

# **Nudges from Grandfather**

Honouring Indigenous Spiritual  
Technologies

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Because May asked.





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# Introduction

*I carry willingly the heritage of my Dead  
My children have yet to recognise theirs.  
Someday before they leave our house  
forever, I'll tell them: "Our Dead  
are the splendid robes our souls wear."<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Wendt, A. (2014), *Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*, Huia Publishers, p354



**Is there a “next world”?  
Are loved ones who have died  
somehow still with us?**

Every Faith and culture speaks of a spiritual dimension; an invisible realm of beauty and light, a place of ancestors and spiritual beings. It is not some faraway place 'out there'. There is no separation, just a thin veil. We are like infants in the womb, growing and developing our capacities until we are born into that realm. Although the infant may be unaware of the next world and think it is alone: the veil between this world and the next is the caul we wear like a cloak, the placenta connecting us with our mother.

From my childhood and youth I was blessed to have Indigenous friendships and relationships, and for a time lived on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming. While each Faith has beliefs around the spiritual dimension, many struggle to understand what those teachings mean in practical terms. One of the greatest joys in my life has been to witness Indigenous spiritual technologies as lived forms of honouring intimate relationships with those who have passed on. There are many tools for bridging the physical and spiritual realm that all Indigenous communities around the world are gifted with and like communities of scientists around the world have spent thousands of generations crafting and refining.

Some people understand Western science to be 'objective' and 'universal', however there is growing appreciation in the culture of Western science that scientific understanding is impacted by the very act of observation. It is relative. One might say, understanding is about relationships.

That moment when we have the flash of insight where all the connections are made and when we deeply *know*, we *feel* it in our body. It could be said that we do not know something *until* we feel it in our body. Until universal truths and principles have become localised in our experience, we cannot really be said to know them. Einstein was able to develop his mathematical model of the theory of relativity because when he was a young man he had a dream or vision of what it felt like to ride a ray of light. He then began to translate that subjective experience into mathematical expressions of the universal. In his own later work, Einstein made explicit the importance of subjective experience as perhaps the most important ground of discovery.

It would be a disservice and indeed false to pretend that the perspective of the observer did not impact the nature of what is being observed. While these understandings have emerged with Einstein's insights, and those of others, Indigenous peoples have known this for many generations. It is why stories of lived experience are a form of teaching these spiritual technologies.

Within that ancient form of storytelling is both an honouring of the subjective nature of observation and an intellectual humility that invites the listener to explore their own understanding.

After I wrote the first draft of this book I was asked to explain and clarify some of the spiritual principles in the stories. I hesitated for a long time to respond to this before attempting. I remembered a practice of my Elders. When telling their stories, I've rarely, if ever, seen an Elder stop her or his story to explain what it 'means' to those listening. There is a wisdom to this, as each person will take away from the story what they are ready to understand and that which they are not yet ready to understand will remain waiting for their discovery as they mature. To try to explain it before they are ready could actually prevent them from the natural step of learning it in an integrated way in their own experience later. More importantly perhaps, I paused from attempting to 'explain' because I've noticed that every so often in my life, I have a realisation that a fundamental assumption about reality I had was completely wrong. Over time the frequency of these realisations of my ignorance have increased. Why then should I 'explain' what made the miracles in these stories happen? That would be like deciding that I should crystalize one stage of my ignorance as 'Truth'. So I've made a compromise and sometimes explained my current understanding of the spiritual principles at work. My greatest hope is that this book will invite you to further practise your own independent investigation of spiritual reality. Faith, Belief and Trust are not just 'firm thoughts'. They are Practice.

If you want to understand and experience a growing connection of intimacy with those who have passed on it is vital to develop your own practice and reflection of spiritual principles. Without putting your emerging understanding of spiritual

principles into practice it is impossible to appreciate or benefit from Indigenous spiritual technologies.

The Faiths and cultures of your ancestors will be important to reflect on as you develop your practice.

In this book I speak from my own experience and practice as a member of the Bahá'í Faith. Sometimes in these stories I mention my specific religious practices as a Bahá'í, however I do not intend to suggest that these stories happened because I am Bahá'í or that my understanding is absolute. Rather this is like a scientist acknowledging that his experiments were from the paradigm of a quantum physicist rather than a molecular chemist. Like branches of science, each Faith provides a framework of meaning and potential practice. Scientists rarely question that there is a reality just because each scientist investigates a different layer of the observable.

