

ICWA LETTERS

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**CE-15
THE AMERICAS**

Chenoa Egawa is a Fellow of the Institute studying the marketing of Native American products, crafts and produce in MesoAmerica.

Dreaming Our Existence

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala

November, 1999

By Chenoa Egawa

I have always been a dreamer. In waking life too, at times, but I am referring to the actual dream world now. Usually, I remember my dreams in detail if I make an effort to do so. Sometimes they are "normal" — a strange mix and match of a particular day's or week's activities and events. Then there are the others. These dreams are so vivid and detailed that when I awake I have the memory and sensation of them imprinted upon my conscious mind. Certainly, the level of importance given to dreams varies from one person to the next; I consider these "special" dreams as gifts. Oftentimes, I have found that they carry important messages and insights.

From my first association with the Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA) I have had a series of vivid and memorable dreams that have been influenced by, and specific to this fellowship experience. I remember them as clearly today as I did on those mornings after dreaming them. The lingering visions and impressions I had from each were so powerful that I wrote them down. I've decided to share three of them. To me, they represent the artistic side of my nature, my intuition and in some mysterious way, my genetic and spiritual inheritance. I also see them as elaborate living paintings and illustrations, only instead of using a paintbrush and color, my medium here is language.

Guatemala is a land of power and magic, of Mayan myths and legends, of sacred altars and ancient temples. The first two dreams I share were obviously influenced by being in Guatemala, a place where nature's presence commands my attention on a daily basis. All three dreams — but more predominantly the last one — are about my inheritance spiritually, and genetically, from both parents and on back through the history of each one's lineage. These dreams form a significant and memorable part of my journey through these past two years.

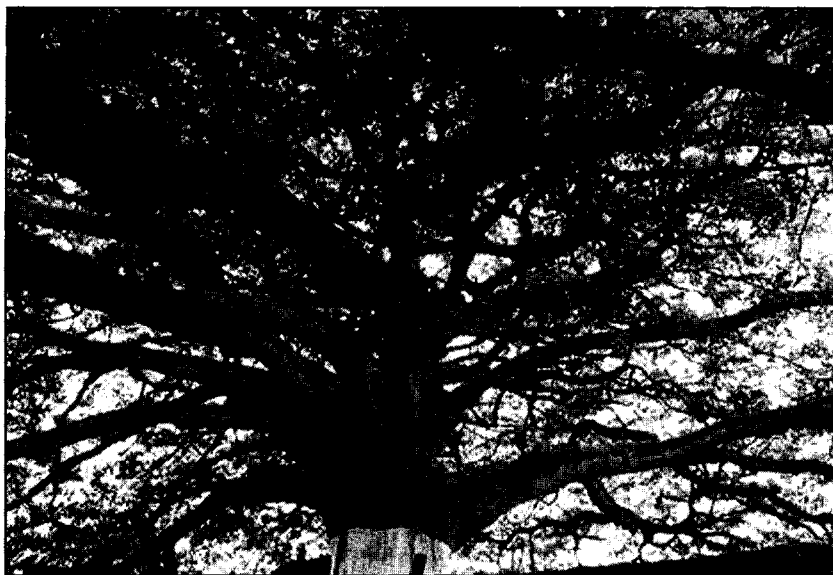
* * * *

Journal entry, June 24, 1998

I was out in the countryside, the Guatemalan Highlands I would say, because I was in an adobe house that was surrounded by high rolling green hills. My mother was there with me, and we were talking to one another about our lives. A few friends stopped in briefly to say hello, a man and his two sons, but they did not stay long.

"We're going for a walk into the hills to take pictures of the trees as they are in winter," one of the boys told me.

As happens often, the people in my dreams come and go, fading in and out



Palin's Ceiba tree

The red flowers played in harmony with flocks of red and orange-red birds. I could not tell if they were parrots, cardinals or *quetzales*. They seemed to be all three, their unity being the color red.

