

Gedin Ch-Lum-Nu

Let It Be This Way



On Lateral Violence, Kinship,
and the Future of Indigenous Community

Pit River Territory · Northern California

*Written with gratitude for the work of Darryl Babe Wilson,
and in memory of Craven Gibson*

*There is no power in destruction.
Only in creation.*

— Craven Gibson (Pit River elder, Atwamsini), October 3, 1970, 4-corners

*Take a hand full of earth from Hawaii
and rub it on the A-juma-wi —
the dirt and the skin will remain the same hue.*

*Take a hand full of earth from A-juma-wi
and rub it on the Hawaiian —
the dirt and the skin will remain the same hue.*

— As told by Craven Gibson to Darryl Babe Wilson, 1971

Gedin-ch-lum-nu.

Let it be this way.

— A-juma-wi, language of the Pit River people

*To my family, my relatives, and my ancestors:
I love you more than you will ever know.*

*And to anyone who reads this:
be kind to one another, be good to one another,
drink some water,
and don't forget to hug someone you love.*

A Note Before We Begin

I should say this plainly at the start: I am not writing from inside Pit River territory. I am writing from diaspora — from the distance that colonialism created between people and the land they come from. I write with deep respect for the Ajumawi and Atsugewi peoples whose traditions I engage here, and with full awareness that I am an outsider to those specific nations even as I feel their teachings speak to something I carry.

I write because the pattern I am describing is not only a Pit River story. It is happening everywhere — in every Indigenous community trying to hold itself together under pressure that never fully stops. And the wisdom I am reaching toward, the wisdom of Craven Gibson and Darryl Babe Wilson and the people of the Pit River Nation, feels like the clearest language I have found for what I am trying to say.

If I get something wrong, I want to be corrected. That is not a disclaimer. That is how I try to walk.

It began as a response to a post. Then it became a response to a pattern. Then, sitting with Darryl Babe Wilson's writing, with the old Pit River Nation booklet, with the recorded words of Craven Gibson, I realized I was writing about something much older than social media.

Craven Gibson — Pit River elder, Atwamsini from Big Valley, storyteller, keeper — told a story in 1971 about Hawaiians who washed ashore on the California coast when their great canoe, their lumja-wi, broke apart on the rocks.

They wandered. They found the Pit River territory. They fell in love with the land and the people. They settled and mingled. Mixed-blood children were born. And when the council finally decided the Hawaiians must return to their island home — because a people who cannot dance on their own land, who cannot feast on their own food, who cannot dream their own dreams, will eventually vanish — some of those mixed-blood people stayed on Ajuma-wi land.

They stayed. They were received. They belonged.

That is the story the elders carried. That is what was recorded in the tradition of the Pit River Nation, passed across generations and written down by Darryl Babe Wilson in the late twentieth century. And what I want

to ask, sitting with it now, is this: how did we get from that — from Cocoonman building a rainbow bridge, from an old grandfather weeping as the Hawaiians danced their song of longing — to a social media post telling people that proximity is not identity, that marriage does not make you real, that the children of mixed families are suspect until proven otherwise?

The answer is colonialism. The answer is lateral violence. The answer is what happens to a people after malaria epidemics, militia massacres, forced removals, boarding schools, Dawes Act allotments, and a century of being told they are wards of a government that never once treated them as human.

But the answer is also, I believe, recoverable. Because Craven Gibson gave us the frame in nine words:

There is no power in destruction. Only in creation.

This book is my attempt to remember that. To argue for it. To hold it up against the light of what our communities are doing to each other right now, and ask: what would it look like to create instead?

I write toward Pit River territory, from diaspora, as someone trying to remember responsibly rather than claim authority I do not hold. I write as a continuation of those who came before me — not as the recipient of a tradition passed down, but as the same flame burning in a new time. The torch was never handed off. I have always had it. And so have you.

Gedin-ch-lum-nu. Let it be this way.

The River That Gathers

Ako-Yet and the A-Juma-Wi

The Pit River does not begin at a single point. It gathers.

From springs seeping out of volcanic rock on the flanks of Ako-Yet — what settlers call Mount Shasta, what the Pit River people call the western cornerstone of their world — from snowmelt and hidden aquifers and the slow seep of high-desert rain, the water finds its way down. It joins other water. Smaller creeks discover the main channel. Tributaries add their volume and their history. By the time the river has a name — A-juma in Wilson's spelling, the big river itself, with the people called A-juma-wi, dwellers on the A-juma — it has already been gathering for a very long time.

The Pit River Nation is eleven bands: Madesi, Itsatawi, Atsugewi, Atwamsini, Aporige, Ilmawi, Hammawi, Ajumawi, Kosalektawi, Hewisedawi, Astarawi. Different territories, different dialects, different relationships to different stretches of the river and the land it drains. And yet one people. One nation. One river, gathering.

I begin here because the river model is the oldest teaching available to us on the question this book is trying to answer. How do you hold a people together across difference? How do you welcome new tributaries without losing the integrity of the main channel? How do you protect what is sacred while remaining open to what the river is always doing, which is moving, changing, gathering more?

