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Reflections of Alcatraz

LANADA BOYER

It was 5 January 1965 when I left on the Greyhound bus from my home reservation of the Shoshone and Bannock tribes to go to San Francisco. I was a participant in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, which sent tribal members from their reservations into the major cities of the nation to get work or learn a trade.¹

There were no jobs on the reservation, and the "No Indians or Dogs Allowed" signs had barely been taken down in my home town of Blackfoot, Idaho.² Poverty, hardship, and despair had grown to be the way of life on the reservation. As a result of governmental rule, our reservation and people were suffering.

I was raised from childhood in an environment of tribal politics. My father was the tribal chairman for a number of years. His resistance to the government's attempts to steal our water and lands through the Shoshone Nation Land Claims put our whole family in jeopardy.³ I would help my father write letters to officials to get assistance for our reservation, and it was in this way that I began to understand about the continuing war against our people.

It was a very hard time for us all; the 1960s did not bring change. When the BIA offered relocation to the city, I took the opportunity, along with many others who left their reservations. We were not aware that the federal government's plan to "drop us off" in the cities was another insidious method of depriving us of our reservation lands and membership in our tribes. Some of us knew that

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non-Indians were exerting intense political pressures to gain more of our lands for their economic benefit.

We began our new lives in the cities, socializing primarily with our own people. On the reservations, it was easy to divide Indians against Indians; but in a major city, we are so glad to see other Indians, we don't care what tribe they are. They are natives, and that's all that counts.

The San Francisco Indian Center became a focal point of social life for many relocated tribal members in the Bay Area. The center sponsored both powwows and non-Indian dances. It published a newsletter that many Bay Area Indian residents received. Other Indian organizations, such as the Oakland Friendship House and the San Jose Indian Center, grew out of the Bay Area where Indians were living. Our organizations eventually became a part of the city, and we were acknowledged along with other city minority organizations. Whenever Mayor Alioto went to the Mission District where many of us lived, he would meet with the Latino and Spanish groups, the Mission Rebels (Blacks), and the Indians. We were recognized as a political unit, and gradually we became politicized.

I cofounded United Native Americans with Lehman Brightman, who actively led our political efforts in the Bay Area. Lee was a former University of Oklahoma football star whose intelligence, wit, and concern led him to become a strong Native American advocate. We networked with other organizations and the California Indian Education Association. One of our first efforts was to seek reform of Bureau of Indian Affairs policies to allow relocated Indians more than a one-way ticket to the city. We wanted to attend the universities in the Bay Area, but, since a college education was beyond our means, we requested assistance from the BIA, which had put us there.⁴ Instead, the BIA ended the relocation program in 1966.

With the support of the San Francisco Mission District organizations, I was accepted by the University of California, Berkeley. In January 1968, I was the very first Native American student to be accepted through special admissions into the Economic Opportunity Program, on probationary status. I kept up my grades and went off probation. At first, it was lonely being a native on a campus of fifty thousand students; then I met Patty Silvas, who was a Blackfeet from Salinas, California. She was the only other native on campus and had entered through regular admissions. We worked together to develop good university support.

It was not long before other native students were admitted; my program allowed me to recruit for UC Berkeley. After a while, we

had enough students to form our own native student organization, which I chaired. The campus was still simmering from the free speech movement, the civil rights and antiwar protests, and it was natural for us to get caught up in the heat of campus unrest with the Third World Strike.⁵

The Third World Strike at Berkeley in 1969 was the most expensive of the Berkeley campus protests, because the university assembled the largest force of Berkeley police and National Guard ever. They marched in with their bayonets unsheathed and fogged the campus with pepper gas. Every class was interrupted and stopped. All of the Third World Strike leaders were arrested on various charges.⁶ After the gas cleared away, I became one of the coalition leaders on the four-person negotiation team for our Third World College. We were victorious in establishing our own Department of Ethnic Studies, consisting of Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American studies programs within the university. Ours was the very first such department in the nation.

It was during this time that the issue of Alcatraz Island became a target of interest for us. In 1964, after the prison had been abandoned, a group of Lakota, consisting of Russell Means,⁷ Hank Means,⁸ Belva Cottier,⁹ Richard McKenzie,¹⁰ and others, had tried to reclaim the island as federal surplus property. Their efforts had been treated as a joke¹¹ by the media.

