

## RED LAKE RETOLD

By Janna Caywood, former MSW Program Coordinator  
jcaywood@goldengate.net

*A very special thanks to social work alumnus, Matthew Thornhill, for sharing his story and reflections.*

### PART I: A Community Responds

It was the second day of spring in the quiet village of Red Lake. The Northern Minnesota sun was bright in the sky, dutifully warming the snow patched ground and icy lake waters. It was a day that began like any other. People went to work. Kids went to school. Neighbors chatted with one another. Elders met and discussed community issues. As the morning hours rolled into the afternoon, it seemed a perfectly ordinary day.

But this day, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005, was far from ordinary. This was the day that everything changed for Red Lake, the day that time stood still, and life as it was known for a proud, strong Nation was indelibly marked between before and after. It was on this day that sixteen-year-old Jeffrey Weise shot and killed his grandfather and his grandfather's girlfriend, then drove to Red Lake High School and shot and killed a security guard, a teacher and five of his classmates. During his rampage, which lasted barely ten minutes, he wounded seven other students – some critically, some permanently. There was a brief exchange of gunfire with tribal police. Then the boy returned to the room where his classmates and teacher lay dead and killed himself.

The horrific event, from start to finish, took less than an hour to unfold. But in that short space of earthly time, the violent act of one teenage boy tore a gaping hole in the collective spirit of the entire Red Lake Nation. The shock and pain were unimaginable. But what happened next is the story that didn't make the headlines of mainstream media. What happened next was a heroic community response, born of the love of family and community so central to the Red Lake people and to Native Peoples across North America, and of the kindness of strangers from around the globe.

"To be present is very important in Native culture," says Matt Thornhill, a St. Paul resident and enrolled member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa\*. Matt is an alumnus of Augsburg College's Bachelor of Social Work program and a soon-to-be graduate of the Master of Social Work program. He currently works as a Foster Care Social Worker for American Indian Family and Children Services (AIFACS) in St. Paul. When Matt heard the terrible news – almost two years ago now – one of the first things he did was go to the Red Lake Urban Office in Minneapolis to talk with local tribal members and see how they were doing. He also contacted Dr. Sharon Parson, Director of Tribal Social Services at Red Lake to inquire about conditions there. "A couple days after the shooting," he said, "she already had more people to help than she had room for."

Several Native newspapers, such as *Indian Country Today*, *Ojibwe News*, *Native American Times*, *The Native Voice* and *News from Indian Country*, gave similar accounts of the flood of help that came. The needs were many and required an immediate response from a range of "first-responders." To begin with, law enforcement from multiple levels of government arrived – federal, tribal, state and county – to secure the area and to launch an investigation into the shootings. Leech Lake police, White Earth police, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Beltrami County Sheriff's Department all assisted Red Lake police in

\*Chippewa as well as Ojibwe are "anglicized" words, according to native-languages.org. Anishinaabe is the tribe's name in the indigenous language – a word meaning "original people"

securing the school and ensuring the protection of the community. The BIA assumed coordination of the criminal investigation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) “to relieve the tribes from stepping over each other” said BIA National Director, Pat Ragsdale to *Indian Country Today*. Native schools across America were immediately placed on high alert for possible “copycat” assaults.

Emergency medical personnel also arrived on the scene and immediately sent the seven wounded students to North Country Regional Hospital in Bemidji, about half an hour south of Red Lake. Two of the wounded, after arriving at North Country, were sent via airlift to MeritCare Hospital in Fargo, North Dakota for specialized emergency surgery on critical head and neck injuries, reported the *Star Tribune*.

There were also crisis mental health workers arriving and mobilizing. They came to help not only the students from the school, but also tribal members in general who were shocked and devastated by this assault in their community. The Indian Health Service (IHS) brought in mental health providers with experience working in Native communities and helped tribal officials coordinate efforts on the ground. A five-member team from the University of South Dakota Disaster Mental Health Institute (DMHI) was dispatched to Red Lake by the Sioux Empire chapter of the American Red Cross, according to the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*. The team has been dispatched nearly 50 times since its inception in 1993, but this was the first school shooting the team has responded to. Dr. Beth Boyd, the team leader, had been to Red Lake just two years ago to lead a workshop there on responding to a school shooting, the *Argus Leader* also reported.

