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# Tales from Pine Ridge

KAREN ARTICHOKER, WITH HEATH DUCHENEAUX  
AND DWANNA OLDSON (LAKOTA)

KAREN ARTICHOKER

“We got along well enough,” Karen Artichoker said of her white dorm-mates decades ago at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. “I even went home with one girl. She was really young. She was sixteen, really smart.” The girl’s parents invited Karen and another friend to their home in La Crosse, Wisconsin, for a holiday weekend, and picked them up at the college. “All the way her mother told me about the big Indian [statue] in the Wisconsin harbor. The whole trip. These girls actually were a little bit better than their parents. ‘I told my mother not to be talking stupid to you, and she’s doing it anyway, I’m sorry.’” The group arrived at a home whose grandeur still gives Karen pause. “We sit down in this formal dining room. I kid you not. This mother . . . These are the nicest people in the world. I mean, there are *way* worse people in the world than this family. This mother says, ‘So. You’re Indian! Tell us all about it.’

“I looked at her and I didn’t say anything, ’cause I didn’t really know what to say. She says, ‘See dear, you tell us all about it now, then we don’t have to bring it up again all weekend.’”

“My friend was mortified. ‘*Mom*. Come on, Karen, let’s go watch TV.’”

“Those girls,” Karen mused, “did not live the same life I did.”

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Nor do they probably lead it now. Who else, in her early fifties, was raising the sixth such child to come into her life—a four-year-old whirlwind named

Devina—while running an organization acclaimed as the most innovative program in Native America to stop the abuse of Native women? It is Cangleska, on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Pine Ridge, known for Wounded Knee, both the bloody massacre in 1890 and the confrontation in 1973, stands out nowadays for dispiriting statistics. The unemployment rate is over 75 percent, the alcoholism rate 85 percent, Karen said. Among the population of 5,000 are some forty gangs. (A small indication of the poverty: at a gas station in the town of Pine Ridge, as I was about to fill my car, I noticed the pump displayed the previous purchase of \$2.00.)

Within this scenario stands Cangleska, the sole shelter for women on a reservation the size of Connecticut. Its rooms are so often full that Cangleska is building a larger shelter. It will include a "visitation room" for women and children to have supervised encounters with the men who hurt them.

In parts of the country, locations of women's shelters are closely guarded secrets. Secrets this large do not work here. The first stranger I stopped, in the small town of Kyle, pointed to the wooden one-story shelter, right next to the seniors' home.

No sign announced its purpose, but clues revealed themselves: metal doors with intercoms and coded entrance systems, curtains over every window except those of the staff.

Inside, a hodge-podge living room (couches, bureaus, TV, piles of donated clothing, a star quilt on one wall, an old-fashioned china cupboard at another) and adjoining kitchen comprised the building's center. Off on one side were offices for advocates (women who help the abused women), a bathroom, and bedrooms for the women and children. The other side contained offices for administrators, including Karen. Out a side door was a scruffy side yard—surrounded by a tall fence—with play area, clotheslines, and a patch of cement under an eave. The more obedient smokers light up there.

Everywhere inside was the image of *cangleska*, Lakota for "medicine wheel," a circle divided into quadrants, four feathers hanging from it. Never far away was the printed exhortation, "Violence Against Native Women Is Not Tradition."

Because of Karen's strong telephone manner and her reputation as a leader in a tough arena, I expected to meet a mighty figure. Oh, that always

happens, she said. She is shortish, with long brown hair, dark skin, a perky nose, glasses, and, to correct a longtime tooth alignment problem, was wearing braces. She goes all out with makeup or forgoes it entirely, seems most at home in comfortable clothes, is a fan of hamburgers and curly fries, and occasionally moans about the pounds she would like to drop.

She spends a lot of time in her office. “It can be interesting, during the day, where you’re talking with someone from a shelter or an advocacy program and a tribe that’s a thousand miles away about their code and their law enforcement response. You’re trying to help develop a technical assistance plan for them, and the next minute you’re revising a budget so you can get it off to a federal agency. The next minute you’re catching up on signing paperwork, and the next minute you’re trying to help some local woman get into a home. And the next minute you’re plunging the toilet, or cleaning the bathroom, because we don’t have those little niceties in our budgets for cleaning people. So you’re doing the dishes or shoveling the sidewalk. I mean, all work is women’s work.”

Her work also includes meeting with tribal and federal government representatives, but she travels reluctantly. She has Devina to think about. Also, Pine Ridge is no transportation hub. It is hours by car to the Rapid City airport, no hub either. For a Minneapolis-area meeting with federal officials about the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, Karen decided it was easier to drive the eleven hours each way. An amendment of the act, Title IX, called Safety for Indian Women, mandates meetings between representatives of the federal and tribal governments. “To see tribes assert that position [as sovereign nations] and, for the record, state how they would like to see Title IX in the Violence Against Women Act work, was very gratifying.”

Gratification has been hard won. Karen described, often with theatrical flair, a road that only in retrospect seemed made for her.

“I was born in Igloo, South Dakota. I-G-L-O-O,” she shouted in her car over Devina’s chants and nursery rhyme CD on the twenty-mile drive to Kyle one morning. “Igloo was a federal army depot. They stored mustard gas. It’s a lovely little town, 100 percent employment.” She always wondered about domestic violence there, she added. Karen and her two brothers lived in Igloo with their parents (married sixty years! she exclaimed) until their

father, a welder, was transferred to Pueblo, Colorado. "The big city," Karen joked. "Everyone thought we were Chicano."

Her father, Benjamin David Artichoker, is Hochunk. The unusual name Artichoker is an Anglicized version of Ah Who Choe Ga. "It translates to Blue Wing. The name was my great great grandfather's. My grandmother is Lakota. My grandfather came to live in 'her country,' so we are enrolled as Oglala Lakota citizens."

Karen's father "was not very cultural in terms of participating in Lakota spiritual rituals, et cetera. He was very cultural in that he hunted, was into 'Indian food,' and lived Lakota values." He used to claim his family was well off even in the Depression, that with a team of horses and a buggy, they "lived like white people." His mother expressed the same sentiments. "I'd say, 'Grandma, what does that mean?' 'Oh, it was this, this and . . .' 'But Grandma, those are good human values. Those are Lakota values.' Of course, the church taught her that anything Lakota was bad. These human values were good and were white. So we're all confused and we're all finding our way back to who we are." Karen's esteemed grandmother Artichoker was an Episcopalian with a sweat lodge.

