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June 12, 2006

*Peace Chiefs at Work:  
Stories About Remarkable  
American Indian Leadership  
in this Generation*

I am honored to be the first speaker in this series on Native American identity – and humbled. I wanted to start this series, and because this is the first, with a narrow point of view. I want to start by talking about my family.

The idea of Peace Chiefs, for me, started at home when I heard my grandparents' stories. The stories I grew up with, stories about native leaders told in the kitchen, dished out, meal-by-meal, and consumed slowly, as if the narrative was meant to last my lifetime.

Here's one of my grandmother's stories. She was born in 1911 on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Her father was an Assiniboine tribal leader. One of his jobs was to make certain the U.S. government lived up to its treaty obligations. Leadership and responsibility were always woven together in the braid of family life. As a young girl, my grandmother said, her father's notions about leadership manifested through work. Irene Clark was always cooking or cleaning because people in trouble would come to her parents' house day or night. The routine was to serve the people a meal, while her father listened to their problems. Then he would try to help.

My grandmother had a wonderful picture of her father, Walter Clark, dressed in a stylish three-piece suit sitting in front of the U.S. Capitol. The year was 1908. He was on his way to the capital city to lobby.

Every time she showed me that picture, my grandmother would talk about what it meant to be a leader. Her father told her that he need to dress the way they did in Washington, to show them that he was a leader, like them. He believed this was camouflage that made him more effective.

Irene Clark escaped the service of leadership – that is, cooking – by going away to school as a teenager. She and her sister traveled 1,100 miles by train from Wolfpoint, Montana, to Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. Her father was eager to see his children educated. He said it was the only way to survive in the modern world. My grandmother agreed because she thought it was a great way to get out of chores, especially those she associated with being a leader's daughter.

Like all young people educated far away, my grandmother complained of homesickness. She was always delighted when the remedy was a package from home, a box packed full with fresh jam, dried meat, and a few dollars. My grandmother confessed she blew the contents soon after the package's arrival. She shared goodies with friends, treating them out to dinner. The package never lasted long enough. But her sister, on the other hand, would dole out the contents carefully. Taking a bite, then wrapping and saving each morsel for as long as possible. So long before the next package from home was shipped, my grandmother had to beg her sister for a loan.

This, to me, was an unbelievable story. My grandmother was a frugal eater. When she would eat out, either in a restaurant or at Fort Hall's elder-lunch program, she would only eat a little bit. Then she'd wrap the leftovers and save the food for another meal. "I have lots of grandchildren," she joked.

She told her stories the same way, offering only small portions. It was up to us to carefully wrap what she told us, saving morsels for later.

My grandfather told stories over cups of coffee (or before that, for me, over a Red Nehi soda). He often started his day at "the store" where he would hang out with his friends drinking coffee. Evans' Trading Post was a small grocery store on the Fort Hall Highway. The store sold groceries – milk, eggs and other items that would be stocked in a convenience store these days – as well as beads, tanned hides and other materials used in the making of tribal handicrafts. It also sold the final products: beaded moccasins, belt-buckles and bolo ties.

The café part of the trading post was small, mostly a long counter, a sink and shelves with dozens of coffee mugs. Regular coffee drinkers had their own cups with their names embossed on the front. We'd walk in and the host or hostess would grab my grandfather's cup and fill it immediately. There was no need to order. All of the seats were along the counter. If my grandfather had a favorite place to sit, I don't remember it. I guess it depended on where everyone else sat. But it didn't matter: Every seat was a window seat, a framed view of the highway passing through Fort Hall. We could see who was coming and going – as if the counter-stool was the best way to "report" coming and goings.

Drinking coffee was the excuse for storytelling. It was a ritual with different groups of workers having set times to meet: before work coffee; those who didn't have to go to work coffee; mid-morning break; mid-afternoon break; and few came in on their way home to wrap-up the day's events.

The stories told over coffee were ordinary events about a place and time. Some of the stories could be called "gossip." Who was running for tribal council? What happened to so and so when he went to Bob Brown's beer-joint? When did a recall petition get taken out on that newly-elected council member?

My grandfather's friends called him "Miggs," a name he was given as a child because he was a good marble-shooter. A "miggs" is the marble placed in the

center of a ring, the target. As a child, when he was given the name, he was known for acquiring his targets (and building a collection of marbles as a result). I never saw him play marbles: But I knew his competitive nature and had heard many of stories about sports.

