There are many books on the market which discuss indigenous ways of knowing, and bemoan western society's seeming lack of interest in anything other than scientific fact-based knowledge. Equally plentiful are the writings of critical theorists who consider today's public education system to be divisive, and manipulated by those in power to ensure that their children have the educational advantages needed to maintain the elite hierarchical status quo.

_Education for Tomorrow_ is unique in that it brings both of these approaches together first by examining the ways that indigenous people and women of all cultures acquire and pass on knowledge, and the deleterious effects that enforced Eurocentric systems have had on that process. The authors then turn to public schools to explore the influences, both good and bad, that today's programs have on the distribution of opportunities afforded to all children in the United States. Finally, they offer suggestions for a revolutionary education system which highlights the need for all students to have the encouragement and freedom to look critically and rationally at their lives and at their relationship with the natural world. This can be achieved by looking back to the pedagogical methods of our indigenous ancestors, and forward to a time when all children, regardless of ethnic or socio-economic heritage, are taught in such a way that every aspect of their lives is addressed, nurtured, valued, and enhanced.
Education for Tomorrow
Education for Tomorrow

A Biocentric, Student-Focused Model for Reconstructing Education

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PREFACE

About This Book

So if today I had a young mind to direct, to start on the journey of life, . . .
I would, for its welfare, unhesitatingly set that child’s feet in the path of my
forefathers. I would raise him to be an Indian!

Luther Standing Bear, *The Land of the Spotted Eagle*

Over the past few years, there have been many books on the market that have
discussed indigenous ways of knowing, and bemoaned Western society’s seeming
lack of interest in anything other than scientific, fact-based knowledge. Equally
plentiful are the writings of critical theorists who decry today’s public education
system as divisive and manipulated by those in power to ensure that their children
have the educational advantages needed to maintain the hierarchical status quo, thus
leaving not only the children of indigenous people, but also those of most minorities
and the poor in a never-ending cycle of inequality.

In this book, we bring both of these topics together by first examining the ways
that indigenous people and women of all cultures acquire and pass on knowledge,
and the effects that enforced Eurocentric systems have had on that process. Next,
we turn to public schools to explore the effects, both good and bad, that today’s
programs have on the distribution of opportunities afforded all children in the United
States. For what are they being prepared? Finally, we apply the findings of liberatory
pedagogies by offering suggestions for a revolutionary education system that
highlights the need for all students to have the freedom and encouragement to look
critically and rationally at their lives. With such freedom, students know that they
can question their social status, and work toward equality, freedom, and change. This
can be achieved by looking both back to the pedagogical methods of our indigenous
ancestors, and forward to a time when all children, regardless of gender, or of ethnic
or socio-economic heritage, are taught in such a way that every aspect of their lives
is addressed, nurtured, and valued, not just their ability to either make money or to
serve those who do.

Since its inception in 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has been the
focal point of public primary and secondary education in the United States. The
opening paragraph of the document states boldly that its purpose is *to ensure that
all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality
education.*¹ These are, undoubtedly, noble sentiments that must be applauded. The
reality, however, is that the education system in this country is still far removed
from offering all students an equal learning experience, and that the overemphasis on assessment has proven to be extremely profitable for testing corporations but a logistical nightmare for teachers. Teaching to the test has become the norm in many schools, especially those whose students are most in need of the help and attention that NCLB promises.

Today, the education system in the United States forces students and teachers to focus on the few aspects of life that are deemed necessary to succeed in Western society—and that, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. It is, however, tragic that ways of knowing that do not fall in line with the system are considered worthless and are actively discouraged. We are then left with young people who are prepared for assessment in reading, math, and science, but whose intuition, relationship with nature, and traditions of their forebears have been abandoned.

One of the main intentions of this work is to highlight the ancient ways of knowing that have been either discarded or forgotten or never known by most people living in the Western world, and to offer ways in which they could be reintroduced into our education system to form a new type of pedagogy which emphasizes the need to educate the whole child, intellectually, psychologically, physically, and spiritually, so that our young people can become citizens who would be considerate of every aspect of the world.

The study of indigenous epistemology is difficult in the United States; research and dialogue on the subject is in its infancy, mainly because many scholars deem it unworthy of study and too far removed from accepted Western thinking. Some Canadian scholars, on the other hand, have been more willing to recognize and value the importance that native people place on knowledge acquisition; thus, much of the fieldwork and research for this work was undertaken among that country’s First Nations and Métis population.

Although a number of universities in this country emphasize that they have Native American writers as members of faculty (for example, Diné poet, writer, and librettist, Laura Tohe, is a professor at Arizona State University, and Diné poet and writer, Luci Tapahonso, holds the position of professor of American Indian Studies and English at The University of Arizona), many less acclaimed native scholars who are not creative writers but are studying or carrying out research on native issues within the United States university system find that, unless they adhere to quantifiable Western topics and methods of study, they often fail to see their work recognized or published. We hope that our work will, in some way, lead to more research in this important field.

With regard to terminology, the use of identifying terms such as indigenous, natives, Indians, Western culture, and civilization, comes from Western education, and we are painfully aware that the English language is terminological quicksand. Moreover, references to Western society, the Western world, or Western culture are not geographically based, but indicate the cultural system founded upon Greco-Roman classical influences. Specific terms may be more correct, but not as easily interpreted. Thus, for the purpose of being more readily understood by all readers,
We have adopted the commonly accepted usages, and we apologize for any breached sensitivities.

It is important for readers to understand that the intentions behind this work are two-fold: first, we wish to offer an overview of the importance of indigenous ways of knowing in today’s world, despite society’s persistent attempt to discredit them, and second, we are suggesting ways in which today’s public education system could be enhanced by embracing the worldviews and needs of all its students.

Finally, the personal narratives that precede each chapter are the work of the first author.
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MTR

First, I would like to thank Michael for suggesting this collaboration; the process has been long, but well worth all of the efforts. I would also like to thank my family on both sides of the Atlantic for all of their support and interest in this project. I am particularly grateful to my husband, Richard, whose selfless patience has been the greatest gift.