Now the island was being considered for purchase by a wealthy developer who wanted to build a casino there. We were concerned that the developer would be allowed to build his casino and the earlier claim would be ignored. This would mean that the federal government had no intention of honoring either the federal surplus laws giving lands back to native peoples or the 1868 treaty that was the basis of the Lakota claim in 1964. This failure to uphold another treaty¹² was enough to push our buttons.

The students at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State had already formed a native student alliance, so when Richard Oakes,¹³ chairman of the San Francisco State student organization, contacted me at Berkeley about having the students symbolically take Alcatraz Island for the Indians, I said, "Sounds great. Let's do it." He informed me that Adam Nordwall,¹⁴ a local Bay Area Indian businessman, was going to rent a boat to sail around the island to publicize the Indians' claim. We made arrangements to get the students together on a Sunday afternoon to sail around the island. Four of our students jumped off the boat and attempted to swim

to the island. We got very little publicity, but it was a nice boat ride on a Sunday afternoon, compliments of Adam Nordwall.

During this time, the San Francisco Indian Center burned to the ground. The community was devastated. The students got together and decided to take over the island as our new center for Indians in the Bay Area. On 14 November 1969, we met on the San Francisco docks and looked for a boat to rent. Finally, we spotted some fishermen just pulling in, and I approached the first man off the boat, asking him to take us to the island one way. Since the island was closed to the public, I had to convince him that we wanted to go for a special purpose. I told him we wanted to go to the island for a ceremony, which might take us awhile. He asked where our food was, and I told him we were fasting. He agreed to take us and charged us three dollars per person. Earl Livermore¹⁵ paid for those of us who did not have any money.

As we waited for the rest of our group, it began to grow dark. The fishermen were getting impatient, and I was afraid they would back out, so we pulled away from the dock. As we were leaving, I could see outlines of figures and legs running, so I asked the fisherman to go back and pick up our friends. It was Richard Oakes and a few of the San Francisco State students. This gave us a total of fourteen Indian students. The fisherman took us out to the island and dropped us off.

We were on the island and it was beautiful. The view was a "knockout," with lights all over the Bay Area. Earl Livermore was on the mainland and would contact the press to let them know we were on the island. We split into groups and agreed that, if some of us were found, the others would continue to hide out and hold the island. It felt like a game of hide-and-seek, and we were not afraid. At times, a search party would be very close to us, and it was hard to keep from giggling or laughing. All that night, the coast guard looked for us with searchlights in the old buildings, but we eluded them.

In the morning, we got together and decided to splinter off into smaller groups. A few hours later, Rick Evening,¹⁶ Kay Many Horses,¹⁷ and I were hiding out when we heard our names being called. I said to Rick, "I thought we were going to hold out and not give ourselves up." He said he would go see what was going on. A few minutes later, he came back and said Richard Oakes had identified himself when the press arrived and had made a deal with the coast guard that none of us would be arrested if we all gave ourselves up. I did not want to say anything to Richard in

front of everybody for the sake of unity, so, reluctantly, I got into the boat.

When we got back to the mainland, the rest of the students¹⁸ were upset with us for coming back. They had begun mobilizing a statewide effort to get other native students to join us on the island. They were upset with Richard for making a deal to come back. We decided to continue the mobilization effort and go back to the island.

On 20 November 1969, Native American students from the major California colleges and universities arrived with their families to take the island. My sister, Claudene Boyer,¹⁹ and my son, Deynon Means,²⁰ arrived with this landing party. My oldest son Devon²¹ was not with me when we went to Alcatraz. When we arrived on the island and made our way up to the second level, I sensed a wonderful, forbidden excitement among our group. The weather was good and the view spectacular as we set up our lookout points on top of the prison. We camped out in sleeping bags all over the island. It felt great to be there and to direct our energies into a stand for Indian people everywhere.

We took the island because we wanted the federal government to honor our treaties and its own laws.²² The previous claim had been made back in 1964, so we were the follow-up. We also wanted to focus attention on Indian reservations and communities throughout the nation where our people were living in poverty and suffering great injustice.

The next day, the press and all kinds of people arrived on the island. The international media focus embarrassed the federal government. The United States is always the first to point out human rights violations in other countries, without regard to its own treatment of Native Americans, Blacks, Chicanos, Asians, and poor people. We hoped to expose the atrocities that the federal government has perpetrated and continues to perpetrate against our people. Every day, as news of the island takeover traveled throughout the country, our people kept arriving. We were in full view of the entire world, and the government made no move to take us off the island.

