

**Turning of the Wheel: Meeting the Challenges and Charting/Creating the World with
Spokes and a Hub
Keynote Address by Rodney Frey, Distinguishes Humanities Professor
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Good evening. I am sincerely humbled by this appointment, and deeply honored – thank you to . . . Katherine Aiken, Dean of College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences and John Mihelich, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. I also want to acknowledge and thank Kurt Olsson, former Dean of the College of Letters and Science, whose vision and perseverance, beginning back in 1988, helped create the endowment from which the Distinguished Humanities Professorship and the Humanities Fellows Program have grown so wonderfully. Gary Williams was the first recipient of the Professorship in 2007-08. Very special thanks to Tom and Susie Yellowtail (elders of the Crow or Apsáalooke), to Cliff SiJohn (elder of the Coeur d’Alene, the Schitsu’umsh) and Rob Moran (elder of the Little Shell Chippewa and Warm Springs), and to so many friends. Dr. Sushma Pant – my oncologist. Kris Roby, loving wife with me at each step of my journeys. It’s only through their gifts that this talk and what follows is made possible. I would not be here without their gifts, ahó.

As an ethnographer working with the Indigenous peoples of this land, stories are so pivotal. This evening we’ll share some stories, some very special stories about wheels, and spokes and hubs, of unique and diverse spokes, of universal hubs – stories that go to the very core of our capacities for effective communications and collaboration, for building community. Stories that can help prepare us to meet the challenges and chart, perhaps even create the world. Stories to think about, to reflect upon. Stories that will launch a Humanities Exploration series of over 30 events, in the days, weeks

and months ahead. In fact, starting tomorrow at 12:30 with an “Invisible Spoke of Magic” and ending May 11th.

Before we begin to share some stories, or perhaps our first story, let’s first prepare to gather some huckleberries. Over the years I’ve come to learn the importance of gathering the huckleberries, a gathering as appreciated by the Indigenous peoples of this land. Of mending the baskets and preparing for the long trip to the mountain, of knowing when the berries are ready, of the care in picking each so as not to harm the bush, of then of properly storing them for future use, and, critically, of sharing the berries with those who couldn’t make it to the mountain, sharing them with those in need. I’ve come to experience the nourishment only the huckleberries can provide.

When Cliff SiJohn, a Schitsu’umsh (Coeur d’Alene Indian) elder, spiritual man, and a brother, would be explaining the importance of the huckleberries to my students, he inevitably would turn the story onto them. He would say, “You know, your education is a gathering of the huckleberries. With your huckleberry baskets firmly strapped to your side, place with care what your teachers, what your textbooks, what your life-experiences, in and out of the classroom, what these stories have to offer you. Cherish these berries. And then when you or someone you love is in need, faced with a challenge, may need a little nourishment, may need a little guidance, pull out some berries and use them.” “Cherish your huckleberries,” Cliff would say.

You never know when you might stumble and fall, get knocked us off our path, when you or someone close might face a seemingly insurmountable challenge – health, relationship, job. How each of us responds is certainly varied, as varied as there are spokes on a wheel, each seeking that particular path that best navigates a dark territory. This happens to be my particular story.

In December of 2005 I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. I was a fit 55, or so I thought, happily married with a wonderful family, professionally successful, and was about to begin a most unanticipated journey that threatened it all. I blamed no one. In fact, felt no anger. But the cancer could not be ignored.

Soon after I was having lunch with Cliff SiJohn, sharing the situation with him. His words helped initiate the critical path in my healing journey. Cliff emphasized the importance of appreciating the complimentary, though distinct processes of "external healing" and "inner healing." He spoke of, "Putting your full trust in your doctors, in the external healing and" and in what Cliff called, "head knowledge." But he also stressed that I needed to pay attention to my "inner healing and heart knowledge" – "to listen with your heart." "That's your responsibility, not the doctors." "Attend to both," Cliff stressed.

Over the years working with Cliff, and Tom Yellowtail, and many other elders, and given my particular involvement in the Apsáalooke - Crow Sundance way, and of conducting research and teaching research methods, I had come to learn a certain meaning to head and heart knowledge ways.

While certainly much more nuanced than suggested here, head knowledge, something most of us are familiar with, is ultimately premised on material reductionism and the Cartesian dualism, and expressed in the scientific method.