LH
NOAA AND THE DEERFLY

A few summers ago, I was in Northwest Ontario, Canada, on a Native Reserve carrying out the initial stages of my search for indigenous wisdom and knowledge. I wasn’t having much luck, so one day I decided to visit local Native mounds, hoping for some insight. The day was warm and sultry with severe thunderstorm warnings posted for that afternoon and evening; my weather radio accessed information services from both the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and its Canadian counterpart. The forecast was important, because I had to travel a significant distance to and from the mounds by boat over a large stretch of water.

My mound tour was uneventful, except for the bugs, particularly the deerflies, so after a respectable time wandering through the woods, I turned toward the small interpretive center. Being hot and thirsty, I went into the café announcing to no one in particular how warm and humid it was and that surely it was going to storm soon. Besides a waitress, the small café’s only other occupant was an elderly Native gentleman who was wearing a Detroit Tigers baseball cap. He was eating a piece of pre-bingo blueberry pie. A minute or two after my professorial pontification, he muttered, “deerflies bite?” After a moment of reflection, I told him “no.” He said, “Hmm.” There it was. Of course, at the time I didn’t realize the significance of his gift to me.

The boat trip back to my island cabin was uneventful and the apocalyptic thunderstorms never materialized. The next morning, I walked down to the dock and was promptly bitten by a deerfly. I got it – the bite and the lesson. If there are deerflies around and they are biting, it will storm. The storms hit the area within the hour. Perhaps the old man only wanted to know if he could get home after bingo without getting wet, but I would like to believe that he was educating me, even though he said only three words. No Doppler radar necessary; deerflies don’t show up on radar anyway.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Objectivity requires an ability to stand apart – but there is no “apart.” We are inescapably of the universe.

John Broomfield, *Other Ways of Knowing*

That deerflies only bite before a storm is not lost knowledge, but rather knowledge that is being or has been ignored or disregarded as irrelevant. How many other examples are there of untapped knowledge that could benefit today’s society and, on a larger scale, alter the way that Westernized human beings view the world and their place in it?

Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, scholars in the Western world have come to consider knowledge as being derived either from an authoritative source or through scientific objectivity; the latter being a way of learning that strips away all that is not derived deductively. Herein, however, lies a paradox; to be objective, researchers must shed their cultural lens and the cultural implications of their subjects: and by doing so, they are forced to ignore intuitively and experientially-derived knowledge, and the myriad educational or cultural outliers that they have been taught to deem irrelevant to scholarly investigation. Failure to siphon such data leaves them vulnerable to criticism that their research is “soft” and therefore not to be taken seriously within academic institutions. It is unlikely that any meteorology program teaches deerfly behavior.

Over the past twenty or so years the works of “new-age philosophers” such as James Redfield,1 Carlos Castaneda,2 and Colin Wilson3 have gained a steady and significant place in bookstores and, indeed, on personal bookshelves throughout the Western world. It is perhaps hard to imagine how, or why, such volumes have touched modern, technology-dependent consumers, but Redfield’s *The Celestine Prophecy,*4 that he had to self-publish as a paperback in 1993 before a hardcover version was produced commercially in 1994, has enjoyed enormous success both in the United States and abroad, including more than two years on the New York Times best seller list. By 2004, according to Redfield’s website Celestinevision.com,5 he had over 20 million books in print in over 50 languages.

The writings of Carlos Castaneda, notably *The Teachings of Don Juan,*6 also need to be taken seriously. This is not because they were all best sellers and wildly popular among the general public, but because their meaning is anything but simplistic, and most academics seem unwilling, or unable, to critique them. Colin Wilson’s novel, *The Philosopher’s Stone,*7 albeit somewhat less popular than the aforementioned works, provides a fascinating vision of human potential that few can imagine, and suggests that an extraordinary untapped power resides within humans.
The popularity of this group of authors may lie in their ability to make important philosophical ideas accessible and interesting to the general public by including culturally-based thinking in their sphere of knowledge, and thus positing new theories that include pre-literate knowledge as a way of knowing. While authors such as these have endured their share of ridicule and derision from “learned” critics, many readers conclude that their message ought to be heeded. After all, they of all writers seem to have provided the general public with alternative worldviews for the future, and a grounded sense of purpose that many people of Western society have lost as they engage in the constant struggle to keep up with technological progress and the pressure to achieve.

At the other extreme are the “academic philosophers” who reach only a select few. An interesting article, entitled “The Care and Feeding of the Reader,” 8 in the September 14, 2007 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education shows that of the almost 1.5 million books sold in the United States during 2006, only 483 sold more than 100,000 copies. The article’s author, Rachel Toor, comments that very few of the 483 had been written by academics, and of those even fewer were actually read, because “…many books by academics are, frankly, nothing more than data dumps. Their authors assume that information is enough.”9 Yet these are the people who define and control what is considered knowledge. So why is it that non-academics are able to connect with their readers more successfully than those who dedicate their lives to garnering and disseminating knowledge? According to Toor, writers who succeed in reaching a wide audience do so because they care about their readers enough to ensure, not just that they are informed, but also that they find pleasure in reading the text.10 The writers of best sellers are not writing to ensure tenure or promotion, or to be able to add a line to their curriculum vitae. They are writing because they have a story to tell, or perhaps because they feel that they have an answer to a societal problem.

University professors, whose audiences are often limited, make sparse mention in their scholarly texts of knowledge derived through non-Western ways. Some would also say that by using language that is exclusive only to fellow scholars, the educational elite is ensuring that they determine how knowledge is derived, what is worthy of learning, and how it will be taught. Non-academics could be forgiven for thinking that the system is designed intentionally to exclude the general public. That would explain why the new-age philosophers are considered by those in the academic world to be outliers, despite their significant popular success, and why they are, for the most part, not only ignored as Western research demands, but also, and even worse, scorned and discredited throughout the temples of empiricism. But the phenomenal success of The Celestine Prophecy and The Teachings of Don Juan series surely suggests that scientifically-derived knowledge is failing to serve all the needs of Western society. One main difference between the traditional academic writing and the work of the so-called outliers is that the latter embraces divergent means of acquiring knowledge; traditional and non-traditional, ancient and modern, deductive and inductive.

