RESILIENCE
By Alexander Landwehr
First prize winner of the UNEA Essay Contest: Celebrating our Collective Resilience.

Trauma changes us. When we’re hurt badly enough, our brains start seeing pain and danger everywhere, regardless of whether or not it truly exists. This rewiring of our neural pathways is an amazing evolutionary mechanism that has kept us safe for hundreds of thousands of years. Your subconscious takes careful note of what has been a threat in the past, and it repels you from it. The way that we adapt is fascinating and advanced and beautiful. And it hurts. It burns from the inside out, does its best to make us jaded, to lock ourselves away from the world that we’ve learned can be so cruel.

The ways that trauma comes to us are varied and fit no one definition. Maybe you experience a single event that was impactful and dramatic enough that it stays with you forever. Maybe you’re regularly exposed to something dangerous over an extended period of time. Personal traumas like these are what most people think of when they hear the term. But trauma can be generational or cultural as well. When your ancestors have unresolved severe trauma, the effects of that trauma can leave epigenetic imprints on the generations after them. If you’re a member of a community that is regularly traumatized, you can experience those effects even if you haven’t been personally subjected to the damage.

Indigenous peoples are traumatized to a degree and in ways that you’d have a difficult time finding a match to. Not only do we have a recent cultural history of overt and largely unchallenged genocide, but we have some of the highest rates of individually traumatic experiences out of any ethnic demographic. Sexual and domestic violence, police brutality, incarceration, and poverty are some of the things that run rampant in our communities. When you factor in these painful experiences, it’s no wonder that our rates of addiction, mental illness and suicide are so high.
But, despite the challenges that we continue to battle against every day, we are not a sob story.

Every time we gather in ceremony, we are demonstrating resilience against the systems that are trying their hardest to divide us and wipe us out. Every time we drum and sing, we are demonstrating resilience against the systems that want us to be silent and obedient. Every time we speak in our cultural tongues, we are demonstrating resilience against the systems that tried to beat the language out of us. Every time we laugh or smile or experience joy or love or pride, we are demonstrating resilience against the systems that have given us nothing but pain for hundreds of years.

You’d be hard-pressed to find an Indigenous person who hasn’t suffered significantly, likely more so than anyone should have to suffer in their lives. And by the very nature of that suffering, you’d be hard-pressed to find an Indigenous person who hasn’t shown breathtaking resilience time and time again.

There’s a quote about trauma that I think about often. I’ve seen it circulated so many times in so many places that I have no way of knowing who said it originally. In regards to the strength that adverse experiences leave you with, “I didn’t need to be strong, I needed to be safe.” And maybe that quote is right. Maybe it would have been better to be safe from the beginning, to never have needed to grow into that strength. But sometimes, we aren’t given a choice. We have safety snatched from us and strength given to us instead.

Resilience, to me, is about how gracefully you take up that strength, and what you choose to do with it. It’s okay to mourn the safe and painless life that you did not have the privilege of getting to live. It’s okay to stumble under the weight of what was handed to you regardless of whether or not you wanted it. It’s okay to become weaker before you heal.

We as a people have mourned. We have stumbled. We have had periods of weakness.

And we as a people have dried each other’s tears. We have helped each other off the ground. We have leaned on each other when we couldn’t stand on our own, taken strength and healing from our ancestors who gave everything so we could be here.

We are still here. We are still moving forward, fighting, singing and dancing and laughing as we do. We are still here, and we are resilient.

LOCKING ARMS, TOGETHER
By Andrew Rideau
First Runner Up for the UNEA Essay Contest: Celebrating our Collective Resilience.

The strong smell of sage smoke and smoked salmon fills Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center as white down feathers fall from the Alaskan Native dancer’s head, floats up into the air and over the crowd. I’m so focused on the group in front of us that I don’t realize I need to get dressed myself. We’re on in 20 minutes!

The Haida Holiday dinner is always my favorite part of the Holiday season. I’m a Kaigani Haida, from the Raven moiety and the Double-Fin Killer whale clan. This annual event is a chance for me to dance and sing the songs I’ve heard all my life and the same songs my ancestors sang generations before me. I get to share my cultural pride out loud where other Alaska Native tribal people and other non-tribal people can watch, listen and enjoy the food, regalia, sights, and smells of our past and present. Each year this event is a reminder of the importance of keeping my culture alive for our elders and the next generation.

I strap on my tan deer smoke tunic painted with a black and red form-line clan design. I place my handwoven cedar bark headband atop my head and slip on my soft leather and rabbit fur moccasins my grandmother made. My Aw’aa is our song leader. She hands me my raven painted drum and says, “Nephew you are now ready to drum with the adults.” I proudly take the drum in one
hand and drum stick in the other and line up behind my older cousin backstage. The waiting audience is chatting and shuffling around when my Auntie yells above the crowd, “Haidas Howk-staa!” The crowd goes silent. “Aang!” We all reply. We beat our drums in unison and step out onto the stage singing, drumming, and twirling in front of the waiting crowd.

