

23 The History of a Friendship, or Some Thoughts on Becoming Allies

DOROTHY CHRISTIAN AND VICTORIA FREEMAN

This chapter consists of two separate commentaries which together reflect what we have learned about decolonization through almost 20 years of friendship. We don't offer ourselves as exemplars of a perfect relationship – far from it, as you'll see. But we want to talk about how friendship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals can be a form of alliance, how it can build or deepen our commitment to work for social change, and how powerful friendships can be in changing both parties – actually helping people to decolonize at a personal level.

Dorothy Christian

If someone had told me 20 years ago that I would be consciously building alliances with non-Native settler peoples in Canada, I would have laughed them out of the room. I am an Secwepemc/Syilk filmmaker in Canada, and much of my work focuses on how the original peoples of these lands relate to the settler governments. The question of who I am in this country is consistently determined by how I relate to, or react to, the settler cultures on my homelands.

In one of my productions for Vision TV, a Métis family has a tongue-in-cheek look at how they select their various identities as they dress in period costumes for a family photograph. They joke about a theme of stereotypes and colonizers, and one daughter, Skeena Reece, a popular Indigenous performance artist in Vancouver, made a profound statement: 'I'm just putting my issues on the table and some of them, a lot of them have to do with being Indian, and that's pretty sad because if in your life, your biggest kind of things that shaped who you are, are really negative, and from the outside, you haven't been able to explore who

you are from the inside ... so being an Indian takes up a lot of my time (laughs), and I want to free up some time so I can do some other things!' (Christian, 2000).

Skeena gives words to an indescribable obstacle I felt in reaching my full potential as a human being who happens to be 'an Indian woman' in Canada. Sadly, like Skeena, a large percentage of my time is taken up figuring out who I am on my own homelands. The paradox: this quest for identity is also what enables me to reach my full humanity. This chapter touches on my journey in taking my place on the land while reconciling my political relationship with the colonizers. On a personal level, a critical part of reaching an understanding evolved through a conscientious and conscious interaction with a thirteenth-generation North American, Victoria Freeman.

I have experienced disruptions that are familiar to many Indigenous families in Canada. My family members were forced into residential schools; my siblings and I were put into white foster homes during what is called the 1960s scoop;¹ and we have lived through poverty, alcoholism, childhood sexual abuse, and family suicides, all the debilitating social conditions that Statistics Canada reports on so regularly.

The tentacles of colonialism have touched every part of my life and have affected me in untold ways. Every rite of passage that is considered 'normal' in the stages of human development, that is, my childhood, adolescence, marriage, and giving birth, were all tainted by some aspect of the colonial relationship. An assimilation policy separated me from my brothers and sisters, which fractured our family structure. The Indian Act told me I was no longer an Indian when I married a man from the Mediterranean. The harshest and most painful experience was when I gave up my daughter for adoption because I was such a good little brown/white girl that I believed white people could do a better job of raising her. I wasted a lot of time spinning my wheels in a destructive anger.

As fate would have it, on 11 July 1990 I got a call at 4:00 a.m. and a voice said, 'The army has gone in.' Canada had mobilized its military against the Mohawks, who were under siege for 78 days while they protected their land rights. During this modern-day Indian War, the so-called Oka Crisis, I was able to use my rage by adapting my skills towards a good cause. I then had five short years to find healers to help me with my rage and post-traumatic stress syndrome, because there was another armed standoff within my own homelands, on Secwepemc territory at Gustafsen Lake in 1995. For the last 12 days of that resistance, I brought my communications skills to support the people who

were upholding Aboriginal Rights and Title while I prayed they would not be massacred.

Both these Indian Wars strengthened my identity as an Indian woman. The line between the colonizer and the colonized was definitively drawn in the ground. The Indians had decided they were not going to give one inch more; too much had been given away already. I got stronger spiritually. But emotionally I had to find healthy ways to keep myself together, and intellectually I deconstructed many things. I started by taking apart the colonial policies and practices which wreaked havoc with me and my family. I needed to understand my relationship to these people who had chosen to settle on my homelands. And I needed to be a healthy and whole human being.