This light lured me out from the walls of the adobe house and into the hills. I went in search of my friends, who were out "taking pictures of the trees as they are in winter." When I found them, they were standing at the top of a small hill below a lone tree. One of the boys had spotted a huge golden eagle perched in an upper branch. Together, we moved closer to the base of the tree to get a better look at this beautiful creature, when suddenly it swooped down toward us. I could hear the sound of the wind be-

ing pushed under the power of its wings. It landed on the ground before us, standing over three feet high. I watched in disbelief as this immense golden eagle transformed into another bird of prey that had rich dark brown and white markings. Its bright eyes and penetrating stare locked upon me, while it shifted its head from side to side with agility. I had never seen one like it before. The bird approached a woman who was with us and she touched it lightly on the crown of its head before it transformed again, this time becoming more auburn brown in color, its sharp hooked beak softening and flattening into that of a duckbill. This duck-like bird then took flight and headed off beyond the tree.

of different scenes. I was standing in the house alone when all of a sudden, I noticed that the light in the fields and along the steep, broad hillside before me began to change. As I stood there, my view of the hills and sky opened up giving me an immense panoramic view of all that surrounded me. Somehow, the house itself had opened too, and when I looked around, I realized I was standing within the eroding walls of an adobe house that had no roof. There were openings in the earthen walls for windows and doors, but only the frame of the house remained. It was completely empty inside and weeds and grass had begun to grow on the dirt floor.

The sky was dark with heavy black rain clouds. Against this sky, the hills were a deep, mossy green. The light was changing, though, and I knew I was supposed to watch it carefully. It was the kind of light that follows a heavy rainstorm when the clouds begin to disperse and the first rays of sunlight reach down to the land again. This is the kind of change I was witnessing. As I looked out at the sun playing through the cloud cover, I was completely in awe of the depth of color that began emerging from the land, and I was drawn into its mystical beauty. In a split second, the clouds shifted just enough to allow the full intensity of the sun to peek through a small patch of blue sky. A brilliant sunbeam shot down to the earth sending a bright fuchsia band of refracted light across the sky and upon the land. In response to this radiant light, the dark green of the earth went through a rapid transformation. It was breathtaking. Intense, vivid color started appearing everywhere revealing flowers and vegetation I had not noticed earlier. Apparently, it had all been hidden beneath the darkness cast by the rain clouds before, but under this magical light, everything began to take on its most vibrant hues. The massive hillside, now in all shades of green, was framed in a mist that was subtle and gentle. A soft curtain of fog began to rise off the land exposing flowers in a range of reds, blues and yellows.

I was alone again. I turned around and began walking toward a wide-open field. All the while, this magical light seemed to be accompanying me, leading me. Everything that surrounded me was glowing, vibrating with color and life. As I neared the field I saw that there was a gathering of hundreds of indigenous people all seated together in a big circle. In the center there were many dancers. I knew that they came from all over the world; I could tell by the variation in their dress. Among this crowd of people, I noticed one woman in particular. She seemed so familiar to me, but I thought that it must be coincidence. *How could I possibly know her?* In that same moment, a young boy ran up to me and asked me my name. When I told him, he ran off. I watched where he was going and sure enough, he went straight over to that woman. *She must be his mother, I thought.* The woman appeared to be older, yet her presence was that of someone much younger. She was a large woman, tall and strong, with brown skin. Her clothing was made of a soft fabric, like cotton, primarily red in color, but it had been finely elaborated with intricate designs of many different colors. In the dream, I remember thinking that her clothing seemed Tibetan; however, it also reminded me of some of the Mayan fabrics and designs I had seen. I watched

her reaction from a distance as the boy told her my name. She looked my way and smiled. The boy ran back over to me, took me by the hand and brought me to meet her.

"It has been a long time," she said with a big, welcoming smile. "It is so good to see you again!" Then she lifted me off the ground in a big, strong hug. She invited me to join her and her family. I stayed there among the people and danced in that light.

* * * *

Journal entry, June 12, 1999

When I awoke, I remembered the dream from this particular place. I was in the Southwest, New Mexico. I knew this, because I was with a young woman named Vernelda Grant from San Carlos Apache, Arizona. She was one of several "Native American Ambassadors" with the Americans for Indian Opportunity Program I had met the week before during the group's visit to Guatemala on a political and cultural exchange.