Marvin “Miggs” Trahant was born in 1909. When he was a teenager, he played basketball on a team that played area towns. One winter the snow was so bad that it closed down the only highway between the reservation and Malad – a town some 60 miles to the south. But both teams wanted to play anyway – winter or not – and a deal was arranged for each team to drive as far as they could toward the mountain summit. Then my grandfather’s team walked in the snow to a point where the road was passable again, where they met Malad’s team for a ride to the game.

Come to think of it: I’ve heard that story so many times – and I don’t even know who won. The adventure was the story, not the game. The very world of Indian athletics in the 1920s is hard for me to imagine today. My grandparents would walk over a mountain for a game – and they lived in a world where an Indian team could be the very best.

I liked the way my grandparents would tell me these stories.

Sometimes it would just be casual, a story told as it occurred to them. But other memories would be more formally dispensed when my grandmother opened up her collection hidden away in a special closet. My grandmother had her own personal archives of the 20th century: she collected photographs and newspaper clippings from her childhood, while she attended school at Haskell, her jobs, and documenting four sons, their wives and grandchildren. I loved the way she used this archive. She’d pull a memory out of that closet – it seemed to be magic to us kids – and take us back to another time.

Her Haskell yearbooks were particularly enchanting. The covers of these books were leather and the heavy paper inside was sewn together by hand. The photographs and words were glued to the page – I imagine the yearbook students working on each book one by one.

When my grandmother attended the school, Haskell was still a “big time” college athletic program. In 1926, for example, Haskell’s football team had 12 wins, no losses, and only one tie. It defeated much bigger schools, including Michigan State and Tulsa. Through these pages my grandmother would introduce me to Indian leaders. She’d talk about Jim Thorpe’s visit to campus, or memories of an older student, Bob Bennett, who later became Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The one good thing about Haskell (and all of the boarding schools) was that it opened up a network of people across Indian Country.

Then there’s the paradox. The design of Indian education was to cast young Indians into the firm mold of a “patriotic and Christian citizenship.” Any idea that promoted individual creativity – or nonconformity – was left outside that mold. Like so many young Indians from that generation, that meant, for my grandmother, losing her language. As kids we always tested her: She’d

remember Nakoda words or phrases from her childhood and she would pass them along to us.

But essentially her first language was gone. She was OK with this. She told me her father wanted her to shine in English because it was the language she would need in the 20th century.

This paradox is extraordinary: Her father wanted her to learn the English language and the ways of the larger society to excel in the world. But the world, the one teaching her, wanted her to be molded into the ordinary.

My grandmother graduated from Haskell and went to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She was assigned as a matron at the day school at Fort Hall – where she met my grandfather.

My grandparents were married during the Great Depression and they could not afford to get a place of their own. “Few of the men held jobs – they just weren’t being offered to them,” grandma said. “I had an offer to work in Oklahoma, but we didn’t think Miggs could find a job. Finally, before we had to move, he got a job with the Census. It paid \$1 a day. We found an old boxcar and moved there. We lived on beans and potatoes for months and months ... but at least we had our own home and that was better than living with his mother.”

My grandfather found a number of short-term jobs, counting people on the reservation for the U.S. Census, working at a Civilian Conservation Corps’ camp and as a day laborer. Then World War II came and he volunteered for the Navy. He was sent on a ship to the Pacific. My grandmother was employed in a munitions plant for part of the war in Pocatello, but eventually moved to Chemewa Indian School, where she worked (and juggled four boys) for the remainder of the war.

There’s one story my grandparents both told that I want my children to know well. The government divided up many reservations into 160-acre allotments for individual Indian families. The plan was to use these private land parcels as a way to break up the reservation, giving each member land title and a “future.” My grandfather’s 160-acre allotment was in an area of the reservation called the Michaud Flats. It was good farmland, although my grandfather wasn’t a farmer. He mostly leased his land to larger-scale operations.

But when World War II started the U.S. Army had other plans for this flat, sandy soil. It would make a perfect air base. The land was condemned and my grandfather was given a check – and a promise. He was told that at the end of the war, once victory was achieved, he could buy his own land back.

My grandparents believed this promise. The government check was kept in a safe place – and it remained uncashed throughout the war. My family wanted the land back, not the money. After the war, however, the Army sold the base to the city of Pocatello for one dollar. This is now the Pocatello Airport. The idea that government takes away Indian land is personal in our family, not just

something that happened in another time. Yet my grandparents were not bitter about this. It was all a matter of fact, something that happened, a story.

