

A Mini-Biography of Dr. William Commanada, OC, Algonquin Elder Founder, A Circle of All Nations

Ninety five year old Alonquin Elder William Commanda from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, Maniwaki, Quebec was born on November 11, 1913 under the bright light of the Morning Star, so his mother named him *Ojigkwanong*; thus the larger universe figured in his personal story from the very beginning. Today, he is seen by many as the symbol of light emerging from the darkness of the first World War, illuminating a path to a new world with his vision for a *Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*.

He is a respected spokesman and spiritual leader at many conferences, participates in United Nations peace and spiritual vigils, and his work is acknowledged nationally and internationally. Fully trilingual, he shares his words and prayers in Algonquin, and translates them into English and French. Central to Elder Commanda's teachings are the concepts of equality, balance, respect and responsibility for Mother Earth, for all life forms and for people of all racial and cultural backgrounds, and he works ceaselessly, alone and entirely without an organization, staff, structure, formal or financial support to animate the *Circle of All Nations*.

A most senior representative of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed, he is the great, great grandson of the legendry *Pakinawatik*, the Algonquin chief who in the mid eighteen hundreds, led his people from their lands at Oka on the Lake of Two Mountains to their traditional hunting and trapping grounds at the confluence of the Desert and Gatineau. He is the carrier of three sacred **Wampum Belts of historic and spiritual importance**: the ancient Seven Fires Prophecy Belt about choice; the 1700s Welcoming Belt about sharing the grand natural resources and values of the original peoples with the newcomers; and the Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt which recognized Turtle Island as a coherent entity. His ancestors inscribed their legends, prophecies and agreements in these carefully crafted items over many centuries. He is seen by many as the carrier of the Seven Fires Prophecy at the time of the unfolding of its final message, and the messages of all these ancient artifacts are as deeply relevant today, as they were in the past.

He was acclaimed chief of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg for over nineteen years, though he himself never participated in the elections. He also worked as a guide, trapper and woodsman for much of his life. He is a **birch bark canoe maker and craftsman** of international renown, and there is a special display dedicated to his work at the Canadian Canoe Museum of Peterborough. He built a canoe for Queen Margrethe of Denmark, and he helped Pierre Trudeau repair his famous birch bark canoe. At the age of 90, he shared his canoe making skills and philosophy in Valerie Pouyanne's documentary, *Good Enough for Two*.

He has promoted **environmental stewardship** and respect for Mother Earth passionately for many decades. He conducted pipe ceremonies for the Pre-Rio Earth Summit Conference hosted by President Mitterand of France in 1991, and his prayers lie behind *Agenda 21*. He participated in the United Nations first Indigenous *Cry of the Earth* conference. He served as spiritual guide to the 1995 seven and a half month *Sunbow Five*

Walk from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific, to raise awareness of the growing environmental crisis; received the Bill Mason River Conservation Award in 2004; hosted workshops on water stewardship in 2004 and 2006, and 2009; is honorary chair of the Ottawa Heritage River Designation Committee; and offers interventions on current environmental issues such as the identification of the American Eel as a Species at Risk, the building of a mega dump on Danford Lake and the Navigable Waters Act.

He is the recipient of numerous awards and acknowledgements of his works and talent: the Wolf Project and Harmony Awards for his **efforts to foster racial harmony and peace building** through the creation of a *Circle of All Nations* (one very well received example of this commitment is the annual international gathering he hosts at his home during the first weekend of August – the 2001 Gathering is presented in the *Circle of All Nations* documentary); a Justice Award from the University of Ottawa and a Peace Award from Friends for Peace. He promotes restorative justice, forgiveness and his outreach to prisoners is captured in Lucie Ouimet's National Film Board Documentary, *Encounter with an Algonquin Seer*.

Recently, his efforts were acknowledged in Ottawa with two special recognitions: in 2005, with an **Honorary Doctorate Degree** from the University of Ottawa, shortly after his book, *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*, was published; and in 2006, with the **Key to the City of Ottawa**, a singular honour for an Aboriginal person from a reserve in Quebec. This was presented on Victoria Island, where the tireless ninety five year old continues working on his vision for a National Indigenous Centre, for the restoration and development of **the Sacred Chaudière Site** as a special national historic centre, and as a think tank for environmental stewardship and peace building of national and global relevance. Two other books, *Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout Book Two*, and *Passionate Waters–Butterfly Kisses* include further reflections on his work and ideology.

In December 2008, he was appointed **Officer of the Order of Canada**, for *his leadership as an elder who has promoted intercultural understanding and has raised awareness of the traditions and legacies of Canada's Aboriginal people*. Elder Commanda says he is deeply honoured to witness this recognition of the relevance of Indigenous Wisdom to this country at this time.

In November 2009, the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Foundation announced his selection as 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. In January, 2010 Willis College announced the Dr. William Commanda Scholarship!

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www.circleofallnations.ca (General Information)

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<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations> (Elder Commanda's Recent Activities)

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