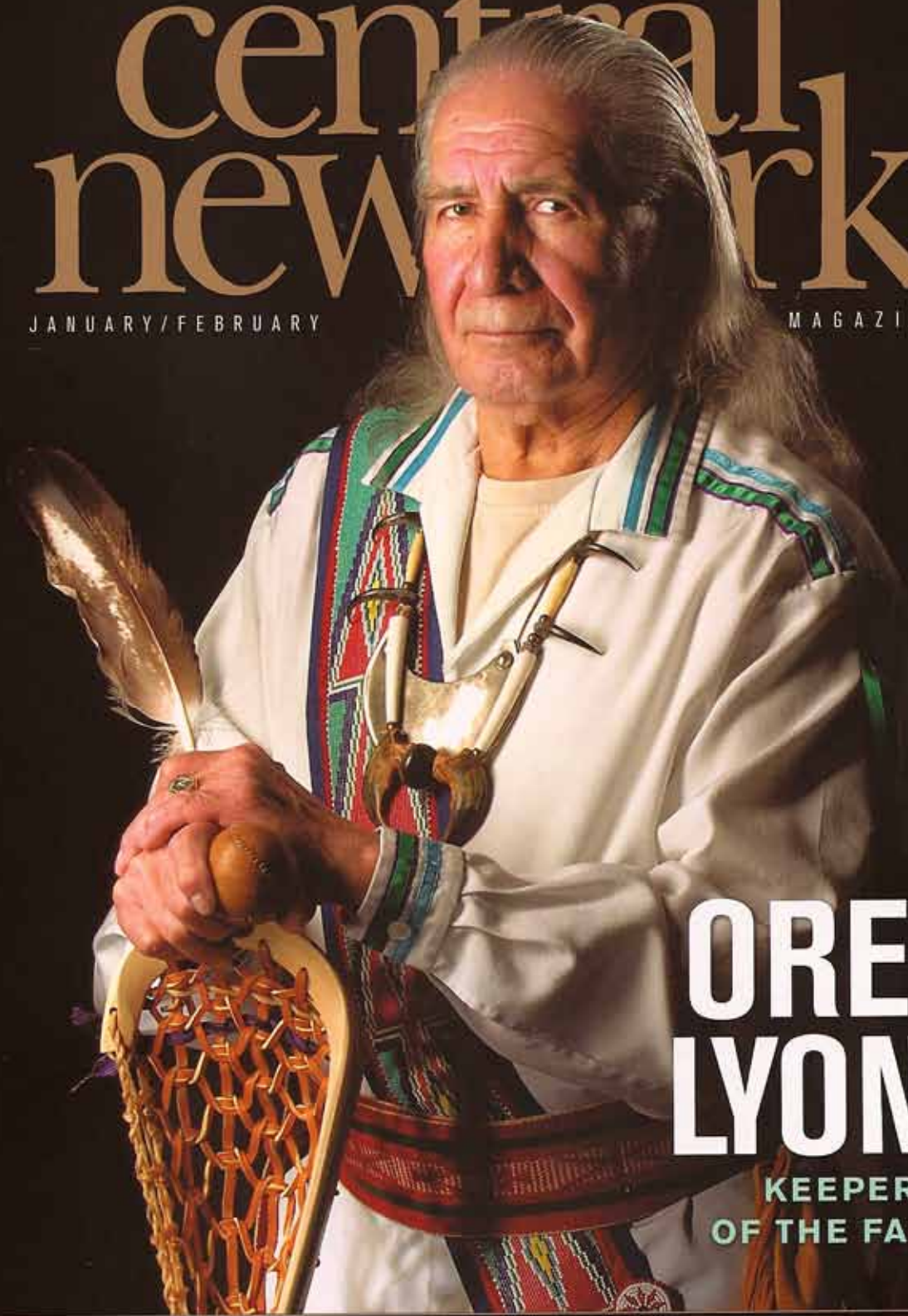


WHY WE LOVE
WHERE WE LIVE

THE GOOD LIFE
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JANUARY/FEBRUARY

MAGAZINE



**OREN
LYONS**

KEEPER
OF THE FAITH

PEOPLE FASHION CULTURE HOME FOOD DESIGN SOCIETY YOU

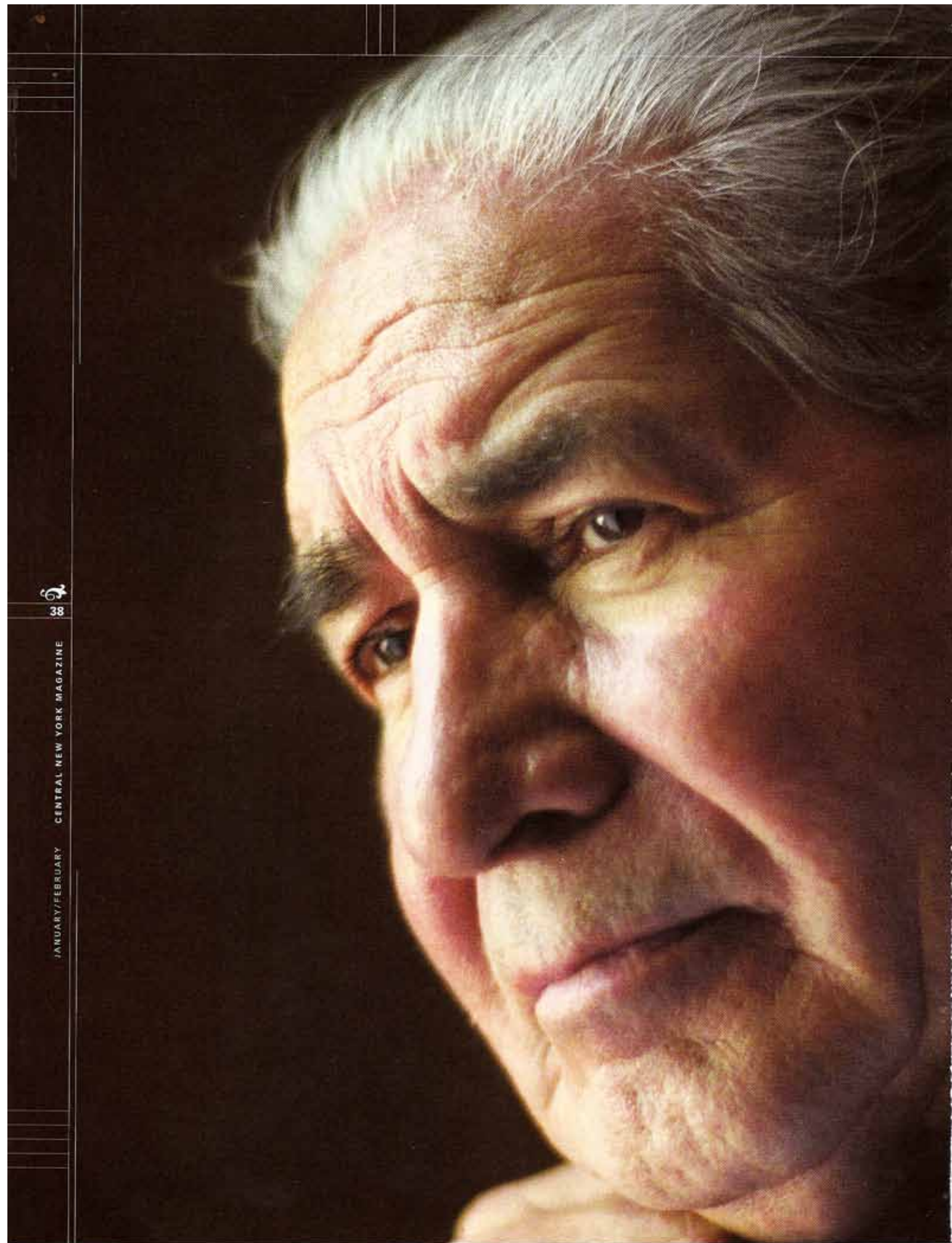
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SUPER CHEFS'
SOUPS

EXERCISE ACROSS
GENERATIONS

'RENT'
BEHIND THE CURTAIN





OREN LYONS: AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

Oren Lyons woke in darkness and eased sideways out of bed. His foot touched moonlit ice, floorboards bleached white by his mother's determined scrub brush. He bent to replace the bedclothes, pushing coats, jeans, socks and shirts gently against his two curled-up brothers. There were never enough blankets. Everything was pressed into service. Seven boys slept in one room. And when the wood burner went out downstairs, their body heat was no match for the cold. ►

TEXT BY M. C. BURNS



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CENTRAL NEW YORK MAGAZINE JANUARY/FEBRUARY

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK ORDONEZ



Oren, 13, was going hunting. He was a Wolf, a member of the clan descended from Senecas on his mother's side, and Onondagas on his father's. He learned the traditions young. The rabbit warrens, climbing trees, medicine plants and fresh water springs were the constants in his sometimes uncertain life.

The old chiefs said the Haudenosaunee (Ho-dee-no-SHOW-nee) — later called the Iroquois by the French — had lived there since land first formed in the ocean. That was when the people got their first instructions of how to live on Earth — a gift from the Creator. Oren made himself a potato sandwich and stuck it in his pocket — a little more insulation. Then, he headed out into the cold, determined to bring home a deer. A year after his father had left, responsibility for feeding the family had fallen on his bony teen-aged shoulders.