Of equal concern, however, is the knowledge that the educational curriculum in United States schools is, to a large extent, determined by these same academics, and
thus promotes only information or subjects that they value. Of course, the political system of the country also plays a large part in determining what will be taught in schools, because the politics of public school funding and the ideology promoted in the curriculum are closely linked. The result is that young people in the United States are herded into an education system that is designed to favor one type of student; the English-speaking, relatively wealthy American with no special needs, and whose parents have been able to choose to live in an affluent school district. At school, these students have access to the latest technology and textbooks, experienced teachers who are highly qualified to teach in their particular field, athletic facilities to ensure fitness, and ample counselors to provide scholarship opportunities. At the same time, they tend to have parents who have the educational background, determination, and time to encourage and support active learning, and a peer group that shares their educational goals. These young people expect, and are expected, to become tomorrow’s leaders, thus continuing their parents’ legacy and sense of entitlement.

On the other side of this educational divide are young people whose experiences with the educational process leave them with few skills and even fewer career options. For these students, school offers little hope for the future; the schools are often under-funded (there is no wealthy Parent Teacher Association (PTA) here), the overall standard of teaching is poor (experienced and effective teachers have the freedom to chose their workplace, and tend to prefer the security and comfort of affluent school districts), parents usually have neither the education nor the means to support their children’s aspirations, and, importantly, their peer group does not want them to succeed (“crabs in the bucket” syndrome). Unfortunately, this is the daily reality for many minority students. While people in this country talk incessantly about multiculturalism and the benefits of a diverse society, the education system continues to favor those of Northern European descent—the very people whose societal norms have been dictated by Greek and Roman doctrine and methods of teaching. Native people, minority citizens, and immigrants from other parts of the world, especially those who are not native English speakers, are often marginalized because their ways of learning and prior knowledge are not consistent with traditional scientifically objective methodology.

Many observers of indigenous people and their ways of knowing and accumulating knowledge have learned and, thus, continually insist that before people can take part fully in all aspects of humanity, they must integrate additional ways of learning into every facet of their lives. And, if education is the means by which young people become knowledgeable and useful members of society, their course of study must integrate both Western and native ways of knowing. This can be achieved by adopting a unified approach to education that equips students with the tools to embrace not only empirical science, but also the many less easily defined criteria that indigenous people have known for millennia and are necessary for a better future.

The subsequent chapters in this book will look at: how people, both indigenous and Western, gain and use knowledge (chapters 2–5); how harmful a forced education system can be (chapter 6); the different ways that people use language
to communicate and learn (chapter 7); and the alienating effects of separating people from their knowledge base and culture (chapter 8). In the final three chapters (9–11), we will suggest ways in which the present Western education model, which is, by all accounts, failing our children, should be replaced by a new system that educates every aspect of every child. A plan that calls for a total rethink of our education system seems to be a tall order and will be discounted by some as a preposterous notion, but most of us know that our present system is broken and that our children deserve much better.
I recall that in my youth I often wondered why at certain times of the year all the Monarch butterflies suddenly started flying south. This wonder was recently revisited when I realized I live near a “butterfly tree.” Most evenings I walk my dog near a pond in south Texas, and I have found that for just a few evenings each fall, a particular tree next to the pond becomes alive with hundreds, if not thousands, of butterflies. Astonishingly, the surrounding trees have no butterflies. This tree, or its location, is special, but the mystery is, how do all the butterflies in the area not only find it, but also know that it is theirs? Surely there are many such trees that serve as hostels for the Monarchs during their long journey, and as evening comes, butterflies go to them, but it is the accuracy of their navigation that is fascinating. As I watch, these beautiful insects are not wandering around looking for a place to rest; they simply fly from all different directions directly to this particular tree. My observations help me to recall the sacred connection between animal and place. There was a time when I had seemingly forgotten, but no matter where my wanderings lead, something always reminds me.

I was taught to hunt and fish as a child and learned that both were important rituals within my community. As an adult, I am always struck by how much more attuned I am to my surroundings after only a relatively short time in the woods. I certainly see and hear things during the first few days, but as time passes, my sense of hearing, seeing, and intuiting increase profoundly as my city-born dullness dissipates. It is as if a fog has lifted. The very presence of the natural world seems to wash out the sensory pollution of the modern materialistic society.

For those who live in a city with a large population, the grime is thicker and takes longer to cleanse. I live in a large city and, although near an extensive green area, I am always aware of constant ambient noise—even during the so-called quiet times of the day. During rush hour, there is a background din that must surely take its toll on the senses. When I retreat to the woods of the Minnesota-Canadian border region, I am always surprised by the silence and by the slow pace of life. The first few days are busy, but once I have completed my post-arrival tasks, it is difficult to overcome feelings of boredom and inertia. That is surely a product of my modern way of life. Unfortunately, not only has Western culture taught us to be continuously occupied, but also today’s society suggests that if we are not multitasking, we are underachieving. This constant activity has, however, made us unaware and unresponsive to our natural surroundings. The prime danger here is that our educational process is teaching us how to be in the world but not a fully integrated part of it. Fortunately for me, my early upbringing taught me to value my connection with nature, and so the longer I stay in the woods, the more comfortable I become with my place in the natural world.
CHAPTER 2

INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

There is a way in which the collective knowledge of mankind expresses itself, for the finite individual, through mere daily living . . . a way in which life itself is sheer knowing.

Laurens van der Post, Venture to the Interior

Indigenous people traditionally acquire knowledge from two spheres; via an axis from above, that is, from the spirit world, and from the earth below. Within this system of learning, science, art, and religion are integrated, and education brings knowledge of how to live and how to be moral. This is a simple model of being human. Culture and education are enhanced through critical consciousness, but they are not liberatory; on the contrary, they are acquired through community life and thus strengthen social bonds.

