

**A Dream and a Painting Marking Raven Woman's Death:
Synchronicities and a Jungian Analysis**

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Years ago I brought a dream worker, of Central Alberta Cree heritage, to a couple of IASD conferences. Sylvia, Raven Woman, was thrilled to come and talk about her experiences with dreams as 'dreamer' for her reserve near Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I recall at a conference in Santa Cruz, she asked me why some of the people she was meeting were talking heads. At first I was puzzled and asked her what she meant, she said that what she saw was heads that were talking but no bodies. I laughed and realized that she was 'seeing' me and my scientist colleagues in terms of our intellects but that there was no body to us. I recall thinking how accurate was her 'vision'. But I kept grinding numbers and began shortly after that to examine dreams of video game players.

Over the years we went our separate ways, when I had a dream about her on January 17 of 2016. I created a collage about the dream.



A few days later my therapist and I worked the dream, considering the painting as part of the process. A few months later, I was going through several major life changes. I sold my house to downsize into a condo and was beginning the bridge to retirement. My son was moving out to explore the world, quite literally, and I had just turned 70. Then on June 12th Raven Woman, died. I heard about it through her nieces Facebook announcement and knew I wanted to go to the funeral. It turned out that the funeral was on the 17th of June, the same day I was closing on my condo. After getting the keys I put the collage on the condo's fireplace mantel and went to the funeral.



This is a story of transitions in the autumn of life, and the role of a dream, a painting of the dream and a depth analysis of both in helping me to find my way. When I had the dream I had not yet made the major life change decisions that all clustered in the spring and summer of 2016, although they had been simmering. Here is the dream from my diary:

Jan. 17 – 3:18 am

Dreamt I saw Renn near my place and he didn't say anything I guess and then I was sitting in some waiting room and he came in and I called out to him and he came over. I noticed that he had gotten so big, filled out, and I told him to sit and he did on a footstool in front of me, and I asked how he was doing and how his mom and aunties were and chided him for not coming over earlier – he said what would the manager say and I said I would tell the manager he was my friend, and Renn asked “what, do you want to talk Indian?” I didn't say anything just told him to please come by from time to time.

Then [a scene shift] I heard something and got up [from bed] and walked down the hall and saw a woman sitting at my dining table and immediately I thought that

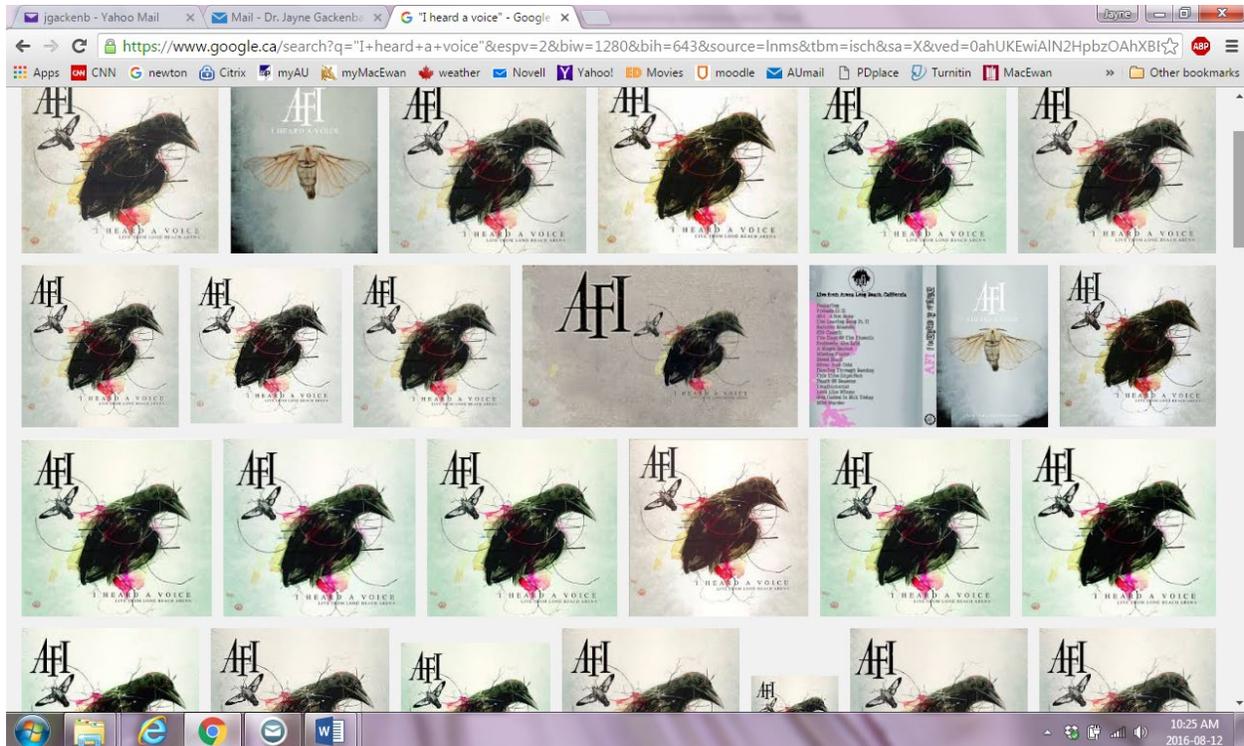
mother had died and she had come to see me at her death and how I knew she would, I went up to her and saw it wasn't mom. The woman seemed from a bit of a distance in the dark, or minimal light, to have short white hair and it was curly. Then I got closer and touched her and realized she wasn't a ghost, she was physical. Then we chatted and I asked her where she was from and she said some place which I knew was across town, and then I said why don't I call you a cab to take you home and that I'd pay for it. I noticed as I got closer that she was an Indian. She asked me something like "what about him?" indicating someone else was in the house. I said "what are you going to take, my microwave" which was right there. But then I heard a voice and I startled awake. My heart was racing and I listened but nothing and I realized it was my own snoring I'd heard.