Many people, diverse tribal groups and nonnatives alike, came to visit the island. Some were just now re-identifying as Indians and “wannabe’s.”²³ We were the tattered remnants of a proud and cultured people—what was left of our once strong and healthy nation. We did not all look or behave like our ancestors, because we were the products of our times. We were finally “civilized

Indians," from liars and thieves to genuine Indian chiefs. The government's racist efforts to deny us our heritage and to assimilate us into the American mainstream had backfired with the Alcatraz takeover.²⁴

In the weeks to follow, the residents quickly set out to organize the island. Everybody wanted to claim fame and to be included in the formation. I sat back and watched everyone scramble for leadership and for recognition by the media.

We had good leadership. As long as everybody wanted to be involved in the hard work of organization and island logistics, that was great. We had a big job ahead, and everybody was doing what needed to be done. Because I did not intend to drop out of school, I needed to attend to my classes, so I did not want to take on any extra responsibilities unless I had to.

The media identified Richard Oakes as the leader on the island, and he wanted the responsibility, so that was agreeable with us. Richard was smart and aggressive—a handsome Mohawk who always knew what to say. We were proud of Richard. We maintained our student autonomy on the island, recognizing the separate campus organizations and community organizations. The students and their families stayed on the island as long as they could but eventually left to continue their studies.

I continued my residence on the island but kept my apartment on the mainland and commuted to the university to maintain my studies. My sister did not leave the island during most of the occupation. Deynon and I would hitchhike off the docks at Alcatraz and would occasionally catch a sailboat or speedboat to the marina on Sunday afternoon, clean up, and check into my classes.

When the government blocked our water barge and boats from docking on the island, Richard successfully brought in food and provisions on the opposite side of the island, where it was impossible to dock because of the high cliffs. When the government took the water barge away, we brought water over in a boat that Creedence Clearwater Revival bought for us. They bought the boat from "Captain Cliff," whom we hired to take us back and forth from the mainland to the island. We named our boat the *Clearwater*.

Initially, we took up residence in the prison block. It was winter in the Bay Area, and it rained most of the time, but we were able to survive under those conditions, because life was not very

different from the poverty on the reservations or in the urban ghettos. It was inconvenient to live on the island without water, electricity, or heat, but most of us became conditioned to the elements. People who were not conditioned to the elements got sick when they stayed.

We formed an island organization called Indians of All Tribes. A lot of rivalry and competition always existed on the island. I sensed that the Indian men did not want to recognize the authority of the women, because they had been assimilated into white society and its male chauvinism.

Everyone had a job on the island—to help on the boats, with the school, or anywhere else they were willing to work. Stella Leach,²⁵ a registered Indian nurse, and Dr. Tepper had moved out to the island right after the invasion. They operated the first aid unit and provided medical support. Dr. Tepper finally went back to his medical practice in Oakland, but Stella stayed on the island.

Grace Thorpe²⁶ kept up public relations with the mainland. Sometime later, she bumped heads with the island council and left, but not until after she had helped the Pit River Indians to hold their land in Northern California, which was threatened by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) Company. A group of Alcatraz Indians joined the Pit River Indians to protect their sacred site; in a confrontation with the police, it took nearly a dozen officers to carry Grace Thorpe off the property.

Richard Oakes was hurt on the mainland during a fight in a bar; he was hit over the head numerous times with a pool stick. He made a miraculous recovery in the hospital, thanks to Thomas Banyacya²⁷ and an attending group of medicine men (including Mad Bear Anderson) from the Iroquois Confederation, only to face great sadness later. Richard and his family left the island when his daughter Yvonne died after falling four stories in an apartment building in the guards' quarters.

During the occupation, a number of Alcatraz Indians left for Washington State to support the Nisqually Indians, who were fighting for fishing rights at Franks Landing. President Nixon signed a bill that returned the sacred Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo. More funding was appropriated by Congress for programs on the reservations. Indians from Alcatraz supported the Pyramid Lake Paiute people in their efforts to keep their sacred lake. Alcatraz provided help to Indian efforts to establish D-Q University in Davis, California. Alcatraz was a "rock" that hit the water and sent

out a thousand ripples: Nearly a thousand documented events resulted from the occupation of Alcatraz.

SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

I took up residence on the second level of a house. My house, which I had painted red, had a beautiful view of the bay, and my room had enough space for my two double beds, like a hotel room. The other bed was for my guests, such as medicine man Pete Mitten and his wife, from New York, who stayed with me during their visit to the island, and Thomas Banyacya and his wife, Fermina.

Thomas Banyacya told me that he had traveled internationally since being appointed as a translator by the chiefs in 1945. After the bombing of Hiroshima, the Hopi had become alarmed at the destructive direction of the United States. According to their rock writings and prophecies, the bomb marked the beginning of a harmful era and had to be stopped somehow by warning as many people as possible of what was to come.

Thomas told me that he and his wife had come to Alcatraz to see for themselves what was happening. In accordance with the Hopi prophecies, the "tree of Indian life" was cut off at the base, but, through the nourishment of the ancient roots, sprouts were growing out of the base of the tree. It was encircled with a design that matched the Bay Area, and the tree growing new sprouts was located where Alcatraz lay in the bay. He said that the young people are the new sprouts growing out of the Indian tree of life. The takeover of Alcatraz symbolized this rebirth.

Thomas told me about the Hopi prophecy.²⁸ To my understanding, the world had ended three times before this world. It was always the result of misusing modern inventions for destructive purposes instead of for peace. This time, it was not supposed to happen. All people would have the choice of continuing in the destructive direction or coming back to the sacred circle of life and perpetuating the spiritual ways of our forefathers. We need to clean up the earth and the environment now, before the three purifiers come from the east. If the people do not change their ways, the earth will shake to wake up the people. Our ancestors will help us survive through the purification if we maintain our beliefs, practices, and spiritual ways.

My personal experience happened one night while I was asleep in my room. I woke up to see a fire in the curtains. Because I was

still half asleep, I did not think; I followed my first instinct, which was to protect my son. I threw myself at the fire and put it out with my hands. There had been two other fires that same night, and the men had just finished battling another blaze on the island. I lived over the dining hall, and the men were downstairs having coffee when I emerged from my room carrying my son, with smoke following behind me.

I handed Deynon over to someone and then fell over. My hands were badly burned, and I had gone into shock. Shock felt good to me, because I felt no pain and it was good to see everyone working together. Several people ran upstairs to see if the fire was out; others rushed to put my hands into cold milk and to carry me to a bed they had assembled in the kitchen. They put my hands into milk because we had no water. There was no boat scheduled until the next day, so they could not take me to the mainland.

They must have suspected arson, because they put me on a cot in the kitchen and guarded me all night. My eyes were closed, but my spirit could see everything all around me. It was an experience I'll never forget. I saw Stella sitting by me all night, and I knew when she fell asleep. I knew who looked into the window at me during the night while on guard duty. I remember the first rays of dawn coming over the horizon, and I remember our one rooster crowing. Stella covered me with the Pendleton blanket that my parents had given me. I remembered my mother telling me how to receive spiritual strength from saying her prayers at sunrise. I gathered my blanket around me, slipped out of the kitchen into the yard and over to the edge of the island. I lifted my hands to the sun and prayed as it rose over the Bay Bridge in the east. I experienced a deep knowledge inside me that I would be all right.

The boat arrived in a few hours, and Stella took me over to Dr. Tepper's office in Oakland. My hands were charred black, and my fingers were huge and swollen like boiled wieners. I had from first- to third-degree burns on both hands. The doctor said they were burned down to the tendons. His medical diagnosis was that I would never be able to use my fingers again.

I refused Dr. Tepper's advice to go to the hospital. He peeled the charred skin off my hands to reveal raw, pink fingers. Then he applied a burn ointment and covered it with bandage dressing. He said it would take six months to a year before I could use my hands. I went back to the island, and, miraculously, my hands healed within six weeks with hardly any trace of scarring. I

recovered full use of all my fingers. This was my very first spiritual experience. I had learned what to say by repeating everything my father taught me; I knew what to do by remembering my mother's words of caution and guidance.²⁹

The federal government sent Bob Robertson to negotiate with us on the island.³⁰ We looked forward to this occasion and were as friendly as possible in order to encourage a good relationship. We did not have much, but we offered him coffee and brownies for this occasion. We did not use sugar, because it attracted insects; instead, we used saccharin in small tablets, which was much more efficient for our living conditions. We asked him if he wanted sugar in his coffee and he said "yes," so we put in saccharin. His report to Washington said that we had put LSD³¹ in his coffee and he had refused to drink it. Actually, I never noticed whether he drank his coffee. How paranoid he must have been!

