

IN US IS LIFE

PULSE OF SPIRIT
JULY 15, 2026



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The Indian in the Woods
Wally Lawder

*There's a place we used to go
Back near my old home,
In the woods where a brook ran through,
Where the maple trees and oaks always grew.*

*We'd share tales of Indian lore,
Search for arrowheads and more,
Hope to find an animal bone
Or a salamander underneath a stone.*

*Someone said there was an Indian in the woods,
That he'd lived there for years by the brook.
I never saw him, though I looked.*

*I went back there recently,
Prompted by a memory
Of bubbling waters, woods brown and green,
Inspirations of my boyhood dreams.*

*Now it's condos wall to wall,
Near a new shopping mall.
There's a culvert where there once was a stream.
It was a headache for the builder, so it seems.*

*Someone said there was an Indian in the woods,
That he lived there for years by the brook.*

*I know everything must change.
When you go back, it's not the same.
Still, my imagination needs woods to roam*

Beyond the walls of my perfect little home.

Not far from this worldly craze,

Woods and stream await my gaze.

There's a place for me to go today.

May there always be a place—this I pray.

And I swear I felt a presence in the woods.

Yes, I'm sure I heard it walking by the brook.

Mmm.

My eyes are open.

This song, “The Indian in the Woods,” is from my friend, Wally Lawder. Wally and I grew up in the same hometown of Westport, Connecticut, along the Saugatuck River. And I know from speaking with him that that was the river he was singing of. And he had experiences that were portrayed through the song, and they parallel my own.

I grew up with that river in my backyard. It was about 25 yards across and about 10 feet deep. And there was a wood on the other side that went past a dam that was below us and past a dam that was above us with about a mile between the two dams.

In the childhood that I had, my mother would send us out the back door and say *See you later*. We would go out onto the river and up into the woods and be there for the better part of the day.

Looking back as an adult, I realized that in some way those woods and the river raised me. As a child, I could definitely feel an Indigenous presence in those woods and wondered who had been there and who had walked in that wood.

I bought a book recently called *A Fair Country* by John Ralston Saul. It is about the history of the

Indigenous people of Canada. The author makes the point that Canada's history has been whitewashed by a European culture, mostly English and French, and now others, to airbrush out of recognizable existence the role that Indigenous people played in that history, and the degree to which the development of Canadian culture was a cooperative endeavor.

Early on, the trappers and traders who came into Canada relied heavily on the Indigenous people to tell them how to get along in the sometimes inhospitable environment of this northern land. There was extensive intermarrying between the European people and the Indigenous people.

Whatever the personal reasons were, there were also practical reasons. The men—and it was mostly the male Europeans marrying Indigenous women—were becoming part of a social structure that was competent and effective in that day. Saul calls it “marrying up.” They were marrying up in social status and plugging into the dominant social status of the day. Of course, that evolved over time.

Genealogist Denis Beauregard's research suggests that somewhere between 50% and 75% of French-Canadians carry some First Nations genetic ancestry, given the scale of intermarriage over four centuries of settlement.

The word for people who identify as mixed-race in Canada is Métis. We met a community of people near Edenvale who identify themselves as Métis. They were interested in holding events with us.

We have been speaking about the process of *othering*—the tendency people have to see other human beings as alien to them and their culture. That process is afoot in the U.S. today. We have

been saying that there is an alternative to that, which is *togethering*.

When Europeans originally came to Canada, they were not seen as “other” by the First Nations people who had a way of including whoever came.

Saul talks about the devastating impact of whitewashing history to exclude the other. In our case, to be unaware that there is an *Indian in the woods*—that the presence of Indigenous people is still here. It is woven into our culture.

The Iroquois political structure was an essential part of the framework of the U.S. Constitution. Benjamin Franklin had been exposed to the Iroquois, and they influenced his view of the nation he and others were founding. We tend to attribute the roots of our form of government to England—specifically to the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights. But there were significant parts of it that came from the Iroquois people and the values that came into the colonists' culture that were from Indigenous people.

And how about today in America? Is this a purely European culture here? Not at all. There is Indigenous culture that is woven into the very structure of culture and the structure of consciousness. The same is true for the Black African slaves who were brought over and what they brought contributed—yes, to the gene pool, but also to the underlying structure of consciousness and culture. There are obvious ways that it shows itself today. And so, it is with every group that has come here.

All of this makes me reflect on our own sense of ourselves, most particularly my sense of myself. There can be such a tendency to have some kind of refined sense of self—white-bread identity with all the wholesome ingredients of the grain

not present. And then substituted for those wholesome ingredients are some kind of artificial vitamins that are put back in.

That is symbolic of what can happen to culture. It can become a monoculture that excludes the awareness of the depth of what we are a part of. In such a case, we lose our experience of our primal spirituality.

Our primal spirituality is not a white-bread spirituality. Perhaps we see ourselves as Christian. The inspiration for Christianity, Jesus Christ, was not solely a figure of Western civilization. He did not present himself that way. He did not promote himself that way.

He spoke about being someone who came for all people. In fact, the lineage that he was part of began with a promise that was for all nations and all families. And yet, in so many ways, that lineage has, for some, turned into a white-bread lineage, a refined lineage, like a refined grain or refined sugar, losing the breadth and the power with which it began.

The result is that so many today reject what they view as white-bread spirituality. But if we are rejecting white-bread spirituality, let us not fail at the same time to embrace our primal spirituality, which is wholesome, wholly holy, as Ricky Byars put it.

