

APOLOGY FOR ANCESTRAL TRANSGRESSIONS

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My mother and I often traveled together to investigate our family ancestry, and on one of these trips we went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where my great grandfather, L. Frank Baum lived for a few years before he published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In 1888 he moved his growing family from New York to be near his wife's siblings, and opened a small store of art, toys, and luxury items he called 'Baum's Bazaar.' When Baum's generous credit practices and an economic downturn forced him to close the store, he became the editor and publisher of *The Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, a weekly newspaper that covered local news, commentary on regional politics, and his editorials and essays.

On December 15, 1890, Sitting Bull was killed on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. Five days later Baum spoke about this with alarming clarity in his newspaper editorial (Baum, 1890). He praised Sitting Bull as the "most renowned Sioux of modern history" and "the greatest Medicine Man of his time." He also described the white conquerors as people marked by "selfishness, falsehood and treachery." Then he continued his comments saying that "with Sitting Bull's fall, the nobility of the redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them." He proclaimed the superiority of white conquerors as "masters of the American continent" and suggested that "the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they die than live the miserable wretches that they are."

Two weeks later, on December 29, 1890, the Lakota tribe was massacred nearby at Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Baum wrote a second editorial

on January 3, 1891 in which he bemoans the “terrible loss of blood to our soldiers” and declares that “our only safety depends upon the total extermination [sic] of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth.” He concluded his comments giving credit to an “unknown eastern contemporary” who says “when the Whites win a fight, it is a victory, and when the Indians win it, it is a massacre” (Baum 1891). I was intrigued that Baum included this quote which indicates his ability to see the results of war from very different perspectives, and reflects a comment attributed to Chikskia, a war chief of the Shawnee Nation (Eckert, 1980). On January 3, 1891, a few months after Baum wrote these editorials, he moved his family to Chicago where he found employment in sales and marketing, and began to write children’s fantasy stories.

As an advocate of non-violence I was shocked to read my great grandfather’s words, and appalled to think someone in my family was proposing the annihilation of entire race of indigenous people. I felt disturbed by the presence of a dark shadow of intolerance and aggression that weaves through the American psyche, and ashamed to see how it had penetrated into my own family ancestry. Although Baum admitted in his editorials that the ‘Indians’ had been wronged for centuries, and acknowledged that their annihilation would be ‘one more wrong,’ he defended this ‘wrong’ by saying it was a necessary action for the protection of our civilization (1981)

Like many of my family members, I wanted to defend my great grandfather, and excuse his words as an expression of the collective and personal fears that were prevalent at the time. Governmental reports and sensational newspaper articles about native resistance were plentiful, and certainly they fueled the anxiety of white settlers who lived in the area (Hudson p.19). In addition to rising social unrest, a severe drought was plaguing the area and white settlers were suffering economically. Native populations were being corralled onto reservations, and “xenophobia was rife with the appearance of the Ghost Dancers” (Hearn, 2000, xxiii). In his personal life, Baum’s wife Maud was

pregnant with their fourth child, and their hopes for financial success had shattered. I imagine the crescendo of anxieties that permeated through early white settlers fueled Baum's personal concerns and fears, but I could not excuse this as a justification for the 'wrong' behavior he endorsed. I was horrified and embarrassed to think my great grandfather had encouraged the annihilation of an entire race of people I admired and respected.

As I investigated the history surrounding Wounded Knee, I learned that a South Dakota governor had declared 1990, a Year of Reconciliation "to promote racial harmony and cultural understanding." Although little was done in the way of reconciliation, a Joint Resolution was submitted to the 101 Congress to acknowledge the 'terrible tragedy' at Wounded Knee and express regret to the Sioux people. There was no formal apology though, and no admission of responsibility or wrong doing.

As Baum's descendent I felt called to apologize to the survivors of Wounded Knee in a personal way, and my cousin Mac Hudson joined me. He had just completed a masters thesis about the editorials and the conditions surrounding Wounded Knee, and felt strongly about Baum's statements. We consulted with Sally Roesch Wagner, who was the founder and president of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation and a strong advocate for native rights.

