

Booshoo! My spirit name is Southern Wind Woman, I come from the lynx clan. My English name is Chrissy Swain, I am a youth of Asubpeeschoseewagong - the ojibway name for Grassy Narrows, which is located 80 kilometers north of Kenora, Ontario.

Let me brief you a little bit about this place. I have always thought it was a beautiful place to live. I've heard a lot of stories about how our people used to live at the old reserve, before it was relocated in 1962. It was relocated to have access to a road, also with promises of a school, hydro, water and sewer. I've also heard the stories of growing up on the traplines. I've never experienced any of these places, but I feel I have because of all the stories. Although I've been out hunting, fishing and picking berries.

Today our communities livelihood still depends on the surrounding nature. We use the trees to keep our families warm in the winter, the certain plants for our medicines, in which we use in our ceremonies and when we are ill.

Every year my mother has taken me out to pick the berries and each time I notice the forest disappears more and more. This year it was only a 15 minute ride before it began to look like a desert. I felt this emptiness inside me. It was like it wasn't only the trees being chopped away, it was also my culture.

There have been other logging companies here before but they would cut and plant, which made it unnoticeable. Now it has become so massive that it has become a shock, almost at the state of emergency. It's like coming home and finding your house is gone. Can you imagine what the animals must feel like?"

I think about it and I realize my son is only 4 years of age and he has already heard the moose calling in fall and he has tasted the sweetness of the berries and the meat. The thing that makes me sad though is that he might not remember those experiences.

He won't remember the freshness of the air, the rich flavours of the wild berries and meat. Instead he'll think that weiners are the best meat around and the sweetest berries will be the ones with the artificial flavours.

Our waters already have been contaminated with mercury, our sacred grounds have been flooded, our berries are being sprayed with chemicals every year, and our forest disappears more and more each day, which has caused a lot of social, health and economic problems, and most of all the devastation of our ojibway culture.

Our TRADITIONAL LAND USE AREA spans 2,500 square miles outside of the reserves 14 square miles. Most of this has already been cut and we are trying to save what-ever is left of our forest. Our battle is against a big company called Abitibi Consolidated which originated in the United States of America. So far we have been creating awareness and protesting. Still the Ministry of Natural Resources has approved for the clearcutting to carry on.

The information I had received was on the forest management five year plan based on how they are regenerating the forest, also to keep animals in certain habitats and the Aerial spraying is supposed to kill off any competing plantation. In other words it's just another excuse for them to cut the forest down.

I totally disagree with everything they say. To me it's all a bunch of B.S. The chemical is supposed to be harmless. They say you can't walk where they have sprayed but you can eat the berries. Apparently the chemical is 2,4,D, which was used in the Vietnam war to defoliate the jungle. Also leaving patches of trees for the animals to live in, it's like making reserves. Are they gonna give them Treaty rights too? In my eyes it is a massacre of the lands. If mother earth wants to regenerate the forest then I believe she'd do it her way.

I think other races are lucky because if they begin to lose their culture they can go back to their countries and relearn their cultures. But where do we go? To a place where there is nothing left? Or a place we fought for and won back before we let a company take it all away from us.

To me it's like if a stranger came into your home with an axe and threatens your family and yourself and carries on to loot your home of whatever he wants, he is committing what is recognized by law and morality as a crime. In a situation like this you have the right to defend yourself, your family and your property by whatever means are necessary. The right and this obligation is universally recognized, justified and even praised by all civilized communities. Self defense against attack is one of the basic laws not only by human society but of life itself not only of human life but of all life. The Whiskey Jack forest is now undergoing such an assault.

This is why I feel that this is a battle I need to fight, for my culture, my background and for the generations still to come. My purpose for this article is to get the word out there and to get the support we need. Thank you for your time and support.

From a youth that cares,

Southern Wind Woman
(Chrissy Swain)