I am nervous. The heat in the crowded room surrounds me and begin to sweat. I drum firmly to the beat as we dance a full circle around the stage then line up horizontally facing the audience before coming to a stop. We now have the audience’s full attention. My Nana walks forward quietly and is handed the microphone. She smiles and begins protocol by introducing our Haida dance group, “We are the fierce warriors from the North. We are The Haidas!” She opens her hands to the crowd and states, “But today we come in peace and friendship.” We begin to sing the Haida National Anthem, a song originally chanted during a time of protest when Haida land protectors locked arms and stopped logging trucks from entering their ancestral lands.

Our group invites everyone in the room to join us, stand up and interlock arms, sway side-to-side, and sing with us.

As we sway I look around the huge open room full of friends, family, and guests, Natives, and Non-Natives of all ages locking arms in unity. It is a powerful moment that I get lost in. I stop being nervous. I am so deep in my thoughts I accidentally continued to sing and drum after we had already finished the song! For the rest of the Haida Heritage performance, the crowd continues to smile, clap and dance with us. As we begin the exit song, I realize I don’t want our performance to end. I feel at home with my people. On the drive home I can’t stop thinking about how everyone in the room joined in together and I didn’t understand it until this moment. I stopped being nervous because my strong connection is not just with my family or my Haida people but every indigenous person is connected through one nation and we can do anything if we stand and lock arms together.

CELEBRATING OUR COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE
By Cante Tadashi Remle
First prize winner for the 8th grade class of the UNEA Essay Contest: Celebrating our Collective Resilience.

Celebrating our collective resilience means many things to me as a Native American youth heading into my highschool freshman year. There are many ways that we as Native people have continuously shown our strength, and our resilience. We show our love of all the Native nations by learning our language, our traditions, and by protecting our sacred sites. I am especially proud of how we stand together to protect and fight for all Native sacred sites and cultures, not just my own.

Sacred sites provide knowledge to new generations and allow us to learn about our past. Sacred sites provide a connection to not just the land, but to the culture and teachings of generations past. That is why standing up for Licton Springs was so important to me and my family. This is why I am so proud and inspired by my Lakota people for still protecting the Black Hills and continue to be inspired by the Coast Salish tribes protecting their land. I’m proud of all Native nations who are still fighting for their land and culture.

Standing up means hope, it is our way of being heard. I hope our future generations will see how we struggled for them and be
inspired to continue the fight. I hope they continue to learn the
culture and the ways of their tribes as we continue to fight to
keep it alive. I fight so that future generations can see the Black
Hills, to see Licton Springs to keep our medicine and to be a
member of our communities. I hope our sacrifice will not be
forgotten and they will remember and appreciate what we had
to do to keep our traditional ways and keep our sacred sites alive.
I want them to know we are fighting corporations bigger than
us fighting governments. No matter what we still fought and
we will continue to fight, that’s what makes us resilient as Native
people. Even back when our land was being taken from us we
fought to keep it. So, when we celebrate our resilience it’s very
important to remember to help out your community and others
to remember to continue to fight for the traditional way.

I’m immensely proud to say I’m involved with the Licton Springs
project. The work everyone has done is nothing short of incredible.
UNEA has created and continues to create opportunities to learn
about and protect our cultures, that’s something I’ll always respect.
Like many others UNEA and Clear Sky has inspired me to stand
up for what’s right.

UNEA showed me that tough times don’t last as long as you take
charge and fix it yourself. That’s something I think everyone needs
to hear; especially the Native youth. Most importantly UNEA
taught me to be proud of what I do even if it doesn’t work out
how I wanted it to. I also want to thank my father for teaching
me my Lakota ways and my language and for teaching me the
ceremonies and responsibilities of being a Lakota.

Being Native is something we have to be proud of, because being
proud allows us to fight through everything anyone throws at
us. I’m thankful for all the opportunities given to me by UNEA.
I am thankful for all the friends I’ve made through Clear Sky,
all the memories and all the help I’ve been given from UNEA,
it’s something I can never repay. I want to thank our elders for
teaching me more about Licton Springs, especially Chief Andy
De Los Angeles. I cannot tell you how lucky I was to interview
Chief Andy and to hear what he had to say about Licton Springs.
Interviewing Chief Andy, made me realize how important it was
to step up and give it everything I could to help protect this Coast
Salish sacred site

STUDENT OF THE MONTH!