After the dream I contacted Sylvia's niece who told me that two of Renn's friends recently overdosed and died and that Sylvia had Alzheimer's. About 10 days later I brought the painting and the dream to a session with Alexandra (Alex) Fidyk, my Jungian Psychotherapist. Alex explains about our work that "artwork like dream work can arise from the unconscious (if not ego-created) and thus becomes a negotiated space between the unconscious and the conscious. Artwork offers another way to amplify the images and symbols (of the dream) and assists us to make associations BEFORE any interpretation in psychological terms occurs. The steps before interpretation are vital and cannot be rushed as this is where the unconscious becomes constellated which I/we feel (the field) -- bodily and emotionally. Thus we must "hang out" in this field (for clues and directions), cautious NOT to move too quickly to interpretation". I should also point out that it is rarely an actual representation but rather a symbolic amplification of key element in the dream.

When I took out the painting Alex remarked that it was "so archetypal"¹ and that "there is something very different about this work relative to your other work". She asked my reaction when I woke and I told her I was afraid that there was someone in the house. I went on to explain various elements of the collage. After my initial dream thought that it was my mother and she

¹ We audio tape our sessions thus allowing me to go back over the session. It's been a huge help in my internal processing as my memory at 70 is not what it used to be! These session notes were taken directly from the audio tape. Alex went over this article for clarification. She gave permission for both the taping and the use of quotations herein.

had died, in the dream Sylvia morphed from Sylvia to her sister, Bear Woman, as I got closer. In Googling images for the planned collage, I looked up the phrase “I heard a voice”. I was surprised that the entire first page was all the same image from a record album.



They were all crows but one image was a Raven. Another sister in this large Cree family had been called Crow Woman. Another phrase from the dream that I incorporated into the collage was “What, do you want to talk Indian?” Finally, I added a phrase which seemed to capture a dream element, “I know what I bring to the table, so trust me when I say I’m not afraid to eat alone.”

Then I told Alex the background of Sylvia, Raven Woman, and her family². I had been involved with them 20 years earlier but it seemed to echo what I was currently experiencing with another family system of Hispanic and Eastern European origin. I acknowledged that these relationships paralleled my own family system. My therapist, who is also family constellation trained, responded that my contribution to these two family systems may be an effort to “bring to life” what I could not do in my own family system. She suggested, “we seek to heal that which

² If the reader is interested in reading further about Sylvia and her family and dream work among the Cree, there are links in the references.

needs healing within our own family”. I told her that in the case of Sylvia’s family that I still felt guilty about Renn, whose grandmother, Crow Woman, died when he was 9 years old. Crow Woman was Sylvia’s sister and had been raising Renn. I still felt I could have done more. I elaborated upon loyalties to ones own children relative to those one might like to care about. So I wondered if in part this dream did not refer to those old issues re-emerging in my life.