I have come to see these acts of war as the result of a hardened attitude of racism and a deep denial of colonial history by the settler cultures; otherwise, how could they turn their guns on the original people of Canada? How can they deny the existence of constitutionally protected Aboriginal Rights and Title and continue to use the old argument of how Aboriginal people stop progress and development when, in fact, their interest is motivated by monetary greed?

During the so-called Oka Crisis, Victoria was a valuable ally who opened inaccessible doors for me. She worked with me to raise consciousness at the global level about the Indigenous perspective on the land rights issues, and nationally she facilitated various things to educate Canadians on how unjust the actions of their government were to the Mohawks who were standing up for all the Indigenous peoples in Canada in terms of land rights.

Even though I knew Victoria was a political ally, she was still one of the 'occupiers of my land.' I tarred Victoria with the brush of being yet another 'do-gooder white woman' who wanted to 'fix things' for me. I remembered only too well those kinds of white women from the various churches I was forced to attend during my adolescence in the white foster homes. I realize now what angered me most was intuitively knowing that implicit in the actions or words of those 'do-gooder white people' was the assumption that I was not capable of taking care of myself.

Victoria and I come from opposite ends of the social and economic spectrums of the so-called multicultural mosaic of Canada. As an Indigenous woman, I grew up in very humble surroundings on a small reserve in the interior of British Columbia. Victoria is a 13th-generation North American settler from an upper-middle-class family that is part of the political elite in Canada. Embedded in our relationship are the

power relations of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy which accentuate cultural, racial, economic, and class differences. We were the most unlikely characters to become political allies or to attempt to bring any kind of peaceful, coexisting relationship between Native and non-Native peoples in Canada.

In the ensuing years, Victoria gained some trust in the Aboriginal community and was a part of the Steering Committee of 'Beyond Survival: The Waking Dreamer Ends the Silence,' an international gathering of Indigenous artists, writers, and performers that I coordinated and fundraised for in 1993. She was the only white person on the all-Aboriginal Steering Committee. I was very grateful for her presence because she became my sounding board as I dealt with some of the complexities of Aboriginal politics.

In 1994 I moved back to my ancestral homelands and was contracted by the national multi-faith broadcaster, Vision TV, to produce mini-documentaries from an Indigenous perspective. In the meantime, Victoria published her book, *Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized America* (Freeman, 2000), and I promoted her point of view on the newsmagazine program I worked for. At the same time, I filmed an impromptu dinner party at Victoria's home, of Native and non-Native intellectuals and activists discussing the Native/non-Native relationship in Canada. In 2000 that production was part of the submission that won a Gemini Award for Vision TV in the 'Best Talk/New Information' category.

In August 2003 Victoria and I were invited to Caux, Switzerland, by the Initiatives for Change organization, which hosted a week-long conference on 'Conflict Prevention through Human Security.' We addressed 700 people from all over the world. The presentations Victoria and I made changed the energy of the conference. We spoke to peoples on both sides of the colonial coin who were attempting to build peaceful relationships through a variety of projects; however, they had never discussed the very basics of their relationship as the colonizer or the colonized. It was the first time I was outside Canada co-presenting with 'one of the occupiers of my homelands,' where I was discussing my place as an Indigenous woman within the colonial state of Canada. I was working in the context of peace, rather than war.

This was the first time I had spent so much time with Victoria. We even had to share a room. This was a tenuous situation, because I have lived alone for many years and I have a tough time being with other people for any extended period of time. In most circumstances, I make sure I have 'alone' time to rejuvenate myself emotionally and spiritually. I do not

want to offend anyone; however, my reality is that it is really hard work to be around white people, or it may be more accurate to say any peoples who are outside my cultural/spiritual psyche. By 'hard work' I mean that my mental/emotional/spiritual levels seem to reach a ceiling after four days, because I have to consistently think/feel/act with two mindsets: that of a Western-educated person and that of an Indigenous woman whose world view is diametrically opposed to Western thought. My already fragile situation was then exacerbated by a very profound experience.

