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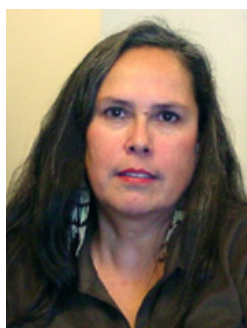
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Who is Sandy White Hawk? (Biography)



Sandy is currently a Commissioner for the **Maine Wabenaki Truth and Reconciliation Commission**.

<http://www.mainewabanakitrc.org/#&panel1-1>

Sandy White Hawk on Soundcloud: "**Make No Bones About It.**"
May 17th, 2015

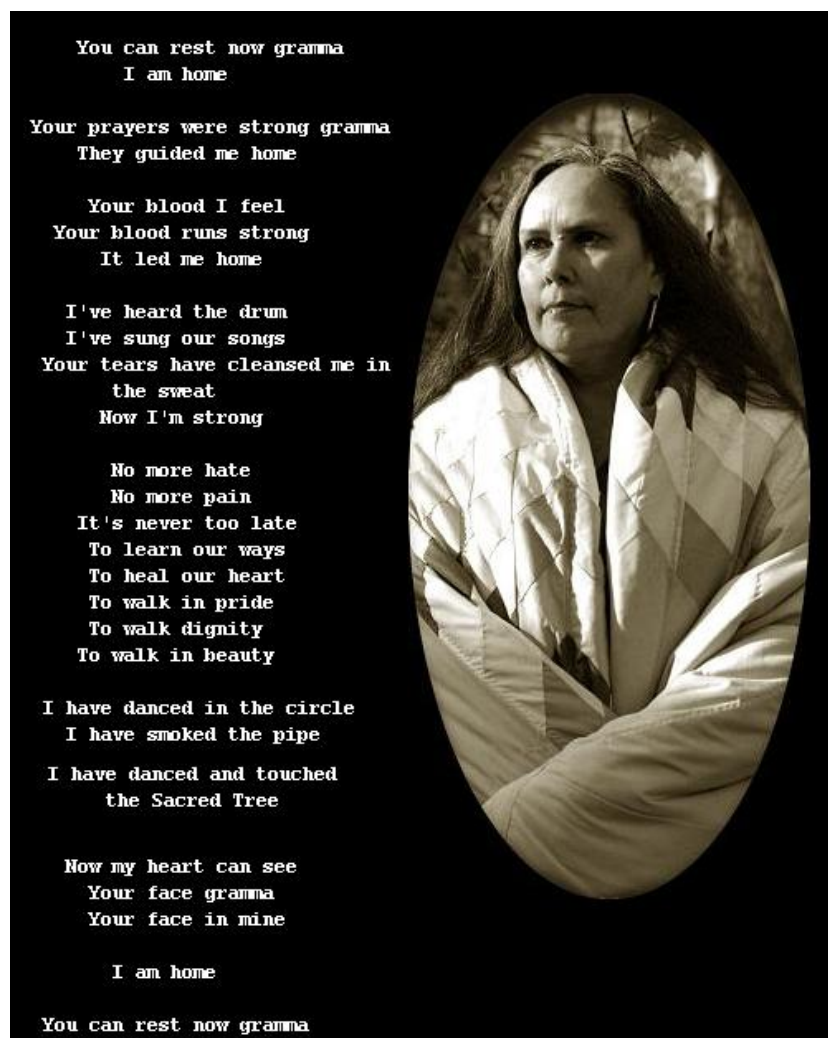
My name is Sandra L. White Hawk. I am Sicangu Lakota, enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, and a United States Navy Veteran. After being a single mother for 14 years I met an Omaha man, George McCauley, who courted me, a small town girl, and brought me here to live in the big city of St. Paul, MN. I had always heard it is never too late to find love, but never thought it would happen to me personally. Trust and complete trust in the love of another was a major issue for me as it is with many adoptees. But I fought through all those fears that had accumulated from being adopted, abused and my own addictions and trusted the love I knew I had for George and that he had for me. On September 11, 2004 we had a marriage blessing in our traditional Lakota way. Together we stood on a buffalo robe and smoked the pipe and put our trust in the Creator to bring us the courage to walk in balance so that we could share this path in good health and happiness with each other. Silently we vowed to help one another with our hearts and talents and to love each other in a way that would strengthen us in our individual growth so that we could love, support and encourage each other in the healthiest way for the rest of our lives. It was a beautiful ceremony surrounded and witnessed by those we love.

Together we have three children, and three grandchildren. George is one of my strongest supporters and encouragers in this work I do with adoptees. I often look to him for guidance and ideas. One of the ways George uses his talent to support me is in maintaining this website. He tries to keep me on track entering current information. Thank you George, you are the love of my life. I look good because of your good work! I love you with all my heart. You give me more courage and strength than I can express.

George also makes sure as many our events get video taped so that some day we will have a complete historical documentary of this work. Some day it will be on PBS!