A few years ago I was reading a history of the Pocatello Army Air Base published in the Idaho State Journal. The newspaper said: "Sixty years ago the land 7 miles northwest of Pocatello known as the Michaud Flats was nothing more than sagebrush, part of the Fort Hall Reservation. Then two Army engineers made an inspection of the site and worked on the construction of a U.S. Army Air Base started in May 1942."

The airport is progress. Period. Before the Army the land was nothing more than sagebrush, desolate terrain on the reservation. The newspaper, of course, knew nothing of the government's default on a promise nor did it know about the uncashed check.

Once when I was home visiting, my grandmother asked me to help her get something out of a tall closet. Standing on a ladder, I grabbed a plastic bag – and inside was an American flag. Grandma said she wanted me to have it – it was the flag used at my grandfather's funeral – given to him as a World War II veteran. This contradiction is powerful: My grandfather was a proud Navy veteran, yet the U.S. Army took his land. And even worse: Nobody even knew the land was taken. It was nothing more than sagebrush, nothing to think about today.

What did I learn from these family stories? And how does that connect to the larger theme tonight, ideas of native leadership in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

One thing I learned was about the continuity of story: Each event was another chapter. History is not something that happened a long time ago, but a continual thread in a greater narrative. To say that history lives understates the case because those stories from the past are essential to where we are and who we are now.

The notion of narrative continuity hit me again when I was working on my essay for "Lewis & Clark Through Indian Eyes." Instead of telling another version of the same story, I decided to use a zoom lens. One of the stories I researched was a family story about our supposed relationship with William Clark (a story I will save for another day). Another story I tell in the book is about my grandfather's cousin, George P. Lavatta.

First a little background. In the Lewis & Clark narrative, democracy is something that was introduced to the American West by the Corps of Discovery. But what if democracy was already present, just in a different form?

Democracy-scholar Robert Maynard Hutchins once defined democracy this way: "Every member of the community must have a part in his government. The real test of democracy is the extent to which everybody in society is involved in effective political discussion."

By that definition many, if not most, or even all, American Indian nations, tribes and bands were democratic from the beginning of time.

The Shoshone band that met the Corps of Discovery already had a democratic system in place. The methods of leadership suited the people and the band's collective ambition.

Lewis even gives us a hint in his journal. "Each individual is his own sovereign master and acts from the dictates of his own mind; the authority, of the chief being nothin' more than mere admonition supported by the influence which the propriety of his own exemplary conduct may have acquired him in the minds of the individuals who compose the band."

Lewis goes on to say that the chief is not a hereditary post, but one earned through influence (indeed, everyman was a chief in some respects).

As I understand it, Shoshone leadership was about following leaders focused on specific tasks.

Much has been written about the notions of peace chiefs or war chiefs, but the concept was much more comprehensive. A band's leader that day or week might be a "fish boss" who would guide a group to fish when the salmon runs were abundant. Then someone else would step in as a leader for a different task.

The people were always choosing the leader they wanted to follow – and if not, they'd simply move on to another leader or join up with another band. Again, if you take fishing as an example, some leaders were quite good at constructing weirs, or small dams, to capture fish during a migratory run. Others preferred to hunt the salmon, chasing them up a river with spear poles.

The governance of these bands was, by any definition, democratic.

"Elections" were held often – essentially when a specific task was needed. People voted by participating.

This initial distortion of what was democratic complicated the Americans relations with tribal nations. For much of our history, the Americans would argue for democracy, while really seeking a dictator. They wanted bosses, someone who could speak for every band of Shoshones (and sign treaties).

This narrative explains why there's continued tension about tribal leadership even today because the same American government that could not comprehend a native democracy went about promoting "self-determination" or local democracy to American Indian people across the country.

Another layer of this same story was the 1934 Wheeler-Howard or Indian Reorganization Act. This time the call for a "first" democracy was a part of John Collier's reform of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

My grandfather's cousin was George P. Lavatta. (I always called him "Uncle.")

Lavatta had gone to Carlisle Indian School and had built a successful career at Union Pacific Laborer, starting as a day laborer and working his way into management as the "advisor general" on Indian matters for Union Pacific's President Carl Gray.

When I asked Uncle George what he did, he'd always reply that he was "organizing." When folks needed housing, they'd get a committee together. Or when more jobs were needed, they'd get a committee together.

He said when Shoshone-Bannocks first started working at the railroad they organized – and sent candy to the employees' children. This was Depression era – and jobs were scarce.

"So when the Indians came in to work, hell, they welcomed them with open arms. No one resented it at all. They weren't taking nobody's jobs."

