

## AT STANDING ROCK

By Reeni Goldin, 1948

With help from Rena Grasso, 1944, and Phyllis Bloom 1944

In early October, after two friends asked in the course of a week if I wanted to go to North Dakota to support the Standing Rock Sioux – I had to say YES! The Sioux Nation was taking a stand against a huge oil company intending to run an oil pipeline through their sacred land and under the Missouri River, their only water source. They had been camped out at Cannon Ball ND since April trying to stop the construction of the pipeline, known as the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

It felt like this action could be the kernel needed to start a movement in this country which really could make a difference on the environmental front certainly, but also to bring people together to make the needed changes in our country, to make it a place that worked for the majority of its citizens and not just for the wealthy. And I wanted to be part of that movement! I had been active in other struggles for housing equity, women's rights, lesbian rights and ending various wars and I didn't want to become a stodgy old woman who had given up on struggle.

This Standing Rock support would involve coordinating the time of 3 older women, getting a 1993 RV in shape to travel the 3,500-mile trip and collecting supplies and money needed to support ourselves and the encampment, called the Oceti Sakowin camp. We gave ourselves 10 days for the trip.

We left on November 3 and really lucked out with the weather – it was only freezing at night but the days were fine. When we arrived we drove down the main road in the camp and were flanked by over 300 flags of the Indigenous Nations supporting the Standing Rock Sioux. Never before had this many Nations come together to support each other. It was a very moving sight! Both water purity and sacred burial sites were at stake due to the pipeline's deliberate route, but also the land of the encampment itself. That land, "belonging to" the Army Corps of Engineers was never officially ceded to the government and belonged to the Sioux since an 1851 treaty. This history of stolen lands and total disregard for the environment seemed to resonate amongst all indigenous peoples and called for a unified stand.

We found a place to park and went out to explore. There were over 3,000 people at the camp at that time. There were tents, tepees, cars, vans, trucks, domes, yurts and shelters of every sort. Many of the tepees had wood-burning stoves inside as did the larger, winterized tents. There were 5 highly

functioning kitchens. There was a medic area where skilled street medics and trained western medical staff treated people for injuries and trauma incurred from police abuse at actions. Healthcare needs at the medic area were also treated with herbal remedies, massage, acupuncture, Reiki, energy medicine and Native healing techniques. There were sacred fires which were tended 24 hours a day. A volunteer tent was set up to give newcomers a sense of the activities at the camp and suggestions for where help was most needed. The main sacred fire was the central meeting place where information was shared. Each morning there was a meeting to welcome newcomers and set the tone for the day with prayers and announcements.

The next morning at 6am one of the elders got on the mike and said “WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WE HAVE THINGS TO DO. THIS IS NOT A VACATION!” On the next Sunday morning he woke everyone up at 5am since he forgot about the end of daylight savings time. He apologized the next morning at meeting.

The whole camp was buzzing with activity: building winter structures, moving hay for the horses and insulation, winterizing existing structures, chopping wood, setting up solar panels for charging stations, dealing with legal and media needs as well as planning strategy. There were daily water ceremonies by women praying for and honoring the continued supply of water and evening drumming sessions by the Native men. The feeling at the camp was one of community – the kind of community I’ve always wanted to create for older lesbians. Walking around people would ask if we were warm enough, if we needed gloves, if we were hungry, join us for a bite, how are you? We knew no one there but we all felt like family working towards the same goal.

Elders in the community are really respected. The Elders are part of every important decision and are their voice carries a lot of weight. At the kitchen where we ate we didn’t have to wait on the cafeteria-type line: we were seated first and actually served by the younger volunteers. Almost embarrassing.

Of the many camps representing the different Nations at Oceti Sakowin there was a Two Spirit camp representing Native (and non- Native) lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer people. They were part of the fabric of the encampment and were listened to and respected when they spoke at morning meetings.

We took part in a couple of actions which were peaceful and prayerful. We were lucky that that the local sheriff’s men and National Guardsmen didn’t attack us as they had attacked the water protectors before we got there and after we left. The government people were totally militarized with Humvees, tanks, water cannons, rubber bullets, pepper spray, (mace, tear gas) and they

were using these weapons against unarmed, peaceful, prayerful people trying to protect their land and their water source.

Our trip was a very moving and meaningful experience. It was wonderful to be part of an action which is on the right side of history. It was wonderful to be part of such a caring and dedicated community.

As of December 4<sup>th</sup> the Army Corps of Engineers has denied the final easement for the oil company to drill under the water to complete the pipeline. An environmental impact statement has been ordered. This could take several months. The Trump administration has said that it wants the pipeline to be completed asap. The struggle is not over. The focus has shifted to the banks which are funding the pipeline. People are asked to close any accounts they have in these banks and let the bank know why this is being done. There have been many demonstrations at local Wells Fargo banks telling them to Divest from the Pipeline.

## AT STANDING ROCK

Phyllis Bloom, 1944

When I heard about what was happening at Standing Rock, N.D. some months ago, I was enormously moved and cried a great deal.

I had always felt very deeply about an indigenous people being forced off their land into a confined space, being robbed of their culture and riches of tradition and lifestyle, being separated from a way of life close to land and animals and nature, being forced into impoverishment and being perpetually plundered and imprisoned after a history of being lied to and murdered. Perhaps this is strong for me in how it resonates with my Jewish history and its aspects of landlessness, being robbed and murdered for what was perceived about us, being a nation of survivors. Perhaps the closeness to land and nature and the ardent protection of the sacredness of earth and water resonates with me simply as a woman, a woman identified with women whose bodies represent living earth and whose sensibilities can represent to me the heart of caring and nurturance. Perhaps it is the way in which as an older lesbian, I have understood what it means to be outside of a dominant culture and what harm abuse and marginalization creates internally as well as externally.

Regardless, and because of the realization of a very finite time left to me, I felt I had to go to Standing Rock and stand in support.

I felt that all that this issue represents and in fact IS, was something I had to put my body into, that I still had a chance to stand for what I believed and felt in my bones, and I was grateful to have the opportunity to do this.

I saw that this was a major front in which to make a difference in supporting a community of people against an army of corporate greed, against the richest and most powerful men who are willing to run over and destroy any aspect of life and globe that stands in their way of acquiring even more wealth and power.

I am tremendously grateful to have gone and to have been part of the community that is still resisting the pipeline, still building for the future. I still feel very much a part of it all.

The three of us who travelled from the Northeast to Cannonball, ND, are older lesbians with a history of activism. We were unsure of what we would encounter. Yet, very quickly, on entering the diverse community that had grown around resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline, we felt belonging, receptivity, eagerness to contribute. We were included in the spirit of generosity, sharing, openness, acceptance, participation, ritual, dedication to Water Is Life. The sense of purpose around a clear intention of peace, prayer and non-violence according to Lakota Sioux tradition, linked spirit and action and kept people centered around values that would benefit all of us rather than a few.