Crouched in the snow, tracking a deer on that frozen morning, he could have no thought of the extraordinary life before him. He just knew he hadn't had meat for weeks and his mother was counting on him.

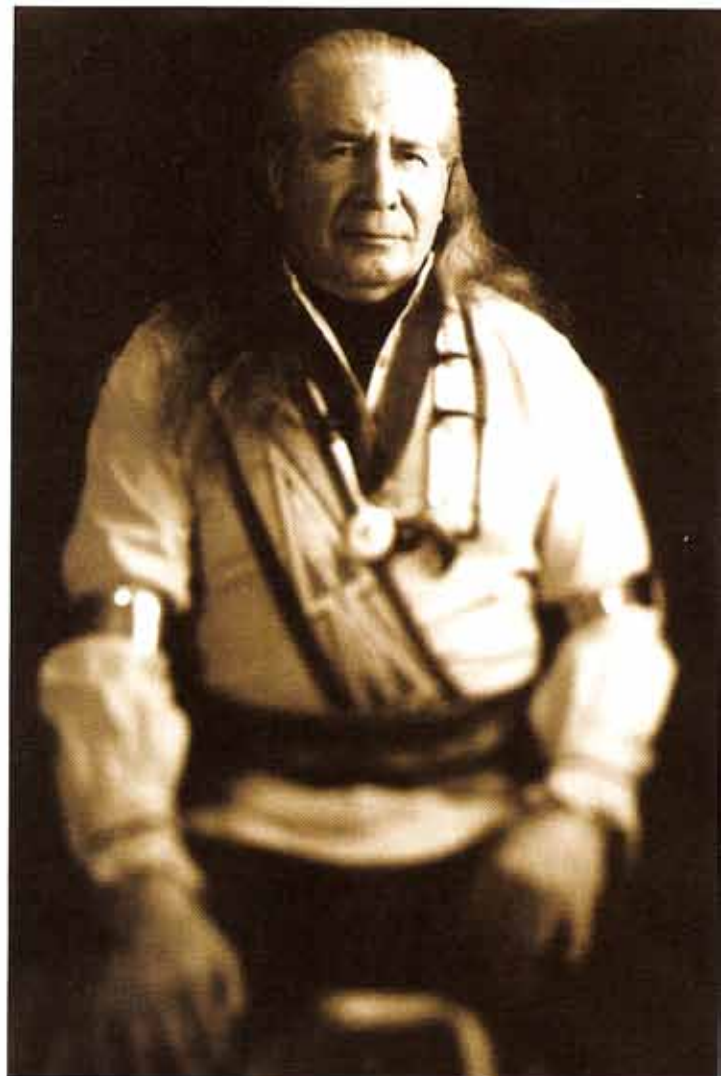
Today, with honorary doctoral and law degrees, Oren Lyons jokes that he is a doctor, a lawyer and an Indian chief rolled into one. A lacrosse All-American, an Onondaga faithkeeper, a U.N. representative for indigenous people, he has met with presidents, negotiated at Wounded Knee, befriended a Beatle, and appeared in a Hollywood film. He grew up at Onondaga and in addition to sitting in council and leading his nation, he travels the world, an advocate for native people and a defender of the Earth.

Oren was the young couple's first baby — six boys and a girl would follow in quick succession. On March 5, 1930, he arrived just as the Great Depression took hold — four months after Black Tuesday — when Wall Streeters flung themselves from skyscrapers rather than face destitution. No one ever said if he was born in a hospital or at his grandmother's house tucked into a hill at Gowanda, west of Cattaraugus Seneca territory.

Named for his father, Oren Sr., he inherited a culture, history and spiritual way of life, grounded in the hills and forests of what his people call Turtle Island — or North America. Oren's mother, Winifred Lyons, was Seneca, the nation at what is called the Western Door of the Haudenosaunee or People of the Longhouse. She grew up help-

ing her mother do laundry for wealthy Buffalo families. The matrilineal tradition of the Haudenosaunee meant Oren was born a Seneca, into the Wolf Clan of his mother. In Haudenosaunee tradition, every child is born into an extended family group — a clan. Chiefs and clan mothers govern the clans and traditional people do not marry within their clans, creating bonds across the nations.

Oren Sr. was an Onondaga traditional believer who played the water drum, a "Kana'tsio:wi," at the Longhouse. Wiry and strong with a shock of thick black hair, Oren Sr. was a



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF OREN LYONS

Oren Lyons became a Turtle Clan faithkeeper in 1970. Lyons is responsible for maintaining the traditions and customs of his people while representing their message from the Haudenosaunee to the outside world community in every aspect deemed necessary by the people. He ensures that Longhouse ceremonies continue and are carried out properly.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF OREN LYONS



ABOVE, As a teenager, Lyons worked as a camp counselor at Camp Onondaga at Long Lake in the Adirondacks. He was expected to dance for the campers and did so in his loafers, the only shoes he owned at the time. "Couldn't afford moccasins," he says.

LEFT, Lyons, center, with his father, Oren Lyons Sr., left, and Irv Powless Jr., right. Oren Sr. was also a faithkeeper and a talented lacrosse player who struggled with alcohol.

legendary lacrosse goalie — known for holding his nerve in the nets. He played in the 1932 U.S. Olympic trials with the "Red Devils" — as the Onondaga Nation team was known. He was also a gifted hunter, with patience and cunning, and was a faithkeeper in the Eel Clan.

They called baby Oren "Sonny," which took on new meaning at his Longhouse naming ceremony. Every year, during

the mid-winter ceremonies, children are brought to the Longhouse and given their Indian names. Oren Sr. and Winifred brought their baby to the Longhouse, where his Wolf Clan mother gave him the name: "Jo Ag Quis Ho" — "Bright Sun Rays." And, during that same eight-day ceremony, lacrosse — as a spiritual practice — was renewed.

Throughout Oren's childhood, the growing family ►



moved between Gowanda and a small, steep-roofed, wood-framed house in the shadow of an Onondaga hill. About the time he learned to walk, Oren picked up a lacrosse stick. Dey-Hon-Tshi-Gwa'-Ehs, or "they bump hips," in Onondaga, is more than a sport. In ancient times, Indian nations would come together for huge tournaments, when 500 or more men would compete. Haudenosaunee people believe they are entertaining the Creator when they play. A Haudenosaunee person can also ask that a game be organized to help them heal. Teams play those games with a traditional deer-skin ball and the person who is ill gets to keep it — a form of traditional medicine.

At 80, Oren still plays in sacred games at Onondaga. Young Oren played attack on the Onondaga Nation team — until one day his father didn't show up. The coach turned to Oren, hoping the talent didn't skip a generation. He has been in goal ever since. "My dad said, 'Don't ever let a player catch your eye,'" Oren says. "If they catch your eye, you're gone."

The old stories Oren tells seem as more like history than memory. For when Oren was born, the Onondagas lived — in many ways as they had for generations. Families tended lush gardens which offered up corn, beans, squash — called the three sisters. Corn stands upright, supporting the bean plants, and the squash vines keep weeds down. The combination works to enhance the fertility of soil, instead of depleting it. Fish was plentiful in Onondaga Creek and, there was plenty to forage in the forest.

None of the houses at Onondaga would get electricity until 1947. There was no running water, and toilets were out the back. Oren's house was heated by a small wood stove, and his mother cooked on another in the kitchen. When he got home from school Oren went into the forest each day to fell a tree. He would chop and stack the wood before his mom had to start dinner.

The Haudenosaunee "one bowl" ethos eased the struggle. Everybody shared. A rag-tag parade of children started in late afternoon. Children would go from house to house, seeking ingredients. "Kids would knock on the door and say they wanted some potatoes. We would give them some and we'd do the same thing," Oren says. "Or, we would forage, go out and find whatever was around."

Children ate wherever they were at mealtimes. The pitching-in philosophy meant Oren never realized he was growing up poor.

The Lyons' house, a ramshackle clapboard partly fronted by a shallow porch, sat in a clearing about 40 feet from the road. Three small rooms were tucked under the eaves — the master bedroom; one for Shirley, the only girl; and the third,

in which seven boys slept, squished into two double beds.

Houses were modest. Banks don't give loans in Indian country because they can't repossess. Everything there is bought with cash, built by Onondaga hands.

Oren Sr. traveled — followed the work — mainly on demolition crews, his strength and fearlessness serving his employers well. Winifred had the practicality and heart it takes to bear and raise eight children and grow crops while baking, canning, preserving and cooking.

"She did the laundry three times a week, heating up pots of water on the wood stove," Oren says. "She did the clothes on a scrub board. I can still hear the sound — zzzt! zzzt! zzzt! We didn't have many clothes, but they were clean. She always kept us clean." The house was spotless too, maple floors bleached white.

When Oren Sr. was home and happy, he would play the old upright piano in the living room. His hands flew across the piano keys, banging out Scott Joplin rags. But alcohol made him mercurial and the children were wary. There were arguments.

"I learned to maneuver," Oren says, quietly.