Matilda Gage was Baum's mother in law, and is well known as a dedicated freedom fighter, political activist, abolitionist, and early suffragist. Throughout her life she was outspoken about her opposition to colonial injustice and her support for indigenous sovereignty. Although she was close to her daughter Maud and the Baum family, she was living in New York at the time the editorials were written. I can't help but wonder how she must have reacted to them. Sally Roesch Wagner was a staunch supporter of Matilda's legacy, and had been raised in Aberdeen. She offered to help with introductions to leaders and chiefs in the native community, and when our intention became known, we were invited to the Pine Ridge Reservation.

OUR APOLOGY

In 2006, my cousin Mac, his wife Amy and I traveled to the reservation along with Sally, Vic Runnels an Oglala Lakota artist and healer, and Cary Graeber, a professional photographer. We were welcomed warmly, and gathered with many families to hear first hand the suffering and pain our nation, and my great grandfather had caused. We spent an afternoon sitting in circle with a gathering of direct descendants led by Chief Little Finger, an elder and historian of the Oglala Lakota Nation. We listened attentively as each participant introduced themselves and shared their grief and loss as survivors of the massacre. It was an afternoon of "wiping away of tears" to honor the deceased, share memories, and create a space of collective healing. For the Lakota this ritual is a way to apologize and heal past transgressions so that a new direction can be established (Hudson, 2004, p.52).

I was caught in a whirlwind of feelings as I absorbed the impact of these people's experience: sorrow, pain, regret, shame, remorse, anger, outrage, compassion, and a deep admiration for the resiliency and beauty of a nation our ancestors tried to destroy. As the afternoon drew to a close I shared a personal apology for my great grandfather's words in a letter written to all the survivors of Wounded Knee.

In the name of self-defense, the American government issued orders in 1890 to slaughter the Lakota Indians who were believed to be threatening the settlers in South Dakota. As a result, Sitting Bull was killed and Wounded Knee became the site of a bloody massacre of Native American families. In a land that boasts "liberty and justice for all" the slaughter that occurred was a disgraceful violation of this country's values and ideals.

At the time, L. Frank Baum was living in South Dakota and like many of the settlers there, he was fearful and distrustful of the American Indian population. As editor of *The Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* he was sensitive

to the feelings of the settlers and often shared his reaction in newspaper editorials. I don't know what inspired his comments about Sitting Bull and the survivors of Wounded Knee. I know he spoke from a climate of anxiousness and concern for the safety of his loved ones, and that his comments were thoughtless and insensitive to the Native American community. As a public figure, his words underscore an intolerant attitude that hides in the shadow of the American psyche.

As his great granddaughter and bearer of the name Dorothy, I wish to acknowledge the offensiveness of his comments and apologize for the arrogant and righteous attitude that permeates through this culture. I hope that L. Frank's remarks can be understood as an expression of the fear and hostility that resided in both communities, and that he can be appreciated for the visionary contributions he made later in his life through the Oz legacy and other publications.

Our presence and heartfelt apologies were received with gratefulness and appreciation for our willingness to connect personally with members of the tribe. The afternoon concluded with a plentiful bar-b-cue, and relaxed conversation with all the participants. Before we left the area, Mac and I were invited to a press conference at the Dahl Art Center in Rapid City, South Dakota. We clarified our intention to apologize to the Lakota people for our great grandfather's attitude saying:

We are here to understand and acknowledge the pain that Lakota communities experience, to bear witness to the after-effects of our great grandfather's attitude of arrogance, prejudice and intolerance, and to participate in a process of healing the deep wounds that are damaging all of us..

Then Mac ready our joint statement of apology.

Today, we stand before you as a family with great sorrow in our hearts; great sorrow for the injustices and atrocities committed by our people

against your people—crimes against humanity that are summed up by our grandfather's call for the extermination of all Indians.

I stand here before you with my wife Amy, and my cousin Gita Dorothy. We bring the blessings of our immediate family who are not here today, and stand in the presence of all our ancestors to apologize for the part our family has played in these crimes and to acknowledge that our silence and our denial of L. Frank Baum's editorials has contributed to the suffering of your people, and the suffering of other Native peoples.