Mis Misa — the small power that dwells deep within Ako-Yet — holds the balance. It shifts like a pendulum each time Great Wonder stirs. It keeps the earth and universe in relation. This is what Wilson recorded the elders saying: not a metaphor for them, but a description of how the world is held together.

The balance is not static. It does not mean everything stays the same. It means the earth and the universe remain in right relationship to each other, continuously, through every shift and disturbance. Mis Misa does not prevent the storms. It holds the balance through them.

That is what I am asking our communities to do.



The Torch That Was Never Passed

There is a common image for how tradition moves between generations: the torch. An elder holds it out. A young person takes it. The elder steps back. The tradition continues, but in new hands.

I do not believe in this image anymore. I believe I was born with the flame already burning. The fire that my ancestors carried through the cold of Contact, through the forced removals, through the boarding schools and the Dawes Act allotments and the termination policies — that fire is not something that was given to me. It is something that was always mine, always ours, always the same flame in different hands at different moments of the same long night.

This is not a small distinction. If the tradition is a torch that gets passed, then it can be dropped. It can be lost between generations. The person who holds it has special status — they are the keeper, the authority, the one with the right to say who may come close and who must stay away.

But if a tradition is a river — if a people are river people, and the river is both what they live beside and what they are — then the tradition does not pass. It continues. It gathers. Every person who walks beside it in good faith is part of it. Every tributary that joins with humility and accountability adds to its volume without changing what it is.

I am writing this from diaspora — from the distance that colonial disruption creates between people and their origins. I do not stand inside Pit River territory when I say these things. I stand outside it, trying to remember something, reaching toward a teaching that feels true to me even at this distance. And what feels true is this: a river that refuses all tributaries, that dams itself against every new source of water, is not protecting its purity. It is dying.



What Living Tradition Looks Like

The Pit River Nation booklet, written by and for the people, says it plainly: the stories are our education, our religion, our entertainment, and are a daily part of life. The stories are not a museum exhibit. They are not a performance for outsiders. They are not the exclusive property of those who can prove a fraction of blood. They are daily. They are alive. They are what you do every morning when you wake up knowing who you are and where you come from.

A living tradition makes new dances. Uses new tools. Has new dreams. When the Pit River people adopted horses from the northern raiders, the horse became part of the culture — not a corruption of it. When Darryl Babe Wilson wrote the story of the Hawaiians using a typewriter and published it in an academic anthology, the typewriter and the anthology became vessels of the tradition — not threats to it.

The question is never: has this changed? Everything living changes.

The question is: does the change come from inside the community, with the guidance of those who carry responsibility for it? Or does it come from outside, extracted without permission, stripped of its accountability, turned into costume or content or personal brand?

Protection is necessary. Ceremony is not for everyone. Sacred symbols are not aesthetics. The elders and cultural stewards of each nation hold the authority to decide who enters, how, and under what conditions of accountability. This is not gatekeeping in the colonial sense — it is sovereignty. It is the river deciding where its banks are.

But banks are not walls. A river with walls is not a river. It is a drainage ditch.

The Hawaiians Who Stayed

— A Mythic Foundation

What the Tradition Remembers

Long before the social media comment sections, long before blood quantum and enrollment cards and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the Pit River people received visitors from across the ocean.

The story was told to Darryl Babe Wilson in 1971 by Craven Gibson — Pit River elder of the Atwamsini band, from Big Valley, keeper of the long memory. It had also been carried by Ramsey Bone Blake and Wes Cline. It was not one person's story. It was the people's story, passed across generations the way all true things are passed: from mouth to ear, in the presence of fire, under a sky of frozen stars.

A great Hawaiian canoe — a lumja-wi — broke apart on the rocks of the California coast. The Hawaiians struggled ashore. They wandered through the coast range and into the great Central Valley, then found their way over the Sierra Nevada and into the territory of the A-juma-wi. The Fall River Valley opened before them, and they fell in love with it — with the earth and the people both, because both reminded them of home.

Ako-Yet stood guard over them at night. The A-juma sang to them as they dreamed. The winds moved through their spirits. The seasons showed them what abundance looks like when a people and a land are in right relationship.

They settled. They mingled. They had children.

But something was missing.

They were feasting, but not on their own food. They were dreaming, but not the same dreams as home. Their children laughed and ran, but not on their own earth. And the elders of both peoples knew: a people who cannot dance

on their own land will eventually lose their purpose. They will vanish from the earth. Their songs will go silent.

The council gathered. Ako-Yet listened. The forest leaned in. Birds and butterflies stopped moving and attended. The hawk and the eagle hovered. Even the deer were still. This was a decision of such weight that the whole living world paused to witness it.

The decision was made by the elders of the Hawaiians and the elders of the A-juma-wi together. The Hawaiians must return to their island home. The decision was painful but swift, Gibson said — like an arrow to the heart of the spirit.

A-poni-ha — Cocoonman, one of the earth makers — was given the task of helping the Hawaiians return. He went to the top of Ako-Yet. He gathered power. He sang a song to all the spirits of the universe, from those close at hand to those dwelling far beyond the farthest stars. He sprinkled into the fire the blossoms of the sage and the pollen of the pine, the flowers of the valley and the perfume of the plum, the dust of the grasses and the lichen from the highest rock of the great mountain.