The first time he saw a white person, Oren was 4. He heard the clip-clop of the pony pulling the ragman's cart down the main road. He stalked the cart for a while, running from bush to bush, trying to get another glimpse of the man's face.

Oren spent his days outside. The boys played daylong games of "hare and hounds," the older ones chasing the younger ones through the forest. Once caught, the "hares" would be locked in a corncrib. "You would really run, because if they got you, you would be stuck in there all day," Oren says.

They played "cowboys and Indians" too. But there was just one problem. "If we were playing cowboys and Indians, everybody always wanted to be a cowboy. Nobody wanted to be the Indian," Oren says, chuckling.

Oren occasionally got into trouble — normally it was for coming home too late. He would be sent into the forest to find a switch and, like many children of that era, get a whipping to make sure he didn't do it again.

Oren and his siblings attended the Onondaga Nation School. "It was like a stockade," he says. "Our mothers would drop us at the perimeter fence. Everybody repeated. Nobody got out of kindergarten the first time. The teachers would say, 'You're not going to leave here until you learn to behave.'"

Among young Oren's friends was Exandine Schenandoah — an older prankster who enjoyed organizing the little guys. When the circus came to Meachem Field, Exandine gathered the boys. "He told us to go around the back of the tent," Oren says. "We would slip under. You couldn't keep us ➤"



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF OREN LYONS



ABOVE, Lyons, center left, and the Haudenosaunee delegation leave Wounded Knee under the protection of American Indian Movement members. While there, Lyons spoke to the common experience of native people, saying, "Before our white brothers came there was a great peace in this land, great peace. We used to always get together. The trails that people travel now, we used to travel to other people's territories once or twice a year to trade and exchange. Down in Acoma, in New Mexico, they have a song they call an ancient rain song. I know every word because it's Iroquois." (From "Voices from Wounded Knee," Akwesasne Notes, 1974.)

LEFT, Mohawks occupied a camp at Moss Lake, near Altona, in 1974, reclaiming traditional territory. Lyons was one of the negotiators who worked on the eventual settlement, which called for the Mohawks to move to a 600-acre site at Miner Lake. It is one of the few instances of indigenous people claiming back lost territory from the U.S. government. Onondaga Chief Irving Powless Sr stands behind Lyons as he gives a statement to the media.



out." Below the bleachers they collected up half-eaten hot dogs, popcorn and drinks. It was a feast.

One evening, Exandine spotted an elephant, chained to a stake in the ground, "Let's give him a hotfoot." He set some paper alight and threw it under the elephant's foot. "It just stamped out the fire," Oren says. "No other reaction. As soon as that happened, we ran. The clowns saw us; they just laughed."

Exandine had a penchant for fire.

"I think Exandine may have burned our school down," Oren says. "We had a wooden school, and when I was in the first grade we could hear feet. People were moving around. Exandine was probably the oldest kid in the whole school. He just opened the classroom door and said, 'School's on fire,' and he laughed. Nobody paid any attention. Then we saw the smoke."

Once outside, Exandine realized he could make some money. "He says, 'Save those desks. I want all those desks.' So the kids go back in and get the desks. There are pictures of the 'courageous' kids saving their desks. Then he sent us back in to get the lunches. He was selling the lunches for a nickel a bag to all the people watching the fire," Oren says. "I wondered later if he started the fire just to get the lunches or did he think of that afterward."

Exandine organized Golden Glove-type matchups on the rez. And he started a Boy Scout troop — supported by missionaries — which made the society page of the Syracuse Herald in 1938.

"I remember the second world war started and we were sitting on Ex's porch, you know, 'We've got to do something, there's a war on,'" Oren says. "Hey, you guys, go get some birds. Don't kill 'em just catch 'em. He was tagging them and sending them off again. He would say, 'Keep 'em flying.'"

When he was 13, Oren and his buddies made one of their regular stops at

Lyons addresses the General Assembly of the United Nations on Dec. 10, 1992, to kick off 1993's United Nations Year of Indigenous People. Lyons told the Assembly: "The catastrophe that we have suffered at the hands of our brothers from across the seas has been unremitting and inexcusable. It has crushed our people, and our Nations down through the centuries. You brought us disease and death and the idea of Christian dominion over heathens, pagans, savages. Our lands were declared 'vacant' by papal bulls, which created law to justify the pillaging of our land. We were systematically stripped of our resources, religions and dignity.

Indeed, we became resources of labor for gold mines and cane fields. Life for us was unspeakable, cruel. Our black and dark-skinned brothers and sisters were brought here from distant lands to share our misery and suffering and death. Yet we survived. I stand before you as a manifestation of the spirit of our people and our will to survive. The Wolf, our Spiritual Brother, stands beside us, and we are alike in the Western mind: hated, admired, and still a mystery to you, and still undefeated. So then, what is the message I bring to you today? Is it our common future? It seems to me that we are living in a time of prophecy, a time of definitions and decisions. We are the generation with the responsibilities and the option to choose the Path of Life for the future of our children. Or the life and path which defies the Laws of Regeneration." At the U.N., Lyons has served on the Subcommittee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council, Washington, D.C. He was on the working group that helped establish the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We were systematically stripped of our resources, religions and dignity. Indeed, we became resources of labor for goldmines and cane fields. Life for us was unspeakable, cruel. Our black and dark-skinned brothers and sisters were brought here from distant lands to share our misery and suffering and death. Yet we survived. I stand before you as a manifestation of the spirit of our people and our will to survive. The Wolf, our Spiritual Brother, stands beside us and we are alike in the Western mind: hated, admired, and still a mystery to you, and still undefeated. "So then, what is the message I bring to you today? Is it our common future? It seems to me that we are living in a time of prophecy, a time of definitions and decisions. We are the generation with the responsibilities and the option to choose the Path of Life for the future of our children. Or the life and path which defies the Laws of Regeneration."

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U.N. PHOTO/ESKINDER DEBEBE



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF OREN LYONS

Lyons first met Mikhail Gorbachev when he was in Moscow in 1990 to speak on the environment. Says Lyons of Gorbachev, "He was a nice guy. He was fascinating. He was very smart, of course. He truly is an environmentalist. He knew what he was saying, he wasn't just reading from some script. He knows how badly damaged Russia is so he's the one that started Green Cross," the international environmental defense organization (www.gci.ch).



Lyons sits across from President George H.W. Bush at the White House in 1991, when he led a delegation of 17 native leaders at a conference on Native American education. Lyons also met with President Gerald Ford along with other Haudenosaunee leaders in 1976. He met with President Jimmy Carter in 1978, leading a delegation of traditional leaders responding to a congressional bill to abrogate Indian treaties. Lyons also represented native people at a religious leaders' White House breakfast with President Bill Clinton in 2000. Each time he has gone to the White House, Lyons has offered his Haudenosaunee passport as identification at the door.

the Onondaga Nation dump, climbing on the smouldering rubbish heaps to see if there was anything worth salvaging. Exandine found a brand-new set of paints with brushes and chucked it toward Oren saying, "You like art. Why don't you take this?"

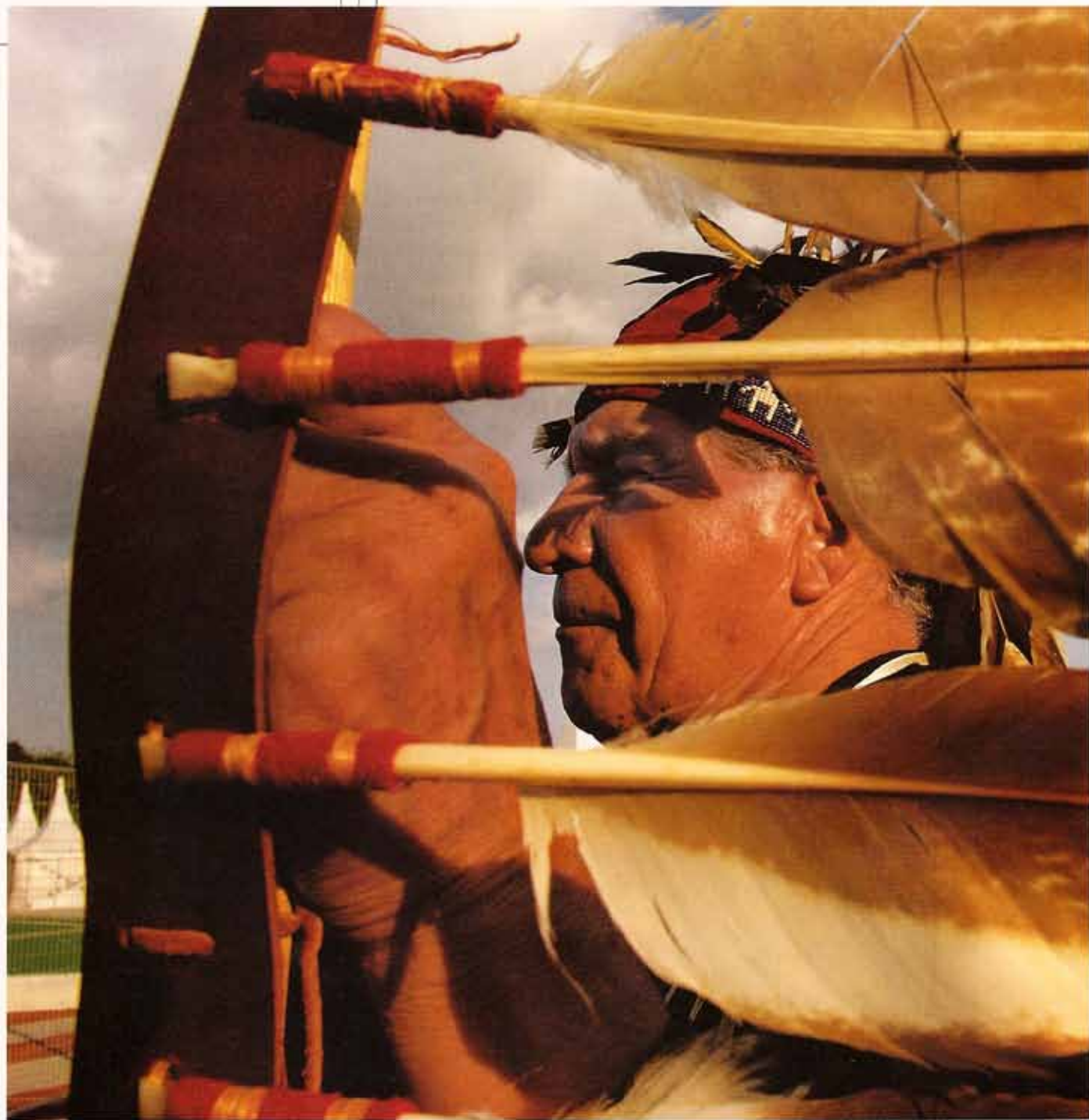
Oren went home and experimented. He didn't have paper, so he improvised. He pulled down the window shades, razored out rectangles from near the top, leaving narrow strips at each edge and then rolled the shades back up. He worked his way around to every window in the house. The first time his mom pulled a shade all the way down Oren ended up back out in the woods looking for a switch. For years after, the vandalized shades stayed furled and Oren found his paper elsewhere. But it sparked Oren's talent.