Karen's mother, the former Hortense Louise Horst, is of German ancestry. "My mom's one of those good traditional woman" and "very much her own person." German heritage, however, leaves Karen unimpressed. "There's no culture there, so we never had any to relate to. What's the culture? Sauerkraut?"

Later, she wrote me that perhaps her mother initially resented the children's growing involvement in Lakota culture, but whether from "maturity, wisdom, and security that comes with age, or what," became more supportive. Her father, she said, "was always able to respect my mother's discomfort" about Native life. He often politely declined invitations to Native events to spare his wife. His qualities did not impress the Horsts. His own father-in-law, said Karen, spoke of "damn Indians, lazy drunkards."

Benjamin David Artichoker was neither. He did go on one binge, which his mother told Karen about. While stationed in Japan shortly after the first atomic bomb was dropped, his grandmother died. "My dad loved his grandma. They wouldn't let him come home, wasn't an immediate relative.

My grandma said, ‘Garfield Eagle Feather told me your dad AWOLed and went on a four-day drunk and got thrown in jail. He was so upset they wouldn’t let him come home.’” As soon as he returned to the United States, he went to his grandmother’s grave and slept on it two nights.

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With her parents’ encouragement, a scholarship, and ambition, Karen went off to college. She knew she wanted to get an education but not why. “I was seventeen years old, what did I know? I just know, we pulled up in our little Ford pickup with the camper on it. I never had a radio in my life. They’d bought me this little AM/FM transistor radio. I really thought I was uptown. Walked in, my roommate had this huge stereo. She had a car and a checking account. My clothes took up this much of the closet,” she indicated the dimension of the steering wheel. “Her clothes took up two closets. But she was really pitiful. Her father was alcoholic, even though they had money. Her mother was a bitch. Her parents were going to kick her out because she was dating this Mexican or whatever. Kick her out! I was telling my dad. He said ‘Let me talk to her.’” Karen listened in. “He said, ‘You’re Karen’s friend and you’re going to come home with her this summer. Maybe it will give your folks time to cool out. You can get a job around here, and you have a place to stay.’ She was crying,” Karen did a mock sob, “‘You don’t even know me.’”

“My dad would never let me go stay with them. She wanted me to spend the summer with them and work at this resort where their summer cabin was. Their cabin was nicer than our house. I was like, ‘Why not, Dad?’ Finally he said, ‘I am not going to have you go stay with white people. That’s how they’d see it, that I can’t take care of my own daughter. If she wants to come here, she’s your friend, that’s fine.’”

At St. Olaf, Karen adjusted, sort of. “There were all these Norwegians, we ate lutefisk [dried cod steeped in lye], oh, pewwww. I went there for two years. It was okay, but it was a hardship on my parents. Even though I had a scholarship, the transportation they had to pay for.”

During her freshman year, the confrontation at Wounded Knee began. St. Olaf’s Indian students immediately had a meeting. “That’s the first time

I smoked a cigarette. It was nerve-wracking. We were making phone calls, trying to find out what was going on. Several students, including my cousin, made a decision to head for Wounded Knee. I thought about heading that way but, quite honestly, I was a goody two shoes and thought about what my parents would say. I knew they would tell me to stay in school.”

“I do think the American Indian Movement and Wounded Knee made all of us more aware of who we are as Indians and what that means. We saw and heard some really good, even great, things. We also saw and heard some not so great things, like male attitudes toward women involved.” Some accounts came from women who were there. “They’ll say they wrote the speeches, braided the guys’ hair, and cooked supper, all at the same time, of course.” Karen also heard, she later wrote me, “about behavior that was confusing. Drinking, woman beating.”

One effect of the activism was that “we were trying to out-*Indian* each other. Very confusing. Very confusing.”

After her fill of lutefisk, Karen transferred to the University of Colorado in Boulder. “They had the EOP back then, the Educational Opportunities Program, so I went in the summer. There were Indian students. We had a blast. Then the fall came and here’s 20,000 white kids. We were looking for each other desperately. By then I was twenty years old and I get this little seventeen-year-old white girl roommate. I think, oh no, I can’t do this again. I went and asked if there were any Indians I could room with. They gave me the room number for this girl, an Osage. I’ll never forget it. I knocked. She opened the door and her eyes got big and she grabbed me and pulled me into her room. ‘You’re an Indian!’” Karen started laughing. “‘I’m so happy to see . . .’ Blah blah blah, ‘I want to be roommates.’ ‘Yes! Yes! Oh God,’ she said. ‘Let’s go eat. I’m scared to go to the cafeteria, there’s too many white people. I’ve been eating out of the machines, I’m starving to death.’”

What could be scary about white college kids?

“They didn’t live in the world. I don’t know what world they lived in, but it sure as heck wasn’t ours. They were self-centered, very narcissistic.” Karen said “the Indian kids” shared whatever money any received, whether thirty dollars from Karen’s brother Benjamin after he got paid for a roofing job, or ten dollars from her grandmother. “We had our little group and surveyed

each other's needs. The white kids could never understand anyone but their parents sending money. 'Why would your brother send you money?'"

Karen was not comfortable as an "Indian kid" herself. "Being the product of a white mother and an Indian father, there was that time I didn't feel worthy or able to practice our customs, our traditions, our spiritual practices. I felt people were going to be saying, 'She didn't grow up like that, so who does she think she is, trying to be an Indian?' I feel really fortunate I found a group of friends who were able to inspire me and encourage me. Oh heck, there's none of us that know everything. Lots of us have found this way, or some of us grew up with it, but went away from it and we're coming back. We come in all shapes, sizes, and experiences."

With her revitalized sense of herself, and a sociology degree, Karen got work as a "mental health technician" at a group home for emotionally disturbed girls on the Rosebud Reservation. (Rosebud adjoins Pine Ridge and shares many of its social horrors; in 2007, a Rosebud leader declared a state of emergency over youth suicide.<sup>1</sup>)

"That's really where I got started with domestic violence. I didn't think much about it until then. We received referrals from Indian Health Service units in the Aberdeen [South Dakota] area, so it was a lot of tribes. The women were coming to the unit for depression. They were invariably battered women and had experienced incest and rape. I started to see the impact of men's violence on women." She mocked the term "domestic" violence as "such a nice word. Even nicer is 'relationship' violence. What does that mean? This relationship isn't violent, *he* is violent."

