

Gigawaabaa-bye-bye

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Jim Northrup's words are like the *zizigwad*, the sound of jack pines, ever alive and reminding us of who we are. He wrote stories for every season of the year and every season of our lives, as individuals and as a community. He left a legacy of humor and storytelling that will be remembered for a long time. He also left a few things unfinished.

What he definitely accomplished is a body of work that memorializes Anishinaabe life. His poems, stories and plays will be read for many years in *Walking the Rez Road*, *The Rez Road Follies*, *Anishinaabe Syndicated*, *Dirty Copper* and *Rez Salute*. His newspaper column, the Fond du Lac Follies, ran for a full quarter of a century, tracing the scandals, shenanigans, politics and rezperspective of the real people who make up a sovereign North American nation.

The Follies first appeared in August of 1989. H. W. Bush was president. The Bingo Hall was small. The Community College was new. Fond du Luth Casino was only three years old and pow wow season was leaning into ricing time. Jim shared the view from his kitchen table. He cracked jokes about Columbus, commods, relationships and relatives. He asked questions: "Didja ever notice, bingo money doesn't seem to last as long as regular money?" And gave answers: "It's got an attitude of "easy come, easier go." Always with a sly wink to let you know he laughed just as hard at himself as he laughed at everything else: "Now what was that last bingo number?"

Behind Jim's lightning fast exchange of phrases was a subtle, yet scathing critique of capitalism, industry and people who don't know how to live right. He encouraged us to go to school, predicting "a few more generations of this and we will consider higher education a normal state instead of a rarity." And he challenged us to get involved, to carry memories, language and Anishinaabe knowledge forward into the future. He would hook us with an image of "canoes edging closer to the road, new rice poles gleaming in the sunlight" and whet our appetites by wondering who knows "how to cook moose ears?" Then he'd point us to "the weeds taking over more and more of the rice beds" and ask the real question, "who is watching the water level of the lakes?" (August Follies, 1989).

Twenty-five years later, he left us in the deep waters poling on our own as “the final curtain came clanging down on the Fond du Lac Follies.” Never one to avoid reality, he said it was time to “step back and hang up the spurs and computer” (August Follies, 2014). Circling back to some of the same topics that filled the Follies first pages he commented:

Monthly per capita payment has kept the lights on in some homes, made car payments and has put food on some tables, the rest of us use plates... Of course there have been some problems associated with gambling. One is we think money can solve anything. Two is we think money can solve anything (August Follies, 2014).

He taught readers that no single perspective is perfect and most importantly you need to hone your own points.

Jim was a veteran and a survivor of many battles. As a marine he served in Vietnam as part of India Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. He survived the war and then came home to “survive the peace” (“Shrinking Away”). Part of the way he survived was through keeping many Anishinaabe traditions alive including spring syrup-making, summer basket-making, fall rice-harvesting and winter storytelling. But perhaps the most important tradition he continued was the art of healing through narration.

Many times Jim answered the query of under-paid public school teachers who wanted him to visit class. Off he would go, on the road sometimes for hours to do what he called “one for the people.” Standing before a classroom of children, he told jokes and used laughter to lubricate creativity. He proved to future writers that every voice matters. Following his example, writers young and old have traced their own journeys, connected with others and dreamed themselves whole to recover their identities in a complicated, and sometimes downright cruel, world.

Jim often began a writing lesson with his “Character Building Recipe” which centered a person and brought the story and teller to life. His theory was that if you think around and about someone, you will find their story. He started with a simple list, sometimes adding and subtracting characteristics:

Character Building Recipe

1. Name
2. Age

3. Skin
4. Height
5. Weight
6. Clothing
7. Tribe
8. Place
9. Voice
10. Language
11. Moves
12. Education
13. Goals
14. Fears
15. Secrets

The list could be used to write a short sketch of Chibinesi, James Warren Northrup Jr. who lived from 1943 to 2016. He had hair that would match a black bear and skin between *zhiiwaagamizigan* (maple syrup) and *maakademaashkikiwaabo* (coffee). According to his Fond du Lac Band Card which “certifies that the person identified is a duly-enrolled member of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and entitled to exercise hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in accordance with the laws of the band” he weighed 210 pounds, was 5’ 9” and had firearms safety training. He typically wore jeans, a t-shirt, maybe a Pendleton jacket, soft traditional Corvette-driving moccasins and around his neck a set of claws or a 1960s era smiley face turned into modern regalia by his wife, Patricia. He wrote from what he called “headquarters” just south of *Chi’zagaa’iganing* (Big Lake) on Northrup Road in Sawyer, Minnesota, and his voice was as wide as the sky and deep as the rice roots sinking into the earth. Some of his best moves involved poling, knocking, tap carving and basket making. One might say he had an advanced degree in all of these. As for official education he attended several schools including: Pipestone Indian School, Brainerd Indian Training School, Carlton High School and Milwaukee Technical College. In 2012 he received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College. Goals, fears and secrets are hard to confirm or deny. In many ways, his writing is an accounting of the goal of living life well and working to heal himself and others, which he accepted as a continual task. Perhaps his fears were of failing

