

The Old Man

From trapline to residential school
to the Canadian army,
he carried a rifle in the Second World War.
The cries of the wounded,
the dying breath of his comrades
slipped into the wind
forever etched into his memory.
He saw the same-colored blood
of many, a mix
that flowed
into the European ground.

When he returned to the reservation
another war confronted him.
Government policies corralled
his people, barb-wired
to confined lands, passbooks and
the dictatorship of an Indian Agent.

He donned the Eagle's head-dress,
lifted the freedom he had experienced,
remembered the equity
among his comrades
fighting on the front lines.
He fought
to unshackle his people in this country
he called home.

He laid down his arms, his headdress,
cocooned in the dark warmth
of the sweat lodge,
head and heart united to
provide for his people.

His actions,
his words,
his teachings,
the ceremonies
he passed onto us

continue to live.

His memory
lives in those who knew him.
Today as in many others
I lift prayer and thought
to him – the warrior
who stood
with grace.

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Parliamentary Poet Laureate**