We stand before you and before the citizens of both our great nations to suggest that *The Wizard of Oz*, a great American fairy tale, and the massacre at Wounded Knee, a great American tragedy, be forever joined in the hearts, minds, and memories of all our people.

As an icon of American popular culture, *The Wizard of Oz* represents both the best and worst of our Nation's history. It would be a wonderful moment of healing if each time we view the film or read the book, we remember these genocidal editorials and reflect on the suffering that has arisen from these atrocities.

Hopefully, in learning from our mistakes, this opens the door to healing and creating communities of cooperation and tolerance.

What I think about now, as a result of my experience on the reservation, is the nature and importance of apology: apology for our own mistakes and harmful behaviors, and also apology for the offensive attitudes and destructive behaviors of our ancestors. According to the Webster dictionary

An apology is an acknowledgement intended as an atonement for some improper or injurious remark or act; an admission to another of a wrong or discourtesy done to them, accompanied

by an expression of regret. (Webster, 1913)

When Mac and I visited the Pine Ridge Reservation, we intended to acknowledge, apologize, and take responsibility for the injurious words of our great grandfather, and to express our regret for the pain our nation had inflicted on that community.

Many cultures have adopted rituals for apology, reparation, reconciliation and the healing of personal and collective trauma. In the Hawaiian culture there is a practice called “Ho’oponopono” which means to bring things back into balance, and make things right by restoring love and harmony. Although I was not aware of it when we made our apology, Ho’oponopono describes the essence of our experience on the reservation. It is a way to say I am sorry for any behaviors that have caused pain, my own and those of my ancestors. The Ho’oponono ceremony creates a safe temenos for sharing and acknowledging past mistakes, so that loving connections can be established. It creates a renewed foundation for relationships, so that past transgressions will not be repeated.

The collective justification for colonial conquest has been a dominant belief throughout history. It has generated centuries of political unrest, violent aggression, and indigenous oppression and exploitation that has required thoughtful efforts for future reparation, reconciliation, and healing. I am reminded of the work that was initiated in South Africa to establish a foundation of democratic values after apartheid was abolished. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report of 1998 was written to promote national healing, reconciliation, and reparation for past injustices and violations against humanity. It encourages the identification of past abuses and human rights transgressions, so that these destructive behaviors can be eliminated and not repeated in future generations.

As a leader of the Lakota Nation, Chief Little Finger’s response to us was in alignment with the African initiative to eliminate the repetition of past injustices. In an email to Sally Roesch Wagner he explained his reason for inviting us to the reservation, saying “If we can reflect on the past, and present it to those who are of the present...we can perhaps change the world for the better” (Little Finger, 2006). By traveling to the reservation I

was able to see and feel the results of my great grandfather's harmful words in a very personal way. I saw the effect of generational transmissions, and the consequences of a world view that supports the invasion and control of other cultures and people. My hope with our apology was to join Chief Little Finger as a voice in the creation of a new world.

Baum's editorials, as well as his later fantasy tales reveal the danger and power of written material. He exposes a dark shadow of righteous aggression that lurks in the American psyche, and also reveals the potential of imagination to transform these disturbing energies. His contradictory contributions invite us to explore the complexity of how such divergent attitudes can exist in one man's actions and beliefs. Like many Oz followers, Baum historian Michael Patrick Hearn explains Baum's editorials saying "such intolerance and racism were not typical of his thought and his paper" (Hearn 2000, xxiv), and my cousin Mac suggests Baum echoed an attitude prevalent at the time, an attitude endorsed by most of the nation's newspapers and publications (Hudson, 2004, p.28). Although I agree with both these statements, they feel incomplete. I needed to explore how my great grandfather could embody such opposing perspectives, and imagined his controversial publications reflected the presence of an internal, and perhaps unconscious tension that needs to be understood.