This experience gave me keen insight into how the game of "divide and conquer" is played. Robertson told us he would not work with a "bunch of young militant Indians" who did not have the support of the responsible adult Indian community. We told him we were not militant Indians because we were unarmed.

To further our negotiations to obtain the island for our people, we formed the Bay Area Native American Council (BANAC),³² composed of all the Bay Area Indian organizations as a support group for Alcatraz. Robertson's first ploy was to fund BANAC, hoping that the Alcatraz residents would resent the government's funding of the off-island organization while the island organization was dependent on contributions. However, this did not cause anyone to blink an eye, because no one knew what it was to be funded³³ in the first place. The money gave BANAC a larger voice in Indian affairs and a more vivid profile.

Next, Allen Miller,³⁴ a San Francisco State student, and I went to Washington, D.C. to gather more support from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). This organization was composed of tribes throughout the country, and we needed their formal support. John Belindo, the NCAI director, was not very receptive. Perhaps Robertson had gotten to him before we did. We were told that it would be up to the delegation. Their national convention was in Alaska, so we had to go to Alaska to seek support.

Bob Robertson was way ahead of us in lobbying against Alcatraz. He knew we had formed BANAC to quash his claim that Alcatraz did not have the support of the responsible adult com-

munity. Robertson's propaganda to the tribes was not only that we were young militants but also that we were "urban" Indians. He told the tribes that the urban Indians were after a slice of the "federal economic pie." The reservations were already receiving very little federal funding, and the pie would be sliced even smaller if the tribes supported the militant urban Indians. We could not even get on the agenda, and we were barred from the NCAI convention.

Robertson found adversaries to our cause among various tribal chairmen and established the National Tribal Chairman's Association (NTCA).³⁵ Thus he created an effective tool to divide Indians against Indians. Tribes fell into the trap. Negotiations on the island disintegrated. The government position was to let us stay, hoping that we eventually would lose support and disappear. To speed the process, they would send out "plants" to observe us and to stir up in-fighting among the island residents.

The island council appointed me as the island's public relations representative. I started by talking with press people about the island, about our people, and about the reservations. Then I was invited to the mainland to appear on news programs to discuss the island situation.

Several times, the local media reported that the coast guard had seen weapons being loaded on the island. I knew that the federal government was trying to set us up to get killed. When it began to look dangerous for us, I called a press conference on the island to dispel any rumors that we had guns. I had the children line up with their toy guns and throw them away. I said if the coast guard had seen guns, it must have been the children's toys, and now there were none.

I was dead set against guns on the island. My experiences at Berkeley had shown me what happened to the Black Panthers after they were reported to be armed and militant. They were all killed. My mother never allowed guns in our home while I was growing up. She always said that my brothers were too young and hot-headed, so I never had any use for guns. Thomas Banyacya told me that the word *Hopi* meant peace and that our people were the true people of peace. I would not allow the symbolism of Alcatraz to be defiled by violence. Besides, I am a mother, and I would not let anyone endanger my son or the other children on the island.

A San Francisco leftist magazine by the name of *Ramparts* had paid my fine during the Third World Strike at Berkeley. Peter

Collier of *Ramparts* asked me if he could take some pictures and do a story about the problems on my reservation. When the story came out, I posed for the cover with a red paintbrush in my hand and the words "Better Red Than Dead." To me, it meant we should be proud of being Native Americans and we should not assimilate and let our culture die. I did not realize I was pushing buttons from the McCarthy era. Since *Ramparts* was not a mainstream magazine, I did not think it would receive wide circulation. I thought speaking out would help create a better understanding, but my words were twisted in the press.³⁶

Jane Fonda³⁷ saw the article and came out to the island. She said she wanted to go to Fort Hall, so I took her to my reservation to meet my parents. After she visited with them and some of my father's friends, she went back to California, inviting me to appear on several local television shows in Los Angeles. My son Deynon and I went to Los Angeles, and then I went to New York for the Dick Cavett Show. Deynon stayed at Henry Fonda's house in California with Jane's husband, Roger Vadim, who remained with their daughter Vanessa and Deynon while Jane and I were in New York.

I had never been on a television show, and it made me feel extremely uncomfortable. During the first commercial break on the Cavett show, I got up and walked off, because I thought I was supposed to leave. I felt awkward, wondering if I was supposed to be witty and funny about the injustices perpetrated against our people.