From that small fire, a rainbow arched across the sky — from Pit River country to the heart of the Hawaiian islands.

The Hawaiians, frightened, refused to walk it. Cocoonman walked it first to show them it was solid. He called Yas — Weasel — who fashioned a flute from a reed found in the nearby stream and played soft music. As Yas played and danced, his dance led him onto the rainbow, and he floated upon it like a hawk landing on a pine limb. As he walked the rainbow path, the Hawaiians walked the land bridge below — without fear. The music was so beautiful it was heard all around the world.

When they reached their islands, the rainbow returned to the fire. The birds and animals returned to their domains. The songs and the music returned to silence and peace.

And some of the mixed-blood people — the children of A-juma-wi and Hawaiian parents — stayed. They stayed with sad hearts, Gibson said. But they stayed. On A-juma-wi land. In A-juma-wi community. As A-juma-wi people.

Craven Gibson told this story as proof of kinship across oceans and continents. He pointed to the shared hue of the earth. He said: we are all related, the Hawaiians and the A-juma-wi. And the proof is the earth itself — take a handful from one place, rub it on the other people's skin. The dirt and the skin remain the same hue.

— ♦ —

What This Story Is Doing in This Book

I am not citing this story as historical evidence that the Hawaiians came to Pit River territory. I am citing it as something more important: as evidence of how the Pit River people, in the tradition Wilson and Gibson kept, have understood kinship, belonging, and the welcoming of others.

In this tradition, people who are not A-juma-wi by birth can become A-juma-wi by relationship, by long presence, by the blessing of the elders and the consent of the community. The mixed-blood children who stayed were not suspects. They were not required to prove a blood fraction. They were not told that proximity is not identity. They were received. They belonged to the land because the land received them.

This is one tradition I am trying to remember more carefully than the logic of the social media post — the post that says marriage does not make you Native, that proximity is not identity, that certain people do not belong in certain spaces. That framework is colonial. It comes from blood quantum logic, from the Dawes Act, from the government's need to reduce the number of people eligible for treaty rights.

The tradition Wilson carried says something different: relationship, accountability, and long presence in a community create belonging. The elders decide — not a hashtag, not a quantum calculation, not an enrollment card.

The mixed-blood people stayed. And they were home.

— ♦ —

The Pattern — A Composite

What follows is a composite. It is drawn from multiple real conflicts observed across several Indigenous communities in California and the Pacific Northwest over the past decade — conflicts that unfolded publicly, on social media, and that the author has either witnessed directly, been asked to help navigate, or studied through public records and community accounts.

No single incident is depicted here. The roles are real. The dynamics are real. The harm is real. The specific people are not. I write it this way deliberately, because the point is never the personalities. The point is the shape of the thing — the way it always seems to go, the way it always costs the same things, the way it always leaves the same damage.

In an Indigenous community — in Northern California, in the Pacific Northwest, on the Plains, because this happens everywhere — there is a woman who has built a following around traditional knowledge. She makes regalia. She teaches basket-weaving. She does presentations for schools. She carries real skills, learned over years, and she is genuinely knowledgeable about specific aspects of her nation's traditions.

She also carries wounds. Most knowledge-keepers do. The wounds come from having had to fight for recognition, from being dismissed as not knowing enough, from watching people treat sacred things carelessly. The wounds have made her determined and, in certain moments, dangerous — because the line between protecting culture and using cultural authority as a personal weapon is very thin, and pain makes it harder to see.

There is also a woman who married into the community — often from a neighboring Indigenous nation, sometimes from a Latin American Indigenous background that does not map onto enrollment categories north of the border. She has been in the community for years. She has raised children in it. She has been taught by its elders. She shows up for the work. She is, in every meaningful sense, family.

There is a history between these two women. A friendship that soured. Grievances that were never properly addressed. And because they were never addressed, they calcified into something that felt like principle but was also personal.

The knowledge-keeper writes a post. It is ostensibly about a general problem — non-Native people inserting themselves into sacred spaces, wearing regalia they have no right to wear, building personal identity on the

backs of cultures they do not belong to. The concerns are real. They describe a genuine harm that happens across the continent. But the post is vague in a specific way: vague enough to apply to anyone the reader wants to apply it to, pointed enough that certain people know exactly who is meant.

The woman who married in reads the post and understands it to be about her. She responds. She names the knowledge-keeper directly. She says what she has kept quiet for years.

A third woman comes forward with her own account of protocol violations, of teachings passed on incorrectly, of community resources used for personal benefit.

The comment sections fill. Old wounds surface that have nothing to do with the original parties. People who were neutral are forced to choose. People who have been silent for years find voice.

And nothing is resolved. It never is.

Cocoonman is not in this story. Yas is not playing his flute. The rainbow bridge is nowhere in sight. And that is precisely the problem.

There Is No Power in Destruction

— Understanding Lateral Violence

The Words of Craven Gibson

Craven Gibson said it at 4-corners, in October of 1970, under a full-moon sky. Darryl Babe Wilson wrote it down. It has been sitting there ever since, waiting for us to take it seriously:

There is no power in destruction.

Only in creation.