Indigenous or aboriginal people have traditionally been hunters and gatherers, but the majority of such people today neither hunts nor gathers. Throughout the world there are still some indigenous people who follow their ancestors’ way of life, but few have managed to remain nomadic. For those who do maintain an itinerant lifestyle, it is common that they have contact with, and utilize, resources from outside their culture. It is extremely rare for indigenous cultures today to avoid contact with people outside their group, but a small number do prefer to inhabit areas that are isolated from modern society. For these people, the greatest threat to their way of life is modern man’s invasion of their territory as he seeks to satisfy his insatiable need to acquire more and more land. Yet, it is from the small populations of those who do preserve the ways of their ancestors that we get a true glimpse of people whose lifestyles are totally different from our own Western civilized model. The following pages offer examples of indigenous people from whom we can gain insight: they are the Mashco-Piro of Peru’, the Sng’oi of Malaysia’, the Bushmen of the Kalahari’, and the Australian Aborigines. While most of these people are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their autonomy, we were heartened to hear that in the spring of 2008 the Brazilian government released aerial pictures of a previously unknown tribe, along with claims that there may be as many as 50 uncontacted tribes remaining in Brazil and Peru.

Indigenous people who have succeeded in maintaining a distance from the modern world retain ancient practices and ways of knowing that most of us have long forgotten, and now can only imagine. But if we are prepared to set aside skepticism and open our minds, we can learn much from these people and from the few who have been privileged to meet them. The rub, however, is that documentation of these
meetings is inevitably recorded through a cultural lens and so must be regarded as
interpretative. Nevertheless, any insight into the lives and knowledge base of people
who have remained true to the way of life of their distant forebears has to be better
than total ignorance of these branches of humanity.

People of Western cultures have a tendency to see indigenous people as “others,” and
to assess their practices and beliefs with a conscious or unconscious bias that
stems from their own culture and education. Moreover, not only do we consider
them as distinctly “other,” but we also often see their practices and beliefs as bizarre
or alien. Yet it is through their uniqueness that most can be learned. Of great concern,
however, is the seemingly unstoppable encroachment of modern humans upon these
cultures—and its devastating consequences.

In 2005, the government of Peru began working to develop a series of “transitory
territorial reserves” to protect nomadic indigenous communities who roam the
Amazon jungle. Unfortunately, because of the many economic interests in the
proposed areas, the engines of bureaucracy have almost ground to a halt and little
progress has been made. The Amazon rainforest area houses the greatest number of
isolated indigenous people in the world. Among these are the Mashco-Piro, one of
the area’s indigenous groups who, since the oppressive days of the rubber barons,
have resolutely defended their traditional way of life by voluntarily distancing
themselves from other cultures. The proposed area lies within the 2.7 million hectare
Alto Purús National Park and offers the Mashco-Piro, of whom there is thought to
be no more than 800 (and even that number is considered by some to be extremely
optimistic), the freedom to maintain their traditional ways and, most importantly, to
avoid the outside world. The Mashco-Piro, according to anthropologist Linda Lema
Tucker, “are nomads who move freely through the forest, subsisting on what they
are able to gather, hunt or fish. They have survived like fugitives in order to protect
themselves from the outside world, which they continue to see as a threat,” and that
threat is real. Logging, both legal and illegal, tourism, and missionary work are just
some of the many activities that bring Western people close to the Mashco-Piro,
and the encounters have proven to be fatal at times for both sides. The indigenous
people have been known to attack and kill loggers who have encroached upon their
settlements, and, of course, non-indigenous people bring deadly diseases into the
area with devastating results for the indigenous groups. According to sociologist
Tarcila Rivera, who works with the Peruvian government’s Center for Indigenous
Cultures, there are laws to protect the “uncontacted” as they are sometimes called.
Unfortunately, however, because of their lifestyle, they are seldom considered to
be like regular Peruvian citizens and are thus “...outside the protection offered to
the rest of the citizens.” Sebastiao Manchineri of the Association of Indigenous
Organizations of the Amazon Basin bemoans the fact that, “[t]he economic
system does not respect cultural diversity, and indigenous groups who have
voluntarily isolated themselves are considered obstacles. ...Without the help of
their governments, those communities wishing to live apart from ‘civilization’ will
become extinct, and there is nothing we can do about it.” The most recent threat to
their existence is a plan to build a highway through the Communal Purus Reserve and the Alto Purus National Park. The project, which is being opposed by many local groups and the national park authorities, would, according to indigenous leader Julio Cusurichi “lead to ‘ethnocide’ of the uncontacted Indians.”

The thought of these people disappearing from the face of the earth and the subsequent loss of ancient knowledge is devastating, and some researchers are keen to learn as much as possible before it is too late. In the first part of the PBS documentary series, *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*, anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis describes his quest to locate the Mashco-Piro. He explains that, unlike other explorers, he and his colleagues recognize the need to film from a distance so that they do not risk bringing disease and death to the already fragile indigenous group. Others have told him about Mashco-Piro women who have been seen close to the river’s edge, and one observer recounted that he saw the native women walking on all fours and later heard them talking with “great sadness.” One of the older women was said to have been “carrying herself with great delicacy . . . walking like a priest,” and having an eerie and seemingly inappropriate laugh. The film tracks Maybury-Lewis and his team as they approach the boundary of Mashco-Piro territory by boat. Suddenly, one (non-Mashco-Piro) indigenous guide points to the riverbank and shouts “Mashco-Piro.” One woman rises and leaves while another sits talking with her hands lifted upward; is she perhaps calling to someone? Maybury-Lewis, noting the distance between his boat and the women, mourns his inability to communicate—he has promised to stay away, and this only deepens the sense of mystery that surrounds these women. It is reasonable to believe that viewers of the series see almost as much of the Mashco-Piro as does Maybury-Lewis, and watching these women as they sit along the bank of a tributary of the Manu River offers a glimpse into another world. Sadly, it is only a glimpse, and little can be learned from such a fleeting encounter. Fortunately, however, Robert Wolff’s description of his encounters with the Sng’oi of Malaysia offers a fuller picture of an indigenous lifestyle.

In his book *Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing*, Wolff recounts his experiences with Malaysia’s aboriginal people, the Sng’oi, most of whom, according to Wolff, live in remote jungle areas far removed from all signs of Malaysian modern civilization. As Wolff grew to know and love these people, he came to recognize their innate contentment and joy. Instead of competing for, and craving, material possessions, they seem to desire nothing that nature cannot provide. They live a pre-agricultural, semi-nomadic lifestyle, hunting a little but mainly existing on jungle fare. When food around their settlement becomes scarce, they move.