Lavatta left the railroad for the Indian Service in 1929. His job, once again, was organizing Indians, recruiting them into the workforce.

"There is just one way of solving the Indian problem. It isn't to sympathize with the 'poor, down-trodden Indian' and make him think that the world owes him a living," Lavatta said in Los Angeles. "The answer is: 'Give them a chance to work – and make them work.'"

Collier's notion of democracy – and my uncle's ideas about work, organizing and the future of Indian country – fit exactly with that era.

"John Collier, I admire that man so much," my uncle told me. "He wanted me to have more to say. And, boy, that's the reason he warms the cockles of my heart."

Lavatta recalled a plan he had for organizing, one that he told Collier about. "We were talking to him about it. He was for it. He said wonderful, go right ahead."

By 1935 George P. Lavatta was a sort of traveling salesman for democracy. It was his mission to convince tribes to accept the Indian Reorganization Act and to pass a constitution.

My uncle was based in Portland, but he traveled to reservations throughout the Northwest, explaining this form of government.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes adopted an IRA constitution – but that document did not bring about the sort of participation that Lavatta and others expected.

In August of 1937, on a Pocatello, Idaho, radio show, Lavatta said it was still "unusual" for tribal members to be asked their wishes by their government. "Due to their lack of understanding as well as lack of opportunities to participate in the

past, a great deal of interest was not shown by the Indians in the various districts in the first election which was held for representative council members," he said.

Lavatta complained that at tribal meetings the Indian affairs superintendent did too much of the talking. But, he said, "when the time came for the Indians to consider and discuss among themselves the contents as well as the benefits of the Reorganization Act, they were ready and at once realized the great opportunity was being provided in which they readily accepted.

The Indian Reorganization Act had a provision for tribes to accept it or reject the act. Many tribes enacted variations from the model constitution, while others passed and came up with others form of governance.

The constitutional model that some tribes – including the Shoshone-Bannock tribes – adopted appropriated the idea of a "check and balance" from the U.S. Constitution with a colonial twist. The official governing council is an elected body, but before laws, ordinances or contracts could be put into effect, that council was required to send the paperwork for approval to the U.S. secretary of the Interior (or a designate). In effect: the U.S. government decided it should serve as the check and the balance.

Lavatta was for the organization of an intertribal democracy, too. In 1944 he was one of the founders of the National Congress of American Indians.

But, looking backwards, with what we know today, my uncle seems a paradox. I think he instinctively understood the democratic process – and must have known, deep down, that Indians were always democratic.

He was always organizing; forming a committee, ready to act. He would have found a way to get people together to solve problems, no matter what form government took.

I remember one time seeing him, long after he retired, at a meeting of Idaho tribes. At a quarter-to-eight, shortly before the meeting was to begin, Uncle George wandered the halls. He shouted loudly: "C'mon everybody. It's time to start. Time to get moving." I caught a sense or urgency in his voice. That meeting (perhaps every meeting) was important. The People (the noun used in its most elegant form) had business before them. This was democracy in action.

Over the years I heard George at many a meetings repeat this call to democracy. At hotel lobbies, or convention centers, he'd urge people to come forward with their business. (At one point, NCAI formally recognized George Lavatta as Sgt.-at -Arms.)

But while my uncle was an inherent democrat, he was also a strident voice for the official BIA orthodoxy, buying into the mythology that democracy was the American gift.

A story my uncle told me hints at this absurdity. He worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the time when the government was terminating its relationship with tribes. Like the IRA, tribes could vote to terminate or continue the relationship with the government.

The policy was designed to get the federal government out of the Indian business or, some said, to "free the Indians."

I asked my uncle what that was like. He said he tried to think about how Indians would gain – or suffer.

We've "got some wonderful people in the Indian bureau, got some wonderful boys," he said. "Then we've got some damn stinkers." He then talked about meeting with the Klamath Tribe as they considered their termination vote. "I talked to them with tears in my eyes, trying them to not terminate. You're not ready."

That was the party line. He said, "you're not ready," instead of "it's none of your business." The American government had the answers.

On that Oregon reservation, the tribal members with direct ties to Washington supporters of termination carried the day. The democratic United States forced a disastrous policy on the Klamath (and then other tribes). The damn stinkers won.

What I find interesting looking back on the Indian Reorganization Act comes back to this question of democracy – and its definition. My uncle could accept the "you're not ready notion," but he didn't see what was there before John Collier, the Indian Reorganization Act and even the civilization that so impressed him at Carlisle school.