When Oren was 9, his legs were mysteriously paralyzed. He simply couldn't move them, couldn't stand. "Just stopped working," Oren says. He went from dashing across the lacrosse box to lying in bed at the Onondaga Sanatorium now Van Duyn Home & Hospital south of Syracuse. The doctors didn't know what to do. His dad brought Oren a crystal set and he listened to dispatches from the war raging in Europe.

"I had been there a while," Oren says. "when I heard one of the nurses say 'It's too bad about that Indian boy. He's never going to walk again.'"

Determined to prove them wrong, Oren got out of bed that night, took crutches from another patient and crawled low past the nurses' station, so they couldn't see him. In an empty room he pulled himself up on the crutches, balancing and putting some weight on his feet. He did it for weeks and learned to walk again. Then he was ready for some fun. Oren crawled out onto the second-floor veranda and scrambled down the drainpipe to jump on the swings. He did that for weeks and, eventually, he told the doctors he might walk. "I had to let them think they were teaching me," he says. And then he finally went home — two years after he arrived.

Less than a year after young Oren was released from hospital, Oren Sr. went off with another woman. "We never knew where he was, but when ➤



he left, the house got a lot quieter," Oren says. Although his father had been difficult, and his drinking made his parents' relationship tumultuous, the family needed him. But Winifred held things together. "We were hard work. Some women would just walk away. But she didn't."

It wasn't easy for Oren as eldest. "The family was living on my hunting," he says. Oren borrowed guns from neighbors in exchange for a share of whatever he shot. Oren Sr. had taught him how to track. He instilled respect — and a certain toughness.

When Oren was about 8, he walked beside his dad into the woods. Oren was the "dog." He would collect anything that

was shot. His dad walked easily, silently through the forest. "He used to keep his gun on a hair-trigger and carry it over his shoulder with two fingers stuck in the barrel," Oren says. Then Oren Sr. hit a root and tripped. He didn't realize his rifle was cocked. The gun went off and blew one of his fingers clean off.

"It was still stuck inside his glove," Oren says. "He just pulled the finger of the glove off and threw it into the woods." He took the glove off to check the wound, then put the glove back on and said, "I guess that's it for today."

Young Oren wanted desperately to go get the finger, to bring it home and show his friends. He spent all the next day



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

looking for it, but never found it. His dad never went to a doctor.

Telling the story today, that toughness abides. Oren chuckles. "That affected his piano playing a bit."

Another time, Oren took his slingshot into the forest, sat and leaned against a tree. He drew back a pebble in the thick rubber band and watched for a flicker of movement. A bird landed on a branch in front of him, its black eyes twitching open and shut.

Oren's pebble hit it hard and the bird fell to the ground. It was a tiny sparrow, just fit in the palm of his hand. He shoved the bird into his pocket, then shot another one.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF OREN LYONS

ABOVE, Lyons played lacrosse for Syracuse University alongside Jim Brown. The team went undefeated in 1957. Lyons was named an All-American that season and in 1958.

LEFT, Lyons founded the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team in 1983. The team draws players from across the Six Nations Confederacy. And, although Lyons designed their uniforms and the purple and white Haudenosaunee flag (based on the Hiawatha wampum belt), the team always carries this feathered staff, a traditional flag. Lyons continues to serve on the team's board of directors.

"My father said, 'Oh, you brought your dinner home. You better get busy cleaning them. You're going to eat them.'"

There were other lessons. Oren Sr. told of his sorrow, when out hunting he found a deer with only its head taken for a trophy, the carcass left by a non-Indian hunter to rot.

When Onondaga hunters take a deer, they thank the animal for its sacrifice. They promise to use its body for good purposes. The meat is eaten. The bones are carved into implements. The brain is used to tan its hide. The softened leather makes moccasins, leggings and gloves. The antlers confer power in ceremonies — they are added to feather gus-

CONTINUES ON PAGE 50 ►





ON SPIRI

A WAY OF BELIEVING AS ONE WITH THE EARTH

Spirituality is the essence of our lives. It is the spirit of things. It's what makes a tree grow and what makes a bird sing. What makes a human smile. Spirituality has its own force and has its own being, something you can't see.

It is the power of the universe.

— OREN LYONS, FAITHKEEPER OF THE ONONDAGA NATION

The spiritual and political center of the Six Nations of the Iroquois is a plain log structure.

There are no images or symbols representing the Creator inside the Longhouse. No ornate stained-glass windows, paintings or marble statues.

Where people of many faiths have struggled to find an image of God—to give the almighty a face, a body, a likeness—the people of the Longhouse believe in what they can see.

They take the abundance of nature as evidence of a benevolent creator. Oren Lyons is the faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, the traditional keepers of the fire of the Haudenosaunee, the people of the Longhouse. He spoke recently about the spiritual ways of his people.

"Our ceremonies revolve around a respect for things that live. It's a thanksgiving. All the ceremonies that the Indians have revolve around things that grow: planting dance and the strawberry and corn, beans and squash, harvest. It's always about life-giving things. Animals are always included.

"There are all kinds of other ceremonies, but it's always in respect for the world, the natural world. It's a part of your family. People just give thanks, appreciation, and that teaches respect to everybody.

"We have ceremonies for wind, rain, all the elements. We understand how they work together. Everything works together, they have this global community. It's all



TUALITY

tightly knit and well done."

Traditional people believe they must perform these ceremonies. They say they are part of their original instructions, given to them at the beginning of time.

Spirituality affects all parts of life, Indians who follow the traditional ways also believe. The Great Peacemaker, who forged the Six Nations Confederacy from warring Indian nations, set forth the Great Law of Peace, a constitution that offers spiritual and political guidance. He came 1,000 to 2,000 years ago, and the principles of the Great Law continue to guide the Iroquois.

"I think there are solutions to modern problems in the Great Law of Peace. It all comes back to morality, how you deal with people, what's right and what's wrong.

"I think today's complexities are in technology but the societies themselves are still under the rules of family and the general rules of society. It's just that there's been a real falling away from rules; you just don't follow them anymore. They are not part of society anymore.