For several days, Matt said, help continued to arrive from everywhere. (There was also *media* arriving from everywhere, which presented its own set of challenges. For more on this see Part II: The Impact of Media.) Matt said emergency responders from all over the U.S. and Canada came and worked alongside tribal first responders, tribal leaders and other tribal members who were trying as best they could to restore some sort of equilibrium. Help was coming not just to join in the response efforts, but also to provide back-up for the Red Lake tribal members in important community roles. For example, the *Cherokee Phoenix* reported that Marshals from as far away as Tahlequah, Oklahoma came to give relief to Red Lake police. Similarly, KARE 11 News reported that Edina firefighters voluntarily took time off from their own jobs so they could cover for their fellow firefighters in Red Lake. Such help allowed these tribal members to take temporary leave from their posts and join with family and friends in attending the many funerals and grieving the devastating loss.

In addition to the professional responders, there was also an influx of distant family members, those who lived off the reservation, coming to be with their loved ones. “This is an instinctive response for American Indians” Matt said, referring to the impulse to come, physically, to the reservation. He tells a story from a few years back of his grandfather who lived in Coon Rapids. A tornado came through his grandfather’s property, but luckily didn’t cause any significant damage. Within minutes, even with the tornado still out there, a neighbor drove up in his truck and asked if everyone was okay. Seeing all was fine, the neighbor drove on down the road to look in on other neighbors. “It’s a cultural value,” says Matt. “We look out for each other.”

Supportive family played a crucial role in the healing process that Red Lake tribal members knew they needed to begin – as a community. According to Matt, tribal elders, medicine men, and spiritual leaders joined with families of the victims and the community as a whole to address the emotional suffering and the fear – because everyone was reeling from the pain, not just the parents of the children killed or wounded. In this way, Matt says, there were many among the community who performed what could be viewed as social work roles – they comforted and listened, brought food and other soothing gifts, communicated needed supports for those who were too traumatized to know what to ask for, organized healing ceremonies and prayer circles, and basically pulled people together in a way that provided a

stabilizing force in the nightmare's aftermath. With so many wakes and funerals to plan and get through, people needed more than ever to be surrounded by family – to take in the spiritual strength offered by the presence of their loved ones. Matt says, what's most important in the immediate term after an event like this is to “attend to the present. You can make a plan for the future later.”

Knowing tribal members living in the Twin Cities area would instinctively want to go to the reservation, Matt set about coordinating funds to get people there. Over half of Red Lake members live outside the reservation, he says, and many live in the Twin Cities area and beyond. Some simply did not have the means to get back. So Matt was able to use his contacts with social service agencies and with metro area tribal members to help coordinate a fund drive to pay for gas cards and other trip-related expenses to get people there. Shortly after the shootings took place, Matt learned that his grandmother's nephew was among those killed, so he too made the trip to Red Lake as soon as possible.

Amazingly, the tremendous influx of people coming to help was fairly well coordinated in Matt's opinion. *KARE 11 News* explained the tribe's process, saying tribal officials and other community leaders simply met each morning at the local hospital to brief one another on the latest wave of responders and then dispatched the newly arrived to where their resources and expertise were most needed. All joined in with Red Lake tribal agencies already at work and took their directions from local leaders. The same was true for help that was requested by the tribe, such as the Red Cross and Beltrami Social Services. “The train was already moving,” Matt said “everybody just jumped onboard.”

In most instances that he knows of, Matt says the non-Native help that was offered was culturally appropriate. When asked how a non-Native person could join in, Matt says they can take their cues from the local people, or can explain what they're thinking of doing and ask if that sounds okay. There might have been a few instances, he thinks, where non-Native counselors wanted kids who just narrowly escaped getting shot to immediately process what had happened. “This could cause more harm than good in a community that doesn't operate that way,” he said. But such instances were not the norm. Counselors, both Native and non-Native, were welcomed by the tribe. Tribal Chairman Floyd “Buck” Jourdain Jr. made it clear in his press briefings that any tribal member who wanted counseling would get it.