This is the story of great men, of the "Godfather's of Science," starting with Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC), of René Descartes (1597-1659) and his Cartesian Dualism, of mind/body, of thought/material exclusive binaries, neither reducible to the other, a world of objectivity, and his method of deductive

logical reasoning, of John Locke (1632-1704) and his inductive empiricism, this is the story of Galileo (1564-1642), following the lead of Pythagoras, placed emphasis on quantifiable variables and their relationships, a reality of discrete numerically-based chunks, i.e., statistics – “the language of nature is numbers,” of Isaac Newton (1642-1727) seeking to establish universal generalizations – “laws” to describe, explain, predict and ultimately control nature – the “laws of motion,” and this is the story of Francis Bacon (1561-1625) and his utilitarianism, that science holds the keys to unlocking the power over nature. Collectively these stories bring forth the scientific method, a story of dualism that separates us from nature so that we can understand it and ultimately control nature.

Head knowledge reflects a tangible world of discrete, quantifiable “objects” viewed as if behind a glass pane. It is a world differentiated by binary oppositions and hierarchies; a world devoid of spirit.

Heart knowledge is premised on very different principles, on spiritual animation, expressed in the Apsáalooke concept of *baaxpée* or the Schitsu’umsh concept of *summesh*, and a unified holism and interconnected kinship, express in the Apsáalooke phrase, *ashammaléaxia*, “as driftwood lodges,” the term for the matrilineal clan.

This is the story of an omnipresent Creator – *Akbaatatdía*, “the maker of all things first,” the *Amotqn*, “sits on the mountain,” and of a multitude of “Peoples,” kinsmen – human, animal, plant, rock and spirit, both of the present and the past – the “ancestors” and the “First Peoples” of the creation time. This is the story of Coyote and Crane, Rabbit and Jack Rabbit, Chief Child of the Yellow Root and Burnt Face, not “Godfathers,” as the “Guardian’s of the Oral Traditions,” who prepare the world for the coming of the human peoples, overcoming “man-eaters” and other monsters, and inundating the landscape with “gifts” – foods, teachings, what human peoples will need. This is the story of deer, camas and salmon as

“brothers” to the hunter or root digger or fisherman, offering themselves up voluntarily when given “gifts” of respect and song, and then to be shared with all those in need; never to be taken without consent.

In the acts of re-telling, re-singing, re-dancing the perennial stories of the creation, the world is re-created and perpetuated, the world renewed; the present is rendered one with the First Peoples of creation time and place. As Cliff SiJohn has said, in telling the stories of the First Peoples, “they come *alive* . . . they *swirl around* you as the Turtle is saying his thing or as the Chipmunk is saying something . . . they *swirl around* you and you see the *Indian medicine* . . . this is Chipmunk talking to you . . . this is Coyote talking to you . . . all these things *suddenly come alive* . . . they are just as alive as they were a thousand years ago.” Hence the Apsáalooke expression, *dasshússuu* (“breaking with the mouth”) and the phrase, “stories make the world.” That which comes through the mouth, be it spoken or sung, be it an Indian name or a creation story, has the efficacy to bring forth the world. In re-telling Coyote’s story of the Rock Monster, the blue in Lake Coeur d’Alene is perpetuated. In re-telling Burnt Face’s story, a scar is removed and a face made new, as a “child’s.”

Heart knowledge is a transitory world co-created at the convergence of those participating, be they human, animal, plant or spirit Peoples, an event of converging relations, always in the making; no glass pane here. A world unified through kinship, imbued with spirit. Contrasting ways of viewing, indeed, of knowing the world – very distinct epistemologies!

You can glimpse these contrasting ways as you view the particular rock formations along the slope of the Clearwater River, just as you enter the Nez Perce Reservation. They can be understood through a scientific understanding of geological processes occurring during a particular geochronological period in lineal time – a landscape full of “natural resources” to be acquired. And

those same rock formations are understood as created through the actions of the First Peoples, the Animal Peoples, such as Coyote and Snake, occurring in time immemorial, and perpetuated and renewed each time their stories are retold – a landscape endowed with “gifts.” And there contrasting ways are oh so apparent in the head knowledge world of Western biomedicine, of the physical action and reaction of scalpels, chemo drugs, and stem cell transplants; and a heart knowledge world of American Indian spiritual healing, of the pulsating force coming through an Eagle-feather fan.

And Cliff said, “Attend to both, equally”? But when we’re confronted with such seemingly incompatible differences, how are we to go about effectively communicating? How are we to go about engaging, no less collaborating, in some sort of manner with the strangers amongst us? When “difference” seems so irreconcilable, so mutually exclusive? Where do we look for guidance; where was I to look for guidance? What huckleberries would be pulled from my basket, relied upon?