While working at Rosebud, Karen met Tillie Black Bear, a founder of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and "one of the icons of the battered women's movement." She became Karen's mentor. In time, Karen became director of White Buffalo Calf Woman Society, the oldest shelter for Native women, and was elected to represent South Dakota in the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "People sort of didn't know what to do with me. To start talking about Native women and tribal issues, it made people very uncomfortable. I don't know if that's guilt or what. Everyone would get very quiet," she said, grinning. "I didn't have a lot of experiences with other races. My experience was pretty much Indian and white, so on a



national scene to interact with African American women, Asian American women, I felt very isolated. I was happy when Tillie and I could do things together. In spite of whatever cultures the other women might be part of, they all seemed the same to us, because none of them knew anything about Indians.”

A turning point for Karen occurred when a hospital psychologist recommended she take a “very, very, very battered” Native woman to a support group in Rapid City. “The first time I went, she and I were the only Indian women around the table. This was probably about 1980. I’m sitting there thinking, this is bunk. These women are a bunch of whiners. They’re taking zero responsibility for their behavior or their choices. The facilitator, to her credit, gave the Indian woman ample opportunity” to speak, but she “sat with her head down and didn’t say anything.” On the drive back to the hospital, though, she “was chattering away,” said Karen. “‘When she said *that*, that sounded just like him,’ and ‘*He’s* done that before.’”

We were now, according to my notes, talking in Karen’s office, where she lit up a Doral. (She is not among the obedient smokers, but she did open a window.) At the hospital, she recalled, she reported that the encounter went “okay,” but thought the women all needed assertiveness training. “I didn’t hear too many ‘I’ statements in there.” Still, plans were made to return the following week. By then, “the Indian woman” had talked up the session to other Indian women in the unit. They all wanted to go. Karen complied. The same dynamic took place. Instead of one Native woman not saying a word, a group of Native women did not say a word—until they got back in the car. Karen went into chatter mode: “‘He said that to me.’ ‘When she said that, that’s *exactly* what he does.’”

“I thought, maybe there’s something here I don’t understand, ’cause these women are very excited about the information they’re getting.” Puzzled, Karen went to see the group’s facilitator, who gave her a number of books that opened Karen’s eyes. “I’d never thought about sexism. I always thought about oppression in terms of racism. Even when I graduated from high school eleventh in my class [among about 275] and the school counselor was encouraging me to go to cosmetology school because the home ec teacher liked how I did somebody’s hair.” The home ec teacher “even said something about Indians, we

were really good with our hands.” Karen groaned. “It never occurred to me this whole thing about cosmetology school had to do with being female. At that point in my life, to start thinking about being an Indian and being a woman, and that they were both who I am, was an awakening.” She paused. “I started hearing sexism everywhere. I remember being really angry. Of course, I was always angry as an Indian, but now I was angry as a woman.”

She visited the facilitator twice a week to talk about the books and the issues they raised. During one visit, Karen burst. “I’m like, ‘How do you do this? I’m mad all the time.’ I always remember her telling me, one day a week I could be angry. The other days I had to work. Use talking about anger as an inspiration to doing something, as opposed to paralyzing you.”

Karen got on the board for the shelter in Rapid City where the support group met. “Pretty soon there’s lots of Indian women sitting around that table.” She was “amazed” that despite the noise in the shelter, the women paid close attention to one another. “Kids could be fighting and screaming and whatever, [women] were focused. I saw a process there that was *so* wonderful. Women who had the same batterer. One woman, her nephew had raped [the daughter of] another woman at the group. These two women having this conflict and yet they were connected by the abuse they had both experienced at the hands of men.”

“If women could come together and be real with each other, maybe we could change the world,” she said softly. “We could get beyond race, we could get beyond class. Because there were women with money there, they were at the shelter, but he’d frozen all the bank accounts or whatever. They were just as pitiful. It was a great equalizer. Violence was a great equalizer.”

The work, Karen said, “became my passion.”

At the same time, she had become a foster mother. She was twenty-one. “This [Rosebud] social worker—she was an Indian woman—and I got to be really good friends. She was telling me they didn’t have foster homes. I was actually quite naïve. I thought, well, I can take care of a kid,” she said. “I thought it was my responsibility as a tribal citizen. There were so many children in need and so many children that were being taken off the reservation and away from tribal families and communities, because they didn’t have Native foster parents.”

Karen was told the child's parents were going through treatment and would get themselves together. "I didn't think it would be a lifetime. When they brought her to me, she had pneumonia and was ready to be discharged from the hospital. Come to find out she'd been in foster care five times previously"—with the same foster parents. "They'd get her healthy and then she'd be back with them again. They weren't going to do it again."

The little girl's name was Coya, she was eighteen months old, and appeared to have been neglected and starved. "My folks had a fit. My dad was like, 'You do not understand the responsibility of having a child, you just got out of college,'" and so on. "She was like a zombie. I mean, move her around like a pawn on a chess board. She would eat and eat and eat and eat." She even grabbed at photographs of food in magazines. When the Artichoker family relaxed after supper, "she would walk around and eat everything that was on anybody's plate and anything that was in the middle."

As much as she craved food, so did she fear other things. Sirens made her "hysterical." The drinking of alcohol put her in a panic. Karen recalled an evening her parents had friends over. "Usually the men would have a beer, maybe a mixed drink," the women a tiny glass of wine. Karen's mother liked using Avon candlesticks as glasses. "The cup's about that big on them"—about an inch. While the men played cards, Edith, the wife of one of the men, visited with Karen's mother, who offered her a glass of wine, then poured the droplets into the diminutive glasses. Coya "went over to my mom and she was tugging on her and tugging on her. 'Grandma, please don't drink that. Because you're going to get drunk and then the cops are going to come and take you to jail.' My mom put her on her lap, and said, 'Edith and I are going to sit here and drink this. You're going to see that no cops are going to come and nobody's going to go to jail.' Coya's this little nervous wreck. They finished their little glass of wine. My mom said, 'See? No cops came, nobody's going to go to jail.' You see all these trauma issues that people have." For trauma, of course, read "historical trauma," a term attributed to the educator Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (Lakota). Karen adopted Coya at the age of five.