But just as important, Chairman Jourdain was quoted by *MPR* to say what the tribe really wanted, really needed, was spiritual support, to help the community heal. To this end, numerous healing ceremonies took place across the reservation, both formal and informal, according to the *Star Tribune*. A peace fire was kept burning for several days outside the Community Center. Sage was burned – a cleansing ritual. Red Lake members also held a traditional pipe ceremony on Tuesday, the day after the shootings, on the front steps of the Minnesota State Capital, which was attended by many state legislators and the governor, according to *WCCO 4 News*.

A tremendous outpouring of well wishes came to the Red Lake Nation. Chairman Jourdain was quoted in several Native newspapers, saying the tribe had received thousands of calls and written communications from around the world. There were phone calls, emails, and public expressions offered to the tribe via the media. Michael Barrett, founder and manager of *Red Lake Net News* told *USA Today* that his site was receiving 1,000 hits per hour and numerous expressions of condolence. Several editorials in a variety of Native papers spoke directly to the people of Red Lake and let them know they shared in their pain.

Matt tells a moving story of two young men, survivors of the Columbine school shooting of 1999, who attended the funeral of his grandmother's nephew. They were enrolled in a college many hours away and when they heard the news, he says, they just got in their car and came. Matt says they were welcomed into the homes of tribal members where they shared their experiences of how they coped.

On Tuesday, the day after the shootings, White Earth Band member, Bob Shimek, organized an interfaith prayer circle in front of Bemidji's hospital. About 100 people attended, Native and non-Native, *MPR* reported. Tribal elders burned sage, smoked a traditional pipe and spoke about the tragedy and the resilience of the Red Lake people. And they prayed. Halfway through the ceremony a lone eagle was spotted circling overhead. The entire crowd lifted their heads to the sky to witness the event, the *Star Tribune* reported. Eagles are considered sacred to Native American Tribes, said Tim Tieyah (Comanche) in a *PBS Religion & Ethics* newsweekly interview. The eagle is regarded as a messenger to the Creator – it flies higher and sees farther than any other creature on earth and so is an intermediary between Mother Earth and Father Sky. The sighting of an eagle when one is praying or participating in a ceremony, he explains, means the bird has come to carry the prayers upon its wings to the Creator. The eagle is also a symbol of strength, endurance and unity.

As overwhelming as the deluge of responders at Red Lake may sound, it really did work out for the better, says Matt, that emergency responders, for the most part, concentrated first on getting there, and second on organizing themselves after they arrived. He contrasts this with what happened in the aftermath of Katrina where, he says, various levels of government slowly pulled together a plan *prior* to actually going to the disaster zone and comprehending what they were up against. Granted, the scale and logistics of the two emergencies are not comparable, but the bureaucratic disconnects between city, state and federal government systems clearly thwarted a timely response in the Gulf States.

There are many lessons the rest of the country, the rest of the world, can draw from Red Lake's response to its crisis. The effective collaboration with neighboring reservations and communities, for example, proved critical in the immediate term for Red Lake. In addition, the integration of community members and emergency responders, all working in coordination with one another, allowed the people of Red Lake to draw on their community's strengths, which include, among others, the traditional Native values of community solidarity and steadfast presence during the worst of times. Also, a cooperative attitude among leaders of responding organizations and tribal officials allowed Red Lake to quickly assess and dispatch arriving help in an otherwise disorienting chaos. Perhaps this is attributable to Red Lake's sovereign nation status as this left no ambiguity as to who was in charge and responsible for relief efforts. Red Lake is also a testament to the vital role positive and close relationships among community members themselves play in responding effectively to a community wide trauma. As Matt points out, investment in healthy, cohesive communities pays multiple returns by lessening the impact of unfortunate events and increasing a community's ability to rebound so they are ready to respond to the next challenge that comes their way.

*Indian Country Today* writer, Richard Scott Lyons wrote this about the Red Lake Nation and its people: "Red Lake will heal from this. And all of Indian country is behind them. There is courage and compassion and respect there – and where those virtues exist, so too does hope."