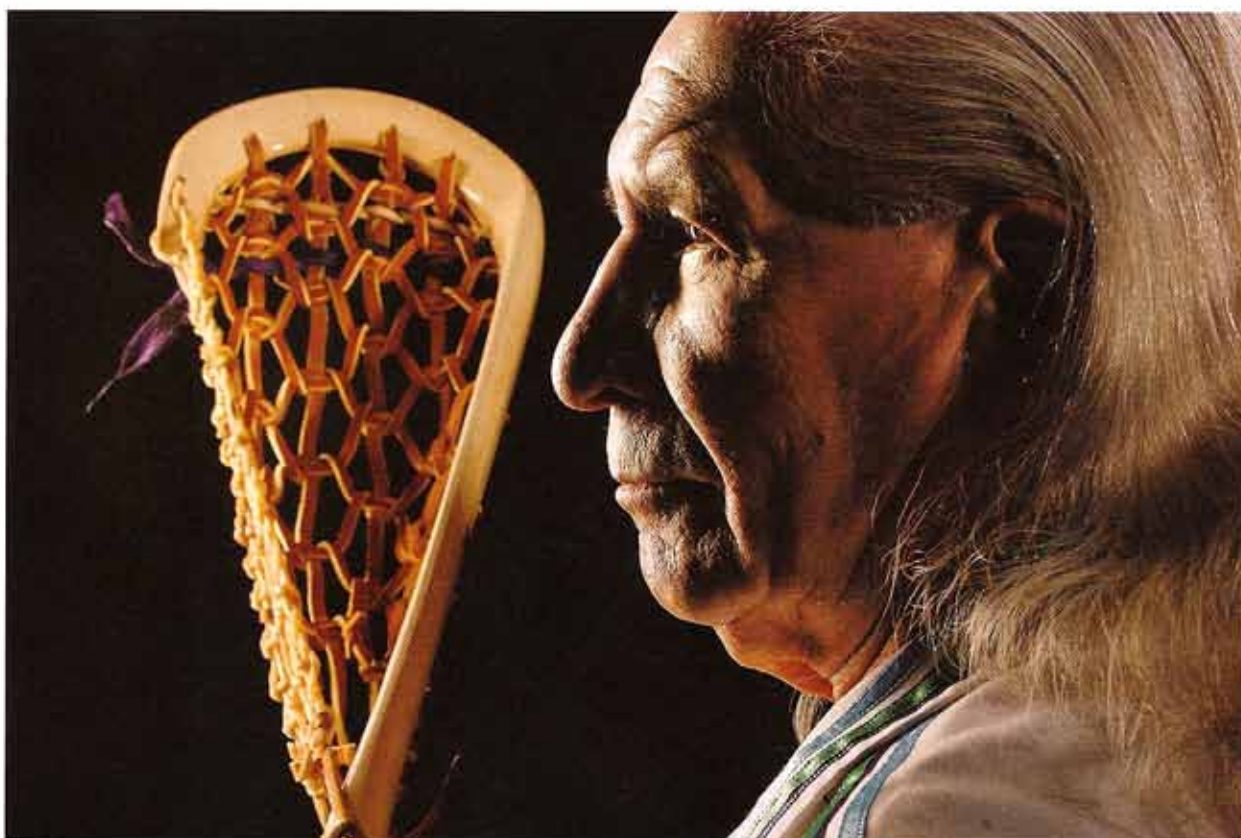
"We just live simply, everybody does, although we do have a few millionaires (at the Onondaga Nation) now

... You have a family and you have a community. It's a lot easier to get along and to have a better understanding of values than if you're out on your own slugging it out out there.

"American society is generally hostile. It's a tough society, which a lot of the Eastern Europeans are finding out now. They're switching over to freedom, but they don't understand what are the other aspects of freedom: You're free to starve on the street. You're free to be homeless. You're free to be without any medical attention. You're free to die out there." ♦

— M.C. BURNS

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MIKE GREENLAR



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

towehs — the traditional headdress of Haudenosaunee men. And the chiefs are given them as a symbol of their office.

After his father left, Oren worked hard to support his family. He picked apples at the Beak & Skiff in LaFayette for \$25 a week. He had a feud with orchard scion Marshall Skiff. Even now, he's not sure why. "We just fought all the time," Oren says. "But his parents knew I worked hard."

During World War II he dug potatoes all across Upstate. He worked in a canning factory in Gowanda and met up with German prisoners of war. "There was a Luftwaffe officer there and he just wouldn't work. He was still in command of the other soldiers," Oren says. "There was another guy named Koster. He had been caught on the Russian front. He was a lot happier to be in a canning factory."

Oren filled his late-teen years working, playing lacrosse and boxing in the Golden Gloves. In 1950, he was drafted. He joined the 82nd Airborne and assigned to train paratroopers on their way to Korea. Oren joined his regiment's boxing team at Fort Bragg but didn't limit his sparring to the ring.



PHOTOGRAPH BY RANDI ANGLIN

ABOVE, now 80 years old, Lyons still plays in ceremonial games held at the Onondaga Nation. **LEFT**, Lyons speaks at the Roy D. Simmons Sr. memorial service held in 1994 at Hendricks Chapel at Syracuse University. Lyons played lacrosse for Simmons. In the background is a portrait Lyons painted to honor the celebrated coach.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

Two SU All-Americans lacrosse greats Gary Gait, left, and Lyons talk after opening ceremonies on July 13, 2006, at the World Lacrosse Championships in London, Ontario. Gait plays for Team Canada; Lyons is the chairman of the Iroquois Nationals.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

Last summer, the Iroquois Nationals were embroiled in a diplomatic conflict when the government of the United Kingdom refused to accept their Haudenosaunee passports for entrance into England, where the international championships were being held in Manchester, England. The team refused the offer of fast-tracked U.S. passports, asserting their separate sovereignty. Lyons, with lacrosse stick, stands with the team near the Statue of Liberty.

On a routine Saturday night, he polished off a bottle of whiskey and a pint of gin before heading to town. "We would fight in this street — we used to call it 'Combat Alley,'" Oren says. "I was known as a good fighter, but I had to hang out in a gang because people would fight you just for the fun of it."

When his regiment went to Texas for maneuvers, it stopped at Fort Benning, Ga. Oren ran into his brother Lee, who was with the 325th. They drank and fought their way from one end of town to the other. By the time his fellow soldiers got to Texas, Oren was accidentally AWOL. It took him days to get back to Fort Bragg.

"I went into my commanding officer and said I was reporting for duty," Oren says. "He asked me if I had noticed the spade leaning against the door when I came in. 'I want you to wrap your artistic hands around that handle and get to work,' he said."

Oren had to dig a 6-by-6-by-6-foot hole. For three days, in the searing heat, Oren dug. Every time the officer walked by, he asked, "Lyons, are you having a good time?" Oren always replied, "I'm having a great time."

In 1951 the order to desegregate the barracks came through and soldiers unhappy about sharing with African-Americans moved their beds outside. "They had to have them back inside and ready for inspection in the morning and then it started to rain, so that protest didn't last long," Oren says. It didn't stop the racism, though. South of the Mason-Dixon Line, African-American soldiers were forced to the back of the Army buses.

Just before his hitch was up, Oren tied a white handkerchief around his knee for his last jump at Fort Bragg paratrooper tradition. "I was the last man on the stick (the line of jumpers) and I hadn't paid attention, I was just looking out the window," Oren says. "I got to the door late and the plane hit an air pocket that rocked me on my knees and instead of jumping, I rolled out, at just about 3,000 feet, and there was no chute. I hit the reserve button and there was no chute. >



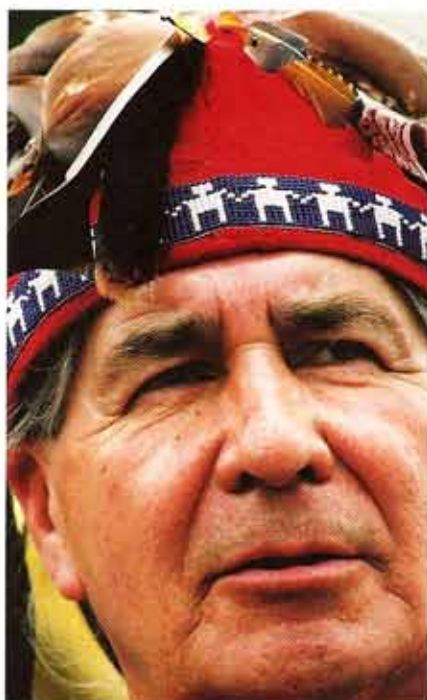
I just fell straight into the trees, blackjack oak, took all the limbs off and came down through. I just remember crashing. When I woke up I was just off the ground, hanging in a tree."

Oren hit the quick release and thudded to the ground. The medics laughed at his handkerchief. "Nice jump," they said. "I didn't say a goddam word," Oren says. "It was just a month before I was going home and I was in the hospital."

His injuries prevented Oren from going to Las Vegas with the rest of the unit. But he would tell you now that was the Creator looking after him. The rest of the guys watched or parachuted through the Nevada nuclear test mushroom clouds. Many of them later died of illnesses attributed to radiation exposure.

