

Seneca Storytelling: Effect of the Kinzua Dam on Interpretations of Supernatural Stories

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Supernatural tales among the Seneca and other Iroquois, or *Hodinöhsyöni*,¹ nations have been a critical part of their culture before recorded history and are still enjoyed today. While the specific content and way of telling the stories may have changed over time, the popularity of supernatural themes remains, and many of the stories' characters still feature prominently in both text and storytelling in the community. The building of the Kinzua Dam on the Seneca Allegany Territory in the late 1960s and the subsequent upheaval in the community have deepened the tradition of stories about supernatural incidents. The upheaval has also served as a means through which old stories have gained strength and aided community members removed by the dam's construction in overcoming those tragic events.

A possible vehicle promoting interest in supernatural themes and Seneca storytelling traditions is the desire to bring together tellers and listeners to strengthen the community against outside threats. Numerous threats to the traditional way of life and landbase have plagued the Iroquois—including the Seneca—since pre-Revolutionary times. The Indigenous people of the region have faced centuries of outside pressures and banded together against them: from the 1797 Treaty of Big Tree that ceded Seneca lands and created reservations in New York, to boarding school enforcement, notably the Thomas Indian School in operation from 1855 until 1956, to New York Thruway incursions during the mid-twentieth century, to the building of dams including the Kinzua Dam, which was ostensibly built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in 1963 for energy and to control flooding in Pittsburgh, hundreds of miles downstream on the Allegheny River. The location of the dam was especially devastating to the Seneca people since it flooded the gravesite of Cornplanter, warrior and diplomat during the Revolutionary War era, and the vision-site of spiritual leader, Handsome Lake. The dam's construction flooded one-third of the Allegany Territory, displaced hundreds of Seneca people, and caused the relocation of cemeteries and the longhouse, a place of worship. As people who enjoy an ancient oral history, the Seneca enjoin their community members to lift their spirits

¹ The *Hodinöhsyöni*, also spelled in alternate ways such as "Haudenosaunee," are a confederacy of related Nations that includes the Seneca, Tuscarora, Cayuga Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk, in what is now New York State and parts of Wisconsin, Ontario, and Quebec. Groups often were re-named by invading peoples; for instance, the *Hodinöhsyöni* were named "Iroquois" by the French and are known as "Six Nations" in Canada. *Onödowa'ga* is the word that the Senecas use for themselves; it means "people of the hills." Senecas have three reservations or Territories: Allegany and Cattaraugus that are part of the Seneca Nation of Indians, and Tonawanda, of the Tonawanda band of Senecas.

during trying times and to maintain legends typifying themes such as winning battles, glorifying heroic figures, and overcoming supernatural beings. The resurgence in supernatural stories mirrors the resurgence of the community itself while the pressures have changed over time.

When asked about supernatural stories in the Kinzua Dam take area, many locals will share their own accounts. Allegany resident Tyler C. Heron shared his perspective of the storytelling traditions at Allegany, the personal twists on these old stories, and the effect of the dam on the telling of contemporary versions. His generation is a bridge between the elders featured in Alberta Austin's *That's What It Was Like* (1986), a collection of interviews with elders who were born in the early twentieth century and with today's youth. Heron explains the contemporary setting for storytelling, old and new purposes for stories, and the effect of English today. Throughout his account are references to the importance of family and community, as well as losses incurred by the Kinzua Dam.

Despite these changes to communities within the region affected by the dam, modern stories are still redolent of some themes of previous generations, while new themes have also emerged. The characterization and array of supernatural beings, for instance, has remained relatively consistent, but the context now includes modern settings that reflect the changes seen by the dam's construction. Through all these modern influences, and especially during Heron's lifetime, even the language the tellers use to tell the stories has shifted from the Native tongue to English; in 1892—even after assimilation measures affected the language spoken—an estimated 2,000 Senecas spoke no English (*Six Nations* 1995), while there are arguably fewer than 50 native speakers today (Chafe 2007). Yet as the language has shifted, the content and significance have remained relatively stable.

As it is with storytelling variations across cultures, the Native storytellers may add a personal twist that changes each time a new person tells an old story. But specifically for Native peoples, there is an ancestral or traditional theme that remains within nations. Because of personal influence, the narrator may alter details, characters, or other story elements, often relating the past to the present (Ballenger 1997:791-93). Often, stories center around specific events or occasions connected to specific points in time, but the stories are remembered by storytellers and shared for the benefit of future listeners (791). Each teller brings his or her own experience to the narration, as “memory is seen *through* an already existing story” (792; italics in original). Yet, both the narrator's influence and the collective memories themselves extend outward to others throughout generations. This pattern of narrative and memory is evidenced at Allegany, as seen in Austin's *That's What It Was Like* interviews and Heron's observations of current storytelling patterns in the community.