I am not sure what happened during our presentation, I just know it was something very profound and very deep. Afterwards, my whole being wanted to curl up into a ball, so I escaped to our room in the castle with its auspicious history of peace-building. Although there was a heat wave in Europe that summer, I was shivering to the very depths of my being. I could not get enough blankets to warm me up. It felt like every cell in my body was being rearranged. All I wanted to do was sleep. At the same time, Victoria was busy arranging meetings for us to attend. She is good at networking, and very astute politically and socially. I am very direct in my manner of communicating, and that just does not work within the rules of engagement of high-level diplomacy.

Victoria dragged me out of bed to attend a significant luncheon with the group of young scholars who organized the conference. One of them asked me a direct question about being Indigenous in Canada, and before I had time to get my first word out, Victoria jumped in and answered for me. I was flabbergasted. I did not want to embarrass her publicly, so I kept quiet. Before the luncheon was over, she did it again! I wanted to slap her, but instead I internalized my anger and went back to our room and crawled back into bed.

The next day, another luncheon was arranged with people from the United Nations, and again Victoria dragged me out of bed. I told her to go alone but she insisted that I had to be there. After all, I was the Indian part of 'Understanding the Other!' By this time, I was getting really ticked at my companion on this alliance-building path, but I knew we had to take advantage of an audience we do not have access to in Canada.

Once we got back to our respective homes in Canada, I was at the hyper-boiling point in my anger at Victoria. We had the biggest fight of our friendship. We almost walked away from each other. One thing that Victoria Freeman and I have in our relationship is the ability to be brutally honest with each other, and neither one of us gives up very

easily. But this time we almost walked away from each other. It took us six months to sort out our issues. It was a very painful time.

I do not know when the healing process started between us. We did not consciously say, 'We are now going to heal this relationship.' We were mindful of our interactions. We acknowledged the racism we consciously or unconsciously foisted on each other. We examined the stereotypes and distorted assumptions we had about each other.

In one of our many conversations, I asked Victoria, 'Can you love this land like I do? Can you love this Earth like I do?' I pose that same question to all settler peoples. My ancestral homelands are thought of as the 'Land of Milk and Honey' by many immigrant peoples. At what point do immigrant groups take responsibility for the land they have chosen to live on? At what point do they acknowledge that the original peoples of these lands are the landlords and they are the tenants?

When referring to my relationship with the colonizers of my land, many times I apply the metaphor of an abusive relationship; that is, as a 'colonized' person I am the assumed victim, and the colonial state, including the settlers, is the offender. In an abusive relationship, the offender controls the situation with a constant threat of violence that creates a situation where both parties 'walk on eggshells' around each other because at any given moment violence may erupt.

In the dysfunctional relationship between Indigenous peoples and the settler peoples of North America, there is an undefined 'walking on eggshells' that sits between us as a 'pregnant pause' or as a very LOUD silence. I believe this is founded in the fear that Indigenous peoples want the land back, that our suppressed rage compounded over centuries will explode at any given time on any given territory (e.g., Oka, Gustafsen Lake, Ipperwash).² Settlers know that the original peoples of Canada have a birthright to our lands and any benefits from its resources. I truly believe the denial of this entitlement and the lack of integrity that the settler governments have in the colonial relationship is at the core of this fear. Settler governments know they have assumed a privilege and an entitlement to these lands; yet at the same time they deny the privilege and entitlement of the Indigenous peoples. The original peoples of these lands are forced to spend thousands of dollars in litigation to prove their place on their homelands.

In an abusive relationship, when the victim becomes healthy and finally has the power to stand up and say, 'No more,' the offender is fearful because he knows the power has shifted and he may have to change, too.

In my healing process, I consulted an Elder about the history of abuse in our family. At the end of three hours, she told me a word in our language that is conceptual. It means, 'Making Your Heart Right with the Creator.' She emphasized that our only responsibility was to the Creator and to the life we carried within ourselves, that the first priority is to make things right with ourselves, then with the Creator, and finally with our abuser. If we maintain any vestiges of victimhood and point blame outwards, this is counter-productive to any change in the abusive relationship. The Elder taught me that the highest form of responsibility is to honour the life I carry, and, in doing so, I honour my humanity.