— *Craven Gibson, October 3, 1970*

This is not a gentle sentiment. It is a political and spiritual analysis. It says: if what you are doing is destroying something — a person's reputation, a family's sense of belonging, a community's trust in itself — you are not generating power. You are spending it. You are burning something that cannot be replaced in order to produce heat that warms no one.

Creation is where the power lives. Building language programs. Teaching children to weave. Walking with the elders while they are still here. Making new dances. Gathering more people into right relationship with the land and with each other. These things generate power that compounds, that grows, that outlasts the person who started them.

Lateral violence is destruction. It is the redirection of energy that should be going into creation, into the tearing down of the very people who are standing next to us trying to build.

— ♦ —

What Lateral Violence Is

The term comes from psychology and colonial studies. It describes a specific pattern in communities that have experienced sustained oppression: the tendency to redirect pain, anger, and frustration — which should be directed outward, at the systems causing harm — onto the people immediately around us.

Colonialism does not only take land. It takes dignity. It takes the sense that your life, your knowledge, your choices, your children have worth in the world. And when that dignity is stripped away systematically, over generations, the resulting pain has to go somewhere. If the system that caused the pain is too large, too powerful, or too dangerous to confront directly, the pain turns sideways. It lands on the person standing next to us.

Lateral violence in Indigenous communities looks like: shaming, gossiping, exclusion, public call-outs, accusations of not being real enough, not being traditional enough, not being Indian enough. It looks like using cultural authority as a personal weapon. It looks like a social media post aimed at a specific person but written as though it is about a principle, so that the author can claim righteousness without the accountability of a direct accusation.

It is everywhere. In every Indigenous community that has survived colonialism. In every community of people who have been told, collectively, that they are not enough.

— ♦ —

The Colonizer's Toolbox

Colonialism gave our communities a specific set of tools for hurting each other, and we should name them:

Blood quantum. This framework — measuring Indigeneity in fractions of biological ancestry — was invented by the United States government in the late nineteenth century, primarily to reduce the number of people eligible for treaty rights and land claims. It has no basis in traditional Indigenous kinship systems. Most of our peoples understood belonging through relationship, responsibility, and community accountability — not through the calculation of a fraction. And yet we use it against each other every day, in casual conversation, in enrollment disputes, in social media comment sections.

The enrollment question. Tribal citizenship is a meaningful legal and political status, and tribes have every right to set their own membership criteria. But enrollment has become a sorting mechanism — a way to decide who is real and who is not, who may be present and who must stand outside. People who are deeply connected to their communities, who carry the language and the protocols, who do the daily work of cultural continuity — but whose paperwork does not qualify them under a particular enrollment rule — are treated as imposters. This is not traditional. This is administrative.

The border. The line between the United States and Mexico was drawn in 1848 by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed between two colonial governments. It divided communities, territories, languages, and families that had been continuous for thousands of years. The peoples south of that line are as Indigenous to this continent as the peoples north of it. When we use the colonial border to decide who counts as Native, we are enforcing the colonizer's geography inside our own hearts.

The authenticity test. There is always a test. The clothes are not traditional enough. The language is not fluent enough. The ceremony is not correct. The knowledge was not learned from the right person. The test is administered differently by different people, but it always functions the same way: to exclude, to diminish, and to make one person feel more real by making another feel less.

These are the tools. And when we pick them up — even with genuine belief that we are protecting something sacred — we are doing the colonizer's work for them.

— ♦ —

The Cost of Destruction

The Pit River Nation booklet records what colonial destruction actually looked like: malaria in the 1830s sweeping through California and Oregon, killing tens of thousands of Indigenous people. The Pit River Rangers — paid by white businessmen — massacring Pit River people at Beaver Creek in 1859. Forced removals. Boats on the Sacramento. People loaded onto boats, sent down the river, some jumping into the water rather than submit. The Dawes Act allotting what little remained into small parcels that were then lost through alcohol, deception, and non-Indian schemes. PG&E eventually acquiring 52,525 acres in Shasta County — land that had been Pit

River territory since before memory — for ten million dollars. Nothing returned to the people.

That is what destruction looks like when it comes from outside.

And lateral violence, while smaller in immediate scale, produces the same essential shape: it drives people out of community. It exhausts leadership. It turns healing spaces into battlegrounds. It teaches the children that belonging is conditional and can be revoked. And it hands our opponents exactly what they want — a people too busy policing each other to protect the land, the water, the language, the children.

There is no power in it. Craven Gibson was right.

Who Is Family?

— Kinship, Diaspora, and the Border

The Earth Remains the Same Hue

Gibson's proof of kinship was the earth itself. Take a handful of Hawaiian soil and rub it on a Pit River person's skin. Take a handful of Pit River soil and rub it on a Hawaiian person's skin. The dirt and the skin remain the same hue. We are related. The proof is in the earth we come from, not in the fraction of blood we can document.

This is not a dismissal of tribal sovereignty or specific national identities. The Pit River people are not the same people as the Hawaiians, and the story does not say they are. It says they are related. It says the earth recognizes their kinship even when politics tries to sever it.

