

AERO-GRAMME #2

The newsletter of the Alternative Education Resource Organization, 417
Roslyn Rd., Roslyn Heights, NY 11577 516 621-2195
January, 1990

Dear Friends:

I got back three weeks ago from the Kee Way Win Indian land, in Northern Ontario. I'll never forget the 60 mile ski-do ride to Kee Way Win over a frozen and treacherous Sandy Lake. The Kee Way Wins now have the beginnings of an educational program for their kids. But they operate under many hardships, and it was shocking to find people with kids who are as old as 12 and do not know how to read. The adults didn't realize that they could do it themselves. They never had felt empowered to do it. Hopefully, things will be different now.

I have a report on the trip which follows. If you know the background, you can skip the first five paragraphs.

There is a lot of other news and communication, which follows the report. We reached the match for the Bay grant, with some cash contributions and with a lot of materials and supplies sent to the Key Way Wins (see letter to Bay Foundation). But if you have not yet sent anything for overall operating costs, mail, phone, etc., please do so now. This operation is about \$5000 in the red now, and I'm not sure how much longer I can keep these projects going.

-Jerry

Mintz

KEE WAY WIN PROJECT

When I was in Toronto this summer to meet Ivan Illich at an education conference, I read an article in the local paper about a tribe of 250 people in northern Ontario that had returned to their ancestral land that they had been forced to leave in 1910. I was able to contact the Chief, Geordi Kakepetum, by telephone. This, in itself, was difficult, because they have no running water or electricity. But they do have one microwave, battery powered telephone. I get through about once in ten tries.

Chief Kakepetum confirmed the details in the article, that the Canadian government gives them no help with housing or education, because they do not recognize the land as an official reserve. He said that he had traveled to Toronto to get some help for his tribe, but that at that point, I was the only one who had responded. Among other things, he said that there weren't even any books or writing materials at Kee Way Win, but that

they were building a small school building. He said that the younger children there had had no educational program since they had returned to the land in 1985, and most of the children up to twelve years old couldn't read yet. Furthermore, he told me that they had recalled the older children who had been in a religious boarding school because the school has used corporal punishment on the children.

I offered to help him create a school using the alternative models that I am familiar with. In 1971 I helped the Mohawks at Akwesasne, in upstate New York, start the first Indian run survival school in North America. These schools have helped the Mohawks (and other Native tribes who have used it as a model) retain their language and culture, while still preparing them for the modern world.

Chief Kakepetum went to his tribal council with my offer, and said that they were very excited and interested in getting the help. Subsequently, I wrote to over 200 schools and individuals around the country and locally, to enlist their help. Many have offered help. For example, the students at Lawrence Academy have organized the Native American Relief Movement to help, which has already raised \$500 and sent over 20 boxes of books.

The Bay Foundation of New York City created a matching grant of \$2700 for this project.

I left for Kee Way Win on December 5th. I had received word that Sandy Lake was now frozen over so that I could travel the final 28 miles by ski-mobile. I went by train to Montreal. Another train to Sudbury, Ontario, bus to Capreol, train to Sioux Lookout. Then I flew Bearskin Air 200 miles north over frozen lakes and countless pine trees to Sandy Lake.

The Sandy Lake reserve is at the western end of the Lake. It is the official reserve, the one in which the Canadian government tried to lump all of the Indians of the area. About 1500 live here. It is remote. You cannot drive there in the summer. In the winter there is sometimes a road plowed through from Red Lake. It has a small airport, electricity, public water, a branch of The Bay, a small combination market-department store with high prices. And there is a public school. The school is in a modern group of buildings, warm, well lighted, and staffed mostly with "Newfies", teachers from Newfoundland, where there is a glut of teachers. Because of the remoteness of the Sandy Lake Reserve, teachers at the school get extra pay, about \$35,000 a year.