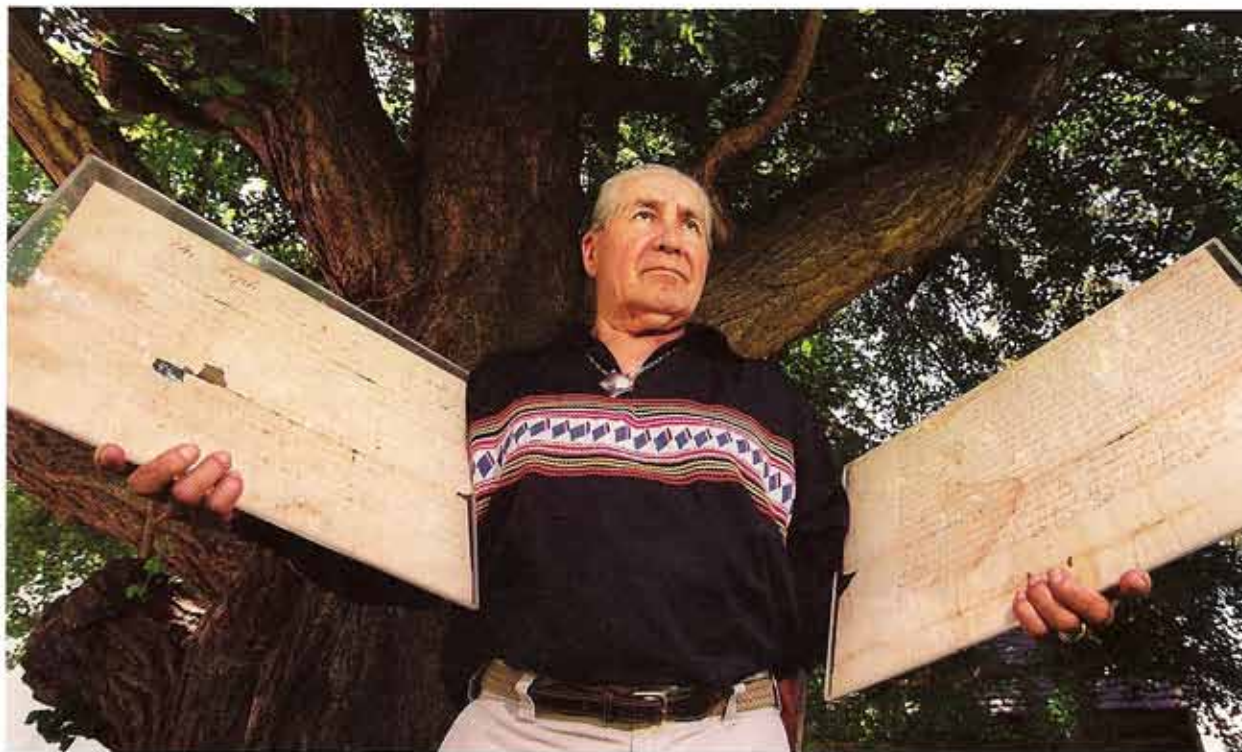
It took three months for his legs to heal and Oren returned to Onondaga. He got a job doing window displays at W.T. Grant, the old discount store. He played lacrosse for the Onondaga Nation and boxed at the Ringside Boxing Club on Salina Street.

Oren also picked up his paintbrushes again, creating portraits of athletes and Indians. He hung them in the sports clubs. Oren took his artistic inspiration



PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM REESE

Lyons, a faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, reflects on the funeral service for Chief Leon Shenandoah in Nedrow in 1996. Shenandoah was Tadadaho, the Iroquois Confederacy's "Chiefs of Chiefs."



PHOTOGRAPH BY AL CAMPANIE

Lyons is the Haudenosaunee representative at the annual commemoration of the Treaty of Canandaigua, which was signed by the Grand Council of the Six Nations and President George Washington in 1794. Here he stands with the treaty. All his life Lyons has worked to hold governments to account for broken treaties with native people.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BERRY

Lyons discusses the land rights action filed in 2005 concerning the Onondaga Nation's aboriginal territory at a news conference at the nation's cookhouse. Attorney Tim Coulter, left, is representing the Onondagas in federal court.

from the natural world and from the symbols of the Haudenosaunee way of life. He painted the Peace Tree, planted by the Great Peacemaker to mark the beginning of the Haudenosaunee confederacy. Ancient chiefs, silent and determined, wearing feathered gus-towehs stared out from Oren's canvases. Spirit protectors — the animals which help Indians survive — and symbols of the clans came to life in the paintings, bears, deer, moose, eagles. And, Oren painted athletes — lacrosse players, boxers and Indian runners — the muscled curves of their bodies a study in power and grace.

When Coach Roy Simmons Sr. saw the paintings, he also saw a way to get an Onondaga lacrosse player onto his Syracuse University team. He sent Oren and his portfolio to the art department, and Oren was accepted in the fine arts program.

By that time, Oren had gotten ►



together with Beverly Cronin, a popular girl on the rez. Oren liked her because she was a bit more serious than most.

"She was a pretty girl, striking really," he says. "She was businesslike, I mean, she wasn't frivolous. She was a much-sought-after girl, actually."

Around that time, Oren woke up sitting on a case of beer atop a telegraph pole on Salina Street. He didn't remember the climb he probably did on a drunken bet. Sitting on that pole, deep in the fog of a hangover, Oren quit drinking. But it took a year before he felt well, before the shakes and the cravings left.

"When I came out of the Army, I was drunk for about year," he says. "It's a way of life, everything is based around that. But I knew I had to stay sober. I remember I was just sitting there shaking and sweating, and the only thought I had was to go over there and pick up a glass. But I didn't. I hung in there six months, seven months, it finally started to clear out."

In September 1954, Oren started at SU, working toward a fine arts degree. He was on the lacrosse and boxing teams. He and Beverly moved into a university apartment. Soon, their daughter Lonnie was born. Once she started toddling, "I said to Beverly I think it's time we got married," Oren says. Beverly's mother made all the arrangements at a nearby Catholic church, but Oren didn't check the lacrosse schedule. He went from the altar, to the celebratory lunch, to goal. It was 1957, the year Oren and Jim Brown would lead the SU team to an undefeated season. Both men were named All-Americans. Oren was honored again the following year.

As gifted as he was in the lacrosse goal and the boxing ring, Oren struggled with his courses. Mathematics was particularly hard, but he got the work done. He graduated in 1958 and headed for Manhattan.

He got a job with Norcross Greeting Card Co. and learned the way to get ahead was to never say no. He learned all about printmaking and treated the printers well. Within two years, Oren was director of Norcross' seasonal lines, supervising 300 artists. He appeared on the TV show "What's My Line?" and stumped celebrity panelists who wasted their questions asking Oren if he carved canoes or sewed moccasins for a living.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF OREN LYONS

In 1992, Lyons was interviewed by Bill Moyers at Onondaga for a documentary, "Oren Lyons — the Faithkeeper." He told Moyers, "I believe that all of this discussion between human beings is one of morality. I think that everyone has to deal with the emotions that are in each individual. And we understand that we have both good and bad in us and that you must strike a balance at all times. This spiritual center then, is what the Great Tree of Peace is. It's a spiritual center. It's a spiritual law."



PHOTOGRAPH BY DENNIS NETT

Lyons and Rick Edwards carry a table of the returning wampum belts after a welcoming ceremony at the Longhouse in 1997. The wampum belts were returned by the National Museum in Washington, D.C.. The Onondagas are the firekeepers of the Iroquois Confederacy, and they will keep the belts.

His son Rex was born, and things were going well. Oren moved his young family to New Jersey and lived in a garden apartment, in Roselle Park until Lonnie spotted a near-by house for sale. Oren used a GI loan for the down payment

and the family settled in. Still, most weekends, he turned his Volvo station wagon north for the eight-hour journey up Route 17 to Onondaga. He hunted in his beloved hills, attended Longhouse ceremonies and reconnected with family and friends.

"We used to go back all the time," Oren says. "I never lost contact with the nation. I was at the ceremonies. I was always there."

The Onondaga Nation Council was down five chiefs in 1968. Clan Mother Rita Peters came to Oren. "She said, 'I am holding five wampums (chiefs' titles). We have to fill these seats,'" Oren says. "The impetus for me going back was my clan mother asked me to help out, to take one of these positions. I said I didn't know. I didn't speak the language very well."

Beverly didn't want to leave New Jersey. But Oren started learning Onondaga. It was difficult and Oren was torn. But he could feel himself changing in New York. He knew he wanted to go back to Onondaga. "When I came back from New York, I came back to the rez," he says. "Wow, I had ➤



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BERRY

Lyons with Jane Goodall, the acclaimed primatologist, in 2006, walking along Onondaga Lake. Lyons said recently, "There are so few gorillas left that almost all of them have a name."



changed. I didn't realize how much I had changed. You've got to be different in New York. You can't be open."

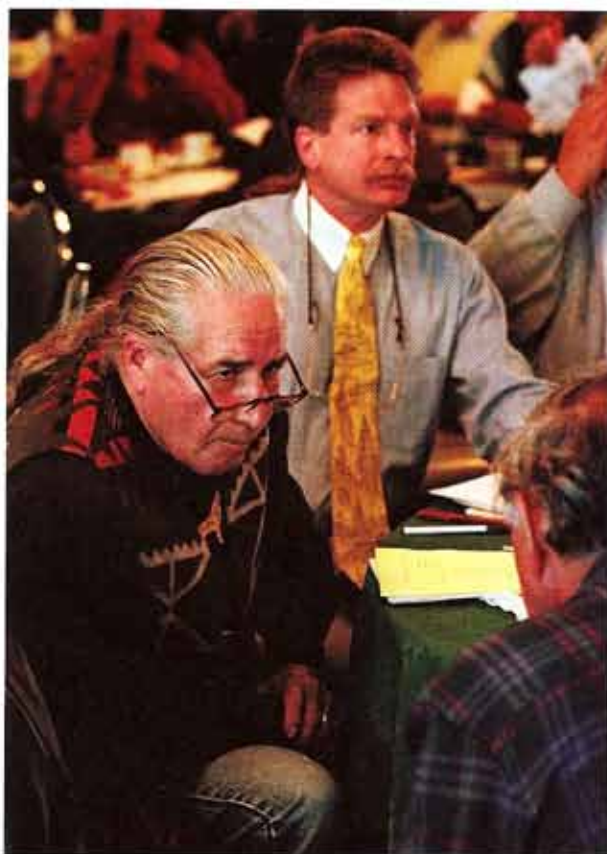
Oren and Beverly separated and Oren left Norcross to go back to Onondaga. The biggest difficulty was leaving Lonnie and Rex behind. Beverly would later bring the children back to Onondaga to live, but she and Oren never reconciled.