It was the summer of 1974 and I was conducting my first ethnographic field work. Bit of background. I was a graduate student at the time, invited by the Apsáalooke, literally meaning, “Children of the Large-Beaked Bird” or commonly referred to as the Crow Indians of Montana, to assist with helping “educate” the young but inexperienced non-Indian doctors who served in the Indian Health Service. They were having a difficult time communicating with tribal members, especially the elders and the more traditional members. Working with the elders, we put together an extended essay on how tribal members understood and approached illness and healing, from their perspective, an essay the doctors would use to better understand and communicate with their patients.

And in the course of this project I was introduced to one of the most amazing ways of looking at and experiencing the world, indeed creating the world. This world view, this behavior was repeatedly

reflected in an uncanny ability of individuals to simultaneously travel distinct ways of life, as for example, of being a sincere Sundancer, devout Christian, a competent Indian Health Service nurse, a self-serving trickster Coyote and a self-effacing caring elder, and doing so with such ease.

This ambidextrous ability was so wonderfully exemplified in the lives of Tom and Susie Yellowtail. Tom was an *akbaalía*, a traditional healer, and the Sundance Chief for his people; and he was a devout Baptist. Susie danced alongside her husband in the Big Lodge and practiced Western biomedicine, in fact, was the first American Indian registered nurse in this country. On various occasions Susie was appointed to Presidential Councils, and traveled widely throughout the United States representing Indian peoples. While in the Sundance Lodge, Tom danced with the whistle and prayed to *Akbaatatdía*, “the Maker of All Things First”; while in the “Little Brown” Baptist Church he read from the Good Book and prayed to Jesus Christ. While in the Sundance Lodge, Susie applied Indian medicine; while in the Indian Health Service Hospital she prescribed Western biomedicine. But the Bible and the stethoscope were never brought into the Sundance, or the Eagle-bone whistle never into the Church. And while the Eagle feathers of an *akbaalía* (literally, “one who doctors”) might be fanned over a patient in the hospital, the prayers and songs of the *akbaalía* are offered only in the privacy of the patient’s room, distinct from the care provided by the physician and nurse.

Each way of prayer and of healing, each way of behaving has its own path, distinct from the other, each with its own integrity. Yet all paths could be traveled, freely jumping between and on each, all leading to the same source. This powerful notion was appropriately symbolized when in October of 1993 in Chicago Tom, in Eagle-feather headdress and full regalia, shared the podium with some of the world’s foremost religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama, and offered words of prayer

at the 100th anniversary of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. Tom's Apsáalooke prayer for world peace was so easily heard, mingling and merging with the over 8,000 other spokespeople from the world's different religions – Christian, Muslim and Jew, Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist, and American Indian.

Tom Yellowtail, who became one of my most prominent and enduring teachers, offered the following understanding of how to travel distinct ways of life. Using imagery he felt I could relate to, he spoke of the world as a great "Wagon Wheel." Tom was intimately familiar with the Wheel, as reflected in the rock Medicine Wheel to the south of his Wyola home and as structured into the Sundance Lodge and the pattern of its dancers.

From its perch high atop the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming, the rocks of the Medicine Wheel have endured since time immemorial, the recipient of countless pilgrimages and prayers. Its 28 spokes of rock were linked by an outer rim of rocks some eighty feet in diameter and a central rock cairn of some two feet in height. As Tom has told in his favorite oral tradition, it was Burnt Face, a young boy, horribly disfigured, deeply scarred, who first traveled so long ago to these mountains to fast and offer prayer, and who assembled these rocks as a gift to the *Awakkulé*, "Little People" who inhabited the area, seeking their help. It's the image of the Wagon Wheel that was offered.

Imagine the Apsáalooke Sundance Lodge from the eye of a soaring Eagle. The Lodge is anchored by its cottonwood forked-tree, the Center Pole, from which twelve over-head poles radiate out to shorter posts to form the rim of the Lodge some seventy to eighty feet in diameter, all enclosed by cut trees and brush, its door open to the rising morning Sun. For three and sometimes four days, the over one hundred participants would fast from food and water, and offer prayer and dance for

loved ones. To the beat of the drum and song, and with Eagle-bone whistles in their mouths and Eagle plumes in hand, men and women charge the Center Pole, with its Buffalo head and Eagle suspended from its fork, and then dance back to their stalls, and then charge again, and again. Each dancer has made his or her own individual vow to the Creator to give of him or herself for a loved one in need, each dancer distinct in intentions and expression from the others. Nevertheless, all the dancers are united as one as they blow their Eagle-bone whistles to the beat of the drum, and as they stand before the Center Pole and offer burnt tobacco in prayer, or as they might receive a blessing or healing, or even a visit from perhaps the Buffalo, or Eagle, and be given a special gift, a "medicine."