Now thirty-two and "a lovely young woman," as Karen described her, she writes poetry, including a moving poem for Father's Day. (Coya's birth

mother died of alcoholism.) “[Her] father, who was a chronic alcoholic, sobered up and got a PhD in education and teaches at Iowa State University. She has made a relationship with him over the years. Her biological family [is] quite known for their knowledge of culture, of language.” Lakota culture itself, Karen said, helped Coya in various ways, from herbal medicine for a skin ailment, to a sweat lodge (Karen has one in her back yard) during emotional distress. Karen also unofficially adopted a young woman, Lisa, who worked at a shelter where Karen met her, and who is now a nurse with three children Karen also helped raise.

Karen’s household is a census taker’s challenge. One October, she and Devina were the only residents, apart from Karen’s brother Benjamin, who stayed there during the week while overseeing construction of the new Cangleska shelter. He spent weekends with his family in Colorado. The following February, after several dramas, her household numbered eight females, plus Benjamin. “As you can see,” Karen e-mailed, “Indian households are quite fluid.”

Hers never included a husband. “Never met anyone that I could imagine spending the rest of my life with.” She even dated men she later realized were abusers. “One of those ‘There but for the grace of God go I’ deals. Plus, I wanted an Indian man, and I don’t think they’re by and large healthy.” Or self-sufficient? One boyfriend lost favor when she learned he did not rotate his own tires.

Karen herself is the vision of a domestic multitasker. One weekend morning at her farmhouse in Allen, which is technically within the Pine Ridge Reservation, she was cooking an elaborate breakfast, playing with Devina, and shaking out throw rugs—all while counseling someone on the phone. She works fewer hours than she used to, though. “Having a young child in my life at my age and this stage of my career has severely curtailed my workaholism.” But Karen was raised to “do what you got to do to get the job done.” It is how Cangleska came to be.

Earlier, Pine Ridge had a small program for battered women but no shelter. “I’d say, ‘Somebody will rise up to do it.’” In 1996, Running Strong for American Indian Youth, an organization led by Lakota Olympian Billie Miles, suggested Karen be “the Johanna Appleseed of shelters,” going from

reservation to reservation to start them. Her answer was no, it does not work like that. “You have to be part of the community.” Running Strong later offered to fund a shelter on Pine Ridge. Because nobody else offered to lead it, Karen said yes. “In 1997, when we started with this, I’d be sleeping on the shelter floor for a few hours and up writing another grant. You don’t build a program working forty hours a week.”

“I don’t think Indian leadership had a clue all of this was going on.” The assault of Native women was not “on the radar screen for tribes.” Then two things changed. More advocates for battered women brought the situation to the attention of their tribal councils. Also, “we knew tribal leaders weren’t going to come to our trainings, so we went to them,” including sessions of the National Congress of American Indians. “I do feel like we’re a progressive people, because the first few meetings there was a lot of that attitude, ‘It’s a women’s issue,’ ‘What about shelters for men?’ We talked about a women’s caucus. My God, even the women had fits. ‘Our circle is Indian people.’ But we kept passing out the information.

“When statistics came out in 2000 and 2002 about the rates of violence against Native women, that was very, very helpful for us. It was the first time the United States government had released any sort of figures [about the abuse of Native women]. We used those statistics to our advantage to bring it home to tribal leadership, that this was a big problem.” In Karen’s opinion, the problem is worse than reported. “The [U.S. Justice Department] statistic says one in three Indian women will be raped. You’re sitting in a room full of Indian women and invariably at least one woman will say, ‘Don’t you think that [statistic] is kind of *low*?’” In some Native communities, particularly in Alaska, the abuse rate is considerably higher.<sup>2</sup>

Karen added that, unlike other groups of women, “we are more likely to be raped and/or battered by men not of our own race. African American women are in danger from African American men, Asian women are in danger from Asian men, et cetera. We’re in danger from all men.”

Once statistics convinced male-dominated tribal leaderships of the problem, “we started making the links with economic development. Women are a major work force in tribal communities, and the violence perpetrated against women is impeding the economic development efforts. That’s when

we produced our little brochure about sovereignty, specifically designed to attract the eye of Native leadership. They would see ‘sovereignty’ and of course they’re going to think it’s about them as a government. Then they open it up. ‘Sovereign women strengthen sovereign nations.’” Another brochure Karen co-wrote describes tactics used for controlling women, including physical violence, intimidation, economic abuse, cultural abuse (“Telling her she’s too Indian or not Indian enough”), and ritual abuse (“Saying her period makes her ‘dirty’”).

Native leadership came around. “We touched key leaders who spoke in support of us. To hear a tribal leader stand up and say, ‘My sister murdered her husband.’ Or, ‘My sister was murdered.’ We started sponsoring receptions at the NCAI conventions. We did a wiping of tears. ‘If you’ve had someone in your family killed or you have a domestic violence situation you’re grieving about, come forward and get a wiping of tears.’” The traditional ceremony was effective. “When we utilize our customs and our protocols, it’s pretty hard for them to be flippant or disrespectful about the issue.”

“In all of our materials and presentations, we relate our belief that all of this stems from colonization. That we are a colonized people and don’t believe [violence against women] was typical of our people. That’s not to say that it didn’t exist. Mary Louise Defender tells a beautiful story about the first battered women’s shelter, and says it was a cave and the first advocates were the wolf nation.<sup>3</sup> How a young woman made the mistake of going to live with her husband’s people—a moral right there—and he abused her. She tried to make her way back to her people and couldn’t. The wolf people found her and took her to their home in this cave and nursed her through the winter. In the spring they helped her get back to her people.”

Another example, she said, was on a winter count (a pictographic record of memorable incidents, usually drawn on a hide). One year the incident involved an abuser who was followed by the woman’s people and killed. “Winter count is smallpox and war, and here is this incidence of domestic violence.”