During this time, after Richard Oakes had left Alcatraz, Stella Leach got fed up with the politics and the constant attacks on her and her family, and she left also. As a member of the Alcatraz council, I had to become more involved, since many of the other members had left.

John Trudell,³⁸ who ran "Radio Free Alcatraz," became the spokesperson for the island. John had strong leadership qualities and a good speaking voice and always had something meaningful to say. John became the new leader for Alcatraz, and we worked well as a team. I welcomed the opportunity to have John in the spotlight, making the presentations to the media, while I, in the background, prepared the press releases.

It was about this time that I wrote the planning grant proposal for Thunderbird University and Cultural Center, named for a group of Indians in the Bay Area called the "Thunderbirds."³⁹ The island chose the architectural firm of McDonald and Associates of

San Francisco to develop the design and model. We unveiled our plans on our first anniversary on the island, 20 November 1970.

As the executive secretary of the Bay Area Native American Council (BANAC), I was asked to go to Washington, D.C with the other officers. Before I left the island, we held a meeting, at which John Trudell became very angry with me and made some rude accusations. I did not want to throw more fuel on the fire by having a confrontation; instead, I rushed down to the docks to catch my boat for the mainland. All of the island residents were aware of the rift.

Ethel Kennedy set up an appointment for me to discuss the Alcatraz situation with Edward Bennett Williams.⁴⁰ On 21 January 1971, I wrote a letter to the island, with copies to the island attorneys and BANAC, requesting approval to secure Edward Bennett Williams as legal counsel to pursue the litigative end for Alcatraz.

While in D.C., I stayed with Edgar Cahn, author of *My Brother's Keeper*, and his wife Jean, who were responsible for many of the poverty and advocacy programs for Native Americans and poor people throughout the country. President Nixon had been elected and was now taking office. Edgar's contact in the White House, Bobby Kilberg, was writing Nixon's inauguration address, which was to be titled the "President's White House Address on American Indians." This message set the tone for programs directed to benefit Indians on reservations throughout President Nixon's administration. The very first and last help we ever received was too short-lived.

When I received no response from the island, I went back to see what was going on. John Trudell told me that the island attorneys had advised him and the other residents not to give approval to litigate. I wanted to hear what an Indian attorney would recommend and recruited John Echohawk,⁴¹ director of the Native American Rights Fund. Echohawk went to the island and gave his legal opinion that it would greatly benefit the island and the cause if we initiated litigation.

By this time, Trudell's wife, Lou, had given birth to their son Wovoka on the island. The baby was the only Native American born on liberated territory in five hundred years. John had the respect and awe of both the island residents and the non-Indian public. Under the Alcatraz attorneys' advice, the occupiers voted down the litigation. John Trudell could have changed their minds

if he had wanted to, but no one could change John's mind about seeking litigation.

I did not give up the litigation issue and went back to the student organizations to seek their support. Richard Oakes had left San Francisco State by then and was living in Northern California with his wife's family and tribe. He was eventually shot to death by white racists. Allen Miller and several of the original Native American students were still attending San Francisco State.

The students at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State were still very concerned about Alcatraz. I told them that the island population was under the influence of the attorneys who had advised against litigation. The island people were down-to-earth, good people who had sacrificed the modern conveniences of the mainland and sometimes went without food in order to "hold the rock." I felt helpless to try to reach them; the divisive gap was just too wide.⁴²

The students were very supportive. They decided to take back the island, outnumbering the antiligation population and putting the movement back on track. I was greatly encouraged by this unselfish gesture. We set the date and met with our groups to arrange for boats to go out to the island. All of the students would take their families to live on the island. It would soon be summer, school would be out, and our academic survival would not be immediately threatened.

The day before we planned to go, the federal government took the remaining people off the island without a confrontation. We were devastated. We suspected that we had had an informer among us.

After the government took Alcatraz back, we all went our separate ways.⁴³ I guess that is how a tree grows; it splits into many branches. We were always afraid that, if the government had given us Alcatraz, they would have said, "We gave you Alcatraz; you got what you wanted!" They would have expected us to be satisfied with that. No, we want much more.

We want to live as free people in our own country. We want the government to pass laws to respect our Mother Earth, with real enforcement to protect the land, the water, the environment, and the people. We want freedom of religion—the right to be human. We want our ancestors' remains to be returned to our homelands. We want the federal government to stop contributing to the destruction around the world and to set a good example so we can all be proud to be Americans.

