

2010

A Man of Passion and Vision: George Whitewolf

David E. Wilkins

University of Richmond, dwilkins@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/jepson-faculty-publications>



Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#), and the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wilkins, David E. "A Man of Passion and Vision." *Indian Country Today* 30, no. 5 (July 7, 2010): 5.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jepson School of Leadership Studies articles, book chapters and other publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

A man of passion and vision: George Whitewolf

Wilkins, David . Indian Country Today ; Oneida, N.Y. [Oneida, N.Y]07 July 2010: 5.

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

[George Whitewolf]'s home was also just a stone's throw from Washington, D.C, and many Natives from the Lakota, Haudenosaunee, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, and countless other nations would stop at George's place for rest and ceremonies as they prepped for their difficult diplomatic visits to Congress and the BIA to discuss treaty rights, protest events like the Longest Walk, and other politically incendiary topics. In the 1970s, George was also very active in the American Indian Movement and his home was under frequent surveillance by the FBI.

George had been adopted by Larry Red Shirt's family of Pine Ridge, and he and Larry formed a very close bond. I traveled with George on numerous occasions to South Dakota for both ceremonies and political gatherings and had the opportunity to meet and get to know Larry, Sam, and their mother, who George simply called Ma Red Shirt. I also had the honor to meet two of George's spiritual teachers - especially Dawson Has No Horses and Frank Fools Crow - two well known Holy Men, and others as well.

Within a few years, George and his allies had made tremendous progress on both fronts and today Bear Mountain is once again the central site for Monacan cultural and political identity. Young Monacane can be seen and heard exercising their cultural sovereignty in various contexts, like the annual Monacan pow wow that George established in 1992. In fact, it was the proceeds from the first several powwows that raised the necessary money to purchase 100 acres on Bear Mountain.

ABSTRACT

George's home was also just a stone's throw from Washington, D.C, and many Natives from the Lakota, Haudenosaunee, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, and countless other nations would stop at George's place for rest and ceremonies as they prepped for their difficult diplomatic visits to Congress and the BIA to discuss treaty rights, protest events like the Longest Walk, and other politically incendiary topics. [...] it was the proceeds from the first several powwows that raised the necessary money to purchase 100 acres on Bear Mountain.

FULL TEXT

My brother, George Whitewolf, a Monacali/Lakota, walked on June 7, 2010. He was 67. George had struggled with heart problems for several years, and had recently had quadruple bypass surgery.

George was my dearest friend, and he was also my spiritual mentor. I first met him in the summer of 1975 on Mohawk lands. We had both been invited to Akwesasne by Jerry Gambill, then known as Rarihokwats, who was the editor of Akwesasne Notes, the most outstanding Native news journal of the day. George and I formed an immediate bond, and when he departed for his home in Maryland he invited me to accompany him. It was a mind and spirit-altering decision that changed the course of my life.

His homestead just outside Ellicott City was affectionately known as "Whitewolf 's Paradise" because visitors frequently discovered that even a short stay there was enough to transport them to a spiritual and emotional paradise after partaking in ceremonies and political and cultural discussions with Natives from all over Turtle

Island who frequented his place.

At this time, George and his first wife, Gloria, also owned and operated a small business in Ellicott City that featured fine handmade buckskin clothing for which he became famous as well as beadwork, bonework, silver work, etc. George, a plumber by trade, was just getting his business operational and longed for the day when he could focus solely on the production of high quality art and crafts.

George's home was also just a stone's throw from Washington, D.C, and many Natives from the Lakota, Haudenosaunee, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, and countless other nations would stop at George's place for rest and ceremonies as they prepped for their difficult diplomatic visits to Congress and the BIA to discuss treaty rights, protest events like the Longest Walk, and other politically incendiary topics. In the 1970s, George was also very active in the American Indian Movement and his home was under frequent surveillance by the FBI.

George had been adopted by Larry Red Shirt's family of Pine Ridge, and he and Larry formed a very close bond. I traveled with George on numerous occasions to South Dakota for both ceremonies and political gatherings and had the opportunity to meet and get to know Larry, Sam, and their mother, who George simply called Ma Red Shirt. I also had the honor to meet two of George's spiritual teachers - especially Dawson Has No Horses and Frank Fools Crow - two well known Holy Men, and others as well.

George's home was a cultural and spiritual magnet for Native people and he conducted countless healing ceremonies and vision quests for many individuals, all while maintaining a presence on the pow wow scene, and continuing to make beautiful art.

By 1990, his birth nation, the Monacan, called him home and he answered by relocating to lands of his ancestors - the mountains of Virginia. While George had felt a powerful tug to move to Pine Ridge to be near his adopted family, ultimately it was the cultural and spiritual needs of his own nation that won out.

Immediately, George set out to revive and expand a more organic understanding and practical exercise of Monacan culture which entailed two major dimensions: Reclaiming Bear Mountain, the most sacred site of the Monacan people; and instilling in Monacan youth an intense love and appreciation for indigenous knowledge, traditions and values.

Within a few years, George and his allies had made tremendous progress on both fronts and today Bear Mountain is once again the central site for Monacan cultural and political identity. Young Monacane can be seen and heard exercising their cultural sovereignty in various contexts, like the annual Monacan pow wow that George established in 1992. In fact, it was the proceeds from the first several powwows that raised the necessary money to purchase 100 acres on Bear Mountain.

Beyond serving as the spiritual guide for traditional Monacan culture, George was also drawn into his nation's political and economic affairs. For the last several years, he served as the assistant chief of his nation and continued to be a powerful advocate for the young people, for the land, for his people's political recognition, and for the continued expansion of indigenous values.

In some eerily similar respects, George was very much like my other powerful mentor, Vine Deloria Jr. Both men were forces of nature, and even though they never met, their personalities, their interdisciplinary knowledge, their love of the land and her many peoples, their insatiable appetites for good food, good friends, and good stories, and their incessant quest for the truth were remarkably comparable.

Vine, as I think upon it now, was my principal intellectual guide as well as being a dear friend. George was my principal spiritual guide and an equally close friend. Interestingly, I met both in that life-altering summer of 1975.

As in the classic Vietnam movie, "Platoon," where Charlie Sheen's character says that he was born of the starkly contrasting personalities and behaviors of the two sergeants, I, too, was born of the exquisite guidance, intense instruction, and unbridled support that I received from these two Native giants. But in my case, I was blessed even more because of the ever-deepening friendships that I shared with both.

Native America has been profoundly enriched and strengthened by the lives and actions of George Whitewolf and Vine Deloria Jr. I have also been emphatically and indelibly influenced in so many respects.

But at this moment, in the immediate wake of George's passing, I simply feel overwhelmingly deflated. Journey well, brother.

Sidebar

NATIVE AMERICA HAS BEEN PROFOUNDLY ENRICHED AND STRENGTHENED BY THE LIVES AND ACTIONS OF GEORGE WHITEWOLF AND VINE DELORIA JR.

AuthorAffiliation

David E. Wilkins, Lumbee, is professor of American Indian studies, political science, law and American studies at the University of Minnesota.