Amid all Karen had to say about violence and colonization, her most provocative comments involved “internalized repression” relating to Native support for U.S. armed forces. “I’ve never been a big fan of the military. When I went through my phase of all I read was books about Indians, getting

more in touch with the history of the United States government and its actions toward indigenous people, I could not twist that around in my mind. Why in the heck as Indian people we're defending a country that tried to wipe us off the face of the earth. I still don't get it." Her father's own military service "wasn't necessarily the best experience in the world for him as a tribal man, getting called 'Chief' and all of that, [but] he'll still defend the flag and the country. Yet he'll make jokes about how if he'd have been born a year [earlier] he wouldn't be a citizen." She spoke of Native Vietnam War veterans being "messed up personally, spiritually, and psychologically. Listening to a Vietnam veteran being drunk and crying about killing somebody that looked like their uncle . . . very, very, very traumatic. Some days I'd wonder [if] maybe a purposeful, intentional lack of opportunity for Indian youth shapes our behavior and herds us toward the military." Her voice softened. "There's even days I wonder if maybe we aren't breeding farms for the military, those days when I think about slavery. Is that what they are doing to us with this military thing? There was a time I couldn't even go to powwows, because there was such a strong military presence. Then I would subject my poor friends to this tirade about all this military brouhaha."

"I do think there is an element of that concentration camp dynamic, where you bond with your oppressor," including from the boarding school era. "You see the impact of removing children from their homes, forcibly, putting them in a concentration camp type of setting, a POW type of setting, the boarding schools, and telling them anything Indian is not good, then sending them out into their community to do their work and to raise children they don't have a clue how to raise. We see our bonding with the oppressor still when we don't see each competent as Indians. We don't see each other as being honest. We don't see ourselves as having a work ethic. If we don't have that mainstream type of thinking about what's honorable and ethical, we're still sort of 'savages.'"

Native Americans proving "they are better American citizens and more patriotic than any American," she believed, is an extension of bonding with one's oppressor.

Adding to the misery was what she called a chemical weapon in a genocidal war against Native peoples. Alcohol. "It debilitated us." Karen estimates

that because of alcohol, more than half the schoolchildren on Pine Ridge have heard or seen their mother abused emotionally or physically, and are likely to be abused themselves. “We know that alcoholism and other substance abuse is going to impact children’s performance in school and their behavior, we know FAE and FAS [fetal alcohol effects and fetal alcohol syndrome] is a big problem, but we hadn’t really talked about the impact of children witnessing domestic violence. Now, we know that experiencing trauma at a young age, even preverbal, actually affects the development of the brain.”

Asked (reluctantly) whether she thinks Native people have a genetic predisposition to alcoholism or whether the problems are sociological, Karen all but shouted, “I don’t *care*.” The answer is “irrelevant to me.”<sup>4</sup>

There are “circles and circles of sober people now” (a tribal election flyer on a store in Pine Ridge included how many years of sobriety the candidate has), yet “as we’re getting healthier, it’s also creating an environment where we can begin to address other social issues,” including meth and gangs. To Karen, all such problems are “engrained, embedded, enmeshed, becoming interwoven, because there has been a lack of attention paid to tribal communities” by the United States government. Modern America itself is another dilemma. “Even though we tend to be somewhat isolated from American society, we do live in American society and what impacts all Americans impacts us. We’ve been affected by a ‘me’ generation that is selfish and self-absorbed.” And yet, and yet, “we also see a resurgence of culture. We see families teaching their children Lakota ways, so these children are growing up naturally who they are, unlike many of us who either had to be who we are in a secret kind of way, or learn who we are.”

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When Cangleska began, there were no programs for batterers. They got arrested, served time, were put on probation. “We set out to help them. I think it was also a way to find a role for male leadership and to minimize criticisms we might get from [them].” Karen is definitely pragmatic. “We knew that in our community women were not going to throw away their male relatives,” no matter how “messed up.” Her strategy was to include



them. We were now at a Kyle café, with extra ranch dressing for the deep-fried mushrooms. “I’ve had this conversation with other Native women. ‘Look, we had this guy call and he wants information. He’s in your community. Get him to some other trainings. Make a relationship with him.’ These guys, you love ’em up, you feed ’em, then you can chew ’em out. They’ll accept that from you. If you just reject them . . .”

The program Karen and her colleagues started for counseling abusers focused on a separate message. “You say you want to be a Lakota man. This behavior is not the true Lakota man.” It worked. “If we use the mental intellect we’ve been given and the inspiration we have through our spiritual channels, we can create something meaningful for people. I think the reason the men who’ve been touched by our work and have joined our work is because,” she paused, “it made sense. It provided them with some answers and helped them understand some things better about why women in their lives behaved the way they did. I think it was also a healing for men, that their mothers didn’t willingly abandon them. That the pain and oppression and violence their mothers and sisters and aunts and grandmas lived with prohibited them from loving them the way [they] should.”

“I believe the thing that’s going to pull us through is that we are all Indian people and have a shared genetic memory of what that means. That’s part of our work, to give those genes a little jump start, so we can release whatever in our brains will help us to remember who we are and how we’re supposed to be in the world.” Once Native people fulfill responsibilities to one another, she said almost cheerfully, “I feel like we will have something substantive to offer the world and will make our contribution to world healing.”

There was a little more. “We don’t really know what our population was at contact, but we know there was a lot more Indians then than now. We survived an attempt at genocide. We’re a miracle.”

#### HEATH DUCHENEAX

“Hello, Cangleska probation. Yes, sir. Tuesday at 1:30 or 5:00, whichever you’d like. All right, thanks for calling.” At his desk in the modern Lakota Express Building in Kyle, a short walk from Cangleska’s shelter, probation

coordinator Heath Ducheneaux was setting up counseling sessions with abusers. Heath, Lakota from the Cheyenne River Reservation, was thirty-one, with a black ponytail, lean physique, and deliberate motions. He could be described, even when seated, as tall, dark, and handsome. As he brewed an afternoon pot of Folger's, a man fiddled with a pencil at a nearby desk. Heath took no evident note of him but in retrospect may have hoped to be overheard. In contrast to Karen's quick and at times theatrical way of speaking, Heath uses a slow, uninflected cadence. It made his candor and intimacy almost unnerving.

"This is the third year I've been doing this work specific, but I've been doing work on myself for about nine to ten years now. The first four years was getting sober. The third to fourth year was figuring out I was still an alcoholic without drinking, and a drug addict. About six years ago, after I went through a divorce and began dating another woman is probably about the time I started to pay a lot of attention to how I grew up.