The Apsáalooke name their Sundance Lodge is *Ashkísshe* – "imitation lodge" – in replication of the world, a microcosm of the greater macrocosm, a reflection, a mirror. Each of the unique spokes dancing, among the many collective diverse spokes, all in unison, united by the ubiquitous spirit of whistle and drum, under the gaze of the Center Pole, of *Akbaatatdíá*, the Creator, the *axis mundi*, anchoring and permeating the many spokes equally. The image of the Wagon Wheel is seen and danced and experienced, and brought forth.

And Tom went on to say, "The spokes of the wagon Wheel . . are the *various paths* to the *hub* . . the *different* religions . . the different peoples of the world . . . each with their *own ways* . . their own languages . . their *own* traditions but each spoke is *equally* important . . . that Wheel just *wouldn't turn* if some spokes were longer than others . . if some were taken out all together *all* the spokes are needed if the Wheel is gonna to turn but all the spokes are linked to the *same hub* . . the same Creator each religion . . each spoke might call the Creator by a different name but

the prayers of all religions are heard by the Creator if the Wheel is to turn.” Spokes unique, spokes collectively diverse; a hub and rim unifying, ubiquitous, universal.

For Tom and Susie, and so many others, there need not be investment solely in a single spoke, need not choose sides, but choice to travel the many spokes. For Tom and Susie Yellowtail they could effectively dance the varied paths, the many spokes, when (1) acknowledging the indispensable and interdependent relationship of the many dances within the inexorable, greater whole, the anchoring hub and encompassing rim, while at the same time (2) distinguishing the unique integrity and the separate significance of each of the many dances, discerning on which path it is appropriate to dance this or that dance, each way of knowing and experiencing the world, each spoke. They can effectively dance when acknowledging the anchoring hub and distinguishing the many spokes. Without such, there would be little turning of the Wheel.

The Wheel can thus provide a map for traveling the many paths without dilemma, without having to make an either-or choice. It’s a map that can chart a course, a map that can create a path. It’s a map of the world, brought to life in deed and action, embedded by values of inclusion, of interconnection, of equality. Regardless of how seemingly irrevocably distinct from the other, the varied paths we encounter, you and I, can be traveled without threat that they would somehow become “mutually exclusive” of each other.

But it is a matter of knowing your map, of knowing its terrain. For Tom and Susie there was a critical competency in knowing which context and setting to be a devout Christian and a sincere Sundancer, a skilled nurse, and a spiritual healer. Knowing the map goes beyond just acknowledging or even just respecting the distinctions of the spokes; its hard work, it takes effort. Tom and Susie

repeatedly demonstrated their capacities to so effectively converse and communicate with Baptist parishioners, with Sundancer participants, and with Indian Health Service practitioners alike, of applying the subtle etiquette, nuances and languages of each. While such distinct communities, Tom and Susie worked with the members of each so easily, always in collaboration, helping sustain their respective “Little Brown Church,” Sundance Lodges, and IHC Hospital communities, without “mutual exclusivity.”

Wagon Wheels and rock Medicine Wheels? Sundancer Participants, Baptist Parishioners, Indian Health Service Practitioners? Spokes and hubs? The interplay between the unique and the universal, between our collective diversity and what we share in common? Are there lessons to be learned? Huckleberries to be placed in our basket? And how would I best heed Cliff’s advice, attending to both the internal and external healing, both the heart and head knowledge ways?

In my own unfolding healing journey, the Wheel did indeed offer a map, a means to meet the challenges, to chart path through a dark territory – huckleberries to guide and nourish, allowing me to be able to simultaneously travel what seemed “mutually exclusive.” I could travel the spoke of an “Indian names,” Eagle-feathers, the Sundance way and heart knowledge, while at the same time travel the spoke of chemotherapy, radiation, an autologous stem cell transplant and head knowledge – without discord, in balance, equally. I certainly brought to bear my own levels of competency in being able to dance the distinct and unique spokes of the Apsáalooke Sundance way and Western biomedical way, in my healing journey of 2006 and again following my relapse in 2009. I danced, or should I say, reclined with an IV of chemo drugs and then of stem cells, hopefully as easily as I did with the spirit of the Buffalo.

As I sought to “pay particular attention to my inner healing,” it was Tom’s most cherished narrative, an oral tradition that further refined a path, helped navigate through a most perilous and unfamiliar territory – a young Native boy would help chart the course of action for an adult Anglo man.

Without warning, we could “stumble and fall,” a healthy state was taken away. “It’s evening; over there they’re running about camp, chasing each other, and he falls, his face lands in the fire.” For a young Apsáalooke boy a face hideously scarred after falling into a fire pit. And for me, a body infested with malignant cells.