Scholars hold that Native storytellers of various backgrounds often reflect on the patterns of storytelling that are specific to their own local communities, the ways that stories are passed on through the generations in their localities and in their families, the significance of storytelling to themselves as tale tellers, and their own personal favorite stories that they still tell to others. These stories were passed down through the generations and held different interpretations and recitations; the stories reflect the time when they were told as well as the time of the teller and the teller's audience. They all contribute to a bigger cultural picture, yet each story stands alone (White 2007:5). These methods of maintaining stories hold true for Seneca. Wonderley notes that the Iroquois were and still are avid storytellers (2004:44); their tradition is apparent from

interviews conducted at community meetings, local schools, or by having coffee with an elder. Moreover, their storytelling tradition is archived in local government offices and the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum. During the interviews I conducted with Heron, he often inadvertently recounted similar stories that his late father and former Seneca Nation president during the era of Kinzua construction, George, was known to tell to listeners on different occasions. Many of these stories focused on the same location, such as a certain cemetery or segment of train tracks, or the same legendary spooky character that reappears in many tellers' tales but often in different guises. The Tribal Historic Preservation Office has archived several interviews with local community members, and some of these interviews contain the same such story settings and characters.

Several authors have also recorded Iroquois stories. Joseph Bruchac, a contemporary storyteller of Abenaki descent, compiled many volumes of Native stories including Iroquois favorites. He reflects on the importance of storytelling in his life, acknowledging "the power of the words that a good storyteller has been given, and a reminder of the responsibility involved in being one who carries those words" (1995:10-11). In his foreword to Arthur C. Parker's *Skunny Wundy* (1991), Bruchac expressed both the significance of Parker to Seneca storytelling and the impact of the Anglo invasion and the dominance of the English language. In his estimation, were it not for Parker's work, in part, "the vital heritage of the Seneca people might not have survived that difficult period of the first half of this century, when most native people were keeping a low profile to survive or were even turning away from their traditional cultures" (1991:ix-x).

This importance of the survival of culture is typified in stories about the supernatural that have endured among the Seneca. Parker has also commented extensively on the topics and themes of Seneca stories at the time, noting that "in particular we were blessed with an ample store of tales of vampire skeletons, of witches, and of folk-beasts" (1989:xix). Among his many "Basic Premises of Seneca Folk-Lore" are themes still active in today's storytelling: unseen spirits, conflict of good and evil spirits, magical power, transformation, ghosts, and dreams (3-4). Especially notable among these themes are the instances of *jogëö*, or "little people," who are common in contemporary Seneca stories as well; witches and mysterious lights are also among perennial favorite themes. Parker commented that the "Will-o'-the-wisp, or *Gahai*, is known as the witch's torch. It is not a spirit of the first order but merely a flying light that directs sorcerers and witches to their victims. Sometimes it guides them to the spots where they may find their charms" (16). There is even a place near the current Seneca Allegany Territory in the Southern Tier of New York State that is known among locals as *Gahaineh*, or "shape-shifter."

Supernatural stories have been ubiquitous among the Seneca as well as their fellow Iroquois neighbors, as traced by several researchers and authors. These stories are included in local cultural materials for school children and are found in the archived interviews in the Historic Preservation office. For example, Hope Emily Allen, a contemporary of Parker's, noted in the late 1940s that the Iroquois "liked spooky things" (Wonderley 2004:183). Wonderley observes that there is something "distinctive" (87) about Iroquois storytelling of supernatural stories, where "there lurked a world of supernatural denizens autochthonous to the deep woods" (134) whose most beloved characters include "Little People, Flying Heads, Stone Giants, Vampire Corpses," (184) shape-shifters, and witches. That this tradition is evident among

Iroquois and their “widely separated” linguistic relatives sharing a “common ancestry” gives testimony that it may in fact be much older, and “may well date to the early 1600s” (105-06).