"I didn't grow up in a home where I saw a whole lot of physical abuse. I saw a lot of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and even psychological abuse my mom went through with one of her boyfriends. He was with us in our home, in his home, that's probably how he'd still say it, for about fifteen years. And for about fifteen years, I didn't want to be in that home." Heath said he stayed because he did not want to leave his mother alone with the boyfriend, but then became him. "I was the re-creation of what I grew up with, with a little bit of my mom's good nature worked in, which made me seem like I was a pretty good guy, to women specific. The other side of me was him." And him, he hated.

Heath began being "disrespectful," treating his mother as the boyfriend did, and doing chores not to help out but to get money for his habits. "I drank my first half bottle of wine when I was nine. After that, it was whatever I could get my hands on as a kid. When I got into middle school and high school, I was smoking pot. LSD, mushrooms, cocaine, crystal meth."

When he met his current wife, Tawa, "she was very healthy coming into the relationship. She knew what she wanted in her life and knows who she is. I, however, coming into the relationship, had no idea who I was." Heath recalled with chagrin an incident that occurred when Tawa was six and a half

months pregnant with their first child, a boy they named Cetan Cikala. They had gone to a Lakota sweat lodge outside Albuquerque. Driving home that evening, Heath asked Tawa why she had talked with one of his friends so long. She replied that both had gone to the University of New Mexico and were reminiscing. "I said, offhandedly, 'It seems to me there's maybe a little bit more going on between you than just friendly conversation about school.' Things slowly started escalating from there."

"I wasn't yelling, but I was talking to her in a voice that was very condescending." At one point, "I put my hand up. I hit the steering wheel." It broke. "I don't remember ever hearing somebody crying and sob like that before. I didn't know what to do, but at the same time, being as unhealthy as I was, I didn't know how to handle someone else being hurt, even though I was the one doing the hurting. I don't really know how to describe the sound she was making." He took Tawa to her mother's and drove off.

The next day, they talked. "She said, 'If you ever raise your hand at me again, don't come back or don't expect me to come back.' Right there, pretty much, I knew if I didn't make some kind of change, even something minor right away, she was going. I hear a lot of people we work with talk about not wanting to lose their children. I didn't want to lose my son either, but I really didn't want to lose her. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have a son to begin with. And I was in love with her. That seems pretty odd to say, given the story I just told you."

The young man at the desk had become still.

"Very fortunately for me," Heath continued, "my uncle and Ben Artichoker and Karen Artichoker wanted to have the first-ever men's retreat camp that Cangleska sponsored, back in 2000. My uncle said, 'You will be there. I don't care what you're doing, you're going to be there all week.'" Heath had been alcohol- and drug-free several years but "had not looked at any of my behaviors. There's a difference between being sober and changing your behavior. That's what brought me into what Cangleska does as an organization."

The now annual retreats include Lakota ceremonies, healing practices, and aspects of Lakota culture from sleeping in tipis to riding horses (in some cases, learning to ride), and attempts to instill Lakota values. According to

various accounts, the retreats are wrenching and life altering. As for Heath, said Karen, he “was a kid” who needed to learn to be a good relative. She cited the Lakota phrase *mitakuye oyasin*, which implies “this yearning to connect with each other as relatives. He wanted to be a good man. He just needed a little guidance.”

Did he ever. During the retreat, Heath dreamt that the counselor, Marlin Mousseau, himself a former abuser, was having a friendly conversation with Tawa in front of him. Heath woke about 3:30 in the morning, infuriated, ready “to go outside and handle business” with the dream flirter. He was dissuaded but later told Marlin about it. “That one dream was the turning point, because Marlin didn’t know my wife. That dream was telling me who I really was.”

Heath has seen a lot of violence committed by men as sober as he was. His clients, who range in age from fourteen to fifty-nine, attend twenty-four weeks of Cangleska classes and get counseling from him. “I’ve heard of people talk about batterers not being intelligent people, but I’d have to say that is very much to the contrary. In order to be able to manipulate people, you have to be a thinker. I’ve done that myself. You have to think fast and be able to think ahead of everybody else to stay one step ahead, to keep the manipulation going to suit your own needs.” Many batterers he counsels engage in emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, as he had. Because police cannot easily prove such abuse, such cases “are usually dismissed.” Nine of ten cases, however, involve physical injuries.

Wincing, Heath recalled an older Pine Ridge woman who needed some sixty stitches to her face and jaw after a drunken Pine Ridge man attacked her. “It gets very extreme. There’s a lot of things that go unprosecuted here on the reservation. There’s probably a very high rate of sexual assault. I don’t want to say we have a bad public safety system here, because we don’t, but we do lack resources heavily all over the reservation. The incidences are very high. Very high.”

In the minutes before leaving to meet his son’s school bus, Heath mused about the abusers he meets. Some days they seem to want to talk, other days they do not, apart from saying they “didn’t do anything wrong.” Other days they are angry. There also are days “when people are happy and are getting a

lot out of the information we are giving.” He seemed especially gratified when men he is about to give up on surprise him. “That very same person I’m thinking about does something very special, very small, that seems like a step for them.” Glancing at his desk, computer, and files, he almost smiled before his earnestness triumphed.

“Every day I’m at my job, I get the opportunity to continue growing in something I believe in. As far as seeing that light bulb go off, it’s because I’ve seen my own light bulb go off many times in one day since I’ve worked here. Not to be selfish about it, but it enriches my family. It enriches the relationship I have with my wife, it enriches the relationships I’m having with my son and our daughter.

“When I first started doing this, I told a friend of mine I was going to have to get used to being lonely.” Some men, he figured, would not go along with the “different way” Heath wanted to live. “That’s certainly been true, but on the other hand, I’ve gained a whole lot of really wonderful friends. They’re trying to make changes similar to the ones I’m trying to make. We’re doing it because we have a belief. That makes it much more powerful, because it’s not just a job. It’s really about what you believe in your own life, how you want to live.”

#### DWANNA OLDSON

Among the victims of violence on Pine Ridge is Dwanna Oldson. The same day Heath was in his office, trying to change men around, and Karen was in her office, trying to change women, men, and policy around, Dwanna was on the other side of the Cangleska shelter, hiding.