I went on to tell Alex, about how I became involved with this Native family. I thought often at the time that this is what a family should be and was having the same feelings about the current family I had become close to. ‘Coincidentally’, at the time of my involvement with this Cree family my nuclear family fell apart. My husband and I separated weeks before Crow Woman’s death. I went on to reflect upon the recent family I was involved with and how this new involvement reflected my deeper inner life. I pointed out, “I see this playing out and there are some similarities between these two families, but what am I not doing in my own family”.

That query prompted me to talk about when I thought in the dream that it was my mother coming to me because she had died. Alex reminded me that I have had several dreams of her dying of late³. These have been prompted because she had just turned 90. Although many people say she does not look 90, none-the-less I’m very aware that she could go at any time despite still living on her own. As it turned out, a dear friend, Raven Woman, was soon to die. Alex noted maybe something is pointing forward in relationship to my mom’s passing. I kept seeing my mom in white in several of the dreams. She suggested that I so often saw my mom as black or in black and now my psyche is showing that I am able to see her, to receive her, in white. That she is both.

She asked about the microwave. I pointed out that I was standing near it in the dream and it seemed not valuable enough to steal. I thought maybe cooking, but more that it was in the center core of my home, which was reflected in its position in the dream and in the collage. Alex noted “If we look at the dream and the collage like a Mandela, the microwave is the center point, perhaps indicating “relationship to self”. She further noted “Its where the deep work happens. When we think of microwaves they move deep into the food [to transform it]”. It’s a different

³ The painting I put in the IASD online art show is another one of her dying.

method of cooking, one that is contained and utilizes super heat. She thought it suggestive of a “cave or womb,” and the Mother.

A commentary on the three sisters aboriginal names (i.e., Raven Woman, Crow Woman, and Bear Woman) followed. Alex said these are creator animals that bring life, as in the creative principle. She further pointed out that these symbolic animals “mark the instinct – [your animal nature]”. This Jungian psychotherapist said that maybe it “marks you coming back to a stronger relationship to your instincts.” I commented that I dream of animals a lot, and she agreed.

She went on to suggest that the big loss that the dream was pointing to “is the new relationship with your mom”. I was confused and she elaborated that the loss of Renn when Crow Woman died and the loss of my Cree friend to Alzheimer’s, echoed my early loss with my mom. I didn’t have her in many ways. She suggested that the dream might be “about re-establishing the relationship with the feminine in symbolic and literal forms.” She went on to say that “motherhood sometimes bears these great sadness’s” and further elaborated drawing upon the work of James Hollis, a well-known contemporary Jungian. He holds that good parenting is about separation and abandonment as the child becomes an adult. One needs to separate from ones parents so that you can come back and reconnect. She wondered if the neglected mothering I had with my mom then became the mothering relationship I have with my children. Now in their 30’s, they have to separate to be fully themselves. One of the changes in my life that was emerging at this time was my son and his girlfriend were planning on moving to the US for her to pursue further education. At the time of this dream they were living in my basement suite.

Alex elaborated that in the dream the appearance of Renn points to the hard choices I had to make to help Renn at a crisis in his life. It was limited and I had to turn away from Renn’s brother including both of they young boys was too threatening to my son. She explained that sometimes “mothers had to enact infanticide” because they do not have the resources to handle all the children. My voice trembled at this knowing the truth of her guidance. She pointed out that I needed to breath into it and be present to it saying to myself “I got enough from my mom and I was able to give more to my children.”

