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Freedom

Maria Starr

We walk through the bush, carving trails in the ground as our feet trudge along feeling almost too heavy to lift. We can see that the trails are the remnants of trails that were once well traveled. Above us the skinny black clouds litter the blood red sky; a sight now normal to us. I can remember what real clouds looked like, the white fluffy clouds that once covered the sky when I was a child. The sky used to be blue and different shades of blue as day turned to night. Mother always taught me to give thanks each morning at daybreak for everything in creation. Thanks to Creator for giving me a new day to live, thanks for my health and my family, thanks for the shelter above my head, thanks for the food we were to eat, thanks for the animals and plants, thanks for clean air to breath and clean water to drink. Our prayers rose to the Creator on the smoke from the smudge that we lit every morning.

Now at times I wonder if all that praying was useless. The Earth is now ruined. Nothing grows from the ground because every thing was spoiled during the war. Birds no longer fly, water no longer flows, and plants no longer grow. If you would have told me this as a child, I would not have believed you. Mother always told me what the end was like. She knew that I would be the one to witness it. Now I am here in the place where she was born and raised to find make everything right.

As I walk these trails, memories of my mother come back to me. These trails were the same ones she and her sister traveled as small girls, exploring the forest. This was the place she loved. The place she wanted to see one last time before she died. Homeland. Deep in her heart, no matter how long she stayed away, this was the place she longed to be but it no longer was the magical place she described in her stories. She described long sunny summer days running through fields of tall grass, only to come to a steep cliff, below that the sandy shores of the lake. She would scale down the cliff in order to swim in the clear blue water with the fish for as long as she pleased and it was no wonder she felt right at home in the water; my family belonged to the sturgeon clan . She



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described trees of humongous stature that she could climb to the highest branch and then swing down to the earth without breaking the branch or herself for that matter. She said fruit and nuts grew on trees then and that is what she would live on in the summer.

Her father, my grandfather was the last of what could be considered traditional people. He knew the land and the seasons like he knew himself; they were one in the same. He harvested wild rice in the fall and in the summer would take the family to pick blue berries. He fished all over the land and hunted every chance he got. Not only that, mom said that the reason he was considered a traditional person was because of the way he hunted. After killing an animal he would offer a prayer of thanks to Creator for blessing him with a good hunt and also a prayer to honor the animal who gave up their life in order to feed his family. There was a certain way to do this and although there were others involved in the hunt, my grandfather would let them tend to the animal while he went into the bush by himself to offer up these prayers in the proper direction. Nothing from the animal went to waste, even though times were more modern, my grandfather would give away what meat the family would not use and bury the bones back in the forest. The hides he dried out and would hang them in his hunting shack. It was such a shame mother would always say that these secrets died along with her father. He never taught his children where to go to find the fish, wild rice or game and he never taught them any of the traditional knowledge he held. In a way it scared him too.

My grandfather had gifts that at the time he could not understand. These gifts were the ones passed down to my mother. When she told me of her gifts I could not help but shiver with fright and pray that they were not passed down to me. She called it the gift of touch. She received this gift at the age of 12, and described it as a spiritual experience where the spirit of a loved one would come to visit her before they passed away. She could always tell by the cold tingling feeling that went through her body that a spirit was present. Eventually her gift matured and she began to see spirit as well as hear them.

The importance of dreams and their significance was always an important value to her. She could interpret them as well and she amazed me as her predictions came true.



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One of the predictions that she had made is now the living reality that I am faced with. She dreamed of a crimson sky with black clouds many times. In her dream all of her immediate family is with her and they are in the bush as sirens and whistles scream by too loud to hear your own thoughts. She remembered praying in her dream that whatever was making all that noise, she hoped that it would not find her and her family for that would have truly been the end because if you don't have your family, who are you?

Your prayers should have been for me mother. My future is now on the line as this war continues. The history of man has been one of war and conquering but mom taught me that that was not our history. We were Ojibway, Anishinaabe. This was our land and would be again. That is where my chapter in the saga of the Starr family comes into play. For my family's gifts were passed down to me and became even greater than that of my mother and my grandfather. Spirit began to talk to me as I was a child but not just any spirit but the Great Spirit and He told me of His plan for me and for the entire Red Nation.