at this. And secrets are not secrets if they are broadcast, but there were a few things he didn't get done before changing his address from one world to another and those secret wishes are the ones I want to honor here.

Jim wanted the story of his grandfather to be summarized and shared, he wanted someone to consider the character of Joseph Anthony Northrup who lived from 1882 to 1947. Although their lives did not overlap by much, his persistence and powers as a storyteller always interested his grandson who recalled: “I met him once, when I was 3 or 4, all I remember was a man with a big nose leaning in to look at me. Later I learned he got frostbite on that nose walking nine miles to work and then nine miles home again” (Northrup, 2003.) Carlisle entrance reports note that in 1908 he was 5' 9” and weighed 151 pounds. The same strange document also indicates his resonance and respiration were “normal.” He is described at that time as a Chippewa from Cloquet, Minnesota who attended the school with the Catholic YMCA of Northfield, Massachusetts listed as his patron. His secret, while at Carlisle, may have been that he was attending the school after pleading guilty to manslaughter, being sent to the reformatory and being eventually released through a pardon from the governor to accompany his two brothers to Carlisle Indian School.

This personal history came to light in 1911 when Joseph was expelled from Carlisle for behavior, but instead of returning home, he headed to Washington D.C. where he was arrested and placed in iron manacles at Union Station. According to the arresting officer, “he was wanted in Minnesota for shooting another Indian.” Northrup explained “there had been a quarrel long ago... and he shot a man who he afterwards learned had died as a result of the wound” (Harrisburg Patriot). Supporters from Carlisle showed up to escort him home, promising to hand him over only to “the legal authority of his reservation.” The complex affection between student and institution continued with records of correspondence at Carlisle indicating that Joseph had a practical view of his education. He spoke both Chippewa and English and school records note he was trained to work as a “disciplinarian, interpreter or forest guard.” No records indicate exactly why he was expelled and that detail remains a secret.

In reply to the Record of Graduates and Returned Students filed later that same year, Joseph stated he was married, living in Sawyer and making \$50 per month working for the Fire Patrol. He wrote, “my home is a happy one and I am improving it continually. We have eighty acres of land valued at \$30.00 per acre, [we also have] pine and [as timber it is] valued at \$1100,

a nice home and also \$150 credit in the bank.” Joseph continued, “I have had an uphill fight, but though only a short time at dear old Carlisle, I got the idea there to always “s-t-i-c-k” and make good. Yes sir, though expelled, Carlisle is ever dear to my heart and what I learned there I shall always treasure.” He remained in touch with his alma mater and in 1914 received a kind letter from the Superintendent to which he replied “I can say that the training I have had at Carlisle has stood me in good stead. I am doing my utmost to uphold the Honor of my Alma Mater. May the good work you are doing for the uplift of the Indian continue.”

Joseph went on to join the U.S. National Guard and was the founder of the Wanabosho Club, named for his own Grandfather, which served the 12,000 Chippewas in Minnesota at the time. He was a community leader who bridged nations and published clear political opinions. In 1921 he wrote: “Exploitation of the Indian must cease in order that this nation of the ‘square deal’ will not blacken its honor by regarding its treaties as mere scraps of paper. The Indians have well earned the right to administer their own affairs like other citizens instead of being held in subjugation while foreigners may come into this country and exercise rights withheld from the Indians.” His rhetorical truth was echoed years later as his grandson, Jim Jr., wrote about using his treaty rights to hunt, fish, gather and govern as a citizen of a sovereign nation.