Bridging Past to Present

Understanding the antiquity of Iroquoian supernatural stories may help to understand their significance to the people who love to tell them. According to both Tyler, and George Heron, and to Austin’s interviewees, the haunting by spooky characters, for instance, serves as a way to teach moral lessons to children, and the stories concerning the dam help listeners define a common unity in the face of an outside threat to it. Both listeners and tellers can identify with the ideals that they hold to be important at the time the stories are told. As is seen in the recursive nature of the supernatural characters and contexts of the most popular stories at Allegany, “[t]his set of belief structures characterizes the connectivity of the story and origins to a practice of continuity that bridges the Ancient past to future generations” (White 2007:35) and helps Seneca community members to “reimagine” themselves (248). The supernatural characters that haunt the Allegany area have been used before 1900 to scare children to stay in bed at night and not wander away from home; these same characters have been used since 1960 to keep people away from the dam area. Such stories “are expressed in language invoking the past and evoking the authority of the dead” (Wonderley, 2004:57). As seen in the examples concerning the haunting by traditional, old spirits of the dam and evacuation of the take area, these supernatural characters can help to make present issues “more meaningful and more palatable” (Wonderley, 2009:xxvii). Supernatural stories also call upon local events considered to be historically verifiable. All of these conditions—the recursive and continued enjoyment of supernatural beliefs and themes, the connection of past, popular characters unified in present versions of the stories, and the resulting present condition in which the community members are reimagining themselves through the sharing of these stories—reflect the tragic removal of the Seneca people from their ancestral home to make way for the building of the Kinzua Dam.

The current storytelling continues this old tradition and wisdom, yet it has changed with the times and the changing events in the community. Bruchac commented, “Even today, the old people continue the oral tradition, though they may now pass on the stories more frequently in English than in Seneca . . . The stories remain and are strong—vital threads that sew together the cloth of their culture” (1995:viii-ix). This transition period of survivors of the events of the early twentieth century has been documented by Seneca researchers such as Alberta Austin.

Austin (1986) compiled a collection of interviews with Iroquois elders that typifies the bridge between past and present stories and traces the use of stories to teach morality lessons and bring members closer together in troubled times. Although the elders spoke of other aspects of life on the reservations—such as education, farming, and family life—many elders reminisced about the storytelling traditions in their families. Most of the interviews took place with locals who lived in or near the territory during the early part of the twentieth century.

Calvin Kettle, born in 1924, commented on the language shift, remarking that the language chosen by the storyteller influences the nature of the story, specifically its force in making the listeners comply with the story’s moral lessons. He explained: “My grandmother told

a lot of stories. The older people taught discipline by telling scary stories” (87). He also reflected upon the ways that English impacted Seneca storytelling, commenting (91-92):

It used to be pleasant when everyone talked the Indian way completely. Now it is mixed with English. The stories told in Indian were more scary and they never ended. The next night it would be continued. If the Longhouse could talk it would have a lot of stories. I have a lot of stories.

Parts of Corbett Sundown’s interview trace the use of stories to bond children together and to teach them moral behavior. Sundown was born 1909 and had been a Tonawanda Chief from 1939 until the time that Austin’s manuscript was published. He said (205):

Another favorite pastime was story telling [*sic*]. After the days chores [*sic*] were done, people would come to my house—either by horse and buggy or on foot by lantern light. The stories they told were old, old stories and were never told the same way twice. Every winter, it was the same thing. I think they told scary stories on purpose to keep the young children from wandering around at night.

He also commented on the theme of using frightening details to instruct children about dangers in the community. “One of the things they scared the kids with was the *Ga:nö’sha’*. The old people would say, ‘If you go out, the *Ga:nö’sha’* will chase you” (205).²

Virginia Logan was born 1899; her remarks typify the unifying power that the stories held within the community. She reminisced about her Aunt Martha, who told stories to children: “She’d make them sit down and then she’d turn down the lights before she started telling stories. She used to stop now and then, and at this point, the listeners were supposed to say, *Heh*, to show that they were listening. If no one responded, that was because the listeners were sleeping” (112).

Austin’s interviews demonstrate the ways in which storytellers have adapted to the changing times, especially the dramatic changes during the turn of the twentieth century such as the boarding schools, landbase dispossession, and culture and language erosion. Despite these threats, the personal stories have remained a strong part of the local community. These stories may have seen a revival after Kinzua was constructed. The particulars may have changed, but the patterns and even some of the characters are still the same.

DuWayne Leslie Bowen of the Allegany Territory published a contemporary collection, *One More Story: Contemporary Seneca Tales of the Supernatural* (1991). His experience echoes that of Parker, Bruchac, Ha-yen-doh-nees, and many other Native storytellers. He explains (1991:xii):

Growing up on an Indian reservation is an unique experience. Naturally there were differences in my upbringing than in the upbringing of any non-Indian. One of the things we had, [*sic*] was time with the old folks. My children will never know this valuable experience, what it was or what it meant.