In my dream, I went with Vernelda to visit her people at home. Not only did we travel the physical distance to get there, but we also traveled through time, in this case, back to the past. The people I met there were "old timers," from the olden days. They still lived a very traditional lifestyle. Their homes were small and simple, basic, but sufficient, and all of their foods came from the land. They ate only what they hunted and harvested, so they were strong and healthy. Nothing was tainted by all of the impurities, toxins and chemicals we ingest today.

No one suffered from diabetes, alcoholism, obesity or cancer; those illnesses were still unknown. I sensed a strong similarity between these "old timers" of San Carlos and the Mayan people of Guatemala. Well, perhaps the Mayans of the old days, I thought. In today's Guatemala, Mayan people, like indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, seem to be caught somewhere in midstream — some are struggling to recuperate the old ways, while others are struggling to catch up to, and find acceptance in the modern world.

I moved on from there — back on the road — traveling, always traveling. Along this road, I ran into friends from the past, people whom I still consider close friends, even though I had not seen them for a number of years. Gina was one of them, and for a little while, she and I traveled this road together. From our vehicle, we passed through many changing scenes, each one representing a specific place and time, places we had been before and were recognizing as such, one scene blending and transforming into the next. At one point along this moving "stage of life," we saw a big beautiful chalet set in a dark green mountain forest, the kind one might find in the Swiss Alps. As we passed by this scene, she and I both remembered the place. I told her that we had been there together five years earlier. We talked about how fast time goes.

"I only have six more months here," I told her. Here, was Guatemala.

My friend Gina faded away, but I was still traveling. I was on a bus in the midst of a large group of people,



Clouds over the Quiché



Prayer to the four directions

tourists perhaps. None of them was familiar to me, but they all seemed to know each other. On this leg of the journey, I was with them, yet separate. I was not sure if they were aware of my presence, but it did not seem to matter. The bus pulled over near a dense stand of tall pine trees that lined the road, and I stepped down out of the bus alone and walked through the trees to the other side. There were fields there; not wide open fields like one might find in a developed country, but small fields neatly tucked into small open spaces, like one might see in Guatemala. They were cornfields — *milpas* — that were obviously planted, tilled and harvested by hand. The climate and atmosphere was much like that of Guatemala today — winter — cool and rainy. It was not raining at that particular moment, but it was cloudy and gray. The rich soil was still dark brown with moisture. It had rained earlier. I walked to the edge of the *milpa*. The corn plants were not yet very big and they were scattered at random throughout the field, not planted in rows. Everything was silent. I was standing next to this field and observing it, when something caught my eye, above and to the right of me. I looked up and to my amazement a small group of people — men, women and children — whose backs were like turtle-shells, flew in towards me and touched down lightly, quietly, in the *milpa*. Their skin was the color of the earth before the rains, a rich, deep reddish brown. They had come to the fields to graze on the crops, like birds.

My eyes were drawn in to the minute details of their turtle-like shells, which covered the entire surface area of each person's back. They appeared to be like very old stone, or coral, whitewashed over time in some places, but accented in other areas with shades vary-

ing from light to dark gray, especially around the edges. In these stone or coral-type shells, there had been deposits of softer sediments that must have been weathered out, leaving tiny, round holes in parts, giving the shells a somewhat porous appearance. This is why they reminded me of coral. Maybe it was this porous quality that made the shells light. I did not have the impression that they were too heavy for the people. On the lower part of these shells — the part that was closer to each person's hind end — bits of smooth, flat patches of moss had begun to grow adding minute touches of brilliant color to the otherwise white and gray backs. The mosses were of two colors — fluorescent green, like that of

new, young growth, and bright, light turquoise blue — earth and sky. Several long green parrot feathers protruded out from under the base of each person's shell. I understood that it was these feathers that allowed the people to fly, to maneuver in the air and to come to a landing. Some of the people did not seem to be able to land very gracefully, but they did not possess as many feathers as a bird either, and their shells were large.

