

Dream of the Earth: Salute to the White Roots of Peace

by [Indian Country Today](#)
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We like to celebrate good things in Indian country.

Sometimes Indians help each other grow in good ways. Back in the 1970s, a traditional Indian educational caravan traveled across the Indian communities and major colleges and universities in North America. The traveling group was called the **White Roots of Peace**, a name that referred to an ancient tradition of the longhouses among the Haudenosaunee.

The group was comprised of elders from Akwesasne and other communities, and editors and other helpers at the newspaper Akwesasne Notes. Their message was to remind Indian people to value their traditional language, ceremonies and knowledge and to remind young people to care for the knowledge of the elders and for the need of the elders. It was a message that came straight from the old men peace chiefs and the clan mothers of the various clans at the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, and that anyone could tell was a constant from the generations. The message of the old-timers was about self-sufficiency and about trusting the production of the land and the woods as a dependable source of nutrients for family and nation.

Not long ago, a Native Americas gathering at Cornell University honored one of the founders of White Roots of Peace traveling group, Chief Tom Porter, Sakokwenonkwes, of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation Bear Clan. *The curriculum of White Roots of Peace said: value the land; work the land.* Chief Porter offered the gathering a prayer where the dream of the land is understood. *He reminded everyone once more that in working the land there is mutual and common benefit. Take seriously the job of protecting and enhancing your land base. We gain economically, some, and we can gain a lot socially, from working with our lands.* Porter was surrounded by other legendary Iroquois thinkers and doers, such as **John Mohawk**, professor and corn farmer, and Janice Longboat, respected elder and herbal healer, both White Roots traditionalists, who paid homage to Chief Porter.

Two young men of that time, activists from Tuscarora and Mohawk nations, who went west with White Roots of Peace, were also there to honor Porter. One, a Wolf Clan Mohawk, ended up marrying at Pine Ridge, South Dakota; the other, a Tuscarora, married at Tesuque Pueblo. Both connected with and raised families among local, community people who had attachments, traditional and legal, to family homesteads on their respective reservations.

Over a generation later, nearly 30 years in fact, *Mohawk ironworker and activist Tom Cook and Tuscarora gardener and artist Clayton Brascoupè reported at Cornell on their long years managing agricultural programs as their primary areas of involvement in their adopted communities.* Theirs are fascinating stories, grand examples of an Indian-to-Indian development tale, how traditionalist thinking engendered personal and political decisions that led to lifetimes of commitment to community empowerment.

Cook's work at Pine Ridge among the Oglala Tiospayes has generated hundreds of family wells, gardens and other self-help projects for an isolated and economically depressed area. In tandem with *his wife, Loretta Afraid of Bear* and her many relations, Cook's work spans generations of people and links agricultural and cultural fields. A strong current of culturally based community development can be seen in the work. **Cook is affiliated with Oglala Olympian Billy Mills and his Running Strong for American Indian Youth organization.**

Brascoupè, who like Cook, credited Tom Porter with great influence on his life, married his life's partner, Margaret Vigil, of Tesuque Pueblo, and soon found himself involved in the gardens of her parents and grandparents. Brascoupè brought his Iroquois steadfastness and his great love of the land to his adopted reservation. Over twenty-five years later, the pueblo now features major gardening efforts and is seriously involved in seed saving, permaculture and other innovative land-based production projects.

Listen to Brascoupè's message:

"I was born at a time when people were still farming and everybody had large gardens and we ate directly from the gardens, and life in general was fairly happy. The communities were fairly intact and doing fairly well.

If you were looking from outside into our communities, you would maybe see that our communities were impoverished – meaning we didn't have a lot of material things. But we had a lot of other things. And one

of the things that we did have was good healthy food, good healthy water, and so forth, which is very different from what we see today.”

Now listen to Tom Cook:

“On Pine Ridge, I helped start a gardening assistance project in the early 1980s and stayed with it year to year with a determination to continue the teachings learned in my youth at Akwesasne. It was there I learned of relating to the earth as our mother, and to extend the practice of obtaining sustenance from her directly. Much of this early learning was from Tom Porter’s nation gardens project in the early 1970s.

“Slim Buttes Agri-Development began with six community gardens in 1985, and this year we prepared 331 gardens over most of the 5,000 square-mile reservation. Our mission is to help the people with their immediate survival and nutritional needs, and help communities develop out of the poverty that surrounds them.”

It is always good to see vision and mission converge, where one’s motivational dream becomes reality in the context of hard work and dedication. *A salute to Tom Cook and Clayton Brascoupè, Iroquois expatriates of the White Roots of Peace, which extended and gave fruit in the Four Directions of Indian country, reminding all Native people to trace back their roots to their original instructions as human beings.*

Clayton Brascoupè & the *Traditional Native American Farmers Association*

Witnessing the damage caused to his fellow Native Americans by junk food and an often inappropriate diet, Clayton Brascoupè decided to research what foods had kept pre-Columbian peoples lean and fit before the introduction of wheat and processed sugars.

This led, in 1992, to the creation of the *Traditional Native American Farmers Association*, whose mission it was to "revitalize traditional agriculture for spiritual and human need, by creating awareness and support for Native environmental issues".

In the beautiful Tesuque Pueblo, outside Santa Fe NM, Clayton, along with friends, family and many Native students, has managed to reintroduce the importance and sacredness of agriculture as a gift that ought to be passed on from generation to generation.

Tesuque Pueblo, NM 87506

<http://www.tnafa.org> tnafa_org@yahoo.com, P.O. Box 31267, Santa Fe, New Mexico 8759

<http://www.RespectfulRevolution.org>

<https://vimeo.com/158677237>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLQLWKcIKHo>

<https://gardenwarriorsgoodseeds.com/2014/07/30/traditional-native-american-farmers-association-tnafa/>

Living Earth Symposium 2 - Clayton Brascoupè Smithsonian NMAI, WA D.C.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qj_PZpwq5Gc

"*On the Table: Creating a Healthy Food Future*" is a special symposium that explores innovative ways to build a healthier, more resilient food future that provides fresh, nutritious choices while protecting public health and sustaining our environment. In this segment, Clayton Brascoupe of Tesuque Pueblo, director of the Traditional Native American Farmers Association, speaks on the important qualities of heritage varieties of crops and the value of the communal and family farming.

Clayton Brascoupe, from Tesuque Pueblo, is the director of the *Traditional Native American Farmers Association*. **Based in the indigenous communities in New Mexico, but with projects as far afield as Belize, the *Traditional Native American Farming Association* is a leading voice for food sovereignty, with many successes getting farmers back on the land, farming organically, and revitalizing traditional methods.**

Brascoupe works to preserve and increase community access to heirloom/traditional seeds and to educate the public on traditional seed saving and the GMO threat to our traditional seed heritage.

This symposium, a part of the annual Living Earth Festival, was recorded in the Rasmuson Theater of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. on July 17, 2015.