² The *Ga:nö’sha’* are headless creatures composed of lower extremities.

Yet, these stories do endure. The common themes that were popular centuries before still resonate with the modern community, though interpreted differently.

Mysterious lights are often the subject of contemporary Seneca tales. In his story “The Lights,” Bowen writes (5):

There are lots of people who have seen these lights at one time or another. You always see them at night. They’re little round lights and they are usually yellow or blue and sometimes orange. You see them everywhere; sometimes down by the river; across the river on the tracks; in the woods; around somebody’s house or even up in the trees. . . . Whenever the old folks saw these lights they would always say, “. . . look, there goes a witch . . .” or “. . . there’s somebody watching you . . .”

“The Lights” is a story of a man who lived by himself; one night he was sleeping and felt somebody was watching him; he saw a light that disappeared. He thought nothing of it until it happened the next night; the following night he tried to stay awake so he could catch it. He saw a blue light that came to his door and disappeared. He tried to stay awake again the next night, but he fell asleep. A sharp pain in his back awoke him, and he saw a blue light flying away. He thinks the light “bit” him because he had said he didn’t fear them (7). Bowen explains, “The subject of lights is a stable item in the realm of the supernatural. . . .The lights have been with us since the beginning of time and they will be with us until the end of time” (7). Some locals assert that visions like these became more prominent during and after the building of the Kinzua Dam.

“The Great Swamp” exemplifies some of the supernatural stories that—although they exhibit old themes that Parker had noted such as ghosts of evil spirits, and teaching youth moral behavior—display these themes in new ways (such as the context of power lines and dam construction) that reflect more current, personal events in the Territory. In “The Great Swamp,” Bowen relates a story told to him by another storyteller; this story happened when the storyteller was young. He was at a dance, and people told him that he was too young to be out so late and that he should go straight home. On his way home, he saw a very tall figure wearing a high hat near the railroad tracks. He knew the person was not from the area, and he could not see the stranger’s face. The figure growled at him, and the boy ran home. He told his parents, who scolded him for being out so late. Bowen writes (18):

This particular swamp being has been described as being very tall, unafraid, never straying far from water, strong, a flesh eater. . . . During the 1960’s [*sic*], the United States Government constructed the Kinzua Dam across the Alleghany [*sic*] River. This forced a great relocation project upon the Seneca people. A major power company was forced to relocate also. This company cut a new powerline [*sic*] through the hills and through this very swamp I have mentioned. During this clearing operation, sightings of a tall man off in the distance became common. The strangeness of the man was the fact that he wore a high hat. This apparition watched the workers constantly while they worked in the swamp area. The workers named this apparition “Abe Lincoln.” During the spring of 1970, the last sighting of this apparition was made. It stood on a beaver dam at an outlet of the swamp.

Power lines are another common theme that has arisen since the dam's construction. Bowen's "The Power Line" is a story depicting events that happened when the power line was constructed. This is both Bowen's interpretation and his own story. In his book, which is told in the first person, he tells several short stories, adding his own remarks throughout: "The power line scared some people because they were afraid that the electricity could kill them. . . . Soon the men began to hunt along the line and then paths began to come and go from it" (39). One man used the path frequently. He had a wife and child, but he was an alcoholic who didn't provide for them. One night when he didn't come home, the wife took the child to a friend's home and went out to look for her husband. She found him with another woman. When she confronted him, he hit her and went off with the other woman. For days afterward he did not come home, and she sat and cried. She told people that she was going to the power line; she gave her ring to her daughter and was never seen again. People searched for her but only saw a piece of her coat on a step of an electrical tower. Assuming she killed herself, they looked for a body but could not find one. The husband finally stopped drinking. Bowen explains that a year after this incident the man was hunting with a friend near the power line. They heard a bird in a tree, and the friend climbed the tree to get a closer look at what they heard. He saw the skeleton and a piece of the coat of the missing woman. They went to get others, but when they returned, she was gone; only the cloth remained. A year later, the daughter disappeared. She had told another child that she was going to the power line—someone's voice was calling her. People went to look for her, and they found her skeleton wrapped in her mother's skeleton; the ring was on the mother's finger. "I hardly ever go to the power line anymore. I hear people tell of seeing figures off in the distance when it just begins to get dark" (42).