These mythical people were dressed like *campesinos*. The women wore dresses that went below their knees and they were frilly and fancy, but obviously old. The men had on equally dated trousers and belts and button-down shirts. Even though their clothes were old, they wore them neatly, dignified and simple. One woman had on a long white dress that went just below her knees and she was carrying a baby in her arms. Someone was by my side then, but I do not know who it was. All I remem-



Milpa and sky

ber is that I told the person to watch this woman, to pay close attention. She had stepped to the edge of an embankment in the field and I thought that she would leap from it and fly again. I was completely fascinated by these people who could fly, these people whose backs were like turtle shells. She leapt, but instead of flying, she jumped from the embankment high into the air, did a full flip and landed back on the ground with her baby in her arms.

The scene shifted and I found myself in the house of another woman, an artist. Many people had gathered there, and I was among them, but again separate somehow, watching. They were talking about the flying people, the ones I had seen in the *milpa* earlier. This artist woman had a collection of their paintings and each one depicted the artist's perspectives and interpretations of the elements. I remember there was one large painting that covered most of the wall from which it hung. It was of the moon and there was a face in the moon and the woman's guests were talking about how they had heard that the face represented the spirit of the moon. I was sitting at the table among several other people when a little bird flew over to me and lighted briefly upon my knee. I stared hard at him, because it looked like his wings were made of cedar — small, fine branches of the tree that is sacred to the Coast Salish people. One of its many uses is for smudging — purification and cleansing. I was perplexed, because I had never seen a bird with wings of cedar before. I asked the man next to me if it was true what I was seeing.

"No," he replied. "It is an ordinary little bird that is carrying that cedar with him. It only appears as though he has wings of cedar."

The tiny bird hopped down from my knee onto the ground, and I saw him separate from the cedar. He hopped here and there along the floor looking for something to eat, but what he found instead was a razor blade and he began to chew it. I was worried for the bird, wondering whether or not that blade would cut him. In my mind, I was hoping that he had what it took to digest the blade and that it would not harm him. As he began to swallow it though, I could see that it was hurting him. In that moment I felt what the bird was feeling and I threw up onto the ground. After that, both the bird and I were fine. Someone next to me asked me what was wrong. I said, "Oh, I'm okay. I was throwing up for the bird to help him get that razor blade out of his throat."

The scene shifted again and I found myself in an art gallery where there were many more paintings by the turtle-backed people.

In one of them, these same people had transformed into giant bats and they were flying into a deep red-orange sunset. It was a simple painting, but beautiful. A man in the art gallery came up to me and told me that these paintings had been entered in an art contest.

"Did any of them win or place?" I asked.

"No," he responded. "In fact, none of these paintings were even acknowledged or noticed by anyone."

"But why?" I asked him.

"Because nobody understands them anymore," he said. "Nobody understands these people with turtle shell backs and parrot feathers, these people who are also bats."

I wandered through the rest of the gallery by myself,



Guatemala's magical light - Temple of the Sun, Tikal, Peten

going from one painting to the next. Somehow, I understood that these people symbolized love, that they were mythical and real and that I was a part of them and they were a part of me.

* * * *

Journal entry, August 9, 1999

As the sun neared the horizon, its light danced on the surface of the dark, slate-gray waters, the Pacific Ocean, I think, in the Northwest near the San Juan Islands. That was my feeling about this place anyway. The waters responded to the light, illuminating in a shimmering brilliance, like silver and obsidian. My brother and sister invited me to go with them, to cross the straits and visit the island that sat off to the west, now a dark silhouette in the fading light. I wanted to go, but not just yet, I told them. I was worried about our father, who had been injured, and I wanted to go and

check on him. My brother and sister came with me.