The work of another settler woman, Jessie Sutherland, principal of the 'Worldview Strategies' website and the author of *Worldview Skills: Transforming Conflict from the Inside Out*, played a role in my personal and political transformation. Jessie's work is thorough and her perspective is global. She presents the concept of reconciliation from various perspectives, which include the Indigenous world view: 'Genuine reconciliation involves a transition from systems of domination to relationships of mutuality. Consequently, genuine reconciliation also requires a parallel process of personal and political transformation.'³

In my transformation, I have applied what Sutherland identifies as 'transcend[ing] the victim-offender cycle,' which sets up a new framework of reverence. I choose to be a sovereign, autonomous, and dignified Indigenous woman standing firmly on the land, just like my grandmother and great-grandmother did. I do not need to affirm my identity or my place on these lands 'in relation to' or 'in reaction' to the colonizers of these lands.

On a microcosmic level, my ally and dear friend Victoria Freeman co-creates a genuine reconciliation with me, which includes many ups and downs while relating in a very real way. She continues to decolonize the mindset of other settler peoples with me. We co-taught a course called, 'Can You Love the Land Like I do?' at the Interfaith Summer Institute at Simon Fraser University in August 2007. We continue to evolve and grow our colonizer/colonized relationship in our very distinct way!

However, on a macrocosmic level, the institutions and governments of the settler culture do not seem ready, willing, or able to decolonize themselves to reach a true reconciliation with the original peoples of these lands. It appears they are not prepared to 'make things right' with the Indigenous peoples of Canada, that they choose to 'maintain systems of

domination' rather than seek 'relationships of mutuality' with the Indigenous peoples.

Victoria Freeman

The best relationships call out or even demand our best selves, and I think this is certainly true of my relationship with Dorothy.

Friendship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is certainly not all that is required for decolonization. There are entrenched, systemic issues of inequality, prejudice, violence, poverty, and theft of land that will take years of political action to address. But the relationship between our peoples does not exist only on a political level; it exists on every level, including the most personal. All of us are part of this relationship; all of us make it what it is. Working things through at a personal level can prepare and strengthen us for other kinds of more public work. The tricky part is to understand what in the personal is political or social in origin.

I have to start by talking about another relationship. Many years ago, I was working with a group of women of colour to organize a women's literary conference. I was a conscientious, white, middle-class woman with good intentions and some theoretical political understanding. I understood racism as something out there in society that I was busy fighting against. One day, one woman whom I had become friends with got terribly angry at me and accused me of racist behaviour. I could not understand how she could have interpreted my actions in this way, and at first vehemently denied her accusation. When I later asked her to help me understand her reaction, she would only respond: 'It's not my job to educate white women about racism!' This angered me in turn, because how was I supposed to make amends if I didn't even know what I'd done? My protestations only enraged her further and she cut off all communication with me. She did not speak to me for 10 years.

This incident challenged everything about me, my very understanding of who I was. No matter how much I tried to deny what my friend had said, or tell myself that she had misunderstood me, what I could not deny was the pain behind her rage. That someone I knew cared for me and who I cared for was so hurt and angered by my actions that she withdrew from our friendship broke through my denial of how racism and colonialism affected not only my society and my friend, but me, and led to the painful realization that in spite of my best intentions, I too was part of that awful dynamic.

The American educator William F. Pinar wrote, 'We are what we know. We are, however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves – our history, our culture, our national identity – is defined by absences, denials and incompleteness, then our identity – both as individuals and as Americans [or as Canadians] – is fragmented.'⁴ What I didn't know was my own relationship to the history of colonization and racism in Canada, and how I had been shaped by it and continued to benefit from it. Furthermore, I had avoided knowing because I did not want to face the terrifying question of responsibility.

As I began to educate myself, I realized how racism or colonial relations could be embedded in the institutions and attitudes of a whole society; in the stories we told about our national history, in the attitudes that were passed on to me as a child. It was painful to see that even my family was part of this process. I came to accept that although I was now doing my best to decolonize my own thinking, occasionally I would probably unthinkingly do things or say things that still perpetuated these attitudes, but that I would still be a good person if I did my best to learn from these mistakes and make amends. I also came to see that I could not shake off my white privilege, no matter how hard I tried; I could not pretend I was not part of this system.