Similar events related to mysterious occurrences after the dam's construction are recorded elsewhere. The Seneca-Iroquois National Museum Pamphlet, "Along the Ohi:yo/ Jonegano:h: Cold Spring: A Look at Snow Street," details the notes of George S. Snyderman, an anthropologist who talked with people at Allegany after their forced removal (n.d.:12):

Community members shared with him some details about moving their ancestors' remains to new cemeteries when the land was taken to accommodate the building of the Kinzua Dam. Some recalled that "there [were] mighty weird things happening around the Longhouse. Several Sunday nights there was a light seen floating near and around Wannie's [Francis Abrams] house. A lot of people saw the glow. It jumped around and floated away, and landed on the roof of Corny and Elsie Abrams' house. After that, all the clans got together and put up one big feast for the dead. The light hasn't been seen since."

Allegany is also mentioned in Mason Winfield's *Haunted Places of New York: A Supernatural Guide* (2003) and in another book by Winfield with Algonquin storyteller Michael Bastine (2011). Winfield and Bastine mention specifically that the impact of the dam's construction is attributed to contemporary sightings and resulting stories of "phantom horses . . . , bogies, and even the Great Snake . . . as if the unrest of the Seneca loosed the zoo of their psychic bogies" (2003:67; 2011:201). These works also mention high hat, lights, UFOs, and a story about creepy beings deep in the water who menaced United States Army Corps of Engineers officers as they worked to construct the dam.

Allegany themes such as the little people and the lights, along with personal twists on ancient motifs, still persist to this day in the oral tradition of the local people. When Tyler Heron was young, he heard stories from neighbors, his great-aunt, grandfather, and others, usually after dinner when friends and family gathered around to talk about the day's events. In those days, he recalls (2009), "for kids, they'd tell a story." Heron characterizes tales told in these settings as "family stories" and "little, personal stories." This type of setting for storytelling is changing since families, in his experience, no longer have supper together. He remarks that people still like to visit his father to hear him tell stories. Family stories of his youth replaced the older stories such as those collected in Parker's *Skunny Wundy* that "were other people's personal stories" that were told "by a person of influence." Contemporary stories are as variable as those of previous generations, Heron says, since storytellers "have their own experiences" and "old secrets" that are unique to the teller.

In Heron's youth, stories had a moral lesson whether the tellers and listeners were aware of it or not. Heron states they still serve as "life lessons" to warn people "about what isn't good." Some family stories told today reflect the importance of nature common to stories of centuries ago that were told by tellers who "discovered how Mother Earth helped us." Heron shared a contemporary story about someone in the community who used to dream about the best natural medicines to collect. Heron also related a story about someone who had gone to collect ginseng when the medicine collector felt a chill and suddenly froze. This medicine collector saw "a little demon or something." Heron explains that different people have seen this figure in the community. Yet another tale serves as a warning about the proper way to collect medicine. Heron explains, "the character of this story had neglected the protocols before he went to gather medicine; walking home he saw a white mist approaching, and it passed through him. When he got home his Mother asked him what happened because his hair had turned white." Some of the themes from Parker's day are still familiar to today's storytellers, and some new themes have also emerged. *Oiwatha'*—meaning something to the effect of "things work themselves out"—is a common theme that Heron mentioned frequently in his discussion and explained that many of the traditional and personal stories reflect the theme of *oiwatha'*. Also, there are still many stories told of the little people. Heron recalls:

My great-uncle Bill was a section foreman for the Erie Railroad, and Aunt Jenny told of an incident a railroad steam locomotive engineer related to Uncle Bill. "The engineer couldn't believe his eyes when he looked out and saw a little person running along with the train at Meetinghouse Run. The train was traveling at least 60 mph."

Much like Parker and the generations before him, Heron had been told that the little people lived among the rocks scattered throughout the foothills of the Alleghenies that surround the Territory.

Heron also discussed the same Abe Lincoln-esque character that Bowen wrote about—*Hohigwe:is:*, or tall hat—explaining that it has been seen by people for generations. Also, *jis:gë:h* are witch-ghost figures that scratch on the walls when people are not behaving, he explained. Their actions may be explained differently today, but they are the same creatures with the same name as in Parker's accounts. Another theme Heron mentioned (also noted above) prevalent even in Parker's day is *Gahai*, or strange lights. *Gahaihneh* is an area near the old Red

House community and has been famous for sightings of unexplained beings. According to Heron, it is one of the places where people have been seeing strange lights. George Heron, Tyler's father, was also known to refer to *Gahiehneh* as "the place of the spooks" when he held storytelling sessions with community members. Stories about the area abound, including several sightings of motorists stranded along the interstate that straddles the edge of *Gahaihneh*. No matter the theme that the "little, personal stories" contain, these stories are still a part of the small community where the tale-tellers live.

