

SPECTRUM

First Nations' View

What is it like to be a Native?

BORDERS! *The ones between the USA, Mexico, and Canada symbolize the feeling of separation that exists between Native Americans.*

by Brian Nicholas

A lot of people ask me 'what is it like to be a Native'? This is a very tough question to answer. It is a question that I ask myself every day. It is also a question with a long answer. It is an answer that involves a lot of personal expressions. This is why my answer will be different from answers given by other Native Americans.

The human species has always had the urge to classify themselves; to place everyone into categories. In fact, every human being is placed in more than one category. These categories range from a people of a country to gender. One of the most common category is a people of a country-Americans, Canadians, Mexicans, etc... Each of these categories can be broken down into more categories - eg Americans can be broken down into African-Americans. Canadians can be broken down into French Canadians. But there is one category that binds Mexicans, Americans, and Canadians together. This category is called Native Americans or Abo-

iginal Peoples of North America-which ever you prefer. Myself, I prefer Native Americans. Native Americans live all over North America-North, South, East, West, and Central.

No matter what category a person has been placed into, that category always starts with a capital J; Americans start with a capital A. Always remember that Native Americans starts with a capital N. Just like every other people, Natives are human beings. Once a person begins to realize this, not only does that person see me associated with my culture; that person begins to understand that I'm also a human being. When I say I'm a Native American, I am saying that I take pride in my culture as well as a human being. Once a person understands this, then the answer to the question 'what is it like to be Native' is only half-answered.

Since Native Americans are human beings, they are also individuals. The second part to this answer

involves an individual expression. All the answers given by Native Americans will not be the same because all Native Americans are individuals and each answer will



contain a different personal response.

Native Americans can be broken down into categories as well. When I use category, I mean that there are different types of Native Americans (just like there are many types

of Caucasians). These different types are usually classified by languages. EG-There are Mic Mac Native Americans; there are Ojibway Natives; there are Hopi Native Americans; etc... Each of these different types of Native Americans have their own culture as well.

The USA, Mexico, and Canada are separated by borders. These borders symbolize the feeling of separation that exists between Native Americans. This separation symbolizes my lack of knowledge of Native Americans in Mexico and the USA. Even though I can acknowledge their existence,

I have very little knowledge about them. This lack of knowledge of them also leaves a lack of knowledge about myself. This lack of knowledge is part of a mountain I must climb to fully understand them. By doing so, it will help me to fully understand my culture and who I am as an individual.

Before I reach the top of this mountain (which could take a lifetime), I must start at the bottom and work my way up.

I have already started climbing this mountain. So far I've learned to respect other cultures. There are two reasons for this. One reason is that by respecting other cultures, I will respect my own culture as well. A second reason is that by respecting other cultures, the people from those other cultures will respect my culture as well.

I've also learned, by climbing this mountain, that the Earth we live on and the World we live in does not belong to us. It belongs to future generations. I have an obli-

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gation to take care of this land for the sake of future generations. I am a care-taker of this land.

To me, being Native American means to be a human being who is an individual like everybody else. Just like everybody else, I have my own culture. A culture in which I'm always trying to figure out exactly who I am. It is a process that will take a lifetime, but it is a process that I'm willing to go through, not just for my sake, but also for the sake of future generations. For this land, does not belong to me, it belongs to future generations. I am here to take care of this land.

But this isn't a complete definition. I don't know if there could ever be a complete definition. The answer to the question 'what is it like to be a Native?' is a question that will take a lifetime to answer.

But to sum-it-up for a Non-Native American - being a Native American is just like any other human being. They are special. So when you are walking down the street and you see me and wonder what it is like to be Native American; always remember that I'm a Native American with a capital N.

Religion and individualism

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dominate? Does toleration imply the privatization, or removal of all religion from the public forum, that is, freedom from religion? Perhaps this also explains why the term spirituality is more acceptable today than the term religion?

Spirituality is that inner, invisible highly personal feeling, view or attitude to life's ultimate concerns. One can be spiritual quite nicely without church, synagogue or mosque. One starts with a "tabula rasa" (blank slate) and simply writes one's own script. This approach is highly individual and private. It is also highly innocuous; it impinges on no one except the self. But, can an individual and private spirituality be maintained, or is it susceptible to our personal or emotional fluctuations?

Religion, on the other hand, is that *outer expression* of one's inner spirituality. It tends toward organization, communal involvement and response. Spirituality must be freely expressed, and one must have the freedom to express it in one's own way. Yet, when this is done in the context of a trusting and caring community of believers it has a greater potential of developing itself. That is, a deeper understanding of what is of ultimate importance in life emerges best in a communal context.

When there is no communal support or context, we run the risk of succumbing to deception. The advertising media has made very great

strides here. As a result, many believe that material consumption (materialism), sexual freedom (hedonism) and self-gratification (individualism) is to be most highly sought. What is seldom mentioned here are the consequences of giving expression to those (religious) beliefs: consumer debt, environmental pollution and material junk; sexual confusion, betrayal and disease; greed, alienation and loneliness.

When individualism dominates, material stewardship, sexual responsibility and self-giving receive less support. When our religious views—and religion touches on all

of these—remain private, we are free to do what we like. But where then is the communal discussion about responsibility, care and concern, especially as it touches on life's ultimate concerns rather than merely our economic "bottom line"?

Our inner spirituality is conducive to caring for ourselves and others. When it is expressed within the context of religious communities it has potential for more meaning. When it remains in the grips of a secular outlook it risks being stifled or underdeveloped. Our spiritual journey to God requires communal nurture.

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Correction

Last week's Positively Pink's "Crisis! What crisis?" was mistakenly called Metanoia and the original Metanoia's "Church, state, religion, and pluralism" was titled First Nations' View.

Sorry, mistakes sometimes happen.