The Alcatraz occupation could have gone much more smoothly. People could have cooperated and supported us more. We could have had all the answers and no arguments. We have a long way to go before we can live in a balanced world and be the best people that we can be. We made many mistakes, but this is how we learn and grow.

We can see today that the tree of Indian life is growing stronger, more mature and complex. Our ancient roots continue to give our spirits strength and guidance. We did not get the island, but we aroused the consciousness of all people, including ourselves, to our plight. Every individual and every nation still has a story to be told. Within these stories are our guidelines for the future.

The island is a reminder of our ongoing relationship with the federal government. It is an infamous prison that carries the burden of the wicked deeds of others, the bondage and captivity of our people, the painful stories of human misery and suffering. The federal government has never recognized our claim and has failed to enforce many treaties and federal laws protecting our rights and those of many others.

Under the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs manages our lives in the same way that Golden Gate Parks and Recreation manages Alcatraz Island. The island is surrounded by the water of the bay, just as we are surrounded by the ignorant and selfish interests of capitalistic industrialized societies. The structures on the island grow old and weatherbeaten, treated with dishonor and disrespect, as are our culture and religion, and the sacred laws of our mother earth.

Today, our people continue to live in poverty—the victims of genocide and injustice. We are political prisoners in our own homelands. We have no individual constitutional protections, because we are considered “political entities.” If truth and justice were truly practiced by the federal government, our traditional governments, our religious leaders, and our people would be recognized today. Our hardships have made our spirits grow stronger. We give thanks for our many blessings and pray that the sacred circle of life continues forever.

NOTES

1. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' assimilationist policy, which relocated the majority of Native Americans from the reservations to the cities, ended in 1967.

2. The 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or religion.

3. Our family suffered great hardships as the result of my father's stand against the government.

4. Education was promised to us under our treaties and federal laws. The 1921 Snyder Act, 25 USCA, specifically stated that the federal government would provide for our education, our health, and our general welfare.

5. This was the coalition of Asians, Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans on the University of California, Berkeley, campus. We used the term *Third World* because our people were being exploited by international corporations and the government, the same as in any Third World country.

6. I was arrested and charged with assaulting a police officer. The charge was then reduced to a misdemeanor. I was suspended by the university for one semester because of the charges brought against me, but they were dropped, since there was no evidence, and I was readmitted the following semester.

7. Russell Means, who later became an American Indian Movement activist, is my son Deynon's uncle.

8. Hank Means is the father of Russell Means and the grandfather of my son Deynon. They are Oglala Lakota from South Dakota.

9. Belva Cottier, an Oglala Lakota historian, was actively involved in many Bay Area organizations. She is my son Deynon's relative.

10. Richard McKenzie, a Lakota, was a former president of the American Indian Center in San Francisco and was involved in Bay Area Native American issues.

11. The newspapers read "Sioux's Sue" over Alcatraz.

12. The treaties forced Indians to give up territorial hunting, gathering, and ceremonial areas and live within reservation "concentration camps"; in return, the federal government was supposed to provide food, health care, education, and general welfare. Every single treaty ever made was broken, and tribes still live in poverty as the result of the continuing violation of laws and agreements.

13. Richard Oakes was a Mohawk from the Iroquois Confederation. He and his wife Anne (Pomo) had eight children. Richard was the chairman of the student organization at San Francisco State College. He was an intelligent young man, with natural leadership abilities and charisma.

14. Adam Nordwall, a Chippewa, owned a pest extermination business in the Bay Area and frequented local powwows, where he participated as a fancy dancer.

15. Earl Livermore, a Blackfeet artist from Montana, was the last person to serve as director of the San Francisco Indian Center before it burned down. One of his paintings portrayed Alcatraz Island, with the fog moving in over the Golden Gate Bridge. The fog took the shapes of spirit buffalo and the "Return of the Buffalo."

16. Rick Evening was a Shoshone Bannock student at San Francisco State College.

17. Kay Many Horses was a young Lakota woman who had been relocated to San Francisco from South Dakota. We called her "Kay, Kay."

18. Our group from Berkeley and San Francisco State.

19. Claudene is my youngest sister. She was a student at UC Berkeley and assisted me with planning.

20. Deynon was two-and-one-half years old. He is the son of Theodore Means, Sr., Oglala Lakota, who is a younger brother of Russell Means. Deynon is Theodore Means, Jr., also known on the island as "The Alcatraz Kid."