What does this mean for the Mexican woman married to a Pit River man, raising Pit River children, taught by Pit River elders? Her ancestors walked this continent for thousands of years before the border that separates their territory from his was drawn. The Mexica, the Mixtec, the Zapotec, the hundreds of other nations — they are as Indigenous to this land as the Pit River people. The border does not exist in ceremony. It does not exist in the soil. It exists in law and in imagination, and we should be very careful about letting it exist in our hearts.

Proximity is not automatic identity. That point is worth holding. A person cannot simply declare themselves a member of a nation because they admire the culture, or because they married into a family, or because they feel a spiritual connection. Nations have the sovereign right to determine their own membership. Elders have the authority to decide who enters ceremony and under what conditions. Protocol is protocol.

But proximity in relationship — long presence, accountability, humility, service — has always been one of the ways people come to belong. The mixed-blood people who stayed after the Hawaiians returned did not hold enrollment cards. They were received by the community. They were

claimed by the elders. They belonged because belonging, in the tradition Wilson kept, is conferred through relationship, not just through blood.



How Our Peoples Have Always Answered This

Traditional Indigenous kinship systems were not primarily biological. They were relational and accountable.

Adoption was and is a profound practice in most Indigenous cultures — not the bureaucratic, paper-transfer adoption of the colonial child welfare system, but the full ceremonial incorporation of a person into a family, a clan, a nation. With responsibilities. With rights. With obligations that run in both directions and are witnessed by the community.

Intermarriage between nations was the primary mechanism of diplomacy and alliance across the continent. The Pit River people had complex relationships with their actual neighbors — the Modoc and Klamath to the north, the Northern Paiute to the east beyond the Warner Range, the Maidu to the south, the Yana and Wintu to the west — relationships that were sometimes competitive, sometimes warring, but always kin-structured at the deepest level.

A woman who married into another nation was not a foreigner to be tolerated at the edges. She was — if she fulfilled her responsibilities, if she walked in good relationship, if she was claimed by the elders — a member. Her children were members. Her knowledge of her original people was a gift to her new community, not a threat.

An elder in one of the conflicts this book draws from said something that cuts through all the noise: you are more Indian than some who are born Indian. This is not a sentimental compliment. It is a traditional assessment. The elder is not saying blood does not matter. She is saying blood is not sufficient — that what matters is how you show up, what you carry, and who you are accountable to.



The Diaspora and the Ache

Many people in these community conflicts are carrying a particular pain that does not have a clean name in English: the pain of being Indigenous but not recognized, of knowing your origins but not having paperwork that confirms them, of belonging to a people that colonialism scattered so far that re-gathering feels nearly impossible.

After the forced removals recorded in the Pit River Nation booklet — after the boats on the Sacramento, after the people loaded aboard at Red Bluff and sent downriver, some jumping into the water rather than submit, some surviving and returning, some ending up in Oklahoma or Klamath where they had been forcefully taken — after all of that, there are people alive today who carry Pit River blood and Pit River stories but who cannot document an unbroken line of residence in Pit River territory. There are people who are descendants of those who escaped the reservations and hid in the canyons, who survived by staying invisible, who raised children in the cities rather than on the rancherias.

These people are not frauds. They are the survivors of successful colonial violence. And when we tell them they are not real enough, not Indian enough, not enrolled enough to belong — we are completing the work the colonial system started. We are adding the final push to a dispersal that was never ours to administer.

The alternative is harder than a hashtag. The alternative is relationship. The alternative is asking: what are you here to do? How are you accountable? Who are your people, and how do you walk with them? What do you carry, and are you carrying it in a good way?

These questions require actual engagement. They require the kind of discernment that elders hold — and that communities are having to rebuild, carefully, in the long aftermath of everything that was taken.

The Student and the Teacher

— What Learning Is

Let Me Help You Remember

There is a relationship I keep returning to, that I think about every time I am in a situation where knowledge is being transmitted or withheld or fought over.

The student says to the teacher: let me help you remember.

This sounds presumptuous. But I mean it precisely. The elder who has carried the basket-weaving knowledge for fifty years — the way to find the silver willow in spring, the way to gather beargrass and prepare it, the way to read the pattern that tells the story of the land — that elder knows something that lives fully in her hands. Her hands know what her words have not yet been asked to say.

When a student arrives — uncertain, eager, full of questions that seem obvious to the teacher — the teacher is called to articulate what had become wordless. To find language for muscle memory. To make conscious what had been automatic. The student's ignorance, in this sense, is a gift. It calls the knowledge into a form that can travel.

Teaching is an act of love and remembering. Without students, there is no teaching — only a private holding. And a tradition that is only held, never given, is not a living tradition. It is a possession. And possessions, unlike rivers, do not flow.

This does not mean that all students are equal, or that any student may demand any knowledge. Protocol exists for good reasons. Some knowledge is only for those who have earned it, who have been prepared for it, who carry the responsibility that comes with it. These structures are not gatekeeping. They are the wisdom of people who have learned what happens when sacred things are handled without care.

But the principle holds: the act of transmitting knowledge is itself a form of the knowledge. How you teach is what you teach. If you teach with humility and patience and joy, you are teaching those things alongside the basket pattern. If you teach with gatekeeping and shame and the constant reminder that the student does not deserve to be there, you are teaching those things too — and the student will carry them forward.