So I listened and I learned the white mans way and excelled at it, just as the Great Spirit told me to do. I too became cunning and deceitful as I made the white man believe that I was an ally. They relied on me to make peace with the rest of my people so that we could continue living harmoniously together on this land. What a crock! I remembered how my people were treated. Mom made sure that I knew the truth, that Aboriginal people were fooled into signing treaties that gave the white man title to the land. But who could own the land that the Creator had made besides Creator himself? This land was borrowed from our children was what mother would say. She explained how the white man continued to hurt our people attacking them where it hurt the most and that hurt was passed down through the generations, creating a hopeless people.

I am what the people would call an "Ogimaw" or leader. In the white mans way I earned a doctorate in Law and immersed myself within his politics. I learned their way inside and out. All my life I secretly surrounded myself with the culture and traditional ceremonies that Creator had given my people thousands of years ago. Joined with others



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dedicated to making sure the old ways never died, we formed a secret society that met once a month in the thickest part of the forest.

Using my knowledge of politics, I had helped my people by giving them the power to own and receive the profits made from the natural resources of our land. The profit earned from here just went back to the people and we educated the youth on how to maintain that power. We eventually became the top of society due to the revenue we earned and the White Man did not like this and he would not give it up without a fight. But I had him because it was by his own doing that I learned how to manipulate and spout lies to lead him to his undoing. But he still held the original treaties over our heads and that is how this war started. But this was all part of a plan that was whispered to me from somewhere above.

I used their own way against them and found a loop hole in the treaties that gave us all rights and title back in a legal and lasting way. The treaties stated that they would last for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow. The White Man has destroyed everything that is life giving and these black clouds do not let the sun shine through which means that the treaties are now voided. He has fled this place that is his own creation and we are now once again the rightful keepers of our precious Mother Earth.

That is why I am walking through the bush today. The fight and struggle that has lasted over 600 years will finally come to an end and it will not have been in vain. I carry with me the original treaties to be burned in a sacred fire but that is not all. I carry with me the gift of life; seeds that have been hidden and collected through the years and have been modified to adapt to what is left of the Earth. These seeds will grow and be fruitful becoming the life giving force that Creator intended. We will survive as we have on this land since the beginning of time. This war is now over and a new age dawns on us.

What is left of our people travel with me to begin our new and rightful roles as keepers of the earth, we are armed with the sacred teachings of old and rely on the spirits of our ancestors to teach us the ways to restore the land. We have with us others gifted with the knowledge to bring the animals back out of hiding and the knowledge of where



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to find the water. This is something that mother had always dreamed of... the day that the Anishinaabe would be free.

Author's Statement

Many times I have heard our leaders and elders say that we do not own this land but are borrowing it from our grandchildren. This is the statement that was to be the inspiration of my story. I often think of what the future would be like for my children and issues such as global warming and world wars can not be ignored as they leave little hope for belief that this world will stay intact as we remember it.

Preparing for the future is something that Aboriginal people have always done and in a way this story is my vision of the worst case scenario of the consequences to these issues that are occurring in the present but will become apart of history as time goes on; which is one of the reasons that I chose the setting of my story to be in the future.

Deep down I believe that in the hearts of all Aboriginal people we believe that one day we will be able to break free and be healed of the past in order to claim what was rightfully ours. This story speaks of that dream in a way that gives hope that we will claim everything that was lost but at the same time become a stronger people by returning to the original traditional teachings that were given to us and then guide our lives by these teachings. Some historical aspects of Aboriginal society are woven into the story such as the traditional life of living off the land, the strong belief in spirituality, the mention of the original treaties, and the value that Aboriginal people are the keepers of the earth. In a way, the main message that I was hoping to get across is that by paying attention to the things that are occurring today, we can prevent a tragedy in the future.



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I hope that the young readers of my story will be touched in some way and maybe it will give others ideas or even the desire to try to make a difference in this world.