Wolff’s book is important because he corroborates what others have said by experiencing what it is like to live with truly aboriginal people. He is quick to point out, however, that he is not an anthropologist; nor does he claim membership of the tribe just because he spent time with them. He is a Western-educated psychologist who was raised in Indonesia. But by being open-minded and non-judgmental, by
learning the natives’ language and living with the Sng’oi, he was able to experience an indigenous way of life and way of knowing, and then to share his newfound knowledge. He describes his experience as being bathed in an overwhelming sense of oneness and of having a deep feeling of belonging. He also suggests that his relationship with the Sng’oi has lit a light deep inside himself. Wolff found that the Sng’oi follow their feelings, and when they do so they find reason for their actions. In Wolff’s words, “you followed your intuition and whatever happened was the reason for having the intuition.”

Wolff found that, in much the same way as the people described by Plato in his “Allegory of the Cave,” the Sng’oi believe that human beings live in a shadow world and that the real world is beyond the shadow. The similarities in the process toward enlightenment are striking, but with Plato the purpose was to convince his pupils to strive toward an absolute source for the betterment of society: “The Good.” Those in authority, of course, provide the definition of what “The Good” and betterment mean. For the Sng’oi, the reason for gaining enlightenment is to achieve oneness with nature. It is important to note, however, that while Plato’s cave dwellers lived in a shadow-world of ignorance, and were persuaded that only education and literal enlightenment could lead them to the goodness and light of the real world—the world of ideas, according to Wolff, the only way for the Sng’oi to learn about the real world is through their dreams, because life is lived in the shadow-world, and the real world is only visited at night. Wolff recounts part of a common early morning ritual in which the Sng’oi gather together to share and interpret their dreams. From an amalgamation of those dreams a narrative emerges: “The story that was created around the memories that four or five people brought back from the real world set the tone for the day.” Interestingly, James Redfield in his The Celestine Vision concludes that “dreams are an obscured form of intuition.” Wolff seems to agree with Redfield’s belief that dreams are a form of intuition, but he takes the notion a step further by suggesting that, like the Sng’oi, not only our dreams but also our intuition should be central to our decision making process. It is safe to assume that Wolff’s life was greatly influenced by his experiences with the Sng’oi, as he confides that it was through his Western education that he “began to feel alienated from the earth and from [his] fellow humans.” It could be said that his life of dreams, dream narratives, and intuitive-based activities with the Sng’oi became more ‘real’ than his Western way of life.

Dreams and the dream world are consistent themes among indigenous people, and their importance in creating links between ancient and contemporary dimensions cannot be underestimated; hence the prominence of shamans who are often called upon to interpret meaning from dreams, and to explain their relevance to present circumstances. It is probable that the shaman is selected for this task because of his or her apparent ability to communicate with otherworldly beings.

The idea of dream interpretation is not new to Western readers. In the old Babylonian heroic poem, The Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, prays for dreams that will bring him favorable messages from the sun god, Shamash.
Unfortunately, his dreams fill him only with dread and uncertainty until his devoted friend, the primitive, uncivilized Enkidu, interprets them in a positive light. The presence of Gilgamesh in the Western Canon cannot, however, be taken as evidence that spiritual connections are readily accepted by Western civilizations. Gilgamesh is often described as being set in so-called mythic time when gods moved freely between the earth and the heavens using humans as their playthings, while the part god/part human epic heroes such as Gilgamesh, Odysseus, and Achilles acted as links between the two worlds. Today’s Western readers who recognize nothing but historical, linear time see little or no parallel between these stories and their concept of reality.

The Western and indigenous worlds can, however, be seen to come together in the number of dream catchers that are seen hanging from the rear view mirrors of modern cars. These native works of art are thought to be tools to ward off evil spirits, but in reality were used by most indigenous people as a means of communicating with the nether world. In his 2001 novel, *Dreamcatcher*, Steven King portrays a Down syndrome man as a dream catcher; a concept that seems much more understandable than the more popular idea of endowing an object with such qualities. Furthermore, this interpretation helps to explain how people, far removed from cultures that recognize the dream world, claim to hear from, or see glimpses of, other dimensions. Farfetched as this idea may seem, Albert Einstein spent a lifetime theorizing about, and demonstrating mathematically, dimensions that ran parallel to our own. Recent developments in *string theory* and the study of the effects of membranes, *m theory*, posit not just a fourth dimension—time/light, but a world with multiple dimensions or universes that continually collide with each other, to which we might move if only we knew how. Unless they are physicists, most people have no idea about how string theory works, or how its impact through vibration affects our lives, but that does not mean that the forces and matter explained through string theory do not exist. Sadly, one of the best explanations of string theory has been cartoon-like, and was on the SyFy channel. But phenomena that exist outside our senses are difficult to understand. Light, specifically as described in the theory of *astral light*, is a good example. The one true constant is neither time nor space; it is light. We don’t know much about light, except that it has a significant impact on all living things, yet virtually all indigenous and ancient cultures use the metaphor of light in describing the spirit and natural world. It is not surprising, therefore, that among indigenous populations, special places that are considered sacred are described as having an energy, feel, and luminosity that foster intuition. Perhaps the sacred places revered by the indigenous and the theoretical constructs created by Einstein and other scientists have more in common than most people believe.

Einstein’s ideas resulted in the Einstein-Rosen bridge theory that raises the possibility that parallel universes can attract one another to the point that they become connected by means of a wormhole. And now, Steven Hawking has suggested that during the short time that these wormholes are open, they could even offer a means of time travel. Reading Wolff’s narrative, it is easy to feel that he has transcended his
reality and crossed over into another time and reality. He has not lost touch with the real world as we know it, nor is he psychotic; he has moved into a parallel universe and rather than a scary place, has found it to be wonderful. Wolff’s experience with the Sng’oi suggests a journey resulting in a state of oneness with nature, a complete sense of belonging, and an understanding that meaning in life is not exclusive to any one group of people. Again, Wolff is not indigenous; he was educated in the Western tradition and possesses no inordinate skills or ability, learned or otherwise, which has brought him the gift of another sense. Wolff claims that we all, to a degree, have the ability to achieve this inner quality, some perhaps more than others. He also claims that he now frequently uses this extra sense in the same way he would a muscle and feels that it must be exercised to keep it strong. Wolff moved from Asia to a city in the United States and realized that he had to make significant adjustments to his lifestyle, because the environment in the city was so full and busy that it created a feeling of sensory overload. His time with the Sng’oi had heightened his sense of awareness of other people, but he found that he did not want to know what the city people thought because they were so filled with “resentment and bitterness.” Wolff believes that Western modern ways of living have made us “deaf and blind” to all that is important in life.