Let me share a little story that simplifies some of my current understandings of how those in the next world work with us. When my son Enoch was about fourteen-years-old, we were walking together around the Sydney Opera House in Australia. As we rounded the back of the Opera House and looked out over the beautiful harbour my son turned to me and asked, “Dad, do we believe in reincarnation?” I paused before answering and found myself saying, “You know how I love you, right?” “Yeah” “Well, when I die I won't stop loving you. And when I die my spiritual vision will increase and one of the things I'll be able to see is a better understanding of your true self. I'll see your spiritual gifts and qualities. I'll also have an ability to see where your gifts match needs in the world. You and I can stay better connected if you are praying for me and doing acts of service in this world for me. If you are doing that then I have a better chance of influencing you with my guidance, in your dreams or creative thoughts. Your heart is the perceptual organ through which you see your way towards your goal. So let's say that in the next world I can see that one of your gifts matches that of a girl on the other side of the world, I'll look at her and think “I love Enoch and I'd like to bring those two together.” However I can't directly influence her as I don't have any connection with her. However I can look over and see her grandparents in

the next world, so I go over to them and say, “Hey you see my son and you see your granddaughter? You see what I see?” and then they will influence their granddaughter to move in

your direction and I will influence you to move in hers. Then one day you will meet and say, “It feels like we met before, like I’ve known you in a previous life!” and you will experience coincidences and a sense of magnetic connection. So in that sense it is true, you did meet in a previous life, so to speak, because previous generations on both sides worked to bring you together and you will feel that intergenerational connection. When that happens it will be important for you to talk with each other and explore your sense of purpose and shared values. There may be a need in the world that can be fulfilled by your working together. It’s important in such moments not to confuse that magnetic feeling for romantic love... because maybe you are meant to be of service to the world together. There may also be romance, but don’t get lost in that and lose focus on the service together.” I finished and then Enoch looked amazed and said, “I can’t wait for that to happen!” I said, “Well I’m not dead yet, don’t rush it!”

Although there are many forms of Indigenous spiritual technology and each of you reading this will come to understand various forms, I wanted to suggest a particularly powerful tool useful for your investigative practices.

I sometimes refer to this practice as *prayerful action in service to others*.

Let me give some background to how I learned of this before I explain the steps to the practice....

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## Chapter 2

### Wisdom Man In Action<sup>6</sup>

In 2005 I was walking down the hallway of Warawara, the Department of Indigenous Studies, at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. I was on my way to see Sam Altman in his office. Sam was the coordinator for the Bachelor of Community Management. As I approached his office I was reading a paper in my hands. I looked up as I neared his office and realised Anita Heiss, the Indigenous Author-in-Residence, was standing in his doorway talking with him. She seemed to be speaking with a deep

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<sup>6</sup> Camilla Chance, author of *Wisdom Man: Banjo Clarke as told to Camilla Chance*, asked me to write this true account as a chapter for another book in production *Wisdom Man in Action* which follows on from her first book on Banjo Clarke (see <http://www.wisdommanbook.com/>)

sincerity, and I wasn't sure if it was a personal moment; yet I was in the awkward position of having just looked up as I arrived. I briefly paused to decide how I could respect their space (do I keep walking?), she turned to me and kept talking as if I was now part of the conversation and so, well there I was. She was saying, "and I'm on the plane reading and connecting to the incredible life of Banjo and his Faith..." When Anita said, "Banjo" I felt wonder and I remembered that three years earlier I had been asked by Terry Widders, a good friend and a supervisor of my PhD thesis, to share my understanding of my 'cultural blindness' with his class of mostly American students (about 90 of the 100 students.) In preparing for that I had come across a website that showed the face of Elder Banjo Clarke and his face mesmerised me. There was something special about this man. I had included in that presentation, a picture of his face and his words:

*Without the land we'd be lost people. It's a spiritual thing.  
That's where you're born, that's very sacred. That's your  
spiritual home 'til the day you die.*

I had wanted the students to appreciate the difference between being tourists and having reverence for the land they were on. Banjo's love for the land shone in both his face and his words.

So there I was three years later with Anita talking about the amazing way he lived his life; his certitude, his faith. She told me Banjo was a man of great compassion and forgiveness. She explained that she had just returned from Melbourne Australia, where she had helped give out the Unsung Indigenous Hero Award to a woman named Camilla Chance. The Award is given to Aboriginal people who have selflessly done something of service for others. This was the first time that this award was given to a non-Aboriginal person. The reason was because Camilla had sat with Banjo for many years; at his request she put his words into writing, into a book called *Wisdom Man*. *Wisdom Man* became a best seller, and Camilla had arranged for all the profits to go to Banjo's family and towards a centre that would teach people about the forest that he loved.

In that hallway, Anita suggested I read the book, which I did. I was fascinated by Banjo's noble history. He was descended from Queen Truganini of Tasmania. He told the stories of her escaping the genocide of her people, going to Melbourne and then to Warnambool. Banjo told stories of the generations since then, his experience of being raised in the bush, experiences of racism, constant need to forgive people who wronged him personally and for their actions in general. While I was reading the story of his family and the generations, I remembered a TV series that I saw as a child in the U.S., called *Roots*, which followed the life of an

African family from the time of their freedom as noble people, to enslavement, emancipation and fight for equality. *Roots* had given me a deeper sense of story of connection and empathy. As I read *Wisdom Man* I thought to myself, “This book would make a wonderful film that could help Australians to feel that sense of connection and love as well.”