I was better prepared for working through such conflicts by the time Dorothy Christian became my friend and a colleague in promoting the work of Indigenous writers. I was intrigued by Dorothy but also nervous around her, because at the time she was often angry and confrontational with just about everybody, white or Indigenous. Although she unsettled me (which I sensed was perhaps a good thing), it seemed I could be useful to her just by listening. At this stage I was probably inordinately proud to have an Aboriginal friend, as if it proved I was an okay white person after all. But I learned a lot from our conversations: Dorothy opened a window onto Indigenous life in Canada. She talked to me about traumas in her family and community and her personal efforts to heal, as well as the difficult dynamics of various political struggles.

If soon became apparent that this was an unusual friendship. Dorothy said to me, 'Anything you want to know, just ask,' and she did answer unless the knowledge I sought was privileged information. Once, when Dorothy and the Okanagan writer Jeanette Armstrong were talking with me, I suddenly felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me, not by any aggression towards me, but simply from the power of a kind of truth I hadn't really known before. It made me aware of a deeper level of knowing than I had ever experienced, on what I might today call a

spiritual level. I had been raised an atheist, and it was puzzling to me that my spiritual awakening came through Indigenous people. I felt a deep need to learn more, and wanted to explore these issues with Dorothy. I certainly began to appreciate and respect Native culture more, but at the same time Aboriginal people were starting to talk about the appropriation of their culture and spirituality, so I wasn't sure what was open to me and what was not.

During the Oka crisis in 1990, Dorothy provided support for both the Haudenosaunee negotiators and a solidarity Peace Run by the Sylix (Okanagan) people. I assisted her by getting information out to some international organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, and by setting up a conference call so that prominent Canadian writers could speak directly to the negotiators. Perhaps my most important role was simply being there for Dorothy as she went through the agony of that summer.

Then, in 1992–93, when we were both members of the organizing committee for Beyond Survival, a conference which brought together Indigenous writers, artists, and performers from around the world, our friendship went through a major crisis. We were walking through the woods near her home one day when we passed a sweat lodge she and her partner had made. A sweat lodge is a sacred place for purification, prayer, and contact with spirits; to Indigenous people every aspect of it has deep significance. I said something about hoping that we could be in a sweat together someday, and immediately our rapport dissolved. She turned to me angrily and said: 'Our spirituality is all we have left. Will you take even that?' Suddenly I was not Victoria, her friend, but just another exploiting, stealing white person, a colonizer. She said later that what galled her was my expectation that I could go into a sweat just by virtue of knowing her, without putting in the hard work to learn and be spiritually prepared. I remember responding angrily: 'Well, I didn't ask to be born here!' and the argument escalated.

What was different this time around was that I was less defensive and she was willing and able to work through this conflict with me. We managed to keep talking. Actually, I've heard her describe it as 'yelling and screaming,' but I don't remember it that way at all – though I believe that is how it felt to her, how difficult it was for her to confront me. Eventually, after several difficult months, we were able to hear each other. In fact, what happened was we reached a far deeper place of trust with each other, which enabled us to work together in a completely different way. We learned that personal and social healing starts from telling the truth,

especially the difficult truth, and having that truth heard; that in going through a process like this together, we learn things about ourselves, each other, and our society that we wouldn't learn any other way.

That confrontation made me realize that I needed to know how and especially why my ancestors did what they did to Indigenous peoples, and what I had inherited from them. That led to seven years of research and the writing of my book, *Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America*, as well as the public education work on Native-newcomer relations I have done since then. In the process, my relationships with First Nations people improved immeasurably, partly because I learned that most of what they said about our shared history was actually true. But another important change was that I let go of an enormous guilt I had carried since I first realized that Indigenous people were the original people of this land. I saw that I was not responsible for what my ancestors had done, though I had inherited their legacy; that I was responsible only for what I did with that inheritance in the present. While I felt shame about that history, I also came to see that a lot of what I was feeling was not guilt or shame at all, but unacknowledged grief. I needed to mourn the devastation my people had wrought, all that pain and suffering and loss of life, the terrible waste of it all. Allowing myself to mourn freed me to act, because I was no longer afraid of uncovering that pain. Furthermore, my political commitment no longer came from a desire to 'help' First Nations people from some position of superiority, but from the need for all of us to decolonize, so that we can all live with integrity.