As a depth psychotherapist, I believe the dynamics of Baum's inner world is expressed through his writing. He was clear in his editorial's that he admired Sitting Bull, and felt it was wrong to advocate for the annihilation of the native population. However he chose to ignore his own moral code, and explicitly aligned with the collective shadow of American colonialism and white supremacy. His decision to ignore his misgivings and support the thinking of the collective demonstrates how easily we can be influenced by others and disregard our own truth. We tend to feel safe and secure when we are part of a larger community, and often feel conflicted when called to honor our individuality, speak our truth, and move to the beat of our own drummer. Baum's editorials show how totally he was caught up in the thinking of the collective, even though he had misgivings. For this he is accountable.

When Baum and his family were settled successfully in Chicago, he began to write about Oz, a fantasy land of peace, harmony, and inclusivity. America's most popular and inspiring fairy tale *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, was the beginning of a twenty year writing career for Baum that included fourteen Oz stories, 59 published children's stories, and a plethora of screen plays, short stories, poems, movies, and other creative accomplishments.

When Baum wrote his genocidal editorials, his life was in a state of crisis. He must have felt vulnerable and threatened by what was happening around him, and like many white settlers, unconsciously projected his fear onto the Lakota. Perhaps his imaginative Oz stories were an unconscious reaction to the harsh realities of frontier life, or maybe they were the psyche's way to resolve an inner, unconscious tension he was unable to name. His views seem to have changed and evolved by the time he wrote the Oz stories, maybe as a result of his Theosophical explorations and his deepening relationship with Matilda Gage. Psychologically he may have been addressing the fear and distress of his Aberdeen experience, by imagining fantasy lands where seemingly impossible obstacles are overcome, differences are respected, and conflicts are peacefully resolved. Perhaps his stories were the psyche's way to resolve an inner, unconscious tension he was unable to name.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is a visionary work of psychological integration. Dorothy finds her way home by staying focused and overcoming the challenges she encounters in the unusual and unfamiliar land of Oz. She befriends strangers who represent the importance of using your mind to solve problems, following your heart to care for others, and accessing your courage to speak your truth and behave fearlessly. She refuses to be intimidated by the Wicked Witch, and unleashes her anger when the Witch grabs for her silver shoes. Symbolically Dorothy's journey shows us how to navigate the strange territory of our inner world to find our way home to a deep sense of peace, love, and self acceptance. Baum says in his Introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, that the story "aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are

retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out” (1899, Introduction). Although Baum says he wants to ‘dispense with all disagreeable incident” in his Oz stories, disturbing events do happen and must be addressed. Although his creative imagination does not totally resolve the problems of building peaceful communities, it voices universal truths that lead in that direction.

Baum is a strong believer in the power of imagination. In the Forward of *The Lost Princess of Oz* he praises imagination as heralding the “present state of civilization,” and declares that “dreams—day dreams, you know, with your eyes wide open and your brain-machinery whizzing—are likely to lead to the betterment of the world. The imaginative child will become the imaginative man or woman most apt to invent, and therefore to foster civilization.” (1917, Forward). The well known psychiatrist, Carl Jung reinforces this when he says “Nothing would exist, there would be no culture in the world, if it were not for active imagination: it is always the forerunner, everything springs from it (2001, p.178. It is through words, images, and actions that we are able to see the powerful and invisible contents of our inner worlds. Imagination is what fuels and stimulates all creative expression, and is the forerunner of everything. As the success of his Oz canon has shown over the years, Baum’s writings have opened a doorway into the powerful and complex world of the imagination.

In conclusion, L. Frank is a complicated and dynamic person, capable of creating profound beauty while also expressing harmful ideologies. His writings represent the presence of two poles of a fragmented personal and collective psyche. Our task is to reassemble these disconnected fragments, and bring the shadow or unconscious material of the psyche into the light of consciousness. This is how our personal and cultural stories can be reshaped and evolve into more harmonious ways of relating. Only by facing this tension — personally, historically, and culturally — can we begin to integrate what has been split, and redeem the archetypal without bypassing the historical. Jung says “the world hangs by a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of man” (Jung, 1973, p. 303). In light of this, I imagine the thin thread of the psyche manifests through the lives of our ancestors, and observing the results of their actions

and decisions carries essential clues for our personal development and the evolution of consciousness.

May we hold this thread together, as we envision a peaceful world where differences are honored and respected.

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