Across the generations, Joseph and Jim also shared a love of telling sweeping, dramatic, unforgettable stories. Using the pseudonym Chief Northwind, Joseph Northrup published the novel *Wawina* in 1937. Described by the publisher as a love story “based on personal records as handed down in primeval wigwam lore” it was also classic romanticism with a tragic ending between lovers of opposing ethnic traditions, in this case a Chippewa “princess” who kills herself and her Sioux lover. The Northrup tradition of writing stories likely began many generations before Joseph and will continue long after Jim Jr. Their contribution was to examine the effects of colonization and deforestation, to measure the impact of Anishinaabeg becoming American citizens. Both Joseph and Jim recorded the unspoken traumas, triumphs and daily trials of continuing against all odds. Each, in his own way, made an important contribution to Anishinaabe-American Literature.

This is the legacy Jim Jr., who had sons he named both Jim and Joe, wanted passed to the next generation. He understood people of many cultures are always healing from the tangle of history that ignites their existence. As he saw the end of his life grow near, Jim began writing and distributing healing phrases. In the *Chitwaa Luke Babaamajimowinini Aakoziwigamig* (Saint

Luke the Evangelist Hospital) he taught the doctors and nurses to say *maashkikinini indaaw* or *maashkikikwe indaaw*, reminding them they are people of medicine, because the word *maashkiki* breaks down into components meaning strength from the earth. Jim knew the power of words. He believed if he could say, *ninoojimo 'iwe* (I am healing), it was more, likely to happen. He wanted the words to be heard in the world: *noojimo* (to heal, restore or cure someone); *nanaandawi* (to investigate, diagnose or doctor someone). He wasn't afraid to ask for help by saying *wiidoowishin* or *naadamawishin*. And always he would say, “*Ojibwemotawishin daga* (Speak Ojibwe to me please).” We would arrive and practice sentences, which became a small chapbook handwritten, copied and distributed to those in need. He included what he felt were the most important phrases:

Ginanaandawin. Ninanaandawi 'iwe-nagamomin.

I am healing you. We are singing a healing song.

Ningiige, mashkowiziyaan. Be bangii ninganaandawiz.

My wound is healing, I am strong. Little by little I am being healthy.

Ningii-bimose miinawaa nengaaj wiisiniyaan. Onizhishin. Maamakaaj.

I walked and slowly I am eating. It is good. It is amazing.

Niwii-minogwaam. Niwii-nibaa gabe dibik.

I will rest. I will sleep all night.

I think he took on this task because *makwa odoodamaan*, he was bear clan. He understood the responsibilities of his clan to be *gikinoo 'amaage* (to teach), *nagadawenjige* (to care for others), to *gizhaadige* (to serve as a guard). He was Marine, he was *Makwa*, he was a grandson, a son, a husband, a father and grandfather, he was part of a circle that he had the wisdom to see while many others view life as a line. Authors are often remembered for their “greatest” work, or most well-known, but as he planned his exit, Jim offered one more chance for readers to learn from him. The last few phrases of his book were written when he was simply trying to move from one place on earth, the hospital bed, to another, the kitchen table. But reading them again illustrates how a great poet writes lines to be read many ways.

Ninogimaakandaadiz.

I am telling myself what to do.

Nindaanjidiz.

I am changing myself

Ninzhaabooskaan.

I am getting through it

Aabdeg nindamaajaa.

I have to leave.

Boochigo niwii-giwe.

I have to go home.

Gimiigwechwininim gii bi dagooshinoyeg.

I thank yous for coming here.

Giga-waabamin miinawaa.

I will see you again.

Giga-waabamininim.

I will see you all again.

I am not related to Jim by clan or family but as a writer who uses Anishinaabemowin we had a thirty year friendship that sustained and challenged both of us to do more than either one of us might ever have done. Looking back on his life I am reminded of another writing exercise:

Ingii-biinjise, makaak gii-izhi-temigag gaawiin da-saakonaasiimaan...

I walked into a room, there was a box I wasn't supposed to open...

Jim opened that box every time. He saw the worst of society, yet found a way to write stories of survival. He attended a boarding school where he was punished for speaking Ojibwemowin, but

became a writer so that his words could connect him to family and friends. He was sent to fight in Vietnam where he risked his life with no welcome home and endured a lifetime of PTSD as a result, but his stories and poems gave all of us a way to process and live with the scars of that war and many more. He last wishes were that we remember his Grandfather and tell stories of healing. Use his Character Building Recipe to write the story of your grandparents, grandchildren or yourself... *saakonaan makaak* (open the box). Last of all, be brave enough to say good-bye, or as Jim might say... “gigawaabaa-bye-bye.”

Works Cited

Anonymous. “Carlisle Indian Goes West with His Hands in Irons,” *Harrisburg Patriot*, 1911.
Northrup, James Jr. “Shrinking Away,” *Walking the Rez Road*, 1993.