I wanted to tell these family stories tonight because they reflect a narrative of continuity. Native people did not jump directly from 19<sup>th</sup> century skirmishes into a world of casinos. It's worth examining: How did we get here? Who led us? And were these leaders the same caliber as those who led the people generations ago?

I started asking these questions as a teenager. I was 19 years old and editing my tribal newspaper, the Sho-Ban News. Suddenly I had access to leaders at home and across the country. I came of age, as a journalist and as an observer, when Indian Country and its leaders were facing incredible challenges. Over the next thirty-some years I have met many of the remarkable people that I would call Peace Chiefs, men and women who met the tests of leadership.

We think of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and think of the inspired stories of remarkable leaders – and so it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Let me switch lenses here. If I started this conversation by telling a family story, let me pull back and look from a much wider angle.

This is what viewers heard from Walter Cronkite on the CBS Evening News on Aug. 25, 1969.

“The uncivilized white man is ruining the neighborhood. So the Indians today barred him from 25 miles of a popular Pacific Coast beach in Northwestern Washington,” Cronkite reported.

The Quinault Tribe cracked down on litter and graffiti by banning non-Indians from their shores.

Cronkite’s cameras were on the scene by his next broadcast.

“In the state of Washington, the Quinault Indians continue on the warpath, against littering and defacing a stretch of a popular beach,” he said. “Since Monday they have barred non-Indians from the area.”

For some 10,000 years, Quinault people dug clams, fished and just enjoyed this beach. “Then the white man came and left his mark, bottles, cans and even abandoned cars strewn along the beach. Litter of all kinds.” The beach cleanup was a massive undertaking. Tribal volunteers, mostly young people, collected tons of debris, loading the garbage on flatbed trucks. “But it will be a long time before this beach even looks like tribal elders remember it,” CBS reported.

This story was much more than a beach cleanup, it represented a fundamental shift in the way American Indians thought about themselves. The 800-member Quinault Tribe was declaring its authority, its sovereignty over its own land. Land that happened to be, what CBS called, “twenty-five miles of, perhaps, some of the most scenic coastline in the state of Washington.”

CBS introduced America to a new tribal leader, Joe DeLaCruz, who declared that his “people just had enough, and said, ‘Let’s close the beach and don’t let them on anymore.’”

DeLaCruz grew up on the reservation. He had been a local athlete from a well-known family, the son of a labor leader. He left home in the 1950s to join the army. Then, after college, he went to work for the federal Housing and Urban Development Administration in Portland, Oregon. He could have continued on and earned a decent living as a government bureaucrat. But tribal elders had something else in mind. They wanted the young man back on the Quinault Reservation.

“When I returned home, in 1967, the fisheries was pretty much down, the timber industry was in decline, the mills that people had normally worked in were all shut down, and it was pretty basically depressed, this was one of the most depressed little communities, I guess you might say, in the whole state of Washington,” DeLaCruz said. “The other thing that was happening ...(was) real estate speculators were coming on the reservation and buying fee land and starting to set up real estate developments and the tribe didn’t like that.”

The Quinault Reservation with its miles of Pacific coastline makes an ideal home, or more likely, second home, for people who could afford the ocean view. Vacation homes dot the coast, most owned by non-tribal members.

DeLaCruz became a leader as tribal sovereignty was taking on a 20th century definition. Tribes were no longer willing to watch their land base slowly erode. DeLaCruz exercised the tribe's inherent powers; claiming governmental jurisdiction over tribal boundaries, not just the land owned by Indians.

The Quinault Tribe's first act was blocking construction of a highway that would have opened up more land to development – and logging – in a pristine region north of the Quinault River. The state had even begun the project, building a bridge across the river. But the tribe said no. The bridge today is known “the road to nowhere” because the road ends a few hundred feet north of the bridge.

The tribe also enacted stiff zoning laws that applied to non-Indian residents. These new ordinances virtually prevented new subdivisions and other real estate developments along the coastline. Most tribal members had lived in the village of Taholah, at the mouth of the Quinault River, but encouraged by the tribal actions, many started to buy up the vacation houses and cottages from non-Indians.

But the most dramatic step – and the most public – was the closing of the tribe's beach. “I can recall an example where some surfers didn't believe we were serious,” DeLaCruz said. “It was almost automatic, within minutes there was like a hundred pickups and cars of Indians coming down there. Those poor surfers were heading for Japan or China, one of our guys fired a rifle in the air and they came in and we confiscated their surfboards and took them down to the tribal police headquarters, of course that got into the papers.”