— ♦ —

What Good Learning Looks Like

In traditional Indigenous contexts, good learning looks like this: you come with humility and you stay humble even as you grow in knowledge. You do not arrive knowing what you are there to learn — you let the tradition show you. You accept correction without defensiveness. You do not share what you have been given before you understand what it means to give it.

You ask permission. You accept no for an answer. You come back the next season and ask again, and the season after that. You show up not when it is convenient but when the community needs you. You do the unglamorous work — the setting up and the cleaning up, the driving elders to appointments, the sitting with the children so the ceremony can happen.

And when you have learned something, you feel more accountable to the people who gave it to you, not less. The knowledge does not make you free of obligation. It deepens the obligation. This is the mark of genuine transmission: the student who has received something real becomes more responsible, not more entitled.

The harmful version — the culture appropriation that communities rightly resist — looks like this: you encounter a tradition, feel drawn to it, participate a few times, feel transformed, and begin to speak about it publicly. You incorporate its symbols into your personal aesthetic. You teach others what you have learned without asking whether you have been given the right to teach. You feel that your genuine appreciation is sufficient authorization.

The difference is not enthusiasm. Both the good learner and the harmful appropriator can be deeply moved by what they encounter. The difference is accountability. The good learner knows that what they carry belongs to

someone — to a people, to an elder, to a community — and that relationship is more important than their personal development.

— ♦ —

On Protocol and Those Who Break It

The community conflicts at the center of this book involve, among other things, allegations that a knowledge-keeper was teaching things incorrectly — filling gaps in her knowledge with invention rather than acknowledging the limits of what she knew.

This is a real harm. When a person teaches incorrect ceremony, incorrect protocol, incorrect history — and teaches it with the confidence of a cultural authority — they create confusion that can take generations to correct. Youth who are given a false map for territory they will need to navigate for the rest of their lives are not just misinformed. They have been misled at the level of identity.

The appropriate response to this harm is not a social media post. It is a direct conversation, first. Then the involvement of elders who can clarify what is correct. Then patient, consistent correction over time. And if the person refuses correction, it is the elders and the appropriate community structures — not a social media audience — who address it.

The reason this matters is not about protecting reputations. It is about modeling what the culture is for. Ceremony is for healing, for connection, for the continuation of life. The way we handle community conflict should reflect that same purpose. If we handle it with shame and public spectacle, we are teaching that the culture is a weapon. If we handle it with courage, directness, and care, we are teaching that the culture is a path toward one another.

Gedin Ch-Lum-Nu

— What It Means to Build

Creation as Political Act

Craven Gibson's nine words are a political argument as much as a spiritual one. If there is no power in destruction, then every act of destruction in our communities is a waste of the limited energy we have to protect our peoples in a time when that energy is desperately needed.

Our peoples are facing violence, addiction, poverty, land theft, language death, and policy attacks all at once. The water that once ran clear through Pit River country now flows through PG&E turbines and emerges as electricity for cities that were built on the dispossession of the people who kept that water clean. The salmon are nearly gone. The language speakers are growing fewer every year. The children are watching.

We cannot afford destruction. We cannot afford to spend our collective energy on determining who is real and who is not, on managing the fallout of public shaming, on the slow erosion of trust that happens when community members treat each other as enemies. We can afford conflict — real conflict, direct conflict, conflict handled with courage and care. But not the kind that produces no resolution and infinite damage.

— ♦ —

Five Principles of Building

I want to offer — not as law, not as policy, but as a frame — five principles drawn from the traditions we have been discussing, for what building looks like in the time of social media:

The first principle: every person's dignity is protected as a starting point, not as something to be earned. This does not mean there are no consequences for harm. It means we begin from the assumption that the person in front of us is worthy of being addressed directly, honestly, and

with care — not mocked, not vaguely accused in a post designed for an audience, not stripped of their humanity in a comment section. This is what Cocoonman demonstrated when he was given the task of returning the Hawaiians: his duty, decided by the council, was to assist them back to their homeland safely, not full of fright.

The second principle: children are at the center of every decision. Not our image, not our political standing in the community, not who wins the argument. The children who are watching how the adults around them handle disagreement are learning what it means to be Indigenous, what it means to belong, what it means to hold something sacred. That lesson — taught by what we model, not what we say — is the most important cultural transmission happening in our communities right now.

The third principle: ceremony, language, and teachings are kept strong by living them, not by restricting access to them. The eleven bands of the Pit River Nation survived not because they kept their culture locked away from anyone who might misuse it, but because they kept practicing it, kept teaching it, kept showing up for it through the worst of what was done to them. The basket designs survived. The creation stories survived. Yas still plays his flute in the tradition.

The fourth principle: conflict is handled with courage and care, which means directly, quietly first, and with the appropriate people involved. Not a social media post. Not a vague public accusation designed to let the author claim righteousness without the accountability of a specific, disputable claim. Direct conversation, then family, then elders, then community process. This is not naive. It is harder than a post. That is precisely why it is more powerful.

