Ours Is a Circle That Never Ends

You do it because you understand that whatever you have, you have to give to the people.

The position of Motherhood in the Indian world is continuity of the race. And continuity of the race means the continuity of our way of life, and our beliefs. Handed down to the seven generations unborn. According to the way, that the Creator gave us.

So, it's really not aaaaaa. It's 5000, it's 5000, oh ingrained to us, it doesn't become any kind of a thing, outside of your life, it's, it is you.

So the public and the private life are one! There's no separation between the public and the private life?

Your prime responsibility is your... invested with the land. The women are with the land and the future generations. And the responsibility - that the land keeps on going forever. So, you make sure, you have someone in there to core forever for your people for the children.

A lot of people talk about, there's a lot of romanticism about Native people. A lot of people will say, we should "Honor our Mother Earth." It's a real catch phrase these days, I'm wondering what this means to you, "honor Mother Earth!"

Well... I don't know... if you have a word for honor, I can't think of one right now. Most of it is, is the utilization that this is our job. And you do it. You do it because you understand that what ever you have, you have to give to the people. That's the only link to ah, to what we think people call this, to... immortality.

And I really think that might be the wrong word. But, OURS IS A CIRCLE THAT NEVER ENDS and we have to keep the spokes going. Keep the things going around and around. And that's the way we look at it. But, it's such a part of what you are anyway, that you don't look at it, as being a separate issue. I think, that maybe the hardest part to explain is Clan Mother. Because of that, it's, it is so, it is so, it is part of you, it is your job, it isn't separate, it doesn't become separate.

Agnes Williams: Good Morning, Fleeta.
Fleeta Hill: Good Morning (laughed).

One of the things I was interested in talking about today is your work and also what you see as your role in the community. You already mentioned that you are a "runner." What does that mean?

I attend all the meetings. The chief's meetings and the Clan meetings. For the Clan Mother. I can't make any decisions, but I have tooo. Take back all of the information to her. And then, I bring back her decisions to the meetings. And I'm also her ears, I'm really learning, lots of things. Because I have to look at a lot of people's places their welfare, their happiness, everything that a person is supposed to have. As a person - that she's (Clan Mother) in charge.

You know, she's kind of like the Mother of... So I have to go and report to her. Everything that happens. If anybody is having problems, then, I go and report to her. And then, she makes the decisions, whatever she can do from there.

A lot of people, when they talk about women's roles in this society, a lot of people say that the oldest profession around is that of prostitution but as Native People, I feel that the oldest profession around is motherhood and it's an honorable profession and that it's a profession that should be promoted and talked about more. People do not think of it as a profession and it is a really big job. And being a Clan Mother is, I think, a part of that, a big part. Maybe, you could describe some of the things, when we say Clan Mother, what does a Clan Mother do? What is a Clan Mother about?

First of all when we are talking about women, I have to drop you a bombshell. You guys in the women's movement are way behind us, us Senecas. Because we've had all kinds of women power, from time, from time beginning. You have a lot to learn from Indian women.
It's very difficult for me to tell you
What my job is, what a Clan Mother's job is.
In the society because it is so normal,
Like washing dishes.

So really anybody could be, could do the
duties of a Clan Mother?

ONLY IF YOU FOLLOW EVERYTHING
IF you speak the language
IF you, if you LIVE and UNDERSTAND
WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN.
And you understand your responsibilities
Toward the CREATOR and that
WHOLE UNIVERSE
And that WHOLE Idea of Life.
Yes, anybody can, as a matter of fact,
WE ARE ALL SUPPOSED TO BE.

Your, YOU come, WE come,
With strict rules and regulations
From the CREATOR and that's down
To the Sea of People.
And out of the Sea of People
Come those people.
So, therefore, your responsibility
In your society, is as, is as important
You have to be that, in order to...

You have to understand that and
YOU'RE IN THAT SEA
And that's where all those people
come from.
That's where your maintenance
comes from.
The Creator left that really nice
For us people.
To be that link,
To understand all of that in nature.

And the rest of nature, it's there.

But for us, for his way of life,

Mind you,
It's got to be People who carry
that around.

Because we are the ones,
That have the minds
We're the ones that speak it
We're the ones that are expected to
understand.

All of that responsibility,
Is left to us TO DO.
I don't know if I'm answering
your question,
But, that is the way I see it.

Floreta Hill is a Seneca Clan Mother who, at the
time of this interview, was the assistant to the Clan
Mother. Agnes Williams is a Seneca woman who is
a PhD candidate at the University of New York.
Buffalo, NY.

Mary Anne Barkhouse
Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance
5¼ inches x 8¼ inches
1991