It was an unusually quiet day. The Oldsons—Dwanna, her son, Nash, almost thirteen, and Alice, eleven—were the only people being protected. Tomorrow, another mother and her children would show up, and the following week more still, but today Dwanna had the run of non-staff areas. A middle-aged woman of sparkle and nerves, she was slender, tall, dark-skinned, with long, dark brown hair and the tentative smile attempted by people missing some teeth. Busying herself in the communal kitchen, she prepared meals for her children with what looked like happiness. Indeed, the

tasks of opening a can of soup, heating it, and ladling it out must have been cherished moments of peace.

Absent were her two older sons. A seventeen-year-old, “the one that’s still with the father,” she said, vows to join her as soon as he turns eighteen. Her eldest son, twenty-two-year-old Dusty, was in Kyle’s jail, “because he’s too old to be here with us.” Cangleska does not allow males eighteen or older to stay under the same roof with abused women. “He’s over there for protective custody, but they let him out. He’s the one that’s set on turning informant and turning our lives around. I guess we’re on a mission to stop our family from being the biggest drug dealers in South Dakota.” Her husky voice emitted a partial laugh.

Dwanna and the younger children get rides from staff members to visit Dusty at the jail, a quarter mile or so away. They cluster in the jail’s vestibule, Nash and Alice surrounding the quiet young man in an orange jumpsuit, JAIL printed in big letters on one leg, Dwanna looking loving and hyper-vigilant. The three could walk the distance, for Cangleska allows freedom of coming and going, an important consideration for women who have felt incarcerated in their own homes. Dwanna avoided such exposure, though. The threat of violence was so much on her mind, she did not even sleep in a shelter bedroom. (Alice told me her mother is “a protective freak.”) When I stopped by one morning, Nash and Alice were each lying on a couch in the living room, Dwanna stretched out on the floor between them. She felt more secure here, she said. If someone broke in through a bedroom window at night, the three could be outside in a flash.

For a private talk during the day, she did choose a shelter bedroom. It had three bare beds, limp curtains pulled across a window. She shut the door, sat on the edge of one mattress and leaned forward. Her family is known on the Pine Ridge Reservation as “the Mansons,” she said, then proceeded to describe a “slew” of aunts who were “well-equipped in loading guns, having shootouts, bootlegging, drug dealing.” She spoke of at least two shooting deaths involving her family. “It was like the Hatfields and McCoys when I was growing up. They think nothing of busting a woman’s skull if she’s out of line.” Her grandma Rita, she said, sold marijuana. Dwanna herself, as a child, sold liquor, which was and is prohibited on the reservation. “I was a

very, very good bootlegger, all my life. I remember being three or four years old, going to the door with a pint of wine.”

Her childhood, she said in an undramatic voice that marked most of her accounts, was “very abusive.” Her first abuser was her mother. “My mom used to come home drunk and make us”—Dwanna and her two brothers—“get up out of bed and fight each other, and bet on us.” Her mother also beat her with a belt buckle, which “laid me out for about four days, with my head swollen and cut up.” Dwanna wanted to flee, but “I didn’t know left from right. I didn’t know how to read nor write or anything.” At school, a therapist ordered pictures taken “of my backside, I was so beat up. My mother was turned in numerous times for child abuse. My auntie would hide me, my uncle would take me,” but her mother “always had some way of paying off somebody” and Dwanna was returned.<sup>5</sup>

“My dad was pretty good. I didn’t really know him. He kind of left my mom. He was a white man. We got the shit knocked out of us for having white blood in us. It was usually my mom doing it. ‘I hate you little white bastards. I wish to God I never had you!’ But she was the one who slept with him, so how it was my fault I never did understand.” Dwanna twisted her mouth on that sentence.

At twelve, Dwanna stabbed a schoolteacher she thought drank with her mother, “causing a lot of my abuse.” The courts stepped in. Apparently because of few options for violent girls, Dwanna was sent to Lookout Mountain School for Boys in Golden, Colorado. There, she said, counselors abused her. She started writing poetry. Later she was transferred to a Denver facility, New Horizons. “They put me in with a heroin junkie. I started shooting heroin and selling heroin out the back bedroom window.”

Somehow, the wife of a Denver police sergeant stepped in. “She taught me proper etiquette. How to read. They used to call me Cousin Itt [a hair-covered character in the fictional Addams Family] because I such long hair; I held my head down so it covered my face.” The woman, whom Dwanna referred to as Mama Kirsch, taught her “there was something other than violence on the reservation.” She said Kirsch also tied her down and sat with her for three days to get the heroin out of her system, then took her to a methadone clinic.

Once clean, Dwanna returned to Pine Ridge. She took classes at Sinta Gleska Tribal College on the Rosebud Reservation, until she became pregnant with Dusty, the son hiding in jail. "A very good boy."

And so we arrived at her current situation. Unlike most of Cangleska's shelter residents, Dwanna was not trying to escape an abusive boyfriend or husband. Her problem was her nephew. He wanted her dead.

The convoluted story she related involved a house she inherited in the town of Pine Ridge (a forty-mile drive from Kyle), a will disappearing, a brother stealing equipment, corrupt tribal council members, an attempted land share negotiated for packets of cocaine, and Dwanna's turning the alleged negotiator, her aunt, over to the FBI. Then there was the nephew, whom she let stay in the house while she served time at the York, Nebraska, Correctional Center for Women for "kidnapping my own daughter and failure to appear in court." It seemed Alice had been in foster care, ran away when an older boy tried to molest her, and Dwanna brought her back to Pine Ridge.

While in York, Dwanna consented to her nephew having temporary custody of Alice and Nash, since he was living in the house anyway. "I didn't know he was selling cocaine; I didn't know there was fifty thousand people living there and trafficking drugs. It was more or less a crack house and I had no idea. When I came home, my daughter informed me she was made to sleep in the dirty laundry downstairs in the basement. There was bedbugs, cockroaches, the house was completely trashed. People would pass out, piss on the couches." Her nephew, she said, has "gotten very powerful for such a young boy, but his power is mostly Miss White: cocaine." Dwanna inferred he made Nash sell marijuana and smoke it, "and subjected him to pain medication" that she had to get him off with the help of a doctor. "It was a nightmare."