We walked away from the shore, inland, and came upon a crowd of people. They had gathered to watch a game where two men were throwing runes, Celtic stones that I understand have been used for thousands of years for divining. I moved toward the center of the crowd and to my horror, I saw that they were gambling with the lives of two men, one of which was my father's. I looked around, but my father was nowhere in sight. I approached the man from the opposing side and watched him intently, concentrating on his every move as he worked the stones in his thick, massive hands. He was smiling wickedly as he let go the runes. The stones tumbled onto the ground before him. They were beautiful semi-precious stones that had been carved and worked into large, round, smooth pieces. Three of them came up turquoise, and two, ochre. *Another winning toss!* As I watched him, it occurred to me that he was winning, because he had the ability to use his mind to control and will the outcome of each toss. I had to stop him, and in this dream I knew I could. Knowing how seemed to depend greatly upon my own confidence, trust and belief in my abilities. Even so, I needed the help of my brother and sister too, and I brought them into the circle, closer to me and the game. The man readied the stones for his next toss, and in that moment, I steadied my gaze and my will upon him. A familiar sensation filled me, awakening every fiber of my being. It was like a surge of energy that was at once intoxicating and illuminating, opening in me clarity, strength and knowing, another level of awareness where I could see that my mind, body and spirit were capable of things I had only before imagined possible. I focused hard to transform the energy that was running through me, then trained it upon the man, directing it out towards him to block his will, to control his toss, and ultimately, to protect my father. *It worked!* The runes were passed to our side.



Fuego sarado - sacred fire. Ceremony in Sololá on Jun No'j (10 No'j) in accordance with the Mayan calendar.

Another man was throwing the stones on behalf of my father. He did not appear to have the same ability to control and guide his will that our opponent had and I was worried about the "score." Behind him was a large round tray that contained all of the runes from his previous tosses. They were much different than those of our opponent. He had arranged them neatly in a circle. I looked closely, and saw that there were several small, stone figurines, each one a different kind of fish. They looked like they had been intricately carved and polished out of stones that were created by the washing of layer upon layer of the earth's sediments. Over time, those layers had petrified, locking an exquisite design into each stone, a record of what had gone before, a history of time and place expressed in earth

tones — white, cream, rich browns and shades of iron-red, from dark rust to pale peach. The beauty and significance of each piece brought me to tears. I thought of my father's heritage. The fish — *salmon people*. His legacy was our legacy. My brother, sister and I inherited his lineage; his heritage was ingrained in the layers of our being, not unlike the stones. In those layers we held not only all that my father had lived, but everything that he too had inherited from his relatives who went before him — all those things good and bad, creative and destructive, family gifts and family curses.

My attention was drawn to three people in the circle who were watching me. For some reason they were interested in what I was doing and how I was reacting to everything. They were standing on the side of my father's opponents, so I assumed that they were against me, and I was afraid of them.

Suddenly, I remembered what somebody had told me earlier. My father was being held captive in a cave somewhere and he would be kept there until the game was over. I needed to find him. Slipping quietly out of the center of the crowd, I headed back down towards the ocean. I walked for awhile, when I realized that the same three people, who had been watching me earlier, two men and one woman, were now ahead of me. Even though there was something about them that scared me, I felt a need to follow them. It seemed as though they would lead me to my father.

I had been trailing behind them for quite a way when I noticed that one of the men had disappeared. In an instant he had come up behind me. He must have doubled back without me seeing him. The other two turned around and stopped before me. All three of them were tall, fair people, with long, wavy, lightly colored hair. Their facial features were distinct, as if they were descendants of an ancient and pure bloodline. Their clothes were strange too. *Celtic, I thought.*

"What do you want?" I asked them in an irritated and angry voice, trying to disguise my fear. "Why are you following me?" I asked, even though it was I who had been following them.

