

# **The Long Suffering**

## **Part II: Living The Yup'ik Inuit Prophecy: Living A Great Lie**

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Village Alaska, 1940's, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) School. First day of school.

Teacher from the Lower 48. Holding a Dick and Jane book. Picture on book depicts suburban America with two children playing with their dog outside on a neatly mowed lawn beside a well kept house. Native children of varying ages sit nervously, their weathered faces hiding fear and uncertainty. Most wearing brand new mukluks and their least faded or worn out blue jeans, shirts and dresses.

"Good morning children. My name is Mrs. Smith. Welcome to your new school. I am very happy to be here. I look forward to getting to know each and every one of you." (Looks at Native interpreter, smiles quickly and nods.)

"It gives me great pleasure to tell you if you complete your education and graduate, you will get a good job. In order to do that, we have rules to help you learn faster. From now on you cannot speak your own language in school. Those who break this rule will be immediately punished. We will only speak English. It is the only language spoken in America. It is the greatest language in the world."

The cobbled street accented teacher started to paint a grand picture of America, how great it is to live in the United States. She told her students about the U.S. Constitution and the guarantee of democracy for each and every citizen. She told them America was a rich and powerful country where everyone lived in comfort because of America's cash economy system. Every part of the students' lives was to change with promises of a better life, security and a prosperous future. The pursuit of happiness lay within the American Dream. The end of the rainbow was anchored in the Great Melting Pot. She told her students they MUST change and become like all the other Americans.

So what is it truly like today for those students of Mrs. Smith? Did they find a better life, security and happiness in the American dream? In order to answer these questions one must see those students before the BIA school and Mrs. Smith came. In fact in order to see the whole picture, one must go back to the time before the Russians came.

Since time immemorial, the villages had been perfecting and using their governing, educational and spiritual systems. The Yup'ik Inuits' systems began during the time when Mother Earth's crust was thin. This was when the Yup'ik people use to be able to hop across a creek, now known as the Bering Strait. Their stories ref-

erence the two major ice ages their people experienced since the two land masses separated. They talk about the minor ice ages in between the two major ones and those following the last major one. The people remember the time when members of different tribes or nations passed through their domain.

The governing system was the Elders Councils. Men and women who had acquired a life time of knowledge and wisdom were responsible for making decisions for individuals, families and their villages. The men and women did daily community chores or assignments. Every one had equal responsibilities except during a

other religion the Devil created so therefore they should not even associate with them.

A few students were sent to boarding schools for several years. Most returned home. Some never returned to their villages. Some were never heard of again. Very few of their parents and grandparents knew exactly what happened as the religious or government schools. Even today they do not know what is really happening at the local schools or at the village church.

Fifty years later, some of Mrs. Smith's students have survived the long hard journey to have their own story to tell. Some didn't go on to high school, some gradu-

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war or raid. That is when the Dog Soldiers and the warriors each take on their special roles and positions throughout the community.

The Elders were responsible for teaching all the children, particularly their own grandchildren, about the history, mythologies, songs, dances, and ceremonies. The parents taught them about daily activities needed to be done for their survival. There was so much to teach that the boys and girls were separated at an early age due to the intensity of their teachings and because of the sacredness of that learning. All children were taught to live a spiritual life (not a religious one) where they lived in harmony with each other and with all the four-legged, the winged, the finned and all living and spiritual beings on Mother Earth and their universe.

For many of the village people, life began to change before Mrs. Smith came, before the BIA school was even built. The Black Robes came before she did. The aging church was the first complete wood building in their village. Many of the students weren't born yet. These missionaries stayed only a month and a half out of the year because they had other villages to "service". Each time the missionary would come and then leave, the children would go through a spiritual turmoil because everything they were learning was completely opposite of their Elders and parents teachings. Some missionaries stated 'the spiritual connection the Yup'ik people had with various animal spirits (like the wolf on a child's parka their mother or grandmother made and they were very proud of) was the work of the Devil.' Or, the next village where their aunts, uncles and cousins lived was no good because they practiced an-

ated. Many didn't. A very small percentage went to college and a much smaller percentage got their college degree.

