

2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship Honorable Mention

by Rakiyah Mullings, Lincoln High School, Portland, OR

I sit in a chair next to my ill grandmother. She has been sick for many years now and is coming up on her last days so I try to spend as much time with her as I can. She used to be lively, full of color and excited to care for her beautiful garden, but now her weak bones make it difficult for her to even feed herself. I was very young but I faintly remember sledding with her down the big hill near her house after school. Now after school, I sit next to her bed and listen while she tells stories of the way things were before, what she calls, "the beginning of greed and the exploitation of our people." My favorite story of hers is from when she was 9. She and her brothers went to take their dog for a long walk around her reservation and they witness the largest herd of caribou to emerge in over 90 years. She says the caribou were majestic and appeared extremely powerful. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before. She and her brothers stood and watched the caribou in awe for as long as the beautiful animals remained.

Those caribou no longer persist in such large numbers. Now, they are on their way to extinction. My grandmother tells me all was well until companies became aware of the amounts of fossil fuel that resided beneath the community. These powerful companies invaded the reservation and began drilling. My grandmother said, "it seemed like with the snap of a finger, things went sour for the whole community. Homes were destroyed and families were forced to move away. She continued and said, "with all of the commotion and destroyed homes, our main source of food, the caribou, has become very scarce and those still alive stay away from the reservation. Due to this, more families were forced to leave in order to get jobs and buy food because of the inability to continue to live off the land. As time went on, more and more people began to flee and the reservation was no longer. Now the former tribe members live in modern neighborhoods unable to connect with their culture.

Before my grandmother was too sick, she gathered the formal tribe members once a month and on holidays to catch up and continue practicing their native activities. During those meetings, she also attempted to get the others to help her in making a change to protect other native American reservations. Although she put in a great amount of effort, the others failed to share the same passion about this issue but I saw the importance of change from a young age. Now that I'm old enough, in honor of my grandmother and her once successful tribe, I have joined the climate change movement. I relentlessly protest and march for change and for large companies to be held accountable for their destructive actions. What I hope to achieve one day is to see oil drilling companies punished or forced to sufficiently reimburse all the communities around the world that have been affected by climate change.