In the face of this relative oasis in this rather forbidding land, it was hard for me to understand why a group of residents would want to leave here to start a community at the other end of the lake, 28 to 35 miles away. In that community they have no central electricity, no running water or

sewage, and no school. If they are lucky, they live in one room log houses. Otherwise, they make do in tents, to fight off temperatures that reach -50.

At first, I didn't get any straight answers. Even the Chief didn't want to outline the historical split that caused them to leave. Finally, one of the council members told me: The Kee Way Wins were once called the Sandy Lakers, and were here originally, settling all around the lake. Then another Chief, from Deer Lake, came here with his band, over a hundred years ago. His name was Fiddler. When it came time to establish a recognized reserve, the Fiddler Band did the negotiating, and the government made their site of several square miles the official Reserve, telling the other Indians that if they wanted government services, they had to move to that site.

Gradually, the original Sandy Lakers moved to the site, but it was an uneasy relationship. They felt they were being treated as second class citizens. There were cultural and religious differences between the groups, centering around different forms of Christianity. In Cree the words "Kee Way Win" means to return home, and that's what the group longed to do. Like the early Israeli settlers, some of them began to return to settle their original land, at the other end of Sandy Lake, between it and Niska Lake. Finally, they got the ear of an official of the Canadian government, and they were granted separate band status. Many of the original settlers rushed to sign on to the new band. They expected that the band status would be followed by awarding reserve status at Kee Way Win. In 1985, hundreds of them left to pioneer at Kee Way Win. but the official who had helped them was "transferred", and they were left in limbo. Therefore, they have had no services, no electricity, water, sewage, roads, etc, since that time, and no school.

Because of the extreme hardships that winter still presents at Kee Way Win, many people retreat to the Sandy Lake Reserve in the winter. The Kee Way Wins are allowed to stay there, but the Sandy Lake tribal council has forbidden the Kee Way Wins to have official meetings there. So, when I met with the Kee Way Win education committee at a house at the Sandy Lake Reserve, it was an illegal meeting. In fact, they were supposed to have reported my presence to authorities. I was warned that if they found out, I would "be on the next plane out of here." Suddenly I felt like I was in Eastern Europe before the 80's. I could understand why the Kee Way Wins wanted to return to their own land.

In the meeting I showed a videotape that I made of Donald Cardinal, a Cree from Alberta who is now living in Roslyn, NY while he tries to get artifacts back to his tribe that are at the Museum of Natural History. Cardinal is very conversant with Canadian treaties and law, and in the tape he outlined why the Canadian government would have to pay for the Kee Way

win's education if they started their own school.

I also had a tape that I made on the way, when I stopped at the Mohawk Reserve near Montreal. The Director of the Indian Way School, Dianne Delaronde, explained how the school was founded, and where its funds came from.

We then talked about ways that the talents, knowledge, and abilities of the members of the Kee Way Win Community could be used in the creation of their own school. It was a bit shocking to find people with kids who are as old as 12 who do not know how to read. It wasn't that the kids weren't interested. It just hadn't been offered to them. They hadn't had a "bad" school; they hadn't had any school at all. The adults didn't realize that they could teach the children themselves. They apparently never had felt empowered to do it. Hopefully, things will be different now.

For example, I met 12 year old Denny. He was very personable, and had spent most of his life in a Kee Way Win settlement that is 7 miles further away than the main settlement at Niska Lake, a total of 35 miles from the Sandy Lake Reserve. At Denny's settlement there is no one to teach the children, and the parents haven't been able to do it. He told me that he still doesn't know how to read. His father died earlier in the year, and his family moved back to Sandy Lake so Denny could start school for the first time. He said they put him in fourth grade. He also said that no one had ever tried to teach him reading before.

At Niska Lake they now have built a one room, log cabin school, and have a volunteer this year for the first time to work with the children. I finally got to see that building and the new community of log houses and shacks they call Kee Way Win. To get there I traveled the longest 28 miles in my memory, over the frozen slush and snow of Sandy Lake.