DeLaCruz was a bold leader determined to improve life on the reservation for his people. He joins a list of 20<sup>th</sup> century American Indian leaders as important as Sitting Bull.

Some of these leaders are well known, like Buffy Sainte-Marie, Wilma Mankiller or Vine Deloria Jr.

Deloria was this generation's American Indian camp crier, his books encapsulated the dreams of Native People in the last century. “In every generation,” Deloria wrote, “there will arise a Brant, a Pontiac, a Tecumseh, a Chief Joseph, a Joseph Garry, to carry the people yet one more decade further.”

Some of those who carried the people yet one more decade are not as well known. Leaders like Forrest Gerard, Helen Peterson, Hank Adams, Annie Dodge Wauneka and Lucy Covington all contributed greatly.

Let me conclude with the story of Lucy Covington.

Washington's Colville Tribe polled its members in October of 1966. Members were asked what they thought about terminating their tribal government and ending the tribe's official relationship with the United States. A "yes" vote was also the promise of great riches because the tribe would liquidate its assets, such as timber, and each member would get a share. The result should not have been a surprise: Two-thirds of the tribal members wanted the cash.

Termination was a quirky promise. The tribes that picked termination were told they would be free from federal interference and would no longer be considered wards of the United States. But termination was also a method for the United States to dismiss its commitment to Indian people. And, the federal government picked the wealthiest tribe for this "experiment" in freedom.

It was natural resource management issues that moved the Colville Tribe down the termination path. In 1965, the Colville's council business council rejected a Bureau of Indian Affairs' plan to build a \$14 million lumber mill on the reservation. The council reasoned that the reservation did not need the debt associated with the project nor, for that matter, the new jobs that would have been created. The case for termination was solid, said tribal chairman Narcisse Nicholson Jr., because "with only a relatively few exceptions, the tribal families of today are self-supporting."

The issue of termination was a done deal. The Klamath, mixed-blood Utes, the Menominees had already chosen this path. If a few more tribes could be convinced, then termination could proceed as national policy.

BIA Commissioner Robert L. Bennett, said he was personally opposed to termination but he would carry out the democratic wishes of the tribes involved. The U.S. Senate had already passed several Colville termination bills and the House was expected to follow suit. The solid pro-termination majority on the Colville Business Council was ready for a new era in Indian affairs.

But if the issue was decided, someone didn't account for Lucy Covington. She followed her tribal council leaders to every public meeting, challenging their view of the world. At a Spokane conference, Covington followed Colville council members, promising, (to) "cover virtually the same ground traversed by the majority, but necessarily from a different view and with different conclusions." She said the tribe's data was misleading citing bleak statistics, such as only one in five tribal members with a high school diploma. The already poor Colville people would be made poorer without the federal government. "The point was being made that these people would suffer immeasurably from termination," she said.

Covington said the solution to the problems facing Colville members was inherent sovereignty. But first, she said, "the present fever and fervor for termination has to be quieted."

She calmed the fever by organizing, educating tribal members about the stakes involved. She stilled the fervor by publishing a newspaper, "Our Heritage,"

reminding the Plateau Indians about their cultural heritage. She also clearly labeled the candidates who would best protect the tribe from termination.

On May 8, 1971, Covington's side won. Mel Tonasket, who was only 30 years old, was elected chairman and the council immediately rejected the policy of termination. Six months later the council closed Omak Lake to non-Indians and voted to take back the law enforcement powers that earlier governing bodies had ceded to the state of Washington. The new order claimed inherent powers of a government. "We are a sovereignty within a sovereignty, and we must be allowed to rule ourselves," Chairman Tonasket said. "The Colvilles are not trying to get even with anyone, but are fast trying to protect their rights as Indians."

Tonasket's point was exactly right: The Colville election, indeed, Lucy Covington's campaign, ended, in the real world of reservation life, the federal policy of termination. From now on, the new language emanating from tribal capitals would be that of sovereignty. Lucy Covington and the Colville Tribe ended Washington's experiment with termination – and the idea of "freeing the Indians" from the BIA, their rich land and their rights as Indian people.

History has reserved pages and pages for the great chiefs, leaders of their people who fought valiantly for their nations. This is the history planted deep into the mythology of the nation.

But Indian Country has always had a next generation of leaders who challenged the conquerors. They refused to let their people or culture disappear. These were leaders who had the vision, passion and determination to carry the people yet one more decade further.