Eventually, Oren was condoled as a chief. In a ceremony created by the Great Peacemaker, the spiritual being who united the Haudenosaunee nations, all the leaders gathered at the Longhouse at Onondaga. They spoke the names of all the chiefs who ever sat on the council. A chief rose and told the story of the confederacy, reading from the wampum belts which form the constitution. Oren's clan mother, Rita Peters, told Oren's family and friends: "Don't try to influence this man. He has enough work as it is. Chiefs are in the most dangerous work because if they fail at what they are doing, they may never see the face of their Creator. So don't try to make life harder for him."

She gave Oren the antlers, the symbol of his office. Then, following the condolence, the whole nation feasted. Meat was cooked in big kettles outside. There was corn soup, corn bread and more — all prepared and eaten without cutlery.

"That's because no blood can be spilled on the day of a condolence — not even accidentally," Oren says.

Oren also had to be adopted into the Onondaga Nation.



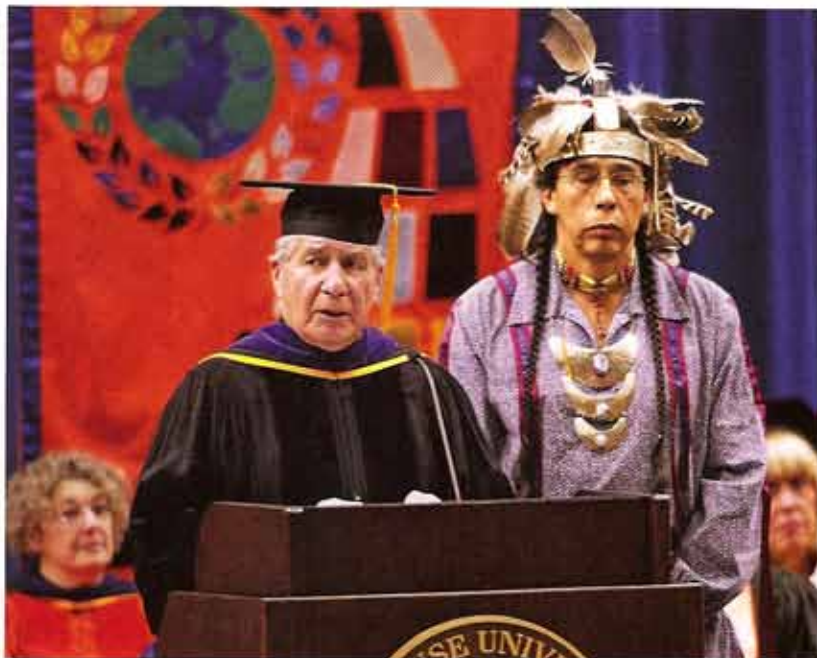
PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE TRAVER

Lyons participates in a conference at the University at Buffalo Law School in 1998. At rear is Onondaga general counsel Joe Heath.



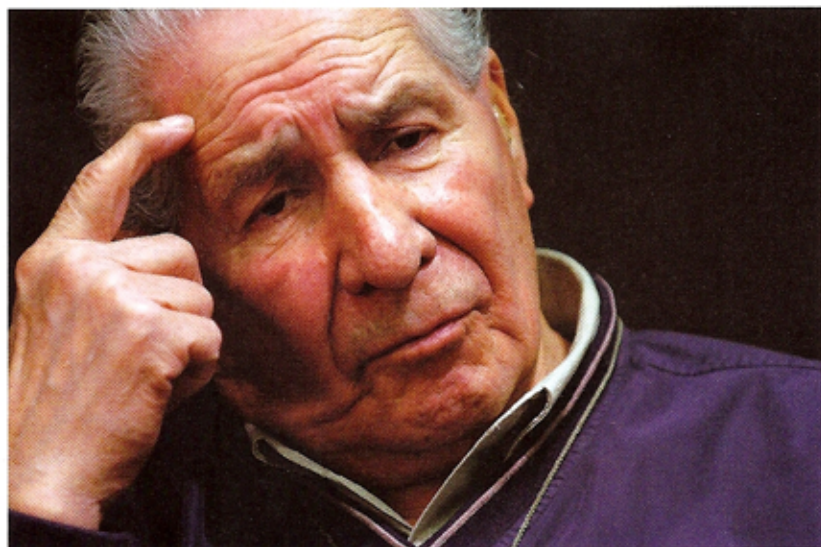
OREN LYONS ON YOUTUBE

There are dozens of videos of Oren Lyons discussing a variety of topics on YouTube. To hear Lyons, go to www.youtube.com and search for "Oren Lyons."



PHOTOGRAPH BY DICK BLUME

Lyons, left, translates a greeting from Sidney Hill, Tadadaho of the Onondaga Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy, at the inauguration of Nancy Cantor as chancellor of Syracuse University.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELLE GABEL

Even when he talks about the destruction which has befallen the Earth and the tragedies visited upon indigenous people, Lyons remains hopeful. Haudenosaunee chiefs are enjoined never to take hope away from people. As a delegate to the Parliament of the World's Religions, Lyons has worked toward repudiation of the Vatican's Doctrine of Discovery. The Inter Caetera papal bull of 1493 called for the subjugation of non-Christian nations and peoples and the propagation of the Christian empire, opening the way for theft of land and abuse of native people in newly "discovered" lands. Lyons has also been exchanging letters and position papers with the papal nuncio in Washington, D.C.

Because he was born a Seneca, Oren renounced his nationality to become an Onondaga chief. Two years passed before the Onondagas adopted him. "I was a man without a nation at that time," Oren says. At his adoption ceremony, people could object. Once it was done they were enjoined to stay silent.

Things got busy from the moment Oren became a chief. Within a year, the Onondagas fought the widening of Interstate 81. They refused to let New York state carve off a slice of the Nation's territory. They faced down the earthmovers and prevented the pouring of concrete.

Onondagas were lined up on Route 81 on Sept. 13, 1971, facing down armed state police. Everyone expected trouble. "We were burning tobacco and we were prepared for a confrontation," Oren says. "A state trooper captain was there with his feet on the concrete and he stepped toward where I was standing on the ground. I said, 'Get your feet back. We didn't agree that you could be on our territory. Get your feet back.' And he said 'Your lacrosse team, they've got clubs.' And I said, 'No, they've got lacrosse sticks. What you've got in your hand is a club.'"

Suddenly the police got into their cars and sped off si-

rens blaring. They had been called to the riot at Attica State Prison. "They went to Attica, and a few days later they killed a lot of people," Oren says. "They were going to kill somebody that day. Attica just came at that time, it was an amazing thing. Once they went through all that up there, they couldn't come back to Onondaga. They were finished. And then we had a talk with the governor."

Oren believes the Creator helped that day, answering prayers sent up on curls of sacred smoke. "He certainly did," Oren says. "We weren't just standing there; we were burning tobacco."

When the state police stormed Attica, 43 people were killed — 39 by state police.

Later, while negotiations and protests continued, Yoko Ono and John Lennon came to Syracuse for her Everson Museum of Art exhibit. Oren showed up on opening night in October of 1971. He chatted with the former Beatle and invited him to stand with the protesters.

Lennon did, and brought a film crew to

gain publicity for the Onondagas.

Lennon wanted souvenirs, so Oren took him to his grandmother's shop. Lennon took piles of rattles, beadwork and moccasins. Oren's grandma said in Onondaga, "Who's he?" Oren replied, "He's a Beatle." She said, "He doesn't look like a beetle. Is he good for the money?" Oren chuckled. "I told her 'Yeah, he is.'"

Oren joined the faculty of the American Studies department at the State University College at Buffalo in 1971. He told administrators he would teach, but he could not sit on committees. His duties as a chief had to take precedence at times. The university agreed. His classes were crowded into a two-day week, and he taught for more than 30 years.

Oren and John Mohawk, a Seneca, formed an academic powerhouse. They published a journal of Native news and edited a seminal text, "Exiled in the Land of the Free" (1992, Clear Light Publishers). He was named distinguished service professor — the university's highest honor — in 2006 and retired in 2008.

The other five days of the week were crowded too. ➤





In February 1973, a group of Lakota and American Indian Movement activists protested government racism and confronted the corrupt elected council at Wounded Knee, S.D. They wanted self-determination and they wanted reforms which would see Indians and white South Dakotans treated equally in court. It became an armed standoff.

A Lakota messenger arrived at Onondaga asking for help. The Grand Council of Chiefs drafted a statement and sent Oren and others to South Dakota. The Six Nations delegation filled three cars with food and medical supplies. They traveled across the country to Pine Ridge, S.D., where they confronted three roadblocks. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the FBI and the Army each had an outpost. The Army had armored personnel carriers and Oren recognized a tanker full of gasoline.