## **PART II: The Impact of Media**

As wonderful as it would be to end the Red Lake story on the uplifting note of the successful emergency response efforts, there is an unfortunate negative side to the Red Lake story. During the interview with Matt, it became quite apparent that a great deal of hurt was caused by some of the media depictions of the reservation itself. This feeling was echoed in several editorials found in Native newspapers, including *Indian Country Today*, *News from Indian Country*, and *Native American Times*. What Matt and his family found so distressing was the way in which the Red Lake reservation was portrayed – as a "typical" Indian reservation, full of despair and devoid of hope – a superficial if not outright false assessment of life in Red Lake according to many who live there and cherish the place. Because Matt was so generous in sharing his story, it would seem unjust to leave this topic of the effect of the media unaddressed.

Therefore, in an effort to correct some of the misinformation that arose from several (though certainly not all) mainstream media reports, a brief consideration of the “bigger picture” of Red Lake seems in order.

Back at Red Lake, in less than an hour after the shootings took place, another group of people, in addition to the emergency responders, were descending upon the community: the press. Louise Mengelkoch, an Associate Professor of Journalism at Bemidji State University writing for *Columbia Journalism Review* and Kelly J. Hansen Maher, a Silha Fellow of Media Law and Ethics at the University of Minnesota both wrote about the media coverage of the Red Lake shootings. They say at first there were primarily reporters from Bemidji arriving at the scene and they were given unfettered access to the area as needed to report the story. Molly Miron of the Bemidji *Pioneer* told Mengelkoch that she was on the scene within 45 minutes after getting a call from a tribal member. But as news of the shootings traveled beyond the local region and reporters from the Twin Cities and beyond started showing up, the media presence quickly escalated into a media frenzy.

By 5 PM, just two hours after the shootings, tribal officials took the much criticized step of closing reservation borders to all incoming traffic and relegating any media already on the reservation to a single parking lot, said Maher. By the next morning, the border closings were lifted, but the media remained restricted to the designated parking area where tribal officials would come periodically to give press briefings, or to Highway 1, the road that runs through the center of town. Any journalists caught sneaking into the community beyond the main road were told they would be summarily escorted to the border, or even arrested for trespassing, Maher said. Red Lake is a “closed” reservation, a fact that proved ill-understood by many in the media. As a sovereign Nation, Red Lake has its own constitution, its own laws and the authority to enforce those laws as they see fit. Journalists who felt they had the right to move about freely on the reservation and among the community were quickly disabused of this assumption.

Larry Oakes, northern correspondent for the *Star Tribune* spoke with Mengelkoch. She wrote, “He thinks the magnitude of the story and the presence of dozens of journalists from as far away as Sweden created a competitive feeding frenzy, during which he witnessed ‘a lot of bad behavior by fellow journalists.... It was a low point in my career’” Oakes told her. North Country Regional Hospital, where the wounded kids had been taken, made the decision about a week after the tragedy to no longer host press conferences about the conditions of the wounded, reported *Ojibwe News*. During this announcement, a hospital official said “It is our request and expectation that the news media will not attempt to contact the victims or their family members while they remain at North Country Regional Hospital”. In fact the hospital took much the same steps as the tribe did, by banning the media from the hospital and directing them to the designated parking lot reserved for media. Reporters had to rely on the condition reports posted by hospital officials - only when there were changes - outside the hospital’s east entrance, reported *Ojibwe News*.

Certainly the “bad behavior” took its toll. Matt Thornhill experienced firsthand the spectacle of journalists swooping in. There were some among the media who behaved ethically, he says, such as Don Shelby of *WCCO 4 News*. Shelby made a point to get the tribal elders’ point of view, “so he could see the reservation through a different set of eyes” and frame his questions accordingly, said Matt. But some journalists and reporters were doing very offensive things, such as sneaking into funerals and taking notes in plain sight. Press were specifically banned from the funerals as grieving in private is a cultural norm. Matt said other journalists tried to trade *chewing* tobacco for information, a tactless gesture, not only for its misapplication of a traditional practice, but also for the opportunistic nature of the request itself. In one particularly egregious example, Matt tells a story of a carload of journalists who gave money to a teenager in exchange for helping them locate the home of a particular tribal member. They then dropped the kid at a known drug dealer’s house. Later he was seen walking down the road high. Matt said it was

sad how some of the journalists at Red Lake had no qualms about exploiting the vulnerabilities of tribal members to get around the restrictions and get their scoop.