Despite the -30 temperatures, the weight of the snow had created cracks in the ice surface through which fresh water had surged. This created an uneven and sometimes treacherous surface on which to travel. The path was marked with tree branches, particularly in the hairy sections.

I went across in a "sled", really a four sided box, pulled by a ski-do driven by Barlow, whom I was assured was an expert driver and woodsman. I needed to go in the sled because I was also carrying my video camera.

Even though I had a full-face ski mask, I had to put my hands over my face to protect it from the cold, and despite that, I had a piece of ice the size of an ice cube hanging from my mustache by the time we arrived. Even though I had bought insulated gloves, I soon discovered their inadequacy. The people there told me they never use gloves with fingers, only "mitts",

so the fingers can keep each other warm.

But the worst part was the bumping, sliding, sudden drops and rises that I thought were going to break my back. On the way over I remember taking a mental snap shot of the situation, almost as if it were a dream, to remind myself later that it had indeed been real.

Once at Kee Way Win, we went into the small office building and started a fire so we could thaw out. The office epitomized a lot of what Kee Way Win is about: A small, spare, room with a barrel for a heater, and a telephone sitting on the desk. The telephone is powered by automobile batteries, and the signal is sent to a mast on the roof and across the lake by microwave. That system cost the Kee Way Wins \$10,000 to install, and shows the strength of their commitment to the future.

We looked into the one room, log "schoolhouse". The volunteer had just left for a Christmas break, but I talked to her on the telephone. She is there because the Mennonite School where she was going to teach was closed down due to allegations of corporal punishment. Her order was covering her expenses. She had organized the room in a fairly traditional way, with a few old desks in rows, the alphabet on the wall, and Christmas decorations hanging all around. Many of the people had gone across the lake to visit friends and relatives and to shop at the one store. Furthermore, an elder had died that week, and the last few people had gone over for the funeral. There is no church yet at Kee Way Win, but one of the council members, Silas Kakegamic, is a minister, and plans to build a church.

In the meetings with the education council, I stressed the idea of using the abilities of the community members, and organizing a curriculum that combined the new with the old, including a tribal council decision making process for the school itself. David Thompson, a Kee Way Win council member, asked what he could do personally, and I suggested that he could tutor kids individually in reading. It was as if the idea had never occurred to him before, but now he was excited about it. He began furiously taking notes, as he realized the possibilities of the approach. The elders know such things as syllabics, the Cree written language, traditional trapping techniques, tribal history, crafts, etc.

We spent a long time on the question of naming the school, and of the best approaches for funding. The next day we heard about the death of the elder. It was the second death in this small band in the week that I was there. Just a week earlier, David Thompson's 2 year old nephew had suddenly died of an unexplained form of parasitic attack.

Some of the children heard that I was a good ping pong player and wanted me to teach them how to play. I decided to set up a model of the approach to

learning that I was advocating. Gordon, one of the men in the community had a ping pong table in a shed. He said we could use it, but needed to bring wood for the barrel stove to heat the room. I told the children that they would need to get the wood, bring it over, and start the fire. They would also have to spread the word about the class. By 7 PM we had the fire going, and eventually a dozen children participated. By the time we were done, past midnight, I had brought them from the point of not even knowing the rules or how to hit a ball over the net, to playing, singles, doubles, and having a mini-tournament. They wanted to do the same thing the next night, my last night at Sandy Lake. But I had meetings scheduled with some council members. So I told them they would have to organize the whole thing themselves, and that I would come over later. Cain Linklater, a 12 year old from the Kee Way Wind Band, organized the event. I had my meeting with the council, and later went over to the ping pong, which was going strong. The group had learned to organize this activity by themselves.

These are determined people and bright children. Before I left, I asked David Thompson if he thought that a school would start. He responded, "The school HAS started." That was the response that I was hoping for.