The Sng’oi did not learn how to inhabit the jungle of Malaysia successfully by reading survival guides. On the contrary they, like other indigenous people, are experientialists, believing only what they experience personally or learn through the experiences of others. Epistemologically, they watch, listen, and wait for meaning to come to them through reflection. This contemplative process is mysterious, particularly for people who have been steeped in Western culture that overvalues the scientific method of learning. The good news is that reflection is not exclusive to indigenous people: as Wolff discovered, it is there for all who are open to trying unfamiliar means of acquiring knowledge.

Many years before Wolff recorded his encounters with the Sng’oi, Laurens van der Post wrote about the Bushmen of the Kalahari in his 1958 *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. Van der Post was perhaps the most obvious Westerner to seek and then to study the Bushmen, because he was raised in an area that had historically been “Bushman country.” Yet throughout much of the book, his account of the elusive nomadic people seems to be little more than a recording of hearsay and legend as he continues a painful search, beset by false hopes and disappointments, until it would appear that he is too late and that the Bushmen have been rendered extinct. It is natural, therefore, that when he actually meets Nxou, a young member of a colony of about thirty Bushmen, his readers share his relief that he “had made contact at last!” This event occurs within the last fifty pages of the book but provides the evidence that confirms and justifies all of van der Post’s hopes and dreams.

Growing up in Africa, surrounded by the spirit of the Bushmen, van der Post found himself relating to all of the myths and fairy tales that he heard about these native people. Indeed, the tales of the Bushmen are not unlike the Western stories of our own epic heroes with their extraordinary attributes and adventures. And, no
doubt, the stories that he grew up hearing greatly influenced his drive to prove that at least some Bushmen still existed, and to find them. The quest, however, at times seemed futile, because modern man’s voracious appetite for more and more land has left little or no opportunity for nomadic indigenous people to survive.

The picture that Van der Post paints in the early stages of his book is of a people who are small in stature, have vision like no other human, and move “with a flame-like flicker of gold like a fresh young Mongol.” These pre-contact descriptions have a colonial ring to them with paternalistic statements about the “child-man,” and, at the same time, offer a non-human, anatomical description of his physical features, such as the shape of his buttocks, the color of his skin, the shape of his face, and his power of vision, all of which are noted in much the same way as one would depict the characteristics of a wild animal. It is not until after Van der Post actually spends time with them that he begins to describe them as peaceful, content, and spiritual—that is, as having human characteristics.

Between the tales that he learned as he grew up and from his own experience, Van der Post has portrayed a people who were such natural botanists and organic chemists that they “used different poisons on different animals, the strongest for the eland and the lion, and less powerful variants for the smaller game.” The Bushmen also made a repellant that allowed them to traverse lion territory without fear and actually use lions to herd other game. Van der Post asked them if they ever climbed trees to find game, and they asked why they would want to do that, for seeing the animals’ tracks told them all they needed to know of their whereabouts. Van der Post states the Bushmen “knew the animal and vegetable life, the rocks and the stones of Africa as they have never been known since.” It is important to note, however, that Van der Post is not describing people who were in control of their surroundings. Unlike modern man, the Bushman “was utterly committed to Africa . . . he was back in the moment . . . when birds, beasts, plants, trees and men shared a common tongue, and the whole world, night and day, resounded like the surf of a coral sea with universal conversation.” As in a fairy tale where animals and humans talk, Van der Post, having being raised among the descendants of nomadic Bushmen, always believed that they understood the language of each animal. Renowned hunters, they never killed except for food, and were both apprehensive and sorry afterwards for having to kill an animal. They owned nothing that they could not carry and made no permanent structures. They neither domesticated any animal nor planted any crop. They lived where they made a large animal kill or near a water supply. Many of these water holes were either unknown or undetectable by others. The Bushmen truly lived in harmony with the land. They considered other animals as “persons of the early race.” Thus, Darwin may not have been the first to discover evolution. It could be said that he simply rediscovered what the Bushmen knew at least 8,000 years earlier. Van der Post claims that the Bushmen were the oldest inhabitants in southern Africa and that the black Africans were northern immigrants. He also states that many black Africans feel that the Bushmen were the first people of Africa, and thus the oldest form of human life left in the world. Unfortunately, but characteristically, colonials
used the Bushman’s integration with nature as evidence of his inferiority—“He built no home of any durable kind, did not cultivate the land and did not even keep cattle or other domestic chattel, and this seemed to prove to his enemies that he was a human ‘untouchable’ and not far removed from the beasts of the veld.”

Since the time of van der Post’s narrative, mystery has continued to surround the story of the Bushmen. Have they vanished under the pressures of modern development, or is there a chance that some have survived? Rupert Isaacson, a London-based writer, grew up surrounded by African artifacts and listening to stories of the Bushmen. His mother was South African and his father was Rhodesian. In *The Healing Land*, Isaacson takes up van der Post’s story recounting his own compulsion to discover the Bushmen’s fate. And yes, he did succeed. But while some were following some semblance of a traditional lifestyle, Isaacson describes scenes of drunkenness, poverty, in-fighting, and prostitution. Some saw the presence of white people as a means of making money: “Maybe people like you – tourists – might come here and see our life. There is money in this…” Isaacson’s tale is one of broken people and broken promises; land claims have been filed and won, but corporate greed seems to always prevail. A Botswana government official explained, “We all aspire to Cadillacs. [The Bushmen] can no longer be allowed to commune with flora and fauna.” The discovery of diamonds in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve did nothing to advance the Bushmen’s cause. To force the Bushmen off their land, the government destroyed their only water well. And without a secure source of water, the Bushmen’s land could not sustain them. In January 2011, the BBC reported that an appeals court had ruled that Bushmen could drill new water wells on their traditional lands. Despite the good news, however, the future of the traditional Bushman is still tenuous. Young tribal members are unskilled in the traditional way of life and many do not wish to follow the old ways. They have become accustomed to the trappings of modern living and cannot imagine living any other way. To compound the problems, the wells are failing to produce enough water to supply the needs of those trying to return to the lands of their forefathers. One of the greatest difficulties that endangers the future of the Bushmen, and indeed, almost every other indigenous people trying to live a traditional lifestyle, is the chasm between their way of seeing and interpreting life and that of Westerners. The Bushmen’s worldview is like that of all other indigenous people, that of a circle. The Bushmen also believe that we are but “a dream dreaming us.” The similarities between the Bushmen, the Sng’oi, and the Australian Aborigine with regard to the importance of dreams are so striking and diverse from Western interpretation that it demands that we revisit our meaning of the dream world.

