

Frybread in Berlin

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29 June 1993

I came from one country of genocide and holocaust to another country of genocide and holocaust to attend the international conference on a disease of genocide and holocaust. The NAZI history seemed as present as the dust that pervades east Berlin. That history is attempting to reappear in the current racial violence against Turks and other non Germanic people. In many ways the fear of racial violence is not unlike the uneasiness of stepping off the plane in Rapid City, South Dakota, driving through the Texas Panhandle or visiting certain neighborhoods in Boston. I think that is why I ultimately felt comfortable in Berlin. There was a familiarity to potential racial attacks. Racial hatred and violence are, after all, as "American" as apple pie.

Those of us who are Indian know and understand that we run into other Indians in the most unlikely and unexpected places. It was that truth that led us to eat frybread in Berlin. I arrived in Berlin expecting that really big wieners would be the only food in abundance. Several of us had the fortune of meeting Janet Dittmer, a woman from the Oneida Nation, who has been living in Berlin for 30 years. Janet arranged for some of the Native delegates from the conference and the Lakota dance troupe touring Berlin to gather for an evening of frybread, potato salad and chicken, the very type of food my grandmother always cooked for our picnics at powwows. We went to a community center, The House of Peace, for our gathering. It's almost impossible to write about that evening without resorting to descriptive clichés but it was true that the evening had a magic quality. It was such that I expected a wanbli (eagle) to land for a visit. As I sat there listening to the Lakotas drumming and singing, a childhood memory of an unci (grandmother) who served as head dancer for some of our powwows and honor songs came to me. She always danced with a hatchet that she would raise into the air at appropriate times in songs. Her movement with the hatchet always gave me shivers, made me feel very strong and grateful to be Hunkpapa Lakota (Indian).

By arranging the gathering, Janet provided respite from the challenges and uncertainties of being away from home, from Native earth and air. However, by the time I left Berlin, I began to slowly understand why she could live there for 30 years. Several of us stayed in homes of Berliners. My hosts, Winni and Michael, were exceptionally sweet and kind and their manners were reminiscent of the traditional Lakota protocol that I learned from my grandparents. Winni and Michael quickly learned that I like to drink coffee in the evenings, so I found that each night they left a carafe of fresh coffee in my room. Their uncomplicated acts of kindness and generosity were reassuring that humanity remains in the world. They made every effort to be considerate and sensitive to my needs and habits. That surpassed my initial preference for the neutrality of a hotel room.

I don't think it is easy for Native people to travel in official capacities outside of North America unless we are in a group. Fortunately there were several Indian people attending the conference and there should have been more. All of us together provided a cultural shield and to some extent we created a mini-nation on the steps of the conference. We picked a certain stairway to gather daily, designated the Indian steps, so we could find one another among 15,000 delegates to the conference. And from there we ventured into the nights of Berlin.

Indian camaraderie in Berlin was as fun as summer nights at powwows or anytime Indian people get together. My experiences in Berlin were good ones because I was able to laugh with other Indian people. I completely trusted in Tunkasila (the grandfather) to help make my experiences safe and good. Tunkasila provided me with more than that. I strongly believe that many of our Native people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS are teachers for all Native people and several serve as my role models for spiritual understanding and practice.

In reading newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area, one gets the impression that the only news coming out of the IXth International Conference on AIDS is the disruptions by ACT-UP pretending that they represent the heart and soul of all AIDS activism. But the real news is that Alaska Soto from the Native and Indigenous AIDS Network (NIAN) addressed the closing plenary with a reading of the group statement from NIAN. The statement reflected the continued frustration and efforts by Native people to be serious participants in the international arena of HIV and AIDS. Our statement was strong, forthright and proudly delivered by Alaska from the American Indian Community House in New York. It appears that we were the only group to directly address the racial violence against Turks in Germany and the only group to explicitly express solidarity with them and to ask the German people to end racial violence. Our statement had ceremony, truth and the simple recognition that HIV and AIDS is not just a health issue but one that impacts every aspect of our lives.

And that is why Native people must be involved in the international conference, to bring ceremony and the circle to a disease that often separates the caregiver from the researcher from the educator from the doctor from the family from the patient.

**DECLARATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS AIDS NETWORK**

Berlin, Germany, June 11, 1993

- WHEREAS, 1993 has been declared the "International Year of Indigenous Peoples" by the United Nations, and
- WHEREAS, indigenous peoples face enormous problems, including poor health status, legalized oppression, and the destruction of traditional cultures, languages and economies, and
- WHEREAS, "Ethnic cleansing" goes on not only in the former Yugoslavia, but continues for indigenous peoples everywhere, and we understand the pain of violence and discrimination on the basis of race and color, and
- WHEREAS, HIV/AIDS is a global problem of enormous proportions, and to date national governments, donor agencies nor AIDS service organizations have assumed responsibility for assuring access by indigenous communities to prevention information, care services and other resources and
- WHEREAS, alcohol abuse and other drug abuse is killing our people, and
- WHEREAS, self-esteem and cultural affirmation are basic ingredients in HIV/STD prevention and
- WHEREAS, our traditions and traditional medicines are a valuable resource not only for ourselves but for humankind, and
- WHEREAS, many indigenous cultures value Two-Spirit or gay/bisexual/lesbian men and women as a part of traditional society and
- WHEREAS, HIV/AIDS does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, tribe, clan, family, sex, race or sexual orientation.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the International Indigenous AIDS Network gathered at the IXth International Conference on AIDS in Berlin, Germany, pledge to continue our work to bring to the world's attention the urgent need for indigenous communities' self-determination in HIV prevention and care, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, national governments, multi-lateral donor organizations, national, regional and community-based AIDS organizations must actively support access to HIV information, care and resources for indigenous communities throughout the world now, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, the indigenous people gathered in Berlin for the IXth International AIDS Conference in Berlin declare their support for and solidarity with Turks and other people of color living in Germany and call upon all Germans of good-will to oppose racism and violence against non-Germans with all their might and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, effective prevention of and care for HIV/AIDS in our communities will require a return to traditional cultural values; and we appeal to indigenous communities and leaders everywhere to recognize the threat of HIV/AIDS to our survival and join with us to protect the future of our peoples.