It is with great joy that we lift up Asia Gellein as the student of
the month! Asia Gellein is a recent graduate from LeadPrep. She
is Cherokee and from Seattle. Her hobbies include performing
and visual arts, music, and being on the water. She hopes to
go to college and continue helping people. Asia has been an
important part of the Clear Sky Native Youth Council since she
was in middle school. Throughout her years in the program she
has shown great leadership within this community, as well as
thoughtfulness and dedication to this community. Amongst other
things, she played an integral role in the Saving Licton Springs
Project and has recently become an Intern with UNEA.

A message from Asia on her experience as an Intern so far:

I wanted to be an UNEA intern because I grew up in UNEA and
consider the community as family. Helping out and giving back is a
goal of mine, as well as growing my leadership skills. So far, I’ve
found being an intern to be fun and have learned so much about
what happens behind the scenes to so many UNEA functions.
I’ve written in the newsletter, participated in the Indigenous and
Asian Allyship Event more!

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH!

We are excited to honor Lareina Redwoman as the Volunteer of the Month!
Lareina started volunteering with UNEA in April and since
then has been an essential part of the volunteer team.
She has done everything from
creating a printed program for our Elders Care Project
Celebration, to making weekly
reminder calls, to helping set
up for graduation! Thank you,
Lareina, for your generosity in
time and care and for your dedication to the work we do.
This past Saturday June 19th UNEA hosted, in partnership with North Seattle College EDI department, our 14th Annual Rite of Passage Graduation Ceremony 2021. The event was a spectacular success! We had the privilege to honor 14 8th grade graduates and 13 Seniors, including special recognition to outstanding Indigenous student leaders.

Shining Star accolade was bestowed on Asia Gellein (Cherokee). Asia has been a member of Clear Sky and NWA for 6 years. In that time, Asia has hurdled many obstacles and challenges and always lands on her feet. This is a huge inspiration and we look forward to seeing her accomplish her goals.

Civic Leadership and Community Service honors was awarded to Hunter Schierbeck (Lakota) for his 16-month community outreach service, internship contributions, and overall positive attitude, bright smile and encouraging actions and words supporting and lifting up everyone he meets.

Leadership, Stewardship and Advocacy honor was awarded to Isaac Hochberg (Dakota) Mr. Hochberg has been affiliated with NWA and Clear Sky for many years. Isaac has led many student panels and conference presentations on the ‘Saving Licton Springs’ Clear Sky project. Through his public speaking and leadership, Isaac demonstrated incredible personal growth throughout his involvement with Clear Sky.

Victoria Olivera (Indigenous) was awarded Academic Excellence award for her scholarly contributions and achievements.

Alex Landwehr was gifted the honor of being awarded Civic and Community Service recognition. Alex joined Clear Sky over two years ago and has continued to share his relentless dedication to supporting our community work in big and small ways. Alex quietly engages with projects and initiatives without seeking attention or expecting personal gains.

We are very proud of ALL our graduates and we continue to be motivated by our student scholars and cannot wait to see what the future holds for each of our precious and special young people.

Congratulations to ‘Celebrating Our Collective Resilience’ essay contest winners; Alex Landwehr, Andrew Rideau, and Cante Remle (8th grade). Your essays captured the spirit and the powerful connection we all share to our ancestors, earth, culture and traditions. We are excited to gift you all with cash prizes for your beautiful, powerful and impactful words.
INDIGENOUS AND ASIAN COMMUNITY CROSS CULTURAL DIALOGUE ARTICLE

By Jazell Jenkins

Aang! Hello! During this Zoom event I learned a lot about the past and present oppression towards the Asian community that has and is still happening from Gwen Lee, including the injustice of the immigration laws, voting rights lost, and the continuance of human rights violations. Also during this panel, I heard Che Sehyun say "America is built on genocide." I can 100% agreed with that because many don’t recognize that or choose not to believe it, so it’s largely ignored by society but it’s so important that we that we all acknowledge it because denial of the genocide against Indigenous peoples by the United States is rampant and erases our real and true history. We’re missing any formal recognition of the systematic crimes committed against Native nations and the ongoing damage that persists through extractive industries, land theft, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the denial of genuine self-determination for Indigenous peoples under international law and any acknowledgement that our societies and economies remain the benefits of genocide.

In addition, Frank said “Solidarity has to come from a lot of respect and understanding.” I can resonate with that because I see the concept of ‘solidarity’ being made up of a mutual respect and understanding between the two communities, along with an overarching theme of wanting to learn about one another. Lastly, it stuck out to me when Kshama was speaking about how we have to unite against common threads of exploitation regardless of race or gender etc. This stood out to me because I think that there are many differences that we have a hard time tolerating, like religion and political views, but beneath everything, we’re more alike than we think even within these things that so often divide us. We all have common values, even if they look a little different from person to person. Even if half of us can start breaking down the walls that divide us and build bridges with the values that unite us, we’ll be well on our way to making that better world we all want.

