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Age 22

### **Genesis to Genocide: The Call of Grandfather Tonniataren:ton**

#### **Genesis**

The earliest memory that is engrained into my heart occurred when I was about *kaye:ri* or *wisk* years old. It's been many moons since that moment in time. Still, to this day I can remember my very first memory like it was yesterday. I try to go back to that very moment in times of strain. That amazing memory was given to me that very moment by the caring hands of my grandfather, grandmother and Creator. I will share the joy of that day with my grandchildren for the rest of their lives. This memory was the life of me.

I woke one morning to the call of a *tonniataren:ton*. I can remember standing, left hand pressed high against on the glass, looking out the window of our family cottage basking in the sunlight under the watchful eye of my grandparents. It was a beautiful day, the sun was gleaming and the sky was as blue as the lake below. The crisp clear air breezed off the lake, filling the air with essences of life. The sunny sky complimented the enchanted beauty of nature. The sun rained drops of light to the forest floor. A flying squirrel glided across the summer skyline into a hollow of a tree. A tortoise emerged upon the lake's surface embracing life outside its shell. An eagle soared beyond limitations, dancing across the clouds above.

All of a sudden there was a crash at the window. My grandfather and I rushed outside to see what smacked into the window glass. By the time I had gotten outside my grandfather had a chickadee cupped in the base of his hands. I followed my grandfather's voice, over to an enormous white pine tree. At that time, he placed the lifeless bird upon the lowest branch of the white pine tree. My grandfather told me at that moment the chickadee was his favorite bird to watch.

As the bird rejuvenated from the ledge of the white pine tree, the sacred *tonniataren:ton* started blissfully singing thunderously from the lake below. The *tonniataren:ton*'s voice of cheer echoed across the glass surface and crystal clear water of the lake, immediately gaining strength with every ripple in its crossing. The *tonniataren:ton*'s voice that day reminded me of a Native flute. As soon as the *tonniataren:ton* stopped its wild chanting, my grandmother came out and put her arm around me. At that instant the chickadee took flight once again. That amazing memory was engrained upon my heart by the hands of my grandmother, grandfather and Creator. I will forever share the joy of that very moment with my future grandchildren. For this memory was the life of me.

*This memory has been an engaging and fundamental influence in my life. This memory was my first memory for a specific reason that was unknown to me at the time of instance. It is not only a memory in my life, but also a valuable lesson in life itself. After actualizing its importance, I came to see that this memory was aided by some greater meaning. Over time the importance of this first memory became more clear and meaningful as life went on.*

*Growing up I was constantly reminded by the life lesson of that memory. Every time my grandmother sent me downstairs to get something out of the freezer, there lay a frozen bird. Each of these birds demise, were all unfortunate results of minor human imposition. Freezing the birds and carving/painting an exact wooden duplicate was my grandfather's way of giving thanks to the Creator for these intrusions of life, as he has great respect for all of Creator's children big or small. My grandfather told me that very day, the creator speaks through Mother Nature's children. That our Native ancestors were talking to us that day through the voice of the loon. Even though some of Mother Nature's children have lost their lives they are not to be forgotten. By honouring and carving an exact duplicate of each bird that just happened to die flying into the window, was just one way of giving something new life.*

## Genocide

The earliest memory that is carved into my brain occurred when I was about four or five years old. It's been many dark days since that moment in time. Still, to this day I can remember my very first memory like it was today. I try to black it out from time to time but at that very moment it plays again. That unforgettable memory was instilled upon me when I was taken from the regretful hands of my grandfather, grandmother and Creator. I will share the consequences of that day with my grandchildren for the rest of their lives. This memory was the death of me.

I woke one morning to the cry of a loon. I can remember standing, hands at my side, looking out the window of our family cottage basking in the shadows under the watchful eye of my grandparents. It was a dark rainy day, the sun was consumed by black clouds and the sky was as dark as the lake below. The damp murky air whirled off the lake, filling the air with essences of moisture. The shadowy sky deceived the inherent beauty of nature. The clouds rained drops of water to the forest floor. A black squirrel scurried across a tree stump to a place out of sight. A turtle lay upon the lake's shore fending off the threats of death by hiding in its shell. An eagle flew far away into the darkness of the clouds above.

All of a sudden there was a knock at the window. My grandfather and I rushed outside to see who knocking on the window glass. By the time I had gotten outside my grandfather had handcuffs wrapped around the wrists of his hands. I followed the Indian Agent's order, to come over and stand beside an unfamiliar tree. At that time, my grandfather fought and argued with the Indian Agent, while the entire time I stood beside the unfamiliar tree. My grandfather told the Indian Agent that I was only four years old and he had nothing to hide.

As the Indian Agent pried me away from the arms of my grandfather the Common Loon started frantically crying out loud from the lake below. The loon's cry of urgency

drifted across the rapid waves and murky waters, eventually reducing itself to a sad whimper. The loon's cry that day reminded me of a broken flute. As soon as the Indian Agent stopped his shouting, my grandmother came out and put her arm around me. At that instant I was stolen from my grandparents never to be seen again. That unforgettable memory was instilled upon me when I was taken from the hands of my grandmother, grandfather and Creator. I will forever share the pain of that very moment with my future grandchildren. For this memory was the death of me.

*The numerical day attached to that very instance will be considered to be one's instant of genocide. Throughout my study of Indian Residential Schools and the 60's scoop, this particular point was the initial step used to begin the process of displacement and assimilation. This instance was particularly traumatizing to both the child and family. This forceful removal or kidnapping of Aboriginal children from their homes and way of life was just the beginning to many of the horrors of Indian Residential Schools. For those Aboriginal parents who already attended Indian Residential School this particular moment was the most agonized and adverse fear as they knew what lied ahead for their children upon removal because they had already lived it. Women survivors particularly when recollecting their own experiences of Indian Residential Schools see the act of losing their children more prominent in psychological pain and personal importance then that of their own personal experiences that directly stemmed from the attendance at Indian Residential Schools.*

*The objective of Indian Residential Schools was to inflict the biggest harms to one's life, from the earliest moments of life. If it be the earliest moments of one's life as a grandparent, parent, sibling or grandchild, the loss of Aboriginal people's children has been part of personal devastation to their communities and families; it is scar tissue that one can not see. It is loss of language, culture, identity and family. According to Creation Story the Loon was the first to look up to see this Skywoman falling from the skies above. According to this story the Loon was the first to see the untold scars of Indian Residential Schools, but unlike Creation Story, Canada failed to hear its calling for help. Overtime*

*the Loon has called out so many times that its voice has faded to a desperate cry. This calling of Canada should act as a constant reminder that there is more to healing both the Indian Residential School legacy and the cry of the loon than a Canadian dollar. The tears of every child that attended Indian Residential Schools have been marked on the back of every loon as a reminder that Canada did not answer their calling.*