I want to extend a special greeting to all adoptees and fostered individuals. And to all our birth parents and other relatives who spend the years we are away from them wondering, worrying about us always praying we will some day return home. We thank you for those prayers for it those prayers that has kept us here and brought us home. Our voices have been silent for many years. Now the time has come to tell this side of the story.

Here is my story.



Today I carry my biological mother's family name. It was not always so. The journey back to my beginnings was filled with abuse, addiction, fear, confusion and resentment.

I was born in 1953 on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. At the age of 18 months, I was adopted out to a white missionary family.

This family was originally from Illinois but moved to South Dakota to "work with the Indians," a phrase my adopted mother always used when she referred to her missionary call to South Dakota. Because of their close work with an Indian church, they were aware of babies being born to already large poor families. They believed that they would be helping a child have a better life in a home with money and stability.

This idea did not come from grace (a basic Christian concept), but rather a cruel assumption that Indian families did not have a religion and a spiritual belief system or a

family system. All they saw was the poverty and alcoholism compared it to their privileged life and came to the conclusion that they and their way of life were superior.

It was from this false superiority that I suffered the cruelest form of abuse: a complete rejection of my natural spirit. My adoptive mother constantly reminded me that no matter what I did I came from a pagan race whose only hope for redemption was to assimilate to white culture. From the time I was small I heard things like, "you better not grow up to be a good for nothing Indian."

My self-concept was so negative. I felt so ugly and unwanted and lonely. I did not have an Indian face to reflect my image. However, somewhere deep within myself I had a sense-as small as it was-that I was Indian and that it was a good thing. I had no language for those feelings. I did not know how I was going to get out, but I felt that I would. I was locked in years of isolation and confusion. It was truly the loneliest place to be.

The very thing that I was to be "saved from"-poverty, abuse and alcoholism-was thrust onto me by life's natural unfolding. My adoptive father died as a result of a farm accident. The farm was lost and my uneducated, emotionally unstable mother supported us on minimum wage jobs as she faded in and out of insanity.

Growing up was difficult because of poverty and abuse. I often think I probably could have survived that alone. But it was the feelings of "being different," of "not fitting in," because I didn't look like any one around me. Which lead to unbearable feelings of isolation. I did not grow up looking into Indian faces, looking at Indian bodies. All I knew was that I did not fit in anywhere, and at the age of fourteen I learned to numb those desperate feelings with alcohol and drugs.

I survived and graduated from high school, joined the Navy, got married and had two children. During the last twenty years I divorced and have overcome the cycle of addiction to alcohol. I also began healing from the wounds caused by abuse.

In 1988 I went home to Rosebud, South Dakota for the first time. My family not only remembered me, but has come to expect another relative to return each year. I was one of nine brothers and sisters, all but one fostered or adopted out. My mother, Nina Lulu White Hawk, was the oldest of twenty children, most of whom had endured the hardships of boarding schools. My family welcomed me home and encouraged me to keep coming back.

Attending social gatherings, ceremonies and pow wows has returned the years eaten away by the pain of separation from my spiritual center.

There was a time when I felt that my feelings of isolation and confusion were solely a result of the abuse. But that's not true. They are a result of not being connected to that spiritual center as an Indian woman.

I have found out that I am not alone in this. It has been documented that as early as 1890, thousands of Indian children were forcibly removed from their homes. Between the years 1941 and 1978 (when the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed) we know that 35% all Indian children were removed from their homes and placed in orphanages, white foster homes and adopted into white families.

These institutions and homes were often brutal, which only added to the trauma of early childhood separation. Many mothers and fathers of these lost or stolen children still grieve their loss.

These children are now adults and struggle with personal identity and a sense of belonging. then mental and emotional toll is evidenced in the high suicide rates and depression of adult adoptees. Many search for their family ties but do not know where to begin, which adds to their pain of separation.

The time has come to heal the wound of this forced assimilation by establishing their sense of belonging to a spiritually rich family.

The vision of a song for adoptees came to me, an honor song that would help those looking to find their way back. I shared this vision with Chris Leith, a Prairie Island Dakota Elder and Spiritual Advisor to the National Indian Child Welfare Association. He asked Jerry Dearly, an Oglala Lakota, to make the song. I hoped the song would also help heal family members who have lost children to the system.

I know that when many of us were taken away there was no Indian Child Welfare Act to assure family resources were used before an adoption took place. Our men were not able to keep their families together. It was a time of incredible oppression. Consequently many families carry this pain with them today, praying quietly that their child is alive and healthy.

The song was sung for the first time in the Black Hills at World Peace and Prayer Day, June 21, 2000. After the song was sung Chris said we need to do a Wiping of Tears Ceremony to heal the grief caused by the years of separation from their families and communities. He said that by doing this we are, *okiciywaste wablenica*-"making everything good for orphans"-through singing this song and using the Wiping Tears Ceremony for those returning home.

After some time we realized the need for an organization that could network and assist adoptees, fostered individuals and their families. Together Chris and I co-founded First Nations Orphan Association.

The time has come to take back what was taken from us. Let us take it back in **love and compassion**.

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