Oren stopped at the first roadblock and went in to a checkpoint to tell FBI agents that his group was there to help negotiate, to try and bring peace. "We looked out the window and they had our car taken apart, everything taken out and it was up on blocks. The doors were off. And I said, 'It's a new car, what are you guys doing? Looking for guns? We're not here with guns.'"

They confiscated the food, adding it to the rotting piles left at the side of the road. "They were trying to starve the people," Oren says.

As Oren turned to go, an agent said, "You go through there and I'm going to shoot you." Oren replied, "That's entirely up to you. You can see that we're unarmed and we have a car that's been inspected by your people."

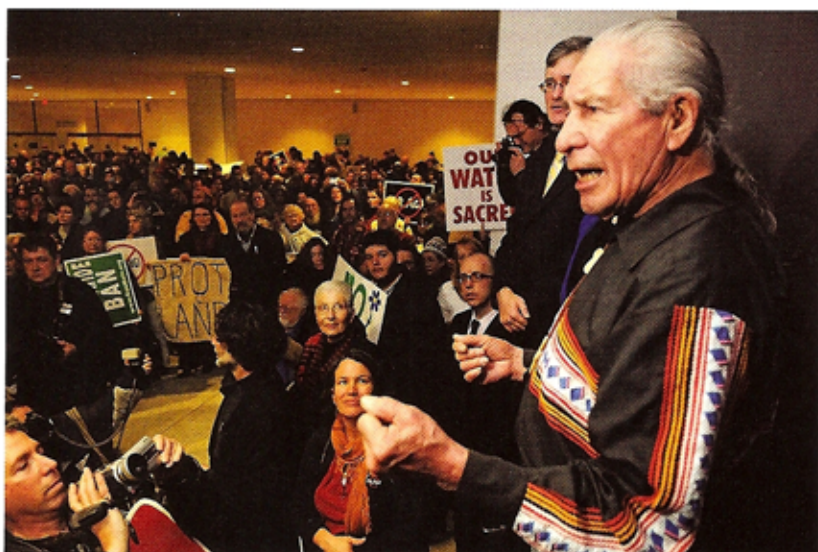
Oren got in the car and he and the others threaded it between parked tanks. They reached the command center at Wounded Knee. The people were dedicated to their cause but disorganized and exhausted from the nightly gunbattles. A rift was forming between the people who lived at Wounded Knee and some of the activists. The Haude-nosaunee delegation helped organize timetables for showers and for cooking. But the gunbattles convinced Oren that no one on the roadblocks would negotiate. Peace would have to be imposed from Washington, D.C., and it would have to be soon. The gas tankers waited.

Oren read out a statement the Grand Council of Chiefs sent to Washington, D.C.: "Remove the marshals and FBI men. They are hostile, and eager to exercise the sanctions of



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK J. MAHAL

John Lennon was in Syracuse for Yoko Ono's 1971 exhibit at the Everson Museum of Art. Lyons met with him and they spoke for three to four hours. Lyons invited Lennon to Onondaga. He says of Lennon, "He was very smart. He really comprehended the situation. He asked questions which were pertinent and sharp. You don't get a lot of questions like that, so I was very impressed with him." The two men became friends and when Lyons was in New York City, he would stop and visit Lennon at his home at the Dakota.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

Lyons speaks out against hydrofracking in January 2010 in Albany.

the United States to subjugate Indian people. Do not prosecute Indians for the methods used to gain your attention, for the fault actually lies with the government of the United States for ignoring Indians for so long."

Oren added his own words of support: "Our brother of 13 colonies, who we held in our arms as a child to grow, now has superseded us in numbers and power. It is a very great and out-sized brother we have, and he leans heavy upon us — it is

a difficult period for he is very strong and he's willful. And I don't know what the outcome will be."

It was as tough to leave as it was to get in. Rogue Bureau of Indian Affairs and FBI agents were angry, fingers on hair triggers. It was a harrowing journey — Oren and the others borrowed journalists' cars, played "chicken" at the roadblocks and stepped on it. Black Power activist Angela Davis, stuck at one of the roadblocks, jumped onto Oren's lap. He got away from Wounded Knee and headed east. He picked up a car in Winner, S.D., and lost his FBI tail. In Washington, D.C., Oren and the delegation met with members of Congress to tell them what was going on. A media blackout — imposed by the FBI — meant little news emerged from the standoff.

"We told them, 'This is the situation. They've moved the perimeters in, there's gunfire every night. And, they have gas. We were out there. We know what the conditions are. We have them written down, and all we are saying to you is you have been told that if anything happens it is on record that you knew ahead of time.'"

They met with Rep. James Hanley, then the congressman

CONTINUES ON PAGE 144 ►



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELLE GABEL

Friends since they were teammates on the Syracuse University lacrosse squad — both were named All-Americans in 1957 — Lyons and Roy Simmons Jr. enjoy getting together at a local diner.

OREN LYONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59

from Syracuse, among others. And, they went to see Sen. Ted Kennedy last. When the delegation arrived, Kennedy asked, "Is Chief Lyons here?" Oren nodded. Kennedy shook his hand and their eyes met for a moment. Oren knew why. Four years earlier when Kennedy contemplated resigning after Chappaquiddick, Oren wrote to him. "I said it would blow over and that he should stay in office. He was a friend to Indian people and we needed him."

Once Oren and the others detailed the conditions at Wounded Knee, Kennedy made a call and barked down the line. He would hold the person he was speaking to responsible if there was more killing at Wounded Knee. Oren never learned who it was. But from then on, things began to improve. Eventually, the roadblocks were rolled back and negotiations began. A peace agreement was reached, but few of the federal government's promises were fulfilled.

After the Kennedy meeting, Oren and the others sought help at the United Nations. They were told that even though the Lakota treaties with the United States were between two nations, the dispute was untouchable, an internal matter.

The Council of Chiefs decided it was time indigenous nations were represented at the U.N. With support gathered from Indians across North America, the groundwork was laid for native people to gather at the 1977 Non-Governmental Organizations' forum of the U.N. at Geneva. Although Oren spoke, his address, "A Basic Call to Consciousness," represented many nations. "We feel the native peoples of the Western Hemisphere can continue to contribute to the survival potential of the human species. The majority of our peoples still live in accordance with the traditions that find their roots in the Mother Earth. But native peoples have need of a forum where our voices can be heard. And we need alliances with other peoples of the world to assist in our struggle to regain and maintain our ancestral lands and protect the Way of Life we follow."

Oren also used that trip to "test drive" a Haudenosaunee passport — a document Oren designed so nation members would be able to travel with their own nation's documents.

At that meeting Oren and delegates started work on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We were left out of the Declaration of Human Rights," Oren says. It would take 30 years to get it passed.

After decades of writing and re-writing, lobbying and politicking, a General Assembly vote in September 2007 passed the declaration. (The U.S. voted against it, however, the Obama Administration recently announced that it is studying the matter.) In its introduction, the declaration says: "Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such."

In the intervening 30 years, Oren continued as a spokesman and a support to Indian nations. On their behalf, he met with Presidents Ford and the George H.W. Bush. He brought calm to the Mohawk standoff at Oka, Quebec, in 1990. He helped found the First Nations Fund at Harvard University, which provides grants for social programs run by indigenous organizations. He established and sits on the Traditional Circle of Elders, a group of indigenous leaders. He has sat on numerous boards — including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting — and has worked with former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his Green Cross organization to defend the environment. He was inducted into the U.S. and the Canadian Lacrosse Halls of Fame, awarded an Ellis Island Medal of Honor and appeared in "The 11th Hour," Leonardo DiCaprio's film on global warming, making the point that the Earth, "has all the time in the world" whether or not humans survive climate change.

Recently he became chairman of Plantagon (www.plantagon.com), a Swedish firm that developed cutting-edge urban greenhouses to be manufactured at Onondaga. He is involved in the fight against hydrofracking, which uses millions of gallons of pressurized fluids to break up shale deep underground and to release natural gas.

"The water has always been good here. We want to keep it that way," Oren told a gathering of people opposed to hydrofracking last year.

Last summer there was an international incident which is unlikely to have happened if Oren had stayed at Norcross in Manhattan and never become a chief. The Iroquois Nationals a lacrosse team which Oren helped found in 1989 planned to travel to Manchester in the United Kingdom to play in the world championships. The U.K. government refused to accept the Haudenosaunee passports (which Oren had been traveling on for decades) and would not allow the team in the country.

The team wanted desperately to play. But not one of the young team members would accept a U.S. passport proffered by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and go to England. It was a victory of sorts for native sovereignty. But it was the work of Oren and other leaders of his generation that allowed the young Nationals players to take for granted that they would travel on their own passports.

Instead of boarding a plane, the Nationals surrounded Oren, cheering, with the Statue of Liberty as their backdrop.

Oren turned 80 in March. But with the continued grace of a gifted athlete, he seems much closer to 60. He might say it's because in early summer he walks the Onondaga hills, searching for his first wild strawberry — believing the Creator made it just for him, with all the medicine within it to keep him healthy for another year. ♦

M.C. BURNS IS WORKING ON A BIOGRAPHY OF OREN LYONS.