Confusion and solitude resulted. “He comes out of his lodge, and they gather around, they see the scar and someone calls out, ‘hey, Burnt Face!’” For a young boy it’s a life of ridicule and rejection, of living alone, as if without family, orphaned. For me it was the awkwardness of others not knowing just quit what to say, how to relate to someone with cancer, or perhaps it was going incognito, as my bushy eyebrows vanished, along with my identity. But for both of us, the isolation was soon replaced with the loving support of family and friends. Prayers given, preparations made.

For each there awaited a long journey of humility and perseverance, . . . of sacrifice and offerings made. “He travels alone to those high mountains of the Big Horns, wearing out each four sets of moccasins his mother had made. There high on the mountain, the sun’s rise and set clearly seen, he goes without food and water, offers daily prayer with tobacco and pipe his father gave him, and moves huge rocks, there that one, and there, to form a great Wheel offering, 28 spokes and a cairn hub, it takes him awhile. It’s an offering, a gift to whomever might come – perhaps to the *Awakkulé*, “the Little People,” who inhabited this area.”

My own journeys involved travel to Lewiston and then to Seattle and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Institute, of undergoing days, of weeks and months of chemotherapy and irradiation, of their chaotic side-effects, and of a stem cell transplant, augmented by my own “rock offerings,” of daily prayer, of holding tight to what I cherished most, my Indian Names – *Maakuuxshiichilish*, difficult to translate – “seeking to help others” – the name Tom bestowed on me when he brought me into his family, and *Kw’lk’il Sqqi*, “Little Red Hawk” – the name Cliff bestowed on a brother, referring to the Red-tailed, who watches and then swoops down to gather his catch, in so doing providing for others, others in need, and to my Gift of Medicine – *Bishée*, Buffalo – received during my fourth Sundance, and critically, to what they meant all to me and what I must do. Journeys of sacrifice and perseverance, in the hope that a healing would be come.

While there are no guarantees, as Tom said, Burnt Face could have perished high on that mountain; the healing journey’s can meet with success, with transformation. “There the Little People come, they’d been watching him. They take him in, “adopt” him, he calls them “Medicine Fathers, and a face is restored to that of a “child’s,” a disfigurement removed.” For me, “reborn” as if “a child,” malignant cells destroyed.

Following the stem cell procedure I had in fact lost a life-time of built up immunity, the chemo and radiation destroying malignant cells along with my immunity. I had to re-take all my childhood immunization shots, as if a 6 and 12, and 18 and 24 -month old child. Just recently I got my series of shots, my mumps and measles vaccination. Indeed “reborn as a child.”

And Immediately following the stem cell transplant, something else was lost, . . . and something else realized. As mentioned, as part of my 2009 stem cell transplant, I underwent intensive

chemotherapy and four days of total body irradiation, all in order to purge my body of cancer. For some 8 days or so, following this traumatic and radically chaotic rendering of my physical being, my bone marrow was also totally compromised, shut down – I could no longer produce the life-giving fluids my body thirsted. I was no longer a viable living being, but dependent on transfusions of the red blood cells and platelets provided through the generosity of others. At the threshold none of us seek.

But out of the chaos emerged another sort of time and place, some sort of liminality – “betwixt and between.” It’s a “timeless-spaceless” domain, betwixt and between the temporally and spatially-defined spokes. It’s where-when you get one of those rare opportunities to truly and deeply listen, with few extraneous distractions – devoid of mundane sensibilities and concerns. You get an opportunity to see what is right before you, but normally veiled by convention and establishment. You get to sort through to what is most vital and essential.

Out of the chaos, during this liminal period following my stem cell transplant it was not apprehension or anxiety or even fear I felt. It was an overwhelming and crystalline feeling of “empathy and compassion.” As I continued to walk the halls of my hospital ward, with life-giving IV fluids attached, I felt my heart palpating, literally reaching out to those around me – some on the road to health, others moving in another direction. I had never before experienced such an innate connectedness, such an outpouring of care for others – at a place transcending my physical viability, eclipsing both Sundance and biomedical ways.

While so difficult to put into precise words, the very essence and meaning of empathy, inlaid with a generous dose of compassion, was for me so unmistakably felt and expressed during the betwixt and between. “Empathy” had to do with placing of one’s self in someone else’s position, in the shoes

of another, each becoming an extension of the other. And “compassion” that capacity to unselfishly give support to another – be it guiding, nurturing or healing. And both capacities resulting in the elimination of the categories of “self” and “other” altogether!