The fifth principle: the story we tell about ourselves is one of dignity and solidarity. Not 'we fight each other constantly over who is real.' Not 'we police each other's authenticity with colonial tools.' The story the Pit River Nation booklet tells is one of a people who survived everything — the malaria, the Rangers, the removals, the allotments, the boarding schools, the termination — and are still here, still learning, still making baskets and jewelry and cradle-boards, still proud people of the Pit River Nation. That is the story. That is what the children should inherit.

— ♦ —

The Governance Gap

Social media fills a governance gap. When communities do not have strong, trusted, accessible processes for handling dispute — when elders are not consistently available for consultation, when community meetings are rare, when there is no established way to bring a concern forward and have it addressed — people find other outlets. Social media is always available. It provides instant audience. It rewards escalation with attention.

The solution is not to tell people to stop using social media. The solution is to rebuild — or build for the first time — the community structures that should be handling these disputes.

The Pit River Nation's constitution provides a foundation. Elected councils, established processes, recognized authority. But constitutional structure alone is not enough. The informal structures — the talking circles, the family councils, the elder consultations, the regular community gatherings where trust is built through shared work — are what give formal governance its legitimacy and its reach.

Building those structures is the creation Craven Gibson was talking about. It is slow. It does not produce content. It does not generate followers. But it generates community — the real thing, built over time, through the accumulation of small acts of showing up for each other.

Building the River Forward

— Addresses

To the Knowledge-Keeper

Your knowledge is real. Your regalia is beautiful. Your basket-weaving is a gift to every student who has ever sat with you. Your presentations for youth are valuable — our children need what you know. These things are true, and they matter.

And: cultural authority is not the same as personal authority. The trust that comes to you because you carry traditional knowledge is a gift from the community. It is not a weapon to be used against the community's members in personal disputes. When you use it that way — when the social media post about cultural protection is also, underneath, about a specific person you are in conflict with — you are borrowing from the community's trust account without its knowledge. Eventually that account runs dry.

Your wounds are real. The wounds that come from fighting for recognition, from being dismissed, from having to prove yourself over and over — those are the wounds of a person who has survived something hard. They deserve to be witnessed and tended. But wounds that are not tended become the place from which we harm others. The community needs your healing as much as it needs your knowledge.

What would it look like to bring the concern directly to the person? To ask an elder to sit with both of you? To address the protocol violations through the community's actual structures rather than a post designed for an audience? That path is harder and slower and less satisfying in the moment. It is also the one that might actually lead somewhere.

— ♦ —

To the Woman Who Married In

You do not need my validation. But I want to say clearly: loving your husband's people, raising your children in their traditions, showing up for the work of community with humility and commitment — this is not appropriation. This is what family does.

The mixed-blood people who stayed after the Hawaiians returned were not asked to prove themselves every day. They were received. They had been claimed by the community through the long practice of relationship. That is what you have built, and no social media post can undo it.

The line between genuine relative and harmful outsider is drawn by your accountability and your humility — by whether you follow the guidance of elders, whether you accept correction, whether you center the community's wellbeing or your own image. From everything visible, you are walking that line carefully. Keep walking it. Let the record of your presence speak more loudly than the accusation.

And: your anger is understandable. Being publicly accused, even obliquely, of something you have been careful not to do — that is genuinely painful. You do not need to absorb that pain without response. But the form the response takes matters. Direct, private, specific — these serve you better than a public counter-attack that makes the conflict larger and gives it a longer life.

— ♦ —

To the Community

You are living in the time Craven Gibson was speaking to when he said there is no power in destruction, only in creation. The list of what is being destroyed around you — land, water, language, salmon, young people's connection to where they come from — is long. You do not have the resources to also destroy each other.

You can disagree. You can hold each other accountable. You can say: that is not the protocol, this is not how we do it, you are welcome here but under these conditions. All of that is right and necessary. Sovereignty requires the capacity to say no.

What you cannot afford is the energy cost of turning every interpersonal conflict into a community war. Every hour spent in a comment section is an hour not spent teaching a child to weave, not spent sitting with an elder, not spent working on the water rights case, not spent building the language program.

The Pit River Nation booklet ends with this: our challenges continue to grow, and we remain a proud people of the Pit River Nation. Proud. Not embattled. Not suspicious. Not consumed with policing each other's authenticity. Proud — because the people know who they are, know where they come from, and have survived everything that was done to destroy that knowledge.

That pride is the inheritance. Pass it forward whole.

— ♦ —

The New Dances

Cocoonman sang a song to the spirits far beyond the farthest stars. He sprinkled sage blossom and pine pollen and valley flowers into the fire. A rainbow arched from Pit River country to Hawaii. Yas fashioned a flute from a reed and played music so beautiful it was heard all around the world. And then he placed the reed back in the stream so it would continue to grow beautiful music forever.

That is the tradition as I understand it. Not the preservation of a single form, not the freezing of a single moment. The tradition — as I have come to see it — is the capacity to build something new that carries the old spirit forward. The flute goes back in the water. The music continues. The river is still moving.

We are in the time of new dances. New ways of gathering — video calls that connect diaspora relatives across the distances colonialism created, language apps that put the words in children's hands before they sleep, digital archives that hold elders' voices safe from the forgetting that is always coming for us. New ways of protecting what is sacred — media protocols that help communities control their own stories, legal strategies that use the colonizer's courts to win back what the colonizer took, youth programs that make it cool to know where you come from.