In the days to come, journalists from all over the world would find their way to the inundated village of Red Lake. Maher said Chairman Jourdain would continually repeat to the press, “This is Indian land. You are our guests.” As Oakes pointed out, the media frenzy might have been inevitable, given the attention and notoriety a school shooting invariably commands. And certainly any small community that is not used to hordes of strangers roaming about would understandably recoil at the onslaught. But as Mengelkoch wrote, “The situation dramatized the excesses of both positions – demand for access and excessive demand for secrecy and control – when pushed to their logical extreme. Those two forces were exacerbated by the horrific nature of the crime, the international media attention, and Red Lake’s closed society.”

Perhaps it is this subtext of antagonism and frustrations over restrictions that contributed to what seemed a markedly unsympathetic turn in some media coverage when tragedy turned to scandal. One week after the shootings, the Tribal Chairman’s teenage son was taken into federal custody and charged with conspiracy in the shootings. After that, the focus of media coverage seemed to shift from the community’s grief to the community’s problems.

After returning from his trip to Red Lake, Matt and his family watched the continuing coverage of the investigation on local Twin Cities news stations and were outraged by what they saw. *Fox 9 News* in particular covered the Red Lake story from what Matt considers a biased perspective. He tells of video footage that focused on desolated areas of the reservation and polluted spots, coupled with a narrative description of Red Lake as a wasteland of poverty, violence and drugs. “The community was in shock, and to take pot shots like that – it was very hurtful to watch this.”

The print media was no better. *USA Today* published an article titled “The World Reaches Out to Red Lake.” The following is a quote that is a typical example of how many in the media described Red Lake: “The shooting has made life harder in a place where life wasn’t easy to begin with. The unemployment rate was estimated in the 2000 Census at 40%. Many in the community live below the poverty line, dependent on state and federal aid. School test scores rank among the lowest in Minnesota. Drug and alcohol abuse is a crippling problem, and the reservation is home to a treatment center for juveniles.” Likewise, in an article titled “Red Lake shooter’s bleak portrait of reservation life was accurate” two *Washington Post* writers had this to say: “Like many Indian reservations -- especially the poor and isolated ones in and around the Great Plains -- this can be a dangerous, soul-crushing place to grow up... As compared with the tidy, if soulless, Denver suburb [locale of the 1999 Columbine school shootings] Red Lake exists in a distant and exponentially more dismal dimension of the American experience.” The story then goes on to layout a “bleak mountain of federal research” to prove how difficult “growing up Indian” can be.

One can grant these journalists the benefit of the doubt that their intention was to lament the social environment these statistics describe and to protest the unjust lot in life many young Native Peoples are dealt. But if in fact this is the intention, then this larger point is sadly lost thanks to the cursory treatment of the subject matter and hyperbolic descriptors like “soul-crushing” and “crippling” that leave the reader or viewer to conclude there is nothing redeeming at all about life on the reservation and certainly nothing good about being a Native kid.

What’s missing from these kinds of stories – besides the glaringly conspicuous absence of anything positive at all about “growing up Indian,” – is a paragraph underneath the sobering statistics that provides an analysis of the broader context in which these realities exist. The omission of any sort of social or

historical context for the “bleak” realities gives the unfortunate message that Native Peoples are solely to blame for their own misfortune and negative stereotypes are reinforced.

Native newspapers also gave stark descriptions of life in Red Lake, but the deeper analyses and nuanced views missing in much of the mainstream reports proved easier to find. In an article for *Indian Country Today*, titled “Horror and Hope at Red Lake Nation,” Scott Richard Lyons gave his assessment of the Red Lake school shootings and of conditions on the reservation. He wrote:

“I’m not going to pretend to know the reasons why an individual would pick up weapons and start shooting children. Does anyone ever figure out why these things happen? Did we ever discover the ‘one true cause’ of the Columbine killings? These things are complicated – as complex and immense as life and death and teenagers themselves. There can never be one cause for events such as these, and we should distrust anyone who claims to have easy answers. There are, however, certain conditions to consider, certain questions to ask, if we hope to build a world in which such things never, ever happen. And in Ojibwe country, we do have hope for that world.”