Throughout my healing journeys, I was able to transverse not only certain oh so differentiated spokes, with a degree of competency, but there was also this hub and rim I transversed, that anchored and secured those head and heart-knowledge spokes, that emanated out of our “shared humanity.” While engaging with oncologists, surgeons and nurses, emanating out of head knowledge dualism, or while engaging with Sundance *akbaalíá* and family members, emanating out of heart knowledge holism, distinct from one-another in so many remarkable ways, they all so clearly shared and extended to me a universal human face of empathy, care and compassion, transcending their fundamental differences. That “pat on the back” can penetrate oh so deeply, be it extended from the hand of a doctor in a white coat or from an *akbaalíá*’s hand holding Eagle-feather fan. Certainly among the great spiritual traditions of the world, each diverse in so many ways, Hindu and Buddhist, Christian and Muslim, do they not all affirm the face and hand of Divinity, of the Infinite, to be ultimately that of empathy and compassion?

In reflection, it was a language I first experienced many years ago, with such sincere expression, in Tom Yellowtail’s face. I can still vividly remember, in so many instances, when a family member and often, a perfect stranger, perhaps a non-Indian, would be seated next to and conveyed to Tom his or her particular illness or distress, just prior to being “doctored” during a medicine bundle ceremony. You would see in Tom’s face, his eyes, indeed his entire being, such a complete absorption, a degree of listening that it was as if Tom had himself entered into and was experiencing the pain and suffering of

his patient. And then a few moments later, with the medicine bundle opened and facing East, the patient would be “doctored” by Tom. The Eagle-feather fan pulsed over the body, here and there penetrating so deeply, and then pulled away, and with it the affliction, pointing the fan to the East, “letting it go with the westerly winds.”

And in reflection there was yet another huckleberry offered that summer of 1974, a huckleberry that, like empathy and compassion, could provide a language that transcended the idiosyncratic spokes that can divide, that can bridge the seemingly “mutual exclusive” among us. Another huckleberry of the hub, of our shared humanity.

I can still see with such clarity that first meeting I had with Tom Yellowtail. I had phoned and asked if we could visit on a tribally-sponsored project I was involved with that summer of 1974. Upon arriving at his rural homestead I found Tom tending to his pigs, fixing that fence that ways seemed susceptible to their burrowing ways. There was a calm to his demeanor, as he gently spoke to these large beasts, in the tone I soon learned akin to that spoken to his own grandkids. And we struck up a conversation. I was always amazed at the almost immediate rapport we had with one another, “as if we had known each other for years.” Yet we came from such radically different backgrounds, seeming so little in common. I was the younger by forty-five years, very urban-oriented, from a White middle-class family, raised far from Tom’s way of life. Yet we could relate and converse with such ease. We soon shared a complete trust in and with one another that would only intensify over the next nineteen years. But in reflection, how was it that two people, so different from one another in so many ways, could come to share so much in common, so effortlessly, so readily?

The Apsáalooke have a term for the act of sharing the narrative oral traditions of Coyote and the other First Peoples, for the act of storytelling, it is *baaéechichiwaau*. The phrase literally means, “re-telling one’s own.” As applied to so many of the most cherished Apsáalooke narratives, an individual could re-tell such a story only if he or she had the right to do so. It was a privilege granted by others. In re-telling a story there was considerations of etiquette and ethics.

But in addition, it had been the practice, still widely followed by the Apsáalooke and by other tribes, that upon some great deed or event occurring in one’s life, he or she would in the company of family and elders re-tell that significant accomplishment or event. This practice was certainly exemplified in Tom’s heroic story of “Burnt Face.” The great deed would be brought to life again, re-told before others, and integrated into and made an essential part of the fabric of the entire community, helping re-define how each person of that community would then relate to this newly transformed person, helping add to the richness and depth of that community’s collective story of itself. A gift received is re-told, gifted to the other members of the community.

For Tom and myself, an additional “language” of our hub, transversing our differing spokes, was the power of story, be it narrative or poetry, be it song or in dance, be it a pictorial representation on a beaded bag or vest. Through the sharing of so many oral traditions, as well as our own life’s stories, through *baaéechichiwaau*, “re-telling one’s own” – of heroes and tricksters, of quests and transformations, of sorrows and joys and humor – we so easily conversed and trusted.

Successfully speaking of the language of story has meant competence revolving around deep listening with the heart, with honesty and humility, as Tom did so often for perfect strangers, a listening so akin to empathy itself, as a listener projecting yourself so deeply into the unfolding story

itself, and then of re-telling those stories with heart, with life, in such a manner so as to welcome others into the stories, as participants, projected into the story as travelers of it. Through our stories, we felt, we cried, we laughed, with remarkable affinity.