Excerpt from Report to Bay Foundation

In terms of the match, Joshua Mailman of the Threshold Foundation has pledged \$1500; Clarise Castello of Germany has contributed \$500. A dozen other individuals have contributed a total of \$450. In addition, a group of students at Lawrence Academy have established an organization specifically to help with this project. It is called the Native American Relief Movement, and they have already sent 20 boxes of materials to Kee Way Win, which they have valued at \$2135, with an additional \$500 in cash raised, mostly being used for shipping costs. In addition, there have been many smaller contributions of materials by a variety of schools. For example, books on wind generation of electricity were donated by Grass Roots School, in Florida. Four sets of large sized cuisonaire rods, with a total estimated value of \$140 are being sent to the Kee Way Wins by the Education Resource Center of Rhode Island.

Articles about this project have appeared in Newsday, and This Week, and I have sent letters and newsletters to over 250 schools and individuals describing the project and soliciting help. I recently appeared on Channel 12, a Long Island cable station, to talk about the project.

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KEE WAY WIN TRIP REPORT

Last Summer, when I was in Toronto for an education conference, I first read about the Kee Way Win tribe, of Sandy Lake, Ontario. Chief Geordi Kakepetum told me of the plight of his people, who had not received any help from the government in the areas of housing and education. Since moving to Kee Way Win in 1985, the children had no school.

When the Kee Way Wins returned to their ancestral land on the eastern side of Sandy Lake in 1985, they were told by David Crombie, the then-Indian Affairs Minister that reserve status would be forthcoming. Unfortunately Crombie was later transferred, and the status was never granted, leaving the tribe in limbo.

Chief Kakepetum, communicating to me by a battery powered, microwave telephone, confirmed the details of the article. I suggested that I might be able to show them how to start a school, using the alternative schools model that I was familiar with. Chief Kakepetum went to his tribal council with the suggestion, and informed me that they were enthusiastic about the idea.

I had to wait for the lake to "freeze up," so that I could travel the final 28 miles by ski-do. Traveling first by train to Sioux Lookout, the next leg of the journey was by Bearskin Air, covering over 200 miles of frozen lakes and countless pine trees, to Sandy Lake.

The Sandy Lake reserve is at the western end of the Lake. It is the official reserve, the one in which the Canadian government tried to lump all of the Indians of the area together. About 1500 now live here, creating a community that includes a small airport, electricity, public water, a small branch of The Bay and a public school.

The school is in a modern group of buildings which are warm and well lighted. In the face of this relative oasis in a rather forbidding land, it was hard for me to understand why a group of residents would want to leave such a comfortable community and relocate across the lake, thirty miles away .

Because of the extreme hardships that winter still presents at Kee Way Win, many people retreat to the Sandy Lake Reserve in the winter. The Kee Way Wins are allowed to stay there, but the Sandy Lake tribal council has forbidden the Kee Way Wins to have any official meetings. When I met with the Kee Way Win education committee at a house at the Sandy Lake Reserve, it was an illegal meeting. In fact, they were supposed to have reported my presence to the authorities and I was warned that if they found out, I would "be on the next plane out of here." Suddenly I felt like I was in Eastern Europe before the 80's. I could understand why the Kee Way Wins

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We looked into the one room, log "schoolhouse" that had recently been built, and saw the assortment of tents, shacks, and log houses that make up Kee Way Win.

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The children had heard that I was a good ping pong player and asked me to teach them how to play. By 7 PM we had the fire going, and a dozen children participated in an impromptu model of a workable approach to education. By the time we were done, past midnight, I had brought them from the point of not even knowing the rules or how to hit a ball over the net, to playing, singles, doubles, and having a mini-tournament. They wanted to do the same thing the next night, my last night at Sandy Lake. But I had meetings scheduled with some council members. So I told them they would have to organize the whole thing themselves, and that I would come over later. Cain Linklater, a 12 year old from the Kee Way Wind Band, organized the event. I

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, led by Chris Balch, a former Shaker Mountain School teacher, beginningsfamiliarhaven'tcommitmentsyllabics!