Today, those that didn't go to high school or got high school degrees don't have jobs. Even some who went to college or got their college degrees don't have regular jobs. Most everyone lives off the land and works at seasonal jobs. Those able to find work usually only get menial jobs. Even when they applied for jobs they are qualified for, or have the appropriate degrees, they are often not hired because they are Natives. Most demoralizing of all is when their own Native organization won't hire them even though they know they are qualified to do the job and instead will hire a non-Native or a Native from another place. (In most cases when people get hired because they have personal or family friends or relatives within the organization who manipulate the job description and hiring process. They do this by writing the job description and hiring process. They do this by writing the job description suited primarily for the qualifications of their relative or friend. Some go so far as having the person they want hired to write the job de-

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*scription himself.)*

This is not all today's Native adults are struggling with. Some students that went to the boarding or village schools were spiritu-

ally, physically, mentally and/or emotionally abused. They, in turn, abused their family members, friends or others in the same way that they were abused. In those villages where there has been a

longer history of contact by outside government and church agencies, the cycle of generational abuses dates back to the great-grand parent Elders of today.

Some adults cannot fish or

hunt in the same places their traditional family hunting and fishing sites are because the government or individuals have stolen them. Their inherent inalienable rights are regularly abolished ad-

ministratively or legislatively without even a hearing though the Natives Indigenous rights are protected by various international and federal laws, including the Alaska State Constitution under Chapt. 12, Sect. 12. Many individuals are forced to hunt and fish in a non-traditional way. They follow seasons and regulations designed for sport hunters and commercial fishermen. For example, they are forced to hunt only mature breeding bulls which are the life force of healthy and strong herds. Traditional laws promote the strong animal herds by allowing the taking of only the young-non-breeding bulls or old non-breeding cows. When the Alaska Natives do hunt and fish using traditional laws to feed their families they are arrested and put in jail.

The contemporary values, principles and systems make it difficult for today's Native adults to communicate with their parents and other Elders because the adults, since childhood, have been in a system designed to completely alienate the generations. They are constantly being pressured to give or compromise a part of their Indigenous Being in order to be "today's Native", i.e. a citizen of the United States or State of Alaska, a shareholder of their village and regional corporations and a congregational member of the local denominational church. They continue to struggle with who they are and live with the dilemma of constant propaganda they must live in "two worlds". Many believed the abuses they received within contemporary systems was an integral part of the system and therefore they must accept it. Even now, Native leaders who work within and benefit personally from these systems are the ones trying to convince their own people to be accepting despite the devastation these systems have and continue to create.

All of the traumatizing experiences has created a code of silence, within individuals, families, villages and nations of Indigenous Peoples of Alaska about what really happened to them and what is continuing to happen today. So many of the Native Peoples are suffering silently without having any opportunity to heal or recover from the cycles of abuse related to the original oppression. Many of the Native peoples have turned to alcohol and drugs so they don't have to feel the pains of the constant, sometimes daily, struggle they have to endure. Some resort to suicide as one solution to these problems. Living this Great Lie for Native peoples is, by far, the most devastating to the strength and balance of their spirit.

Things have begun to change for many Natives adults. The Great Lie has begun to unfold. For example, many learned the United States of America is not the greatest country in the world. Many have seen the document (the Kostlitsov Memorandum) which clearly shows that the United States

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# • Kostlitsov memorandum locked up in Archives

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knowingly lied when they said they bought Alaska from Russia. This document clearly shows that they only bought the property of the Russian American Trading Co. Many Natives also now know the United States took that document, immediately hid and locked it up in the National Archives.

Some village leaders have accumulated national and international legal documents that determine the specific type of relationship the United States and other countries have with all the tribes in Alaska and how that relationship works. Some of these documents also show how the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska can work together to take back all their lands, if they choose to do so. The Native village leaders also now know the United States and the State of Alaska politicians and their administrators knowingly and purposely continue to break these national and international laws designed to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples all over the world. Tribal Members and their leaders know only the village Tribal Governments have the authority to represent and make decisions on behalf of their Tribal Member's rights, lands and all

interests to their property. Future commentaries will focus on these documents).

Many adults now know they don't have to give up any of their culture or traditions to succeed in this cash economy system. They do not have to give up their language, traditional songs and dances, their relationship to the land, the winged, the four-legged and the finned, but most important of all they do not have to give up their Sacred Ceremonies. The most encouraging event the Alaska Native adults are experiencing is they can heal and recover from years of spiritual, physical, mental and emotional abuse the U.S. government systems and the denominational religions committed and are continuing to do today by forcing the Natives to continue to

Live A Great Lie.

Throughout this long journey one thing no one could take away or kill was the Spirit of the Alaska Native Peoples. It survived the greatest effort to eliminate it that our people can remember in recent times. The Native Spirituality has been battered, torn up, stepped on and spit on but it is still alive. Now is time for all Native Peoples to use this to heal themselves and others. Each person, each family, each community, each tribe and each national must commit themselves to this healing because the right kind of medicine for their spiritual afflictions cannot be found in federal or state government, the churches, in modern medicine or any place where these abuses happened but within their own Being and Way of Life.