The indigenous Australian culture may be one of the oldest of any that still exists, and is arguably the most difficult for Eurocentric minds to understand. Furthermore, although they share similar beliefs about the importance of dreams with other indigenous people, it is the Aborigine’s sense of time and *Dreamtime* that sets them apart. It is from this culturally isolated population that we can learn much since their strangeness (to our minds), and our lack of understanding, correlates with
their isolation. What is Dreamtime? It is the time that exists below the surface of wakeful awareness, and it is also the time before the world as we know it was fully created and whole: a time within a time. Dreaming and then believing that what has been dreamed still exists in a physically distinct geographic place is unique to the Aborigine. Physical places are important among all indigenous populations because they serve as portals that people can use to connect with their ancestors and the spirit world. For most indigenous people, buttes, mountaintops, waterfalls, and valleys are their churches. It is from these places that they learn and integrate visual and oral traditions into their cosmology. Physical places are therefore not separate from spirituality, and different gods, spirits, and ancestors dwell in different places. But for the Australian Aborigine there is no portal; it is all present in the here and now.

Like the Australian Aborigines, Native Americans recognize the spiritual aspect of the wind and sky, and of dreaming, in their cosmology, and there are similarities between the aboriginal Dreamtime and Native American spirituality. Both particularly emphasize the importance of places versus events and the difference in the knowledge of men and women, and each relies on the connections between language and geography as a means of acquiring knowledge and determining meaning: linear time as we know it does not exist, and there is no history. Clearly, Aborigines and the indigenous Bushmen provide a glimpse into a different world that is beyond ancient history. Van der Post experienced this when he found two hunters and offered them a ride in his truck. While the vehicle was going “full speed” across the desert, one, on sight of an animal he wished to track, “hurled himself from the vehicle.” With no further ado, he got up and continued the hunt as if nothing had happened. Why did he step off a moving truck? Probably, it was his unfamiliarity with the dangers of unnatural speed, and his belief in the natural laws of motion. This incident may highlight the difference in the way indigenous people perceive the world around them. While the time for learning from the Bushmen themselves may be gone, there is perhaps a chance that we may learn from their libraries—yes—libraries. As Van der Post states, “how mistaken is the common assumption that literature exists only where there is a system of writing.”

The Bushmen’s intricate color paintings and symbols on the walls of caves and overhangs that exist throughout much of southern Africa are their libraries. Historically, Western people have gone to great pains to decipher written language, but little effort has been expended on symbolic languages that use pictures rather than words. This is understandable. According to Tim Jones, director of the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society,

Trying to determine the meaning of the paintings from a modern perspective and a different cultural context, especially when some of them may represent the very personal religious experiences of individuals, is an exercise fraught with potential pitfalls. . . . Appreciating the general cultural context is, maybe, as deep as we can get.
Written languages correlate with the means by which the authoritative sources of the three major Western religions transmit knowledge while the use of symbolic writing and animal-like images has generally been linked to aboriginal people. The latter have always been considered primitive and less sophisticated than the former, primarily because to treat both forms of language equally would have been seen as humanizing the Bushmen and others, making it more difficult to displace them and to justify treating them as less than human; a practice that was widespread during colonial times and has yet to be fully eradicated. For those who care to look, the Bushmen’s influence may be seen from the Iberian Peninsula to Egypt to the far reaches of southern Africa: these were Paleolithic people who roamed all of Africa, and it would be comforting to think that some who share their ways of knowing and living still do.

There is much we can learn from ancient and indigenous people, but there may be as much if not more that we can learn from our fellow animals. The deerfly of Chapter 1 spoke through the old Indian, “I will not bite you unless a storm is imminent.” The old Indian learned from his elders about deerflies as a means of forecasting the weather, and also from his experience of being bitten and the subsequent storm. It is the behavior of the deerfly that creates this knowledge, but it is the wisdom of the person that allows him or her to translate the behavior into meaning.

On November 4, 2007, the people of the small village of San Juan Grijalva in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico, woke to find all their cattle running up the mountainside. Fearing the loss of their cattle, most of the 600 villagers chased them, only to witness, from the safety of the high ground, their village being swallowed by a mudslide from the neighboring mountain. Like the survivors who also followed animals to higher ground before the 2004 tsunami struck Asia, the villagers may not have made the connection between their animals’ behavior and the pending disaster. They chased their cattle for economic reasons, but the behavior of the animals foretold the event: deerflies and storms are more numerous than cattle and mudslides, and thus the correlation is more observable. Maybe Kafka was right when he said, “All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog.”

The stories of indigenous people tell us that there was a time when humans and animals could speak to one another. Now people try to control animals and, indeed, all aspects of nature. Animals are afraid of humans, and with good cause: humans have butchered them, often killing for the sake of killing. The recent popularity of horse and dog “whisperers” harbors back to the time when animals could trust mankind. Although we don’t understand how humans and other animals communicate with one another, we have come to recognize that there are people who do seem to have a way to connect with animals, and a means by which to communicate with them. We talk a lot about animals, have pets, watch documentaries on animals and visit zoos, yet we are androcentric in the extreme. We talk at animals, but if we listen they will try to communicate with us, and when they once again learn to trust us as they did in the past, perhaps they will enlighten us about things that they know
and we do not. But today if people were to say that they talk with animals, not only
would we not believe them, but we would be concerned about their mental health
when just the opposite should be true. Ancestral connectiveness includes our fellow
animal species.