So many things came from working through this conflict. Together and with others we developed Turning Point: Native Peoples and Newcomers On-Line, a web site for dialogue and information-sharing (see Freeman, Chapter 10, this volume). Dorothy also made a video about my book and another on our relationship and intercultural dialogue.

Many years later, in August 2003, Dorothy and I went to Caux, Switzerland, to speak at an international conference on human security and conflict resolution. Our topic was 'Understanding the Other.' It was the first time we had ever shared a stage and spoken about our relationship. Something extraordinary happened that day when we spoke. This wasn't just our subjective perception, because others commented and wrote about it, too. People seemed to be very excited and very moved by our talk. I had challenged the Europeans in the audience to face the people they had colonized and to recognize the colonizer in

themselves. That had an extraordinary effect, as if they had found a way to address this aspect of themselves and their history without hating themselves. Dorothy had talked about her struggle to move beyond hating white people to recognizing that both colonizer and colonized needed healing. This changed the focus of the conference from talking about the world's problems as something 'out there' to dealing with the colonial histories of the participants themselves.⁵ Suddenly everyone was talking about colonialism, thinking about their own experience. There were people from Columbia, South Africa, India, and many other countries telling us 'your work is relevant to us,' which really surprised us, because we had only been thinking about our relationship in the context of Canada and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. I think when we spoke together we offered hope to people who had never witnessed a loving relationship between people on opposite sides of the colonizer/colonized binary.

From that incredible experience of deeply affecting other people simply by talking about our relationship, perhaps it was inevitable that immediately afterwards we would go through the biggest fight we had ever had, a conflict that reached into the deepest levels of our beings and almost resulted in our walking away from each other. There were several things I did at Caux that pushed Dorothy's buttons in ways that were very complex and challenging for me. First of all, there was her perception of how comfortable I was with my white privilege there among the hoi polloi of the UN, whereas she felt really alienated being among so many powerful white people. Worse, at a lunch we had been invited to, when someone asked about the situation of Indigenous people in Canada, I had apparently answered several questions that were directed at her, usurping her voice and speaking for her in the incredibly presumptuous and superior way that non-Aboriginal people often do. Unfortunately, I had absolutely no memory of doing this. Whatever I did was totally unconscious, which was very discouraging to me after all the years I'd spent trying to educate myself about racism. This raised a real dilemma for me; should I trust that her interpretation of my behaviour was correct, even though I had no memory of doing any of these things? In the end I decided to trust her on this, but it was very difficult to do so.

These issues became even more difficult for me when an interaction I had with someone else at the conference led Dorothy to believe I was abusing my power in relation to this person, who came from Africa. This was hugely triggering for her because of issues of abuse in her

own life and her fear that my African friend did not recognize my colonizing behaviour. I did not share her interpretation of my actions, but I also found it hard to defend myself, first of all because she knew a lot more about abuse than I did, and, secondly, as I later realized, because of unconscious guilt I carried from early childhood experiences. This guilt had nothing to do with Aboriginal people, but arose from issues of exclusion, difference, and privilege in relation to my sister, who was born with Down's Syndrome. This is where relationships between our peoples can get so complicated – as all relationships can. But between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, there is often already fear and mistrust, guilt and anger, a ready template of abuser and victim roles that can fuse with unconscious psychic wounds that we may already carry. Dorothy reinforced the critic in my mind that was already undermining my own perceptions of myself and my actions in the world – a dangerous mix.

The fact is that both of us carried elements of the abuser and the victim, to different degrees perhaps, but we both had wounds from the past that deeply affected how we interpreted each other's actions: we were both quick to attribute motives to each other's behaviour that fit into our own internal narratives. I was floored by her perceptions of my power, when I didn't feel nearly as powerful as she perceived me to be; at the same time, I was terrified by what felt like her hatred. I felt she was so angry at me that she wanted to and could annihilate me. This conflict upset us both so deeply we were unable to talk to each other for several months, and we nearly ended our relationship permanently. Each of us had to turn away from each other and take care of ourselves.