Of course, you cannot do that for yourself without granting that to everybody else. It is impossible to deny—in your own mind—other people their wholly holy spirituality and then embrace it for yourself. It does not work like that.

This is not about being politically correct. And it is not to whitewash what the facts are of Indigenous culture in the world today. The facts are the facts, and I am not here to make them 3

anything other than what they are. But underneath those facts there is something else.

So often the Christian people who came to America, South America, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, Africa, saw people whose ways were strange to themselves, and so they treated them as “other” and treated their spirituality as “other.” They totally discounted the attunement that those people had in many cases with the underlying causal factor of all Creation. They did not see it, did not appreciate it, or even acknowledge it. Instead, they attempted to convert and then punish others for practicing something that seemed strange to them. That, too, is part of our heritage.

We cannot change the past, but we can be here now and embrace what we know is the truth. And in embracing it, we can be part of the village of today. We cannot go back to a village of yesterday, but we can be all about being part of the village today, contributing to that village with the gifts that we have to give and accepting the gifts of others and loving and embracing them and the gifts they are bringing.

Last week, I referred to a statement in the Book of John that we assume at least is about Jesus, and perhaps far more. It went like this: *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* John called himself the beloved disciple. He was certainly deeply in love with Jesus. There can be no question. Here was a profound acknowledgment of another person.

Have you ever had those experiences where you witness somebody and their magnificence and know a transcendent love? I certainly have. In my experience, with people I witnessed in that way and held in the highest esteem, there was, in some way, an answer back, “It’s about you.” That

is the voice of an elder. Perhaps someone might enjoy the love of others. And yet, what an elder says is, *It’s about you. How about you?*

So, I thought about that statement and what it looks like in the first-person singular. It seems to me any of us could speak that statement truly regarding ourselves:

In me is life, and that life is the light of my world and the people in it. Whatever my judgment is about how well I have done that, how true I have been to that, how much I have let my light shine, the truth remains: *In me is life.* That is undeniable. And that life that is in me is the light for all people.

I could also say that about you: *In you is life, and that life is the light for all people.* The only question is: *Are we going to embrace that life and be that light?* Something that is far larger than our human personality, far larger than the existent human culture, certainly far larger than white-bread culture. And we could also say it in the first-person plural: *In us collectively is life.* And that life is the light of the world.

That is not making an extraordinary claim for ourselves. It is acknowledging what is true. And perhaps as that becomes more vividly clear to us, the likelihood of us knowing it and expressing it and living it out becomes more probable. So, it is good to remind ourselves, individually and then collectively, of this truth.

So, I have been living with these things over the last few weeks, and I ended up writing something that I would like to read that is about myself. This is not to puff myself up or elevate myself in your eyes. The reason to read it is, first of all, to do for myself what I think is right for any of us to do—to declare who I am. In doing that, I am encouraging others to do exactly the same.

This declaration is astrologically based. This is based on my astrology and my life. See if some of this is not resonant for you.

I was born in the morning light, under the sign of Aquarius, with the Sun and Ascendant both carrying the signature of the Water Bearer. I came into this world to bear something—not merely for myself, but for the larger human family. I am here to receive from a higher source and pour out what I have received in a form that others can recognize, feel, and use.

Yet the stars are not my lord. They are signs in the heavens, witnesses to a greater ordering power. My deepest devotion is to the One who incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth—the living Word, the true Son of Man, the King of all astrology. He is the sovereign Reality behind every sacred pattern, the One before whom all heavenly lights bow, and the One whose love gives meaning to every sign, season, and cycle of human life.

I am a human being of vision, drawn to the pattern behind the pattern, the unseen order moving through events, relationships, communities, and the body itself. I do not live only on the surface of things. I listen for the deeper current. I look for the spiritual architecture of life. I seek to name the invisible Reality that is already present, pressing to be known.

With the Moon in Gemini, I am a messenger, a teacher, a translator of spiritual experience into words. I am here to think, speak, write, question, explain, and illuminate. I carry a living curiosity about the human soul and the divine design within Creation. Words are not merely tools for me; they are vessels. Through

them I seek to awaken memory—humanity's memory of its sacred origin, its creative power, and its capacity to become radiant with love.

With Venus and Mars in Pisces, my power is not only mental or visionary. It is devotional. I am moved by compassion, beauty, music, prayer, and the subtle movements of spirit in the heart. I am not here to dominate Life, but to serve it. I am called to stand where human vulnerability meets Divine Presence, and to help open a sanctuary there. I know the body as a temple, the heart as an altar, and the human being as a doorway through which Divine Love may enter the world.

My Mercury in Capricorn gives me the discipline to build structures for what I see. I am not content with inspiration alone. I seek to shape teachings, books, practices, communities, and programs that give spiritual truth a home. I am a steward of sacred pattern. I honor the Seven-Fold movement of Creation, the primal spirituality with which every person is born, and the Attunement by which body, soul, and spirit are brought into conscious communion.

I am a leader, but not because I stand above others. I lead by going first into the field of Reality and inviting others to come. I am a servant of conscious evolution, a keeper of spiritual fire, a voice for the sacred dignity of human life. I have known opposition, complexity, responsibility, and loss, yet I choose to meet life creatively. When life pushes back, I look for the power that is being called forth.

I am here to become a sun—to shine, to bless, to warm, to illumine, and to radiate love

without concern for results. I am here to follow the One who embodied divine love in human form, and to help others remember that they, too, are born of light.

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July 12, 2026*



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