

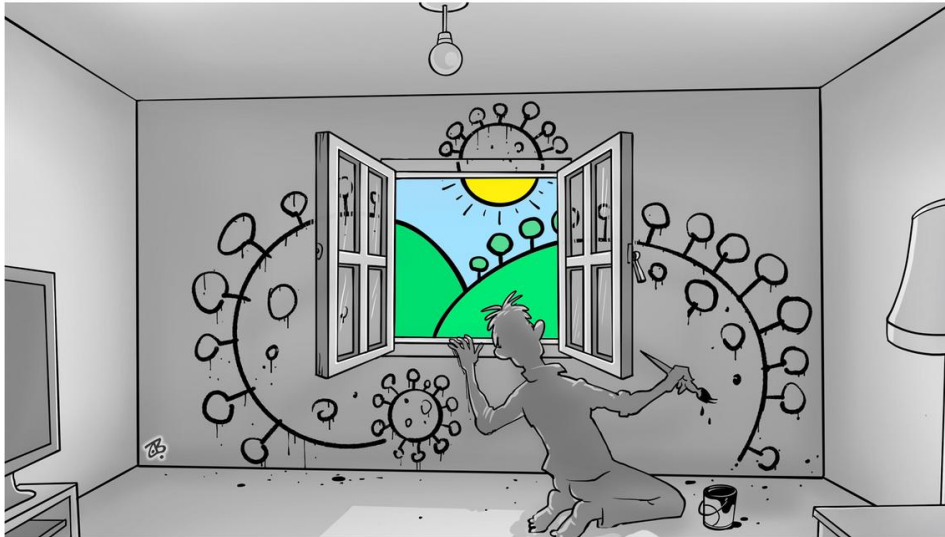


COLUMNS

Local View: Restore our connections to each other, the natural world

From this Column: 'In the new year, let us come together for renewal as a community and for the restoration of a worldview where human beings are both part of the natural world and its staunch protectors.'

Written By: "Gwiiwizens" Ricky DeFoe and Janet Keough | Dec 8th 2020 - 3pm.



As the year gets ready to renew itself, we have a chance to heal ourselves, our human communities, and the larger community of all beings in the natural world. We have a chance to restore our relationships to the environment and to each other. We can rid ourselves of the arrogance and ignorance that comes out in violence.

We've experienced stress from living in an abusive environment, not just in some of our families but in our society as a whole. This has brought negativity to the forefront of our community in the form of competition, aggression, and selfishness. Our community is out of balance and harmony.

In order to heal our differences and renew our spirits and our world, we first need to name these problems. If we can't relate to our own community in a positive fashion, how can we relate to the environment?

We must start with mutuality, solidarity, and community. American culture has socialized us to see group divisions: Black, white, Native, and other. Add privilege to that mix, and it makes a violent society with racial and social division.

As Americans, we are also told we can fend for ourselves. So we see power, money, dominance, prestige, and credit work against relationships and drive negativity within and among even elements of our communities which share similar goals and values. Healing begins by doing good work for others. If we turn away from selfishness and instead lift others' spirits and burdens, it takes away our own hurts and divisions. Healing means a holistic renewal that is physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social for both the individual and the community.

The Ojibwe language speaks about you before me. In English, we say, "I'll see you later." In Ojibwe, we say, "Giga-waabam-in naagaj," which means, "you will be seen by me later." In English, we say, "I love you." In Ojibwe, we say, "Gi-zaagi-in," which means, "you are loved by me." When we speak about you before me, we also seek to think about you before me.

Institutions are manifestations of actions that stem from our cosmology, philosophy, and values. If we don't understand we are related to the rocks, the water, the plants, and the animals in all their forms, it is easy to see only hierarchy and dominion. That allows us to destroy and allow destruction. We experience societal devaluation of nature, the demand for short-term profit, and regulatory capture in our government.

It is important to re-spiritualize the world. For all those who enjoy and protect our natural world, we need to remember and regain those spiritual and emotional feelings we have for waters, lands, and wildlife — a commonality and worldview that brought us all to our work and creates our well-being.

We and the other beings on our planet have the right to exist, the right to flourish, and the right to be sustained and be sustainable.

In traditional Ojibwe culture, we are each part of our own healing. We can't just go to a doctor or another person and expect them to do the healing for us. We go to the waterways and forests to find healing medicines. We participate in our own healing.

Now is the time for us all to take responsibility for our own healing: physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and socially. We all need to go, both physically and in spirit, to wild and natural places. We need many types of knowledge — intergenerational, dream state, ceremonial, and contemporary knowledge of science —

not just power and profit. We need the rivers, the wild rice, and the animals. And they need us to come together as a community to share the same objectives: clean water, air, land, and preserving life now and in the future.

This year has been a time of isolation, and people long for relationships. We are a social people. We can change the way we relate to each other and rebuild the sense of working together for the welfare of all the people.

Our spiritual and emotional medicine will also be found in the connections with other beings who share our natural world. In the new year, let us come together for renewal as a community and for the restoration of a worldview where human beings are both part of the natural world and its staunch protectors.

"Gwiiwizens" Ricky DeFoe of Cloquet is a Fond du Lac Band Elder and a board member for Water Legacy (waterlegacy.org), a nonprofit that advocates for clean water in Minnesota. Janet Keough of Duluth is a retired U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientist and president of Water Legacy.



"Gwiiwizens" Ricky DeFoe of Sawyer points the pipe in each of the four directions while saying a prayer during ceremonies at the site of the completed five-acre solar power array (background) on the Fond du Lac Reservation.

News Tribune file photo



Janet Keough