The next day I went over to Anita’s office with excitement and told her what had occurred to me; then I said, “I’d love to help them make it into a movie, maybe I could do something to help? I don’t know anything about how movies are made, but maybe I could do some fund raising or just make coffees or .. whatever I could do to help.” Anita smiled and said, “I’m sure that the movie rights for the book already belong to Penguin and .” My face may have looked a bit sad, and then she said, “But I can give you the contact details for Camilla and you can speak to her yourself.” So I wrote to Camilla letting her know the effect *Wisdom Man* had had on me and what I hoped. She wrote back within minutes! She said, “Call me now...” and gave me her mobile number.

I called her and she said, “We have been waiting for the right person to come along. Banjo says you are the one we have been waiting for and you will help us make this into a movie.” I was stunned, first of all, Banjo passed away in 2000, and this is 2005, so how could he have said that I would help make it into a movie? I

said to her, “What? Me make it into a movie? I don’t know anything about making movies though... *I just wanted to help...* what would I do?” She then said, “Before Banjo died he said he wanted Phil Noyce to be the director of the film.” I asked her who Phil Noyce was and she said he directed the movie *Rabbit Proof Fence*.<sup>7</sup> “You could start by sharing the book with Phil and asking him to direct the movie.” “Where do I find Phil?” She told me he had an office in Fox Studios in Sydney, which was actually pretty close to where I lived. I agreed I would do my best to get *Wisdom Man* to him.

After our call I sat down and said some prayers and meditated. How did this happen? How could I possibly accomplish this? While I was sitting silently in contemplation after the prayers I remembered that the next day was my birthday. I also remembered that in the previous year something extraordinary had happened on my birthday when I said some prayers and offered myself up in service to help some people. I remembered Shoghi Effendi’s five steps to prayer, *which included trusting we would be guided and acting with complete faith on whatever inspiration came after prayer*. I finished the night by saying some prayers for Banjo, and recalling ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’'s words. About people who have passed to the spiritual realm, He says:

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<sup>7</sup> Rumbalara Films, 2002

Those who have ascended have different attributes from those who are still on earth, yet there is no real separation. In prayer there is a mingling of station, a mingling of condition. Pray for them as they pray for you! When you do not know it, and are in a receptive attitude, they are able to make suggestions to you ...<sup>8</sup>

I went to sleep hoping Banjo might visit me in my sleep to offer some guidance.

I woke on the morning of my birthday feeling excited with anticipation and started to help my children (May then 11, Martha 9 and Enoch 8) get ready for the day and for school. Then I looked at the map of where Fox Studios was and started to get ready for my errand. Enoch was the last out of bed this morning so I went into his room and sat next to him and sang a morning prayer. He opened his eyes (I think he was pretending to sleep) and said in a croaky voice, “Dad, I don’t feel well.” I knew he had been having a problem with some bullying at school. For a moment I felt a bit sad and selfish, inwardly I thought, “My son can’t be sick today!” I paused and then said, “You can stay home with me today.” He immediately looked cheerful and said “Yay!” and hugged me. After

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’, *‘Abdu'l-Bahá’ in London*, UK Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982, p96.

I finished getting May and Martha to school I turned to Enoch, “Guess what? You and I are going to Fox Studios today!” He let out an even bigger “YAY!”

I got my copy of *Wisdom Man* and we drove to Fox Studios, Sydney, Australia, which I found was about 25 minutes from home, towards the Olympic Stadium. I pulled the car into one of the parking levels and we started walking. I had never been here before. There was a combination of tourist-type stores and office buildings. There were some extras having brunch during a break for making what might have been a period type movie. The smell of some beautiful grilled food drifted past our noses and Enoch said, “I’m hungry!” We walked over to one of the food stalls where a woman wearing something that looked like traditional Turkish clothes was making gözleme, a traditional savoury Turkish flatbread and pastry dish. It was delicious. (For years to come Enoch remembered this food as his favourite and would ask for us to return.) We walked along eating our hot gözleme and looking for where Phil Noyce’s office might be.

At one point Enoch shouted, “Toy store!” and he ran off towards a brightly-lettered building. I called his name asking him to stay closer to me but he ran faster and disappeared into the store. I went in after him and saw it wasn’t a toy store but a large children’s clothing store. Before me was a sea of clothing racks and no sign of

my son. I started to feel a bit anxious. I called out his name and started to look for him under and between the clothing racks. As I passed the shop counter a woman there who I noticed was very pregnant turned to me and said, “Can I help you?” and I quickly said, “No thank you, I’m looking for my son.”

I eventually found Enoch hiding and giggling in the middle of a circular clothing rack hugging the central pole. I took his hand and we started to head out of the store. As we passed the pregnant woman behind the counter I had the thought “Well she did ask if she could help ...” and so I went over to her. Again, “How can I help you?” and I said, “Would you by chance know where Phil Noyce’s office is located?” Her eyebrows went up with surprise and she spoke with intense interest, “Why do you want to know where Phil Noyce’s office is?” I thought to myself, “Why are you asking me like that?” but instead I started to tell her about the life of Banjo and his great compassion, wisdom and forgiveness. As I spoke her eyes started to brim with tears. I asked her what was meaningful for her in hearing about Banjo’s life.

Her reply stunned me.

“In my life right now forgiveness is a powerful theme and hearing about his story has meant a great deal to me and given me hope. I