21. Devon was four years old and stayed with my parents on the reservation in Idaho. His father is John B. Owl of Cherokee, North Carolina.

22. The federal government forced us to give up our lands and live on reservations, where we fell into the depths of poverty and many of us died. The government failed and continues to fail to uphold the laws passed to protect us.

23. Many native people who had lost their identities and culture were inspired by the Alcatraz occupation to identify as Indians again.

24. We recognized that it was time to find out who we were and what it means to be connected with our ancestral roots.

25. Stella was a powerful spokesperson and a leader on the island. Her son David participated in both of the landing parties on 14 November and 20 November. Through her guidance and with the help of other community leaders, we were able to survive the in-fighting that resulted from the insecurities and jealousies of various individuals. She was a strong Indian woman, and I admired her for her courage and wisdom. I wish I could have been more encouraging and supportive to her. She contributed greatly to holding the island together during those hard times.

26. Grace Thorpe was the daughter of the Olympic star and great native athlete Jim Thorpe. Her goal was to get her father's Olympic medals back. The island supported this effort.

27. Thomas Banyacya was appointed by the Hopi elders in 1945 to carry the message of peace. He is an important international traveler and a knowledgeable, gifted traditionalist.

28. Banyacya says that the Hopi originated from the ancient civilizations of the Inca, the Maya, and the Aztec. After the sacred laws were violated, which meant the "coming of the continents," they needed to get themselves situated on both continents, with half of them moving into North America and the other half going into South America. The four colors of red, white, black and yellow represent the four races of humanity. They all practiced the same ancient laws of the universe, and their people were the last contingent left to maintain the sacred laws. When they left for North America, they had to pick a site to implant the ancient roots of their nation. They selected the desert because it would be the last place that anyone else would want. This is when they became Hopi. From this point, they migrated into the four directions. They are known as different people throughout time, but their tribes are from the same roots. It is only the different plants and animals of the geographic regions that make them appear as different tribes, but the practices and beliefs are the same universal laws that everyone around the world practiced at one time.

29. My mother is Olive Burns Boyer, a strong Bannock woman. She is a master of everything she undertakes, from housecleaning to hide and beadwork. She is a Bannock, Shoshone, and English speaker.

30. Bob Robertson was an aide to former governor Paul Laxalt and went to Washington, D.C., when Laxalt was elected senator of Nevada. Robertson is from Carson City and is far from the Indian expert he thought himself to be, but he always managed to get appointments in Republican administrations.

31. LSD is a synthetic hallucinogenic drug.

32. I liked this name, because the pronunciation was the same as my tribe, Bannock. Everyone always said that they had never heard of my tribe, and I thought it could use some exposure.

33. Organizationally and financially supported by the government or private funds.

34. Al Miller was a Seminole from Oklahoma. He was the next chief in command of the San Francisco State students and a member of the Alcatraz council for a period of time. Al was noted for his intelligence and easygoing wit.

35. The NTCA was funded initially out of Vice President Spiro Agnew's office to counter militant Indians.

36. Collier wrote an article for *Ramparts* describing me in a typically ignorant, degrading, non-Indian fashion.

37. Many people have bashed Jane Fonda's support of Indians, but she was the only mainstream movie star to come out in support of native people during the occupation of Alcatraz. She was no more ignorant of our people than the rest of nonnative society, but she was more misunderstood.

38. John Trudell was a Lakota spokesperson and a leader on Alcatraz Island.

39. The Thunderbirds were a kind of Bay Area "warrior society" composed of people who banded together like a family. They were not an official organization, but they were dedicated to supporting the island. My brother Dwayne was one of their leaders.

40. Williams was an East Coast attorney who was renowned for taking sensational cases. He was the current owner of the Washington Redskins.

41. John Echohawk was the first Native American attorney to graduate from the Indian law program of the University of New Mexico. He is a Pawnee from Oklahoma.

42. While I was in Washington, D.C., Herb Caen wrote an article stating that Ethel Kennedy had set me up for a screen test with a movie producer. I did not know anything about it, but the island residents apparently thought I had gone to Washington for a screen test, which caused more jealousies to flare.

43. I graduated with honors from UC Berkeley in 1971 and went back to my home reservation. In 1972, I left for law school in Washington, D.C. The Trail of Broken Treaties came to Washington that year, resulting in the takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and continuing to the siege at Wounded Knee in 1973.