Amid several narrative detours, Dwanna said she got a female police officer to the house to evict everyone, at which point her nephew, in an armored vest and full of cocaine, pulled a gun. Next, a call for backup, an arrest, FBI involvement, wrestling with a gun, a search warrant, tribal police finding an arsenal of various weapons and drugs, including "some packets of cocaine, which never showed up in evidence, so one of the cops ended up with those."

Dwanna refused protective custody. "I figured if I didn't stand my ground, they would bully me all the time." While her nephew was in jail, she



said, he made death threats through his lawyer's son and "orchestrated about fifteen people to gut my house. They literally took the doorknobs, the locks, stripped the house, vandalized it," leaving only a dresser, a lamp, clothes, and a kitchen table. "We had to bar the door shut and sleep in front of the living room door, because they terrorized me all night long, saying they were going to burn the house down, shoot us. They would run through the yard, hit the house with things." She said her nephew's mob called her a "turncoat" and a "traitor." (She was also excoriated as "white," she said.)

At this point in Dwanna's whirring tale, Alice, a lanky beauty who seemed to yearn for anything of interest within the confines of the shelter, entered the bedroom, ostensibly to give her mother an address. "You need to knock," said Dwanna, taking the slip of paper. "Okay, shut the door, please. Thank you." Alice left at her mother's soft urging. It was clear the family held onto courtesy like a lifeline.

Dwanna's mind returned to the terrifying night her nephew's mob threatened to burn the house down. She and Dusty "put the two little kids in the middle and I slept against the wall," Dusty on their other side. Early the next morning, she got the younger children up and off to school, "where I figured they'd be safe." The next episodes, delivered in a rush, involved Dwanna and Dusty getting restraining orders, being directed to the tribal housing council, a neighbor driving up, saying the house was on fire, an organization called Violence Assistance in Indian Country getting the Oldsons a motel room. "While we were at the motel room, the sheriff came and took custody of my two kids."

Now, Dwanna said, she has custody of them and rights to the gutted uninhabitable house. That was about it for the good news.

"My nephew wants to shoot me, the FBI wants me to turn state's evidence against all the drug dealers, and I've got nowhere to live, no money in my pocket. But, I do belong to the Mansons, which brings me to today."

Well, not quite yet. About ten years ago, Dwanna informed authorities which family members, including her mother, were dealing. As a consequence, "They beat me up really bad" on her mother's orders, she said, "and left me in a ditch in Pine Ridge. I was a couple of weeks pregnant with my daughter and having internal injuries from being kicked and pummeled.

My eye was swolled shut and my cheekbones were fractured and my nose was broke and my teeth were busted in half.” At that point, an FBI agent named Mark Vukelich, “who ended up more or less pitying me, took me to Nebraska to stay with my dad, ’cause my dad’s not scared of my mom and them.” Although reeling from the awful account, part of me wondered if it was true.

Sipping a cup of coffee across from FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., Special Agent Mark Vukelich said yes it was.<sup>6</sup>

Vukelich, a prematurely gray-haired, mustachioed man whose FBI assignment included western South Dakota, allowed that Dwanna differed from often shy, downward-glancing, self-effacing Native women he met there. Despite Dwanna’s problems, she was notably forthright. And he did drive her to her father’s home in Nebraska (not really a by-the-book action) because he wanted her to be with someone who cared about her. She was wrong about his motive, though. No pitying involved. Just doing my job, ma’am.

“I stayed with my dad and laid on his couch until I healed. The month I had my daughter I applied for a job in a bar, and Bruce was the owner.” He was “a wonderful man,” she said. “He fell in love with my kids, first of all. He loved kids. And Nash had been retrieved from being kidnapped and was . . .” she briefly stopped. “Was injured and molested.”

“When I turned my mom in and she had me beat up, she took my kids and gave them to their dad who was shootin’ heroin and cocaine. The grandfather, they figured, was the one who molested and abused them [her now seventeen-year-old son and Nash, then only thirteen months]. He doesn’t know nothing about it. We did a lot of therapy. You couldn’t touch him at one time to change his diaper, without him biting himself and screaming bloody murder.”

She added, “I’ve had my woes, I’ve had my faults, I’ve screwed up plenty, but I’ve never let my failures diminish my family values all the way.”

Back to Bruce. Dwanna, clean, sober, and “an awesome wife” in her assessment, and her two youngest children lived with him in his “beautiful home” in Nebraska for years. There were two problems. “My nephews and nieces and one fuckup after another would show up at our door. Disrespectful, obnoxious shit. It’s just . . . I think inside he just liked the bigger women.” Ah, the other problem. Dwanna came home one day and

caught Bruce “with a great big huge 200-pound woman on my floor.” The Oldsons departed.

Now, Dwanna semi-laughed and recited calmly (this is only part of it) her physical insults to date at the age of forty-three. “I’ve had most of my teeth knocked out. I’ve been beat up with a hammer by my Uncle Chuck; I have seizures due to severe head injuries. I’ve still got a couple of ribs that need to have surgery on them. My brother Les knocked my eye out of its socket and cracked my cheekbones and tore my sinuses. I have tubes in my sinuses.”

There is another opening of the door. “Mommy, mommy.” It is solemn Nash, reporting that “Alice is cussing.” Dwanna assures him she will be there in a minute. He nods and leaves.

She watched the door. She worries about schooling being interrupted, she said. “They’re A students; they’re very well-mannered. I get tremendous compliments on my children. The only time I’ve ever spanked them is if they’ve been caught fighting each other or lying to the authorities.” She stretched her long arms. “It’s been a hell of a road and I’m tired, and there’s not a day that don’t go by, I wish I could put my kids to safety and kill myself.” She did try by overdosing on pills, a scene she described in haunting detail, but a counselor found her.

Amid the horrors, Dwanna managed a peaceful closure with her mother in the months before she died. “I think most of all she needed to forgive herself, but she wanted me around to get that approval” and offer her own forgiveness. Dwanna seemed empathetic as she related her mother’s own story of being raped and beaten by her stepfather.

There is yet another stirring at the door. Alice could not seem to stay away, then left again. Dwanna said, after a summary of what Alice has been through, “she went from a very protected little girl to wide exposures,” adding softly, “it’s caused a lot of crying.”

“Somehow I manage to always really screw it up.” Still, Dwanna is safe, for today. She also has a palpable bond with at least her two youngest children. In trying to give them a different perspective, she tells them they are all having “adventures.”