And new ways of handling conflict — ways that bring in the elders and the protocol and the long view, rather than the audience and the algorithm and the dopamine hit of a post that goes off.

The Pit River people are still here. Eleven bands, still gathering. The Pit River is still running from Ako-Yet to the Sacramento, still carrying the memory of every source that joined it, still moving.

Gedin-ch-lum-nu.

Let it be this way.

Afterword

For the Children Who Are Watching

Yas placed the reed back in the stream so it would continue to grow beautiful music forever.

I want to speak to the young people who are growing up in the middle of these community conflicts. Who have watched the adults they love say terrible things to each other in comment sections. Who have heard people they respect described as frauds, sell-outs, culture vultures, gatekeepers. Who are trying to figure out what their identity means, what their community is, whether any of it is worth the trouble.

You are not required to inherit the conflicts. You are required to inherit the knowledge, the responsibility, the beauty, and the work. The personal grievances, the social media wars, the lateral violence — you do not have to carry that forward. That is not tradition. That is wound.

The tradition is Cocoonman climbing to the top of Ako-Yet in the dark. The tradition is Yas playing a flute on a rainbow so beautiful the Hawaiians stopped being afraid. The tradition is a grandfather standing strong before all the world and speaking a decision that cost him something, because the council had decided and the decision was right. The tradition is the mixed-blood children who stayed, who made a life, who belonged.

Your ancestors prayed for you. They prayed that what they carried through tremendous suffering would reach you intact. It is reaching you. Even now. Even in the middle of all this noise.

The language is still there. The land is still there. Ako-Yet is still there, holding Mis Misa in its heart, balancing the earth and the universe with every shift of the pendulum. The elders who remain are still there. The basket patterns are still there — goose, stars, geese flying — in the hands of people who learned them in the right way and are waiting to teach.

Pick it up. Carry it carefully. Walk the rainbow if you have to. And when you get to where you are going, place the reed back in the stream.

Let the music continue.

Gedin-ch-lum-nu.

We are still here. So let's be gentle with each other while we build what comes next.

— ◆ —

End of Draft

Notes and Acknowledgments

The story of the Hawaiians who came to Pit River country is drawn from Darryl Babe Wilson's essay 'Gedin Ch-Lum-Nu (Let It Be This Way),' published in *Surviving in Two Worlds: Contemporary Native American Voices*, edited by Lois Crozier-Hogle and Darryl Babe Wilson (University of Texas Press, 1997). Wilson received the story from Craven Gibson — Pit River elder of the Atwamsini band, from Big Valley — in 1971. The story was also carried by Ramsey Bone Blake and Wes Cline. The author has paraphrased and engaged with this story throughout this book as a mythic and analytical framework, not as a verbatim reproduction of Wilson's writing. Readers are encouraged to read Wilson's original essay in full.

The words of Craven Gibson — 'There is no power in destruction. Only in creation' — are cited from Wilson's record of a conversation at 4-corners, October 3, 1970.

Historical information about the Pit River Nation — the eleven bands, the territory, the colonial period, the land struggles, the language — draws on *People of the Pit River Nation* (Shasta County Schools / Johnson-O'Malley Program), written and produced by Ron Demele for the Shasta County Schools, with elder consultants including Floyd Buckskin, Leo James, Margaret Wolfin, and many others.

The linguistic and ethnographic designations of bands and speakers in this book draw on Bruce E. Nevin, *Aspects of Pit River Phonology*, doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998. Nevin conducted fieldwork with Pit River speakers from 1970–74, including Craven Gibson, and his work is the most authoritative linguistic record available. Nevin lists Gibson's band as 'Atwamwi (atwáamwí)' in his phonemic transcription system — this is the same band the Constitution and the Pit River Nation booklet call Atwamsini, which Nevin's footnote 49 confirms: 'Atwamjini or Atwamsini is from atwáam, valley, referring to Big Valley.' This book uses 'Atwamsini' throughout, following the Constitution's official spelling. Nevin further notes that 'Ajumawi' or 'Achumawi' properly applies only to the Fall River band; he uses 'Pit River' for the people as a whole, following their own current usage. Band spellings in this book follow the Pit River Tribe Constitution (Article I) as the governing document of record.

Darryl Babe Wilson is an Ajumawi and Atsugewi writer, poet, and cultural keeper from the Fall River Valley in northeastern California. His memoir

The Morning the Sun Went Down (Heyday Books, 1998) is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand Pit River territory, history, and spirit from the inside.

The composite conflict depicted in Chapter Two is drawn from patterns observed across multiple publicly visible community conflicts over the past several years. No single incident is depicted, and no individual is portrayed. Identifying details have been deliberately altered and combined to protect the individuals involved while preserving the analytical truth of the pattern.

The Ajumawi and Atsugewi language terms used in this book — A-juma-wi, Ako-Yet, lumja-wi, Mis Misa, A-poni-ha, Yas, Gedin-ch-lum-nu — are drawn from Wilson's writing and from the People of the Pit River Nation booklet. Any errors in usage or spelling are the author's own.

This book was written in gratitude to every elder who kept the fire burning when it would have been easier to let it go out.

— ◆ —