REFLECTING ON THE INDIGENOUS AND ASIAN ALLYSHIP EVENT

By Kayla Harstad

The Indigenous Asian Allyship event was very powerful. I learned many different things about Asian American history and how each Asian country has their own complex history. When listening to the speakers, I enjoyed how everyone brought a different perspective and information to tell. I especially enjoyed hearing from presenter Frank Irigon, and the information he shared about what it’s like being represented as a model minority, and how it affects and influences other Asian American youth today. I believe events like this are important because they can help us build solidarity with one another and be better allies to each other. As for my next personal steps and my participation in the Clear Sky leadership program, I will continue promoting anti-oppressive practices in community events and in everyday life.
Indigenous and Asian Allyship Event
By Gia Tran

My name is Gia Tran. I am a first-generation Vietnamese, Laotian and Teochew (Chinese). I was born in Seattle. My parents both fled their countries during the Vietnam War, and spent time in refugee camps before coming to the United States. Growing up in the U.S, at a young age I had interest in learning about the original caretakers of this land. In May 2019, I began as a volunteer for UNEA. To this day, I am a Clear Sky intern and have benefitted amazingly from my time working with the Urban Native community.

When the violence towards the Asian community had an uprising with the start of COVID-19, it put many in fear and confusion. Between marginalized groups, there was some chaos in where to stand against the violence. Sarah Sense Wilson, the chair of UNEA initiated a statement of solidarity between the Native Indigenous and Asian community. It gave me much joy and hope for more bridges to be built across POC groups.

On Sunday, May 23rd 2021 Clear Sky Native Youth Council held a cross cultural dialogue event featuring 4 notable Asian American panelists. Gwen Lee, Che Seyhun, Kshama Sawant and Frank Irigon. The aim was to shed light on Asian American struggles in our times and to address the violence that has occured out of anti-Asian sentiment. The Clear Sky youth interns spent many hours preparing for this event, facilitated and came up with the important questions to ask the panelists. We took away a lot from what was shared.

Speaking on cultural similarities, differences, and history of ethnic groups in the US is not an easy topic. All 4 panelists came with their own set of knowledge based on the work they have done in the community for social justice. Sarah provided us (the Asian community) a platform to speak, share our pains, and bring awareness to the public about our silenced history and colonization. Being Asian American, we experience a level of silencing in the oppression we face. That is what made this event so powerful. I hope that from this event, we were able to see the commonalities between Asian and Indigenous groups.

In hosting this event, I really admire that acknowledgement of diversity in Asian ethnic groups. Having a diverse Asian panel, really spoke to this. There is a lot of misunderstanding and stereotyping about Asian people even in the BIPOC community. In the event, we addressed the ‘Model Minority Myth’. I believe the message stands as continuing to educate ourselves, and dismantle White Supremacy together as a collective. Much of that comes from decolonizing ourselves, and learning about one another. This cross cultural dialogue aimed to do just that.

To diffuse stereotyping and conflict with one another, sharing and listening is a great remedy. Kshama Sawant emphasizes that if we are able to work together in harmony we can fight the greater forces such as climate change and more affordable housing. Gwen Lee has done so much for UNEA as a board member and gave such an insightful lesson on Asian American history that most are not aware of.

Frank Irigon spoke on how much the Native and Asian community has actually worked together; what we’ve accomplished, and lived side by side together. Che Seyhun has an amazing voice in speaking truth to power; and talking about difficult subjects. Che gives a sense of direction in a confusing world, navigating through what seems to divide us but instead spends a lot of his time in unifying the Asian community and bridging to others.

Overall, I am very grateful to UNEA and everyone involved. It makes me feel empowered and inspired to keep going, and the work we are doing is important. For a more peaceful world, with harmony to flourish.
GREETINGS ALL FROM CHRIS BISHOP

My name is Chris Bishop. I came to the Seattle area from Boise, Idaho. I’m a recent graduate of Goddard College, earning an M.F.A. in Creative Writing. I consider myself an educator, writer, and artist. I started at UNEA as a volunteer tutor during November of last year. Since then, I have been growing a deep appreciation for this organization. I’m honored to take over Brooke’s role, and cannot wait to meet more people from this great community. I want to thank Brooke for all her amazing work over this past year, and for her guidance as I transition into her administrative role.

With sincerity and excitement,
Chris

FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM BROOKE

It is with sadness that I announce that I will be stepping out of the role of Administrative Assistant, but with excitement that I welcome Chris Bishop to the role! Although I will no longer be in this position, I will still be a part of UNEA as an active volunteer. I have had an incredible year working with the UNEA community and have learned more from UNEA youth, mentors, and community members than I have in all previous roles and work experiences. It has truly been an honor to be a part of the transformative work of this organization, one that I will cherish!

With love and gratitude,
Brooke

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