

DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: RESOURCE SET 5: HANDOUT 2

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard Interview¹

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Left: LaDonna Brave Bull Allard.²

Right: Standing Rock protestor camp, 2016.³

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Historian LaDonna Brave Bull Allard on DAPL Protests and Seventh Generation Activists

By Mikki Halpin for Teen Vogue, April 26, 2017

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard was there when the very first tipis went up at Standing Rock last spring — and when they came down this winter. Her land was the site of Sacred Stone, the first camp of resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Allard remained on the ground through all the clashes with law enforcement and private security. She endured water cannons, tear gas, attack dogs, and seeing her own daughter arrested and brutalized over the course of the protests.

She sat down with Teen Vogue to talk about Standing Rock, the legacy of historical trauma, where the struggle goes from here, and why she believes we are living in a time of prophecy.

Mikki Halpin: What was your life like before Standing Rock happened?

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard: I am the historian and genealogist for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. I keep the history of all our chiefs. I always tell people, “I never was an activist.” I never thought of myself being in the front lines, protesting. My idea was going out into the community and educating people. And then I realized it's the same thing.

¹ <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/standing-rock-sioux-tribe-ladonna-brave-bull-allard-interview-dapl-protests>

² <https://www.westword.com/news/standing-rocks-ladonna-brave-bull-allard-wins-conservation-colorado-award-9097986>

³ <https://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/native-americans-put-aside-differences-at-standing-rock-to-fight-pipeline-construction/>

MH: Can you talk a bit about that history, and about historical trauma? How does knowing that history make a difference?

LBBA: We know about our families' lives. We knew about how we grew up. We know the stories that are told to us over and over again. But there's a point in your life when you feel those stories. [For me] everything changed when they invited me to Whitestone. [Ed. Note: Whitestone Hill is the site where General Alfred Sully attacked a peaceful gathering of Yanktonai people and killed hundreds, including women and children.] This is where my grandmother was shot.

I remember, we drove up in a car. I told my husband, "We have to stop. I have to put food and water down, and ties." You could just feel it coming out of the ground: grief, and screaming, and crying. I was really having a hard time. My mind kept on saying, "This is not you. This did not happen to you. This happened to your relatives." But I couldn't stop the grief. I know what historical trauma is. It is that oppression, and that hurt that we all experience today. It's that hurt and oppression that we have suffered for 500 years. It is that reality of our lives.

MH: You've talked about how young people are part of how that trauma will be healed. Was there a clear moment when you realized that?

LBBA: I remember the day after the [first] bulldozers came. It was September 4. And everybody was really grieving for them tearing up those burial sites. Security forces used dogs and pepper spray against the peaceful resistance. The whole community came up and surrounded the area. We had a big prayer ceremony. Prayers for the workers, and prayers for ourselves.

I walked off that ground after the prayers, and I was watching people come out. I looked at all the different nations that were there. The young people. And I said, "Oh my God." That was my first inkling that we were in the middle of prophecy. When the Seventh Generation stands up to heal the Hoop. When the Eagle and Condor gather together to heal the nation. When the Black Snake comes to devour the earth, and we stand up to stop it, to save the world, we are in prophecy. Each one of these young people that stand up are that dream, that hope, that prophecy. Who would believe this stuff? I have just been in awe of this whole time. And I repeatedly remind people, I follow the young people.

MH: What has become known as "Standing Rock" started as a small camp near your home and became an international symbol of struggle. Did you have any sense of how big it would become?

LBBA: Chairman Dave Archambault was going to all the districts, telling people about this proposed pipeline. I was at the Long Soldier District when he was there, giving a presentation. Joy Braun, Jasilyn Charger, and Joseph White Eyes were there. And they said they were a part of the [Keystone] XL Pipeline fight, and would we consider starting a camp? After, I walked up to Joy and I said, "Joy, you know, I have some land. Maybe we could start a

camp there.” Me and my husband showed them the land and they said. “Wow, this is perfect. When do you want to start the camp?” And we set it up five days later. So the camp had no planning. It just happened.

