, and my dad grabbed the guns. All along the highway were cars and trucks, both rusty and new, lined side by side, with only room for the doors to open up. It looked like the parking lot of a pow-wow, without the pow-wow.

My dad rushed to a congregation of bandanas, braids, leather and brown skin. I walked off with a couple of cousins to the edge of the chaos. We just watched, without many words, unable to comprehend the fury behind the chaos.

“What's going on?” I asked my cousin.

“It's a blockade”, he answered.

“Oh”, I thought for a moment, “What's that?”

“I don't know” he whispered.

The abrupt nature of this exchange left me with nothing. What were they doing? On one side was my dad with a bunch of people I recognized from the rez, even my chronically drunk uncle Jim was there! On the other side was one cop car with two obviously bored police officers just there as protocol. Then a red car pulled up. I thought there would be a problem because whoever that was, they couldn't leave. This will be good – I thought. A spry old white lady with snow-white hair popped out of the red car with a box. She happily approached the congregation of armed radicals and started handing out cookies and cake. They readily accepted, and one big scary guy in Ray-bans and a black leather vest, without a shirt, hugged her! It was a big bear hug.

Then my dad hopped onto the back of one of the trucks with a megaphone, and hollered for everyone's attention. The little white lady, the two cops, and all the gathering of Native people went silent as their eyes looked in his direction.

“People! We stand here not for ourselves, but for the progress of our people. 1874! The Indian Act is passed and we become the legal property of the Canadian government. 1920! Federal legislation makes it a law for all Native children to be placed in residential schools by the age of seven, yet some were taken as young as three! 1929! Right here in Alberta, the Sexual Sterilization Act is passed, allowing for the sterilization of at least 3500 Native young women. 1933! All native parents are forced by law to surrender their children into the custody of a residential school principal or face imprisonment. Our people have never been free...”

July 20, 1990. “The Oka Crisis Fallout”. The occupied land in dispute is no longer the main focus of the Mohawk warriors and leaders. Blockades of highways are erupting all across Indian Country. The people demand recognition as a nation alongside the proper negotiations of a recognized sovereign nation. As well, they demand an international

inquiry by the United Nations into the actions of the Canadian Federal government in it's dealings with the Native people.

The Canadian Armed Forces fight for an 18-hole golf course.

“The number of lawsuits against the church leaders running these government sanctioned schools grows to over 5000. By the year 2000, it will grow to over 10 000. This is not a democracy, this is a Canadian holocaust! And now it's over. We are here to support our people nationwide who struggle just like we do with the consequences of our past. People! We stand here not for ourselves, but for the progress of our people, for the survival of our people!”

Everybody at this pow-wow, without a pow-wow, broke out into whistles, cheers, war cries, and the honking of car horns. Then a gun shot.

BANG!

Everybody suddenly went quiet again, looking around for the shooter. A young man in the crowd sheepishly grinned and sank deep into the crowd. The cheers slowly began again, this time with a flurry of gunshots into the air alongside the joyful war cries.

My cousins and I laughed at the happy sight and began throwing rocks at the two policemen. But, we had terrible aims, and the cops were too busy clapping and whistling to notice. Even the old lady was clapping, jumping up and down like she was twenty years old.

Like the shattering of glass, a horrible scream then came from a woman, interrupting the unbridled joy. Everyone looked about, eyes wide with wonder. It was a huge pregnant woman standing in a pool of water! About ten men rushed to her aid, none



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of them were her husband. Again she screamed that horrible scream, and now the police were alarmed. They rushed to her as well.

“We could escort you ma’am”, an alarmed officer spurt, as he ran back to his cruiser.

Her ten new husbands helped her to the first vehicle they saw and off she went to the hospital with half of the people at the blockade assisting. That was pretty much the end of the blockade. Whoever that kid was, that was born that day, will sure have one good birthday story to tell.

September 26, 1990. “The Oka Crisis Ends”. Mohawk warriors surrender and put down their weapons. Upon leaving the occupation, soldiers begin arresting the Native people. Men and women, old and young, are beaten, thrown to the ground, and physically assaulted by the Canadian Armed Forces. 34 people in total are arrested.

I heard gold was therapeutic.

I was only nine and I didn’t know what we were doing, only that we had to do it. After that summer, things never went back to normal for me. However, *life* itself went back to normal. My father was gone again, and I was back in school that fall. I remember the Native people on the news that I had so identified with. They were no gone like a season of episodes on television. The road that goes into town was no longer important. Yes, life was back to its routine, but my mind was never the same. I always wondered why we were there that day, and what my father meant when he told me it was time for me to become a warrior.



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George Erasmus, an Assembly of First Nations leader, said in 1988, “We want to let you know that you are dealing with fire. We say, Canada, deal with us today because our militant leaders are already born...”