The families at Allegany have been living in close-knit enclaves for centuries. Stories have been intertwined within the "context of the reservation." People in the community often mingled at socials, sporting events, and other activities. Kinship has been a strong factor that "at some point, personal stories became community stories," the younger Heron states. "Here, it's a close community, so when something happens, it gets around." This communal atmosphere has helped contribute to the popularity of both old and new stories.

Permeating Heron's accounts of storytelling in his community is an acute sense of loss. "Storytelling is kind of lost," he remarks, yet some families have maintained the traditions. Still, the forced removal that the United States government mandated for the Kinzua Dam has affected Heron and many others in the community, including effects on the quality and quantity of storytelling in the community. Heron reflects, "we left a lot behind after Kinzua;" the flooding of more than a third of the Territory "covered a lot of stuff left behind." Furthermore, a cemetery had to be relocated, and this relocation created enough concern for people that it became central to community stories. Heron shared an example that took place "during the Kinzua Removal. An elder was walking home and it was a little after dark. Along the route he had to pass the burial site of Blacksnake near the old Robinson Run School House." He related to Heron that "his feet became heavier and heavier until it was very difficult for him to walk, it was though a force was holding him back. The elder kept moving and the force weakened. The elder took the incident as a sign of displeasure from the spirit world maybe or even Blacksnake about the disturbance and removal of the Seneca cemeteries."

The trauma of the dam affected the lifestyles that the residents at Allegany enjoyed for centuries, and the lifestyle changes in turn affected storytelling at Allegany. Partly due to the long-established dominance of English, community members Dar and Sandy Dowdy established *Ganöhsesge:kha Hë:nödeyë:sta'*, or "The Faithkeepers School," a private Seneca culture and language revival school, where Tyler Heron sent his children. At the school, stories such as the Seneca Creation Story and other tales are told, many of them in Seneca. The school's importance to maintaining the traditions cannot be underestimated, and its timing could not be more significant, as Heron explains that "Kinzua changed communal living." After the forced removal, "elders began passing on;" as families spread out, the "forum for stories" changed. Heron also points out that many stories of his generation have gone with the places that were submerged or abandoned. Before the dam, there were countless stories "about old places . . . community centers If people went back there, the stories would probably come back again."

Recovering from Tragedy and Inspiring Hope

There may be a good reason why these stories will endure among the Seneca at Allegany. An allegory noted by Wonderley (2004) may help point to the reason why their popularity resurfaced during the early twentieth century, why they undergo revival periods to this day, and how this renewed interest in storytelling traditions may coincide with the recent revival of the language and culture: stories strengthen people's spirits in the community during times when they face new and changing threats. Wonderley posits that "a supernatural needs human help to overcome an enemy" (2004:224); the tellers and listeners may assist the supernatural characters in fending off future incursions into the territory. The dam may have been one of the most significant incursions in the area during the twentieth century. Winfield explains that "it's hard for non-Iroquois to appreciate the anguish this caused the Senecas" (2003:66).

Other stories, such as those historically told of wars fought, helped the people "think well of themselves and get through bad times" (Wonderley 2009:33). The stories also aid the people in asserting what is rightfully theirs: "A claim to possession that is historic and right is surely important to a dominated people" (32). Since people often need to "make sense of tragedies" (White 2007:31), storytelling, including stories about supernatural beings and events, may serve as a vehicle for the teller and the audience to overcome tragedies among people who "struggled to make symbolic sense of dispossession and reduction" (Wonderley 2004:xxiii). Tellers "tweaked" stories and were "quite possibly raising the issues they were facing at this point in time" often ending with messages inspiring hope (White 2007:464).

Heron is optimistic when reflecting on storytelling at Allegany. He tries to keep stories alive by telling them to his children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews:

Is it possible to keep the stories going? Yes, if we take the time to tell them. . . . It has to be a family atmosphere. . . . I tell stories . . . kids like supernatural stories . . . Maybe 20 years from now, they'll tell the same stories. . . . Some places are too new for stories to happen . . . you need time for things of significance to happen. . . . There are many personal stories within us.

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