Faith Spotted Eagle, Elizabeth Lone Eagle, and Allen Flying By did a water ceremony to bless the ground, they did a pipe ceremony, they did prayers. We started the fire, and the camp was started. That first night, Joy Braun, Jasilyn Charger, Joseph White Eyes, and Wiyaka Eagleman were the ones to stay. The community started bringing in food, coffee for them, wood for them. And then [more] people started coming.

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Moccasins on the Ground offered us direct action training. The Indigenous Environmental Network came in to help us. We were a camp of about 10 to 20 people from April until June. In June, we went from 20 to 30 people. We did mostly training. Security training, direct action training, and reconnaissance. We set a camp on the east side of the river, watching the construction. Trying to stay within the law, but watching. As people came into Sacred Stone, there was not a lot of space, so they started moving down the river, and then across. And everything grew so fast.

At Sacred Stone, people would come all day long to have a prayer ceremony, to pray, to drink water. They brought water from all over the world and put it in the river to help it heal — spiritual leaders from every facet of every indigenous people — Mongolians, the people out of Africa, India, China, Australia, New Zealand. And of course, all of our brothers and sisters in South America and middle America and Canada.

It was something we never imagined. It was something beyond any of our dreams. It was something bigger than any of us. When people want to say, “Who started this?” Nobody. Everybody. There was no one leader. There was no one person. It was everybody. Each with their own journey. In the middle of all of this was the youth, who continued to stand up. Who continued to bring that power, that healing.

MH: How do you remain in prayer when you’re faced with aggression, like water cannons and pepper spray?

LBBA: The youth, when they were going to the front line, they would all gather and pray before they went up there. And I think that was the essence of everything. Prayer. How did they stay in prayer? When you're there, that's all you have. When they're shooting you with tear gas and water and concussion grenades, and screaming horrible things at you — all you have is prayer.

We have been under oppression for so long. We’re not going to sleep again. We have awakened. And at this point, we are going to change the world. And how do we do that? Just those young people.

MH: Social media played such a huge role in getting people to pay attention, and connecting people. Can you talk a little about that?

LBBA: One of the things that the young people taught us is this technology: Facebook Live, Instagram, Twitter. They used this technology to touch the world. And they were quick, and they were fast. People in China knew exactly what we were doing. It was instant. They would start these livestreams, and a million people would be watching them. Because of that this movement became worldwide.

MH: So, this is such a sad question. What was it like to see that all go away? I watched the camps be taken down on one of those livestreams. Where do things stand now?

LBBA: When we got the order [to move], we sat down with our people, and we agreed to move. And we decided to go quiet. We moved, and we set up in a secret location. We may not be right at that spot. But we're here, everywhere. And I think that's how it's supposed to be. This is the progression of this dream. We're still standing.

MH: Can you say more about this secret camp?

LBBA: We have a camp set up. We are going through our negotiations to take care of our land issues. Right now, we are going through the legal processes to be able to regain my father's land back from them. Once that goes, we will be developing not a camp, but a village, to show people how to live on the earth, to do organic farming, green energy, thermal, wind, and solar. We have amazing people from all over the world who have that technology, who want to share it. If the whole United States went into green energy, we could provide more jobs than fossil fuel. We can provide a way of living that causes people to live good with the earth. To be able to grow food. Right now, we are destroying our food source.

There are two things human beings, animals, and all living beings need: water and food. That has to be the core of everything.

MH: One of the things that *Teen Vogue* hears from readers is, "What can I do? How can I help?" How can they express support, and how can they be involved?

LBBA: This is a human issue. It's an everybody issue. Everywhere you go in the world, you have a creek, you have a stream, you have a river, you have a lake, you have a pond. Stand. It may be just picking up trash. It may be going to your government agency and saying, "Hey, we want to be a part of making sure this is preserved."

There are simple things people can do in their communities. Don't waste water. Start reducing use of plastic. Make a plan in your life of how to divest from each of these. Do it simple. Do it easy. And you will see the end result. What can you do? Stand up.