Lyons then gives the familiar statistics of Red Lake’s unemployment rates and struggles with violence. But instead of stopping there, he goes on to place Red Lake’s economic and social circumstance in a larger context. He says:

“Furthermore, this condition of poverty is not reducible to any failings of the Red Lake people, but owes itself to a much larger and irrefutable history of colonialism. Who among us has acknowledged that gaping historical wound and the traumas it repeatedly engenders? Is it possible to understand this tragedy separate from the related contexts of colonialism and community poverty?”

Lyons discusses the prejudice Native young men often endure from the dominant culture and the generally low expectations larger society has for them – all of which are broadcast to them through modern media. And he even goes so far as to consider the even broader context of the violent world kids today are asked to make sense of, most especially, he says, the violence in American foreign policy. He ends with this:

“It will likely be concluded by politicians and pundits that this shooting was an isolated act of violence committed by a lost youth, and that we probably need greater security and harsher punishments for dangerous teens. But clearly it was not an isolated incident. It was a social incident... Let us stay focused on the big picture: the social context in which children, including but not only Natives, are raised.”

Like Lyons, Matt does not dispute that poverty and violence and chemical addiction are problems for Red Lake, and he like many Red Lake members are very concerned about the effects of these conditions on Native youth, and on the quality of reservation life. It is not the reporting of these conditions by journalists in and of itself that has Matt and many others upset. Rather, it is the narrow and superficial way in which the reports are presented, leaving the not-so-subtle implication that these conditions are what define Red Lake and that they are the result of a dysfunctional, incompetent and indifferent community.

Chairman Jourdain had similar complaints when he spoke to the *Star Tribune* about the media coverage. “Visitors focus on crime, poverty and other problems, and overlook the great strides Red Lake has made from the tarpaper shacks and abject poverty of a generation ago... Our lifestyle here may seem simple, but people are content with their surroundings and having control over their lives.” Robert Truer, a non-Native living in Bemidji also told the *Star Tribune* “There’s a wonderful Indian world there that a lot of

whites know nothing about. And it's not all feathers and beads. It's in the way they show affection, with a lot of touching. It's in the way they 'sit fire' for a four-day funeral.”

In an article titled “Setting the Record Straight,” which appeared in the August 2005 issue of *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, academics expressed similar frustrations with the mainstream media. Dr. Jon Quistgaard, President of Bemidji State College, said the media covering Red Lake had “narrow perceptions” and largely ignored the “numerous strengths of the tribe.” Similarly, Dr. Henrietta Mann, Chair of the Native American Studies Program at Montana State University said “I am afraid that many people are still laboring under stereotypes of the poor, drunken Indian, and that America sees us as some kind of relics from the past, as though we were locked into museum cases and were on exhibit. There is just in general a failure to see us in terms of our contemporary significance.” Carrie Billy, Deputy Director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium added, “We’ve been trying to figure out for years how to tell our story in a more effective way so we don’t have to keep repeating what our history is...and what our Indian reservations are like. But it doesn’t seem to sink in because we are always having to explain ourselves all over again, and not only to a new journalist who may not be familiar with such matters, but also to most members of Congress. In fact, when it comes to testifying before congress, half of our time is usually spent going over our history before we even get to the issue that we are supposed to be discussing. Other groups don’t have to do that.”

As Matt points out, the poverty, drugs and violence apparent in Red Lake are *symptoms* of a larger, more complex reality that cannot be explained away by failed community values or indifferent community leaders. It’s just not that simple. There is a broader context that needs to be considered, he says, namely a long history of colonialism, multi-generational oppression and stolen cultural identity. History matters. It matters a lot. And history isn’t confined to the past. It reverberates even today through long-term consequences that don’t disappear just because the dominant culture has moved on and forgotten.

