

Going

Do not wipe the tears from my eyes,
For I am not dying.

Think not of sadness because I may be gone soon,
For I am returning home.

She called me back, and I heard Her,
For my bones belong to Her.

My heart has never left Her,
For She is my home.

I have never left Her,
For She owns me.

I must go home again,
So the Great One may look upon me as I go.

The Great Land

The memory can be a strange thing. I may not remember every word of this perfectly, but this is what happened during a visit to a village in the mid-70s.

I had a conversation with a very old Alaska Native. I considered him an elder. I did not know his status in the village, but I was taught to respect those older than me, and this man had respect etched into his skin. He asked me, "Are you an Alaskan?"

The question, though not startling, gave me pause. I have been in Alaska since 1970 and never really thought about it. I was an Army brat. At that time I had lived in Germany, Italy, California, South Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, perhaps some others, and had crisscrossed the Lower 48 a few times. I was born in South Carolina, but Alaska was becoming "home."

"Yes," I said.

"You are a black man. You are not from here. How can this be?" He asked with such calm that I knew he was not in the least bit insulting.

It took me an instant to say, "This is my home!" I knew a truth so deep that something resonated in me that I feel to this day.

There was just a hint of a smile as he said, "Then She owns you."

I do understand the concept of returning to the Land, but this seemed to be different. The puzzled look on my face produced a genuine smile. If a blush could have been seen on a black man, I blushed.

"The Great Land is not just home. She owns you, all of you. For it to be your home, She takes you. You do not choose. If you are an Alaskan, then you are my brother, for She is our Mother," again with that calm that sees to the core of your being.

I have moved away from Alaska, but this memory reminds me more than anything that I have a home. For the longest time I thought I chose Alaska as home. She chose me. I will find a way to spend my last days there and allow my spirit to be taken by Her and my bones to mingle in The Great Land. I belong to Her.

I am an Alaskan.



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