



What The Abenaki Say About Dogs

Dan Close

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How This Book Came To Be: Some years ago, the Abenaki of northwestern Vermont staged a demonstration against the practices of certain contractors who were building homes on sites the Abenaki had identified as ancient burial grounds of their people. About a month after that demonstration, I happened to travel near the area in question. Along the way, I noticed a small group of people standing around a big yellow loader on a building lot that had been ripped up to dig a cellar hole. The loader's scoop, filled with sand, had been lifted to table height and people stood around it, not the usual work crew. Four of them: two men and two women. They looked at me with more than usual interest as I passed by. One of the women came over to my car and introduced herself as Donna Moody, the Repatriations Coordinator of the Western Abenaki. "This is where a builder started to dig up a graveyard," she said, "until we got a court order to stop him." They were now scooping up the disturbed soil and sifting through it, looking for the bones of their ancestors. I told her that I did not wish to intrude, but that I felt I had to stop and let them know what I was doing there. Donna immediately put me at ease and said that it was good that I was there; it was good that I could see what they were doing. Meanwhile, my little cocker spaniel, Buffie, climbed onto my lap and stuck her head out the window to say hello to Donna. It was love at first sight. After a long meeting and greeting, Donna looked at me smiling and said, "Do you know what the Abenaki say about dogs?" She told me the story. I drove off down the road and pulled off to the side and wrote this poem: What The Abenaki Say About Dogs. Wrote it right out. I sent a copy of it to Donna, along with another poem I called Sifters. These poems led to others over the years, and this book is the result of my regard for the Abenaki - their culture, their history, their place in contemporary society, and their traditional dwelling places in the mountains and especially along the shores of this great lake called Champlain. or as the Abenakis call it, The Sea Between. I do not pretend to speak for The People of the Dawn. They speak for themselves, with a great tradition of poets and singers and storytellers you can go to for their work. This book speaks of their interaction with the land and this great inland sea. I simply hope that here in this small volume I have done them justice. Dan Close, Underhill, Vermont, 2009

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Christopher Wilkerson:

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