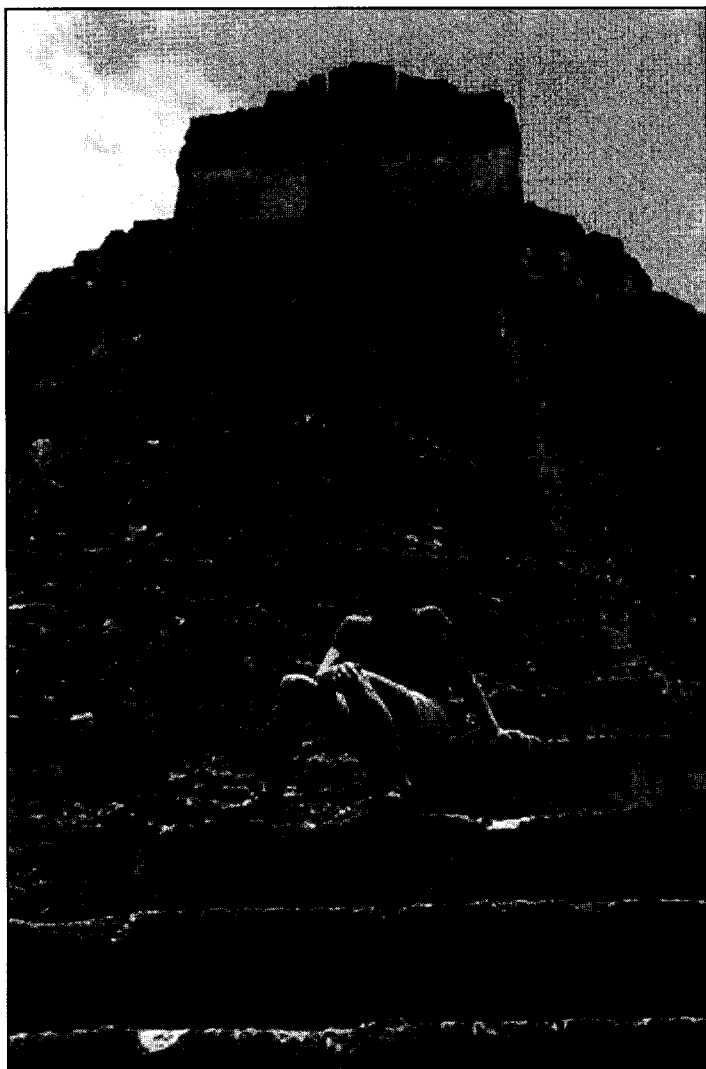
"Do you know how to throw the runes?" the woman asked me.

"No," I replied.

"Do you want me to throw them for you?" she asked.

She was carrying two large bundles with her, and be-

Institute of Current World Affairs



Author in Tikal

fore I could respond, she had opened one of them and placed it before me.

"Pick something from this bag," she commanded me.

"Should I look inside first?" I asked, a little confused.

"Do not look into the bag," she said.

I reached my hand down into the very bottom of the bag and pulled out a clear glass object that fit perfectly in the palm of my hand. It was smooth and round, similar to the shapes of some of the runes I had seen back at the game. Within the clear glass, I could see small, bright, multicolored shapes. It was beautiful.

The woman immediately began throwing her own set of runes. With each toss she would materialize a sheet of paper and hand them to me one by one. Some were like photographs and others like paintings. I recognized one immediately — a painting of a small cove with a crescent shaped beach at sunset. I knew the place from other dreams; I had been there

more than once. One time I had gone there for a huge gathering of people who came from many different places. I remembered arriving that day by bus and getting out on the bluff above so that I could take in the whole view below. Other people had already arrived, and were gathered on the sandy beach below, like tiny ants in the distance. It was a place that I loved.

The painting of this scene was on a double-sided card, with a picture of another familiar place on the back. She handed me four or five more cards, each containing an elaborate scene filled with all kinds of different animals, creatures that I did not recognize. I understood that she was showing me my life and my origin. The last card she manifested from the toss was my father's.

"It is the record of his karma," she told me.

In that moment, I looked into the woman's face and

she turned into my sister. She held the card in her hand and I could see that she too understood why we were being shown this "record."

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, "he is the original one of us," meaning that his origin had given way to ours — his children. Together, we read the card and it led us through the series of events that explained our father's past, his inheritance, our inheritance. It told us why he was struggling in that moment, what it meant and why it was happening. Everything was written there on that card. It showed us how we have a responsibility to uphold in this life, not just to ourselves, but to all of the past and future generations. Now this legacy was in our hands. It was our turn to right the wrongs, heal family wounds, develop family gifts, dream this existence and build upon the intricate and precious thread of life that has no beginning and no end. □

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