

TWO TALES OF LONELINESS AND REDEMPTION

As told by Chief Beau Dick to the Spaceship Earth Round Table convened by the UBC Peter Wall Institute of Advanced Studies. Chief Dicks' first story concerns Dzonoqua figures at the Museum of Anthropology that belong to his family.



Chief Beau Dick with lost boy and forest spirit dancers. Spaceship Earth public event, UBC, May 9, 2014. Photo credit Ngaio Hotte.

The young woman and Dzonoqua

A girl is born, but the mother dies. The father is heartbroken, desolate, but expends all his care on bringing her up. She grows in beauty. At her first menstruation, she is richly dressed and uplifted onto a pedestal, where she must stand all day without moving a muscle. She accomplishes this. She is now a woman. She is warned—as she has been all her days—to not stray too far into the forest, because it is dangerous.

Of course she wanders happily in the forest, until, just as dusk begins to fall, she meets an old woman. This is Dzonoqua, a miserable, jealous and greedy spirit. She is afraid, but the old woman makes reassuring sounds and indicates that she will take her to a good place. They come

to a little house. When they go in, the inside is beautiful, with all objects and signs of great wealth. The old woman approaches her with a greedy look in her eyes, and she begins to be very afraid. When Dzonoqua makes signs and begins to stroke her eyebrows, it dawns on the young woman that Dzonoqua wants to be as beautiful as she is.

She quickly tells the Dzonoqua that her father has the skill to trim her eyebrows and hair and make her beautiful too. She runs to her father, who comes with his hammer and adze. He kills the Dzonoqua with a swift blow to the head. So we learn that wealth and beauty are not ends in themselves, but the results of living in a good way, of, "Walking in ways that do not offend the Creator."

Chief Dick's second story was told to us in part in performance, in part at the meeting.

A boy is born, but his mother dies in childbirth. The heartbroken father blames the boy and mistreats him. Other children shun him. He feels he has no use or value, that he is unlovable. He is desperately lonely.

One day, when he is drawing water for the house, he is startled by his reflection in the pail. He has never seen himself before. He runs for four days and four nights through the forest, without eating or drinking. He comes to a clearing in the forest, stops and sets a snare. This is his skill, when he sets a snare, he always catches something. He falls asleep and dreams that a grouse comes to his snare. He picks up a good size rock to kill it, but is astonished when the grouse speaks, "Please don't kill me, and I'll take you to a place where the spirits dance." As hungry as he is—and he *is* hungry! He sets her free. The grouse flutters off, and the spruceroot snare jumps up to and twines round his ankle, begging to come, the *Snare* is the gift of curiosity.

So all three leave the clearing and set off into the woods. She leads him along until, one by one, the shy forest spirits appear, each with a gift. The story that belongs to Chief Dick's family has masks and garments for each of forty spirits. As the dancers put on the regalia, they *become* the spirits. Each one has a gift for the lost boy. The *Long Face* gives the knowledge of plants and medicines that give long life, the *Ground Keeper* gives the gift of organization of life and thoughts...

[...I cannot recall or do justice even to the nine or so spirits that we were privileged to witness and to listen to...]

...The boy seems to be taking too long to bring the water, so his father cuts a stick to beat him and paces angrily on the beach. Some people find the pail floating downstream, and he fears the boy has drowned himself. Filled with sorrow and remorse, his father goes looking for him...

...the boy wakes and there is a grouse in his snare. He sets it free, and starts home with his many gifts, of which the richest is that he has the choice and the gift of freedom. Chief Dick ends his story, "Freedom, Freedom, what a great word, what a great thing."

These are ancient stories that can be read at many levels. This is what it said to Nigel...

There is a lost child in all of us. We came to the Round Table seeking partners that would in some way, complete our work and our lives, which, for all of us, are interwoven. We came as masked dancers with gifts that we were shy to share, in fear that others would make little of us, would not recognize their value.

The sea has many gods, and many voices - TS Eliot

We are all lost children, shy forest creatures, shy sea creatures. I have said before and tactlessly—because my gift is to speak truth, but my curse is to do it rudely—that some voices of the sea are too loud. I take these words back. The voices of science, of ecology, of economics are not too loud, but too lonely. Creative justice calls for them to be reunited with the voices of art, of spirituality, of religion in its true forms of compassion, love and care for the poor, the sick, the marginalized and the oppressed.

We learn from our musicians, from our colleagues at other tables, that—sometimes at least, and certainly now for us—harmony is a better metaphor than consensus.

We are deeply grateful to our convenors. We are particularly grateful to the Wall institute that has enabled us to knock some bricks off the wall¹ that divides the ancient orchestra of voices of love for the sea. To conclude, here is Robert Frost:

*Something there is that does not love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.*

¹ Oscar Wilde tells of a Selfish Giant, who built a great wall to keep children out of his garden. It was so bleak without them, that the north wind, rain and hail, the frost and snow came to stay. The flowers hid under the earth, and the trees refused to flower, until, after many years, the wall crumbled and the children came back to play.