



Kathryn Harrison's Speech

1983



q^hata mayka? nayka lakit shawash tilixam pi nayka lush-tətəm pus nanich msayka. ntsayka chakwa saya ili?i pus ntsayka miłayt ntsayka wa wa msayka. [*How are you? My four tribal people and I are happy to be here. We have come a long way from our homes to talk to you.*]...

As Vice-Chair of the Grand Ronde Tribal Council, I bring you greetings from my People; descendants of a People who began our passage through Oregon's unwritten history 127 years ago. How fortunate we are that they persisted so we, who came after them, could be here... Chosen by our tribal council to come here, we will be weaving a picture for you of our land, our People, our culture and our Spirit, the basics of an Indian nation.

We are speaking up today for our "right to exist." In the eyes of the government, we, as a terminated tribe, have been "statistically dead" for twenty-nine years. It has taken nine of those years—nine long struggling years—to reorganize, elect a new tribal council, and do research to work towards our goal... We were recognized once; we need to be recognized again. As a comparatively small tribe each member is vital to us, so each time one is lost, we can't help but feel that they might still be with us if they had continued health services. Many of our members are unemployed now, but we wonder perhaps if they'd had access to continued education assistance, if they would be in skilled labor jobs now. Most important is our identity—both individual and tribal... Our children, especially, need this identity. So we need to return to our rightful place within the family of Indian Nations. Lastly, the land. All the valuable timber land that was lost, with proper management, could be supporting us today... All these services are due for our People; we've already paid dearly for all of them.

Once we were happy and free in our own lands; we were seldom hungry, for there was plenty for everyone. Land was always regarded as a living entity and sacred to my People, but it became important, too, to the white invaders.

Our lands, means of existence, even part of our dignity, were taken long ago, encouraged by missionaries, army officers and government agents intent on ridding this country of our Indian existence. But the Grand Rondes were strong and continued to live through the years of the allotments and land cessions, weaving their beautiful baskets as they conversed in the Chinook Jargon, gathering their traditional foods and living in the new homelands they had no come to know and love so well. They knew they had seven treaties and that no other people had such a unique relationship with its government... The People were all living together now, and like their ancestors, the strands of their heritage were held tightly in their hands. But soon another change would be forced upon them.

In 1954, our second "Trail of Tears" began; this time they called it "termination"... legislation that forced us to surrender our identity as a federally recognized tribe, all our remaining lands and all social services. Families began to leave Grand Ronde or, worse, were separated... Termination was a disaster.

You can look at me and see that I'm an Indian—if you could look clear into my soul, you'd see that I'm an Indian. Yet, like my people, in the eyes of the government, I am not. My parents and grandparents were Indians; my parents attended and met at Chemawa School during the times when it wasn't considered “in” to be Indian. Yet I learned to be proud of my heritage through their lives and their teachings. I remember the conversations and laughter, using the Chinook Jargon... the traditional foods and the sweathouses. Although I lost [my parents] at age ten, my Indianness remained as strong as ever.

As a member of a recognized tribe... I was able to attend Chemawa, too, yet my children do not have that choice today. There is a brand new health clinic there, but my people cannot use it. The “Indian preference” jobs are not for us, either.

Like history repeating itself, our people have endured much, but they have endured. We're here today having walked through twenty-nine years of termination. But like our ancestors, we have continued to hold tightly to those strands of our heritage, forever mindful of the coming generations.

lush ikta lush ntsayka wawa yakwa. saxali tayi nanich saxali msayka. [*This has been good talk here in this place. May our Father above watch over you.*]