Having said that, no one is arguing that Red Lake or any other Native reservation is above reproach. Quite the contrary. Criticism is a necessary component of any democratic state that wants to avoid stagnation and improve the lives of its citizenry. There will always be legitimate complaints to be aired about any complex society. But criticisms should be thoughtful, grounded in fact, and take into consideration the larger context. Solutions based on an ill-defined problem will inevitably fail to achieve the desired change.

One example of Red Lake criticism that does not condemn the entire community is the newspaper *Ojibwe News* based in St. Paul. Its publisher, Lawrence Sullivan, an enrolled member of the Red Lake Band, is a “persistent soul” who has been “waging a free-speech battle with all eleven tribes in Minnesota for seventeen years” says Mengelkoch. He has been critical of Red Lake’s tribal leadership and of the conditions at Red Lake. But Sullivan, like Lyons, takes the time to provide a broader view when discussing Red Lake’s social conditions, and has many positive things to say about Red Lake’s strengths as a community and as Native People.

In spite of its heavy and persistent burden, the historical persecution experienced by Native Peoples does not define their core identity any more than current social or economic hardships do. These are salient facts of Native existence, but they do not make up the soul of Native America. For this we need only look to the valiant response efforts at Red Lake to see an example of the true core of Red Lake and its people – of Native America and its people. There is a tremendous caring for one another in Red Lake. And there is staunch pride in the traditional Annishinaabe culture. And there is hope at Red Lake. Many, many people with hope for the future, and a determination to continue building the community they love.

As Matt rightly points out, the best way to address the problems still facing Red Lake is to acknowledge and support what is good about Red Lake, what strengths are there, in spite of what seems like



overwhelming odds. The Red Lake Nation has resisted many attempts from oppressive powers throughout history to divide them from their land and from one another, but they have persevered. As Matt tells it, “We are a proud, strong Nation. We hold onto our traditional values, yet we adapt with the times. Red Lake is gonna make it.”

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Sources for this article include: Matthew Thornhill, *Cherokee Phoenix*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *Indian Country Today*, *KARE 11 News*, Kelly J. Hanser Maher, Louise Mengelkoch for *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Minnesota Public Radio*, *Native American Times*, *The Native Voice*, *News From Indian Country*, *Ojibwe News*, *Public Broadcasting System*, *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), *USA Today*, *WCCO 4 News*, *Washington Post*.

Recommended reading:

**Red Lake Nation: Portraits of Ojibway Life**, by Charles Brill

**Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country**, by Louise Erdrich (owner of BirchBark Books in the Kenwood neighborhood of Minneapolis)

**Living Our Language: Ojibwe Tales and Oral Histories**, by Anton Treuer

**Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions**, by Thomas Peacock

**The Healing Blanket**, by Gina Jones, et al

**The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway**, by Basil Johnston

**Shingebiss: An Ojibwe Legend** (a children’s story), by Nancy Van Laan

**Minnesota Anishinaabe: Nations and People**, An Information Resource and Manual, published by the Department of Social Work, University of Minnesota Duluth

**Brief History of Red Lake**, from the Red Lake Nation web site:

<http://www.redlakenation.org/history.html>

**Red Lake Net News**

<http://www.rlnn.com/>

A thoughtful interview by the LaCrosse Tribune with the family of the shooter, Jeffrey Weise

[http://www.lacrossetribune.com/articles/2005/07/10/news/red\\_lake.txt](http://www.lacrossetribune.com/articles/2005/07/10/news/red_lake.txt)

**Sovereignty: Teacher Background Information**, by the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

[http://www.cri-bsu.org/IA\\_web/htdocs/resources/s-bkgnd.html](http://www.cri-bsu.org/IA_web/htdocs/resources/s-bkgnd.html)

Summary of the **General Allotment Act of 1887** by the Indian Land Tenure Foundation

<http://www.indianlandtenure.org/ILTFallotment/histlegis/GeneralAllotmentAct.htm>

Summary of **Public Law 280**, by the Tribal Law and Policy Institute

<http://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/pl280.htm>