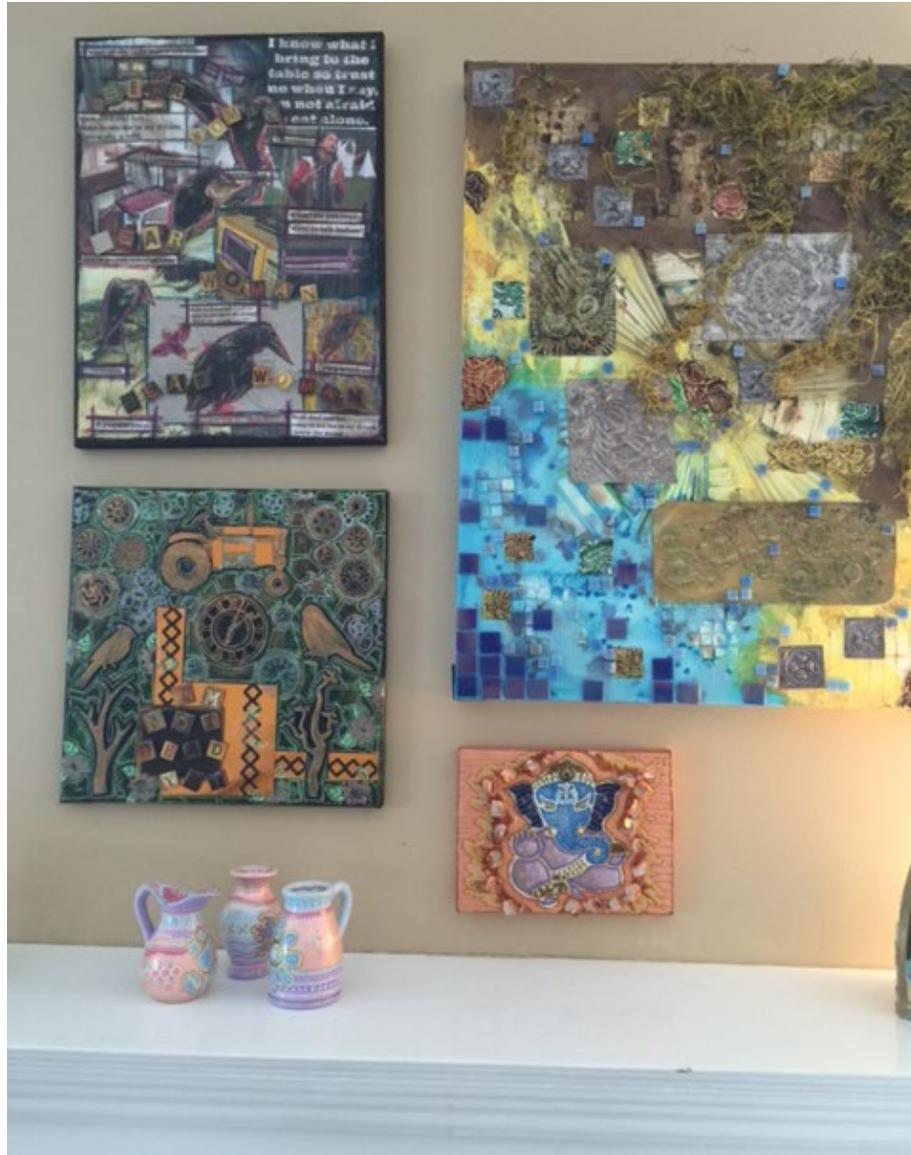
She then suggested that I look at these women in me. I pointed out that I was emotionally involved with all three of them. I specifically related how Crow Woman taught me about touch, Raven Women furthered my dreaming education, and Bear Woman would call me out about my

disconnect from my emotions. My therapist thought that I might go back to the book I wrote about Crow Woman's death and look at it to discover what might I learn from other elements of these relationships.

We went into the question asked by Renn in the dream "What, do you want to talk Indian?" – I told her that while the spirit is alive there was also such pain and pathology. Thus for me to return to a discussion/dialogue with Indians, I felt was a step backward. There seemed to me to be very little middle in their society but I noted that Sylvia was in the middle. I spoke of Sylvia's reluctance to lead too many psychological workshops with her sisters for Canadian Aboriginals. And how she would say no from time to time. We further speculated that her Alzheimer's was the ultimate no. In family constellation work, Alex pointed out, that is one way that Alzheimer's is viewed. She asked, "how good are you at saying no?" I answer not very good but certainly better than I was.

Alex said "This is huge that you've come to these women at this time, knowing that your son's were connected". The affect load was heavy. She noted that a basic pattern of family constellation work is that "people [often] manifest illness or fail in things in order to bring what is not seen into light". Thus this psychotherapist asked what is it within family systems that might not have been seen or honoured. I reflected upon the roles that mothers and sons have played. She noted how important it is for the mother to say no to the son – and to turn them toward their fathers. As such, the timing of my son leaving my home is both right and difficult. Mothers must let go so that sons can love their mothers but stand with the strength of their fathers. I went home and found the book transcript and began to reread.

Eleven days after this session I made the long simmering decision to retire and applied for a two-year bridge to retirement from my university. Jelling at the same point was the decision to sell my house and buy a condo. I timed the move for when my son and his girlfriend moved out in June. Following my 70th birthday in late May, the dream/painting came back when Sylvia died. I placed the painting on the mantel after the condo closing, as I left for the funeral. On July 4th I moved from my house to a condo where the Raven Woman dream image remains but I added two other dream images. One was done during the retirement decision days and was the last painting done in my old house. The other was a painting of an old tractor and on it part of a poem by an old tractor lover saying, "I ain't dead yet".



References

Additional readings about these Cree women and the role of dreams in their culture are listed below.

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