Human intelligence does not set us apart from other animals; forgotten knowledge
has caused our separation from the natural world. We understand Darwinism, yet we
continue to think of humans as separate from its evolutionary mandate. The grounds
for this separation are legitimized by the Hebrew influence in Genesis: “Be fertile
and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the
sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” And while it is not right to lay
this all at the feet of the Jews and Greeks, David Abram reminds us that it was they
who carved it in stone:

So the ancient Hebrews, on the one hand, and the ancient Greeks on the other,
are variously taken to task for providing the mental context that would foster
civilization’s mistreatment of nonhuman nature. Each of these two ancient
cultures seems to have sown the seeds of our contemporary estrangement—
one seeming to establish the spiritual or religious ascendancy of humankind
over nature, the other effecting a more philosophical or rational dissociation of
the human intellect from the organic world.

These two rich cultures, as much as they have brought to the modern world, on
a darker side provide the ingredients and, via the written word, a recipe for the
definition of the priest-king hegemony. This unholy marriage of religion and
philosophy spawned an ecological and epistemological holocaust beyond our
imagination. The result is a mindset that allows humans who have been raised and
educated in the Western tradition to set themselves both above and apart from all
other living beings, and to dismiss their actions, beliefs, and lifestyles as obsolete,
alien, and naïve.

One such common belief among indigenous people is the concept of shape-shifting:
a term used to describe the ability of animals to change their form dimensions. It
includes the ability not just to see or hear entities within another dimension, but to
move one’s physical self, part or whole, between dimensions. A deer may disappear
before a hunter’s eyes, but this usually has more to do with the latter’s hunting
ability. Among northern American Indians, Windego stories were often told to scare
small children into behaving, and every culture, ancient or modern, has some type of
“boogieman.” Interestingly, the Bugis (upon whom the boogieman myth is based) are
a seafaring people who live in Indonesia. The Bugis resisted European colonization
and were labeled by the Dutch as fierce pirates, and hence the term “boogiemen.”
Windego is a popular name that is commonly used for parks and streets, but you
may not want to live on Windego Lane. The Windego was a shape-shifter between
moose and man who flew through the forest looking for people, usually lost children
and bad men, to eat. The rational adult mind suspects that the Windego is no more
than a mythical character in a campfire story that was told to keep children close to
home, or in a tribal story that explained the scorn of banishment, or to tell the fate of someone who simply got lost and died in the woods. It was also used in the past as an odious but plausible means of explaining away starvation and cannibalism. But regardless, the principle of shape-shifting was a commonly held belief that had to come from somewhere. Shape-shifting is but another difficult concept for Westerners to understand because it does not fit into our worldview. Has shape-shifting been relegated to fairy tale status by monotheism? For animists, people who are in tune with the natural world, or students of Einstein or Newton, it can be real. Einstein believed that dimensions can intertwine, and Newton believed that natural elements could be combined to create something entirely different; so how much of a stretch is shape-shifting? And it has been real to too many different people across too many different lands to be ignored—here is its premise:

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen could happen.
All you had to do was say it.
Nobody could explain this,
that’s the way it was.43

There is a widespread interest today, particularly among young female readers, in one aspect of shape-shifting thanks to the widely popular Twilight series written by Stephanie Meyer. In this vampire narrative, a resident coven is challenged by a group of young Quileutes who are able to transform into wolves. As with many works of fiction, this story has some grounding in truth, or in this case, in tribal
legend. According to Quileute mythology the tribal name is derived from Kwoli (Quileute for wolf) because its people are descended from wolves who changed into people.

But people tend not to accept as knowledge, information that cannot be quantified because quantification means control. Knowledge through sensation is difficult to control; hence we are both skeptical and fearful of it because it seems dangerous. The rational mind has difficulty with the infinite or sensual. Thus, the creation of “truth” is something we are told is concrete and onto which we can mentally hold. And we are often taught not to question truth lest we stare into the abyss of the infinite. Yet while we cling to the idea of truth to keep our feet firmly on the ground, religious faith offers freedom to transcend our physical world. It is this constructed faith that is important, and the spiritual process of sustaining that faith allows us to believe in eternal life, our human understanding of the infinite. The concept of shape-shifting should be no more difficult to accept than eternal life, or heaven and hell (other dimensions) but, because it is sensory and includes other animals, it has been rejected as mythical. Shape-shifting may be a heightened form of “synaesthesia,” the synergistic blending of the auditory and visual aspects of all natural things.

Our senses are the base of our experiences and our experiences are our life, but to believe this is considered “nonsense,” which goes a long way toward understanding why modern humans feel so disconnected and adrift from meaning and purpose in their lives. The idea that a cure for “losing your mind” is to “come to your senses” suggests that we know better. We have, however, been so programmed by idealism and realism that we rarely do come to our senses and, although escaping from our constructed realities will free us from artificial and mechanical thinking, we often feel guilty for doing so. Ironically, like Plato’s chained prisoners in the cave, we would rather see the shadow than learn the truth. We are programmed to accept that progress is always for the best, and so we strive to learn new things and move forward. Yet many answers to societal problems lie in the distant past, waiting for us to rediscover them. One strategy should be to look to the behavior of the ancients and of the animals around us for help. Animal behavior is not dictated by a clock, an appointment book, or the need to be seen to be progressing; they have in-built mechanisms that control all that they need to survive.

Like the monarch butterflies, all animals, including humans, have a circadian clock, and researchers have found that the monarchs as well as other animals have cryptochrome proteins, which allow for navigation using the sun’s position. So butterflies have a built-in global positioning system (GPS) that allows them to know exactly where they are at all times relative to fixed points, all in their pinpoint size brains. Steven Reppert, a neurobiologist from the University of Massachusetts, has been studying monarchs and their circadian rhythms as it relates to sleep disorders and depression. It is no wonder then that ancient seafarers traversed the Pacific using stars; the wonder is how and why we humans now need a GPS to go to the grocery
CHAPTER 2

store. And how is losing this ancient ability good? Hopefully, we can relearn what we have lost and use this reclaimed knowledge to reconnect humans with the natural world. The result will be that we view the natural world through new, or renewed, lenses. The revised mindset will allow people to see the world not as an entity to be controlled and stripped of its resources, but as a life support system for all living beings to be nurtured, cherished, and revered.