And in reflection it was, of course, narratives that helped me navigate a path through a dark territory, that of Burnt Face, and albeit a short vignette, Tom's Wheel, maps to transverse the "seemingly mutual exclusive" ways of Sundance and Biomedical ways. What irretrievably divides our spokes is not so great that it cannot be bridged by some expression or capacity of our shared humanity, through some form of common language, some form of hub.

As you've seen, the format of this address is itself very much a narrative, a reflection on my own experiences, a re-telling of my own story, *baaéechichiwaau*. These stories have created my world and re-defined me in relation to my Indigenous hosts, my colleagues, my students and my family, in relation to you – they are "stories that make the world." And now, in my re-telling, they are stories offered to you, for you, for our community and beyond. Perhaps there's a huckleberry or two to add to your own basket?

While applicable in one person's healing journey, could these Wheel huckleberries nourish and guide in other situations, for myself professionally? Certainly the interplay of the unique and universal, of the turning wheel, along with many other huckleberries and lessons from my many Indigenous teachers has been instrumental and critical in my research and teaching. As an ethnographer," in its distilled definition, "one who seeks to understand others, and then re-tell them for others" – something perhaps we all seek to do? – while conducting research I've attempted to travel the territory of the many spokes of the Apsáalooke, the Schitsu'umsh and other Indigenous

peoples of this land, always with permission, respectful of their cultural property rights, and in collaboration with my hosts, attempting to see from their perspectives. And continuing our collaboration through publication and in the classroom, we have sought to re-tell the stories and “give back” to those in need, of doing applied, collaborative-based anthropology.

Certainly throughout all my teaching and research, understanding the interplay of the unique and universal, the diverse and shared in common, has invariably played itself out in a myriad of ways, expressed in a rich and vibrant tapestry – be it while glimpsing the narratives of the Indigenous Aranda of central Australia or Inuit of the central Arctic, the narrative of Christianity, Hinduism, or Taoism, the narrative of Science or Capitalism, the narrative of Abraham’s Covenants with the Lord or Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, the narrative of in a Pablo Picasso painting or a Sufi Nasrudin tale, or the narrative view from atop a tower at Jericho of 10,000 years ago, through Galileo’s telescope, or from within Plato’s Cave. Seeking for my students and myself to dance the many spokes of our hosts with appropriate competency, in partnership. Seeking for my students and myself to be able to recognize and speak the universal languages of the hub, some degree of competence.

While applicable in one person’s healing journey, could these Wheel huckleberries nourish and guide in other situations, for others? Could the lessons of Tom’s Wheel, of the interplay between the unique and the universal, between our collective diversity and our shared humanity, find application in other aspects of our unfolding stories, our professional lives as students, as researchers, as teachers? In your unfolding story, as student, as researcher, as teacher? Huckleberries waiting for you? Let’s take a journey, a humanities exploration together!

Now donning the regalia and dancing as the “distinguished humanities professorship” – though at my core still an ethnographer – this Humanities Exploration is really a year-long unfolding ethnography, a work in progress. My “research design” emanates out of the humanities, a mode of inquire particularly well suited for my “research question.

The humanities certainly share with other academic disciplines, such as in the natural and social sciences, and in the arts, the goal of seeking to understand and appreciate the human conduction. What distinguishes the humanities disciplines from others is not so much its content and subject; a creative playwright, a behavioral psychologist, and humanities professor could each be dealing with the same subject, for example, gender identity.

What distinguishes the humanities from other disciplines is that it is “interpretive.” Taking my lead from the Idaho Humanities Council, the IHC defines the humanities as belonging to the “interpretative disciplines.” These include cultural anthropology/ethnography, communications studies, cultural studies (such as American Studies, International Studies, American Indian Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies); they include the languages, law, literature, history, philosophy; and they include the reflection and theory in creative writing, in the performing arts of music, dance and theatre, and the reflection and theory in the visual arts of painting, sculpting and architecture.

While not a black and white distinction, the interpretative methodologies of these disciplines are typically distinguished from the positivist and empirical methodologies of the natural and social science disciplines, and the creative and imaginative endeavors of the arts. Such interpretative methodologies, for example, include hermeneutics, literary criticism, phenomenology, and in my own discipline of ethnography, “thick description.”

To “interpret” certainly seeks to render something meaningful and understandable, serving to inform, enlighten, instruct. Likely first expressed in the 14th century Middle English, “interpret” is derived from the Latin, *interpretārī* – “someone who serves as an agent, a negotiator.” Hence, to interpret certainly seeks to (1) generate new knowledge, rendering something meaningful, be it culturally or historically distant, be it something more immediate but veiled in some fashion. But to interpret also seeks to (2) render that knowledge accessible, applicable, relevant, that is, linking and integrating. Indeed, “negotiating” known and knower. Indeed, an element of rendering knowledge empathic, of projecting the knower into the known!

