

NAAA Lifetime Achievement Award

Grandfather William Commanda

Article and Photographs by Danny Beaton Turtle Clan Mohawk Nation
www.dannybeaton.ca

His gentleness, compassion, radiance, and love for life, people, creation, and his Creator is profound. He is the 2010 Lifetime National Aboriginal Achievement Award (NAAA) winner. Concern for harmony with the natural law, natural world, respect for the gifts of the great Creator, for what his people live with abundantly from Mother Earth. William Commanda speaks softly always, never raising his voice, and a perpetual smile is on his face for all to witness. From the gifts he has been given, a brown eye and a blue eye shine at you with light, fire, and life in his calm demeanor. He will engage in our conversation at his ripe old age of 96 years young, saying the gifts we have been given must

be respected and honoured as is the law of the land. Respect was taught to him by his elders, and his elders were taught by their elders.

William Commanda is a leader, a prophet, a healer, a historian, a canoe-builder, and a peace maker for his Algonquin culture and his nation and his ancestors. He strives to create unity for all people from his birthplace in Maniwaki, Quebec or wherever he is. He has traveled back and forth to the United Nations conference "Cry of the Earth." He has walked for eight months across Canada to raise awareness among all Indian Nations to have the respect that was made during first contact and let the treaties be honoured as was made in our Sacred Wampum Belts.

The gathering that took place this year in Regina, Saskatchewan for the 14 NAAA recipients was nothing short of a sacred ceremony, which was highlighted the next day with over 2,000 Plains Indians gathering to drum and dance for the First Nations University of Canada Pow-Wow. The organizers of the NAAA came from across Canada to showcase Native achievement and leadership with Canada's best sponsorship for the restoration of Native culture and Native education.

The National Aboriginal Achievement Awards ceremonies were held at the 2,000 seat Regina Conexus Arts Centre, which was packed full, with hosts Raoul Trijillo and Andrea Menard. The lead sponsorship of CIBC helped to maintain the organization's goals of restoring Native culture through traditional and academic education. Roberta Jamieson, leader, former chief, and Canada's first Native lawyer, was a bright and articulate spokeswoman for Native culture and justice.

In closing this year's celebration for 14 National Aboriginal Achievement Award winners for Canada, it was a blessing to have its winners here

working at home for justice and harmony, as it has been a blessing to have all 17 years of these awards celebrations and to have Native people living here in harmony with Mother Earth for thousands of years. The event at the Regina Conexus March 26, 2010 was moved by performers and speakers over and over, but the music by legendary Buffy Saint Marie with the closing song with her band and Traditional Singers Red Bone was what blew the house away and left the audience in a daze of clean, fresh restored spirits of healing, thanks to Executive Producer Jennifer Podemski.

Grandfather William Commanda Speaks Out

"In many respects, it is too late, because many of our children and people have been educated and raised in new ways and now believe in ownership of land. Many have forgotten their Sacred Relationship with Mother. You cannot own Mother; we belong to her. So we must stop the endless cutting of the trees that produce our oxygen and life breath. Trees hold the waters and prevent flooding and mudslides. Trees create, protect gardens of biodiversity and medicine plants. The forests of the world are habitats of the fourleggeds and winged creatures. The Rivers are the veins of Mother Earth, and everywhere dams impede her movement of water life and accumulated debris and poison are not washed out to the seas for cleansing. Our cancers are a reflection of the poisons and contaminants in our Mother Earth's body.

We must respect the four elements and creatures of the natural world. We must re-ignite a Sacred Relationship of Respect with Mother Earth if we are to survive. Take prayer and ceremony and tobacco to her and

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William Commanda, NAAA Life Time Achiever, Regina Conexus Arts Centre, to be Broadcast Global Television May 1st 9pm eastern standard, Photo by Danny Beaton



Buffy Saint Marie and William Commanda, Regina, Saskatchewan, March 26 2010. photo by Danny Beaton



Danny and William at airport in Toronto, March 24, 2010

**Commanda
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Group photo of 14 NAAA and National Aboriginal Awards Foundation. photo by Alicja Rozanska



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to particularly Sacred energy places. We need to influence the mainstream world with the ideology of Indigenous environmental ethics. To do this work, we must reclaim our relationship with the land, teach our children how to listen to her, speak our languages that evolved from our relationship with the land, and assert with courage the Cry of Mother Earth that is whispered with increasing urgency to us.

Indigenous Peoples who have retained the Sacred connection with the lands of their birth and ancestors have a special role to play in the Healing of Mother Earth and all her children and in decrying commodification of every aspect of her being. This is our biggest job, and we must prepare ourselves for it by going back to the land for guidance.

Mother Earth is an endlessly creative spiritual being. Decades ago, Indigenous people prophesied that she would start her own process of cleansing, and over recent years we have begun to see this in the devastating hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, floods, fires, and mudslides across the globe. She is also generating new life forms and land, so she will continue to be a powerful creative force. But nothing is free on Mother Earth anymore—people own everything. Everything has a price. You can no longer travel safely and freely; you can no longer pick wild berries or call for other food life, so Mother Earth cannot provide for us in her own way. And we have abused our sacred relationship with her, and so, we have to pay for that. We have to reconnect with the four elements and learn to work with them as our ancestors did in order to create hope for our children.”

**Grandfather William
Commanda’s Dream**

“I pray to see the restoration of the Sacred Chaudiere Site and the establishment of the Asinabka Indigenous Center on Victoria Island in Ottawa in my lifetime. It is here that the people of Turtle Island will gather to heal, revitalize, and celebrate our individual and collective heritage, inspire the world with our deep respect and reverence for Mother Earth, the sacred fire, the water and the wind and All Our Relations and ignite a fire for reconciliation and Sustainable Relationships, consistent with the Seven Fires Prophecy.”

Grandfather has a proposal and a dream for a special National Indigenous Center at Asinabka/Chaudiere Falls, Ottawa, Canada. The vision is for a fully inclusive city park Historic Interpretative Conference Center and Aboriginal Center at the Sacred Site of Asinabka/Chaudiere Falls, Chaudiere and Victoria Islands, within the nation’s capital Ottawa, Ontario. Contact Romola or William Commanda at [www.asinabka.com] for further information.

Every year, Grandfather William Commanda organizes a Circle of All Nations, a culture of peace, a global eco-community gathering at his home on Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg in Maniwaki, Quebec during the summer months for all people to heal and give thanks. William will again host his annual gathering Circle of All Nations on the weekend of August 6, 2010 in Maniwaki, Quebec, Canada. For details online, visit [web.mac.com/circleofallnations].



Congratulations to William Commanda for receiving the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his Lifetime of work within the community



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