For me, then, a necessary development in our relationship was finding the courage to question her interpretations when she interpreted my behaviour solely in terms of the colonizer/colonized relationship, and attributed motives to me of wanting to colonize or wanting to be superior. At the same time I had to recognize that that was how our interaction made her feel, and that this might be the effect of my behaviour. I had to deeply question myself, but I also had to stop thinking that just because she's Aboriginal and I'm not, that she knows everything about these issues and I know nothing.

I had to say to her, 'You do not know my heart; you do not know all the reasons I do what I do. No one can know that.' I had to find a balance between listening to what she was saying about me and letting myself consider the possibility that she could see what I couldn't, at the same time honouring my own process and maintain-

ing my sense of myself as my own person. I had to stop imputing motives to her behaviour, and focus instead on what was triggering my own issues.

It helped that Dorothy wrote at one point:

Remember, DON'T TAKE ANY OF THIS PERSONALLY – we are teachers for each other ... I've always felt really good about our relationship in that I always felt we were working within a context of LOVE. That, no matter what – we would overcome it because of a DEEP LOVE we have for each other's humanity.

And I wrote to her:

If it is too hard, let's recognize that we have done our best and that the differences that come between us so horrendously sometimes are not really of our making, but are the products of our histories, our environments, what we were given to work with. If you say it is too hard, I will understand and still love you.

Somehow we got through that particular crisis. Dorothy and I are still loving friends, still working together on decolonization and reconciliation, still convinced of the importance of dialogue. We've reached an even deeper level of trust with each other. We know that we can question each other profoundly and survive. Did we resolve everything? We're not sure. But I believe that by confronting our history of oppression and colonialism together, and in learning from our responses to it and to each other, we are actively contributing to a healing that must take place between our peoples. It's hard to work through these kinds of interactions, to brave that maelstrom of anger, truth, and love, but I believe that it is very important that at least some of us try – as honestly and fearlessly as we can.

NOTES

- 1 During the 1960s scoop, 80 per cent of the children in my community were removed and put into white foster homes because my people supposedly were not good enough parents. Bear in mind that this wave of destruction was enforced after the colonial forces had already damaged any parenting skills of the generations before me through forced attendance at residential schools.

- 2 Canada mobilised its military against the Mohawks at the so-called Oka Crisis in 1990. One Sûreté du Québec officer was killed. In 1995 at Gustafsen Lake, in BC, the RCMP and Special Ops from Canada's military were mobilized against the Secwepemc peoples. No one was killed. In 1995, at Ipperwash, the Ontario Provincial Police mobilized their forces against unarmed Indigenous peoples who were reclaiming expropriated lands. A Native man, Dudley George, was killed.
- 3 See Sutherland, *Worldview Skills*, 23.
- 4 See Pinar, 'Notes on Understanding,' 60-70.
- 5 See Sutherland, 'Reconciliation,' 29.

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24 Cross-Cultural Collaborations: Friend or Foe? An Arts Interactive: Empowering the Individual within the Home Community and among Diverse Cultures

DAYSTAR / ROSALIE JONES AND NED BOBKOFF

As theatre and dance professionals who work individually for the most part, we have also worked in collaboration within mixed cultural groups both in the United States and abroad. As persons of differing cultural backgrounds ourselves, over the years we have become attuned to the cultural differences in others as a springboard to the highly creative atmosphere necessary in artistic work in the performing arts – theatre and dance. We have found that the process demands openness from everyone participating, an openness that allows for new discovery without sacrificing personal or cultural sensibilities. In the following pages we explore our experiences and insights, each in our own voice.

NED: We live in an age where cultural exchange and cultural divisions often go hand in hand. Witness the current events that represent the clash between cultures, events that dominate the news, our thinking, and our fears. Most importantly, the common bonds of humanity, so desperately needed in a fragmenting world, seem sorely tested in these times.

How do the performing arts cut across cultural boundaries and forge fresh relationships, through imaginative and transformational means? What are those time-honoured performance pursuits of doing, becoming, and revealing that work best cross-culturally? An answer often lies in small details that are singularly human and transformational.

I remember an incident that occurred at the College of Santa Fe where I was teaching 'Acting for the Camera.' The course was exploratory and incremental, since the equipment we had was new, and the work we did was observationally based. Students were given exercises where they spoke to the camera directly, and later did scenes in the studio, or outside where students blended interviews with external events. The point was