The Idaho Humanities Council states that “through [the] study [of the humanities it seeks to] yield wisdom.” Wisdom is that deep understanding that goes beyond knowing, to thicken and extend our understandings, to apply, to engage that knowledge in civic life, both locally and globally, to address the challenges faced by humanity. To take up the “big questions.”

In his 2007 keynote address, Gary Williams, my predecessor in this role of Distinguished Humanities Professor, and building upon the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities statement, emphasized that the Humanities are “. . . a way of thinking about and responding to the world – tools we use to examine and make sense of the human experience in general and our individual experiences in particular. The humanities enable us to reflect upon our lives and ask fundamental questions of value, purpose, and meaning in a rigorous and systematic way.”

With this understanding of the interpretative-nature of the humanities, the humanities are particularly well suited to assist and compliment the STEM disciplines – of science, technology, engineering, and math, for example. In reflecting upon, and the re-telling, in re-imagining the STEM

stories to more fully render them accessible and applicable, and to integrate them more fully into our lives. The humanities might just offer a language of the hub, providing a means for transversing the material and imaginative in our lives? We'll get a chance to see over the weeks and months to come in our Humanities Exploration series.

As an ethnographer using "intensity and snowball sampling techniques," and with my primary "research question" embedded in "a set of semi-structured interview questions," I ask you, as I've already done for some thirty other faculty and student "members" of the Vandal community:

From your perspective, what is the significance of the interplay between the unique spokes and universal hub, between the particular and ubiquitous, between our collective diversity and our shared humanity?

How and in what ways has this interplay resonated with you, in how you learn and teach, in how you research and create, in how you engage and disseminate knowledge, in how you relate to fellow students, to fellow colleagues, to others in our community?

This Humanities Exploration is very much an ethnography of a single community, that of our University of Idaho. All the responses to my questions are coming from the members of our community, from you, its students and faculty, and any the insights that are revealed, discovered, created, will go back to you, into our community, and most assuredly beyond the borders of the University of Idaho.

It comes as no surprise, that as I've asked the question of the interplay between the unique and universal of so many members of our Vandal community, it hits home. But in the responses to the question, the specific characteristics of the "diverse" and of the "shared" have found new expressions,

fresh extensions on the original theme – multiple ways of thinking about and acting out the interplay between the spokes and the hub/rim.

Not surprisingly then, how the Vandal interviewees are responding to the question of the “interplay” is expressive of a variety of ways and means – from performances in dance, music and theatre, through exhibits of photographs and paintings, through creative writing and playwright readings, and through colloquium talks on philosophy and jurisprudence, sociology and religious studies, history and public policy, through talks on biology and chemistry, computer science, entomology and physics. Responding in ways that are reflective, experiential and participatory, that are cognitive and affective. Responding with their own huckleberries to offer us.

And interwoven throughout these responses, these varied stories, to the question of the interplay between diversity and universality are far reaching implications on our capacities:

- for cross-cultural and trans-disciplinary communication and collaboration,
 - for creativity in the arts and discovery in the sciences,
 - for tolerance, civility, and respect,
 - for building and sustaining local and global community, among and between the students, faculty and friends of the University of Idaho, and far beyond.
- for the “Five - C’s” – civility, communications and collaboration, creativity and community!

If we are to effectively engage with and understand, work together and build community with the distant and many strangers amongst us, distinguished by such divisions as class, ethnicity or religion, by cultural distances, distinguished by academic disciplines and theoretical paradigms,

distinguished by entrenched partisan politics, are not the lessons from the hub and rim, of our shared humanity, just as critical as the lessons from the spokes, the lessons of our human diversity?

Do we have to wait to be galvanized by some external threat or catastrophe, to re-discover what we already know, what we already can do?

Can we not embrace the values of inclusion and interconnection, of equality and empathy as easily as Tom and Susie Yellowtail did?

Can we, in our own lives, transverse the seemingly "mutually exclusive" as easily and effectively as Tom and Susie Yellowtail did in theirs?

Posing the question, "What is the interplay between our human diversity and shared humanity, between the unique and universal?" please join our Humanities Exploration team. Let's come together to re-tell and share some stories. Let's do some *baaéechichiwaau* and see what a waits? Let's see what huckleberries might be gathered, huckleberries that might guide and nourish, huckleberries that might meet the challenges and chart the world, might even create the world, . . . and that just might taste pretty good too!

Thank You. Let's continue our exploration in the hall, with your questions and comments. And join use for some Hackberries – Huckleberry Ice-cream waiting for us there!