

Teachings on the Mountain

By Sara Morgan

In the summer of 1977, solar energy was the big up and coming "good guys" business of choice - perfect for idealistic, earth-loving and tree-hugging hippies, with government subsidies, a burgeoning economy and endless New Mexico sun making it a perfect venue for right livelihood. So when the New Mexico Solar Energy Association called Lama Foundation in early spring to ask if they could hold their annual week-end convention at Lama, what we called the "core group" in those days, had a resounding "yes!"

On the Saturday morning of their gathering, when all the solar enthusiasts were gathered in the Dome, I was walking from the kitchen toward the ISC. I glanced downhill and to my surprise saw Grandfather David Monongye walking up the old Lama road. There was a long-haired hippie on either side of him, looking like they were half holding him up as he took each deliberate step, very slowly, but steadily, purposeful. He already seemed an old man, (although he lived at least another 25 years, to the age of 105). He looked up at me, squinting through his coke-bottle-bottom-thick glasses, his grey hair pulled back, Hopi style, in one short stubby bundle and with a thick red cloth wrapped around his forehead.

"Grandfather David!" I yelled happily, as I ran down to greet him. I had met this legendary hero and leader of the Hopi Nation and knew from the unforgettable experience of his presence why he was esteemed and respected as a great holy man and wisdom carrier not only by his own people, but by all Indian nations. I knew how often he had traveled to Washington DC to speak on behalf of native peoples. And how all the children in Hotevilla, Hopi land, loved him and ran to sit near him or jump into his lap any chance they got. I knew he could look out at night from a promontory outside his house and see every house in Hopi, and how he never went to sleep until everyone's lights were out in all the villages. And I knew how deeply he held, transmitted and lived the Hopi Prophecies.

After offering him coffee and getting him settled in a room at the ISC, I went back to the picnic tables just as lunch was ending for the retreatants. I was told that when they heard Grandfather David was on the land, they had asked if he would be willing to speak to their group, or do anything at all, at the beginning of their evening program that night. When I asked Grandfather after his rest, he nodded yes.

At 7 pm all the solar guys, young and eager to save the environment and change the world, even then, had reconvened, along with a few Lama Beans, in the Dome, sitting on the floor watching the sun begin its ever dazzling sunset descent out the Dome window. Then, from the door to what is now called the "Music Room", Grandfather David entered. Slowly, silently, stooped in his probably 80-something body, but sure and certain. And silently and slowly he took out his pipe, and filled it with tobacco. Deliberate, contained, entirely focused, he lit the pipe, inhaled and raised it to the East, with a long slow exhale of silent prayer, then turned to each of the other directions, South, West and North with the same wordless invocation. The room became profoundly quiet, and absolutely still. He then took another inhale of the sacred smoke and raised the pipe above his head to Father Sky, and one more, bending down, with steady care to honor Mother Earth.

Without a single word, he then turned and in his unhurried, unself-conscious way began to walk back toward the door, to leave.

At that moment, someone in the audience called out: "Grandfather David! Could you please tell us, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT SOLAR ENERGY?"

He stopped, turned back to face the audience and said, in his native slow way of speech with each syllable

and word being punctuated and singular:

"SOLAR.....ENERGY.....NO.....GOOD!"

And then, as the mouths of everyone in the room dropped open in surprise or confusion, shock, or resistance, he continued, with one more line. And these last words I have contemplated again and again, since that evening so long ago. I offer them to you and to the world in a time when our interest in solar and wind and thermal and whatever other resources we think we can use, to give us what we think we need, is finally coming to the forefront of the whole world.

This mighty oak of a man, Grandfather David said: "YOU.....NO.....ASK.....PERMISSION."

And then he walked out, leaving us to ponder and reflect, meditate and ruminate on these words. And hopefully, I would add, to consider the deep teachings of asking permission, because maybe everything is alive and divine and to be respected, because maybe we are not the center of the universe, but only a small part of a large and sacred world.

