

"Ancestors"..... The Story Behind the Song

I wrote this song with dear friend Melinda Wood Allen. We had both arrived early at the 2017 Positive Music Awards in Tampa to write new songs with a few of our longtime musician colleagues before the actual festival began.

Here's the set-up: You are assigned a writing partner, and the two of you are challenged to go off in a corner somewhere and come up with a great song (or at least the beginnings of one) in two and a half hours. It's a little like speed dating, but more friendly and creative.

Melinda and I were sent off to a middle-of-the road, clean-but boringly antiseptic hotel room with a cheap half-assed digital piano and only our intuition, musical experience, and receptivity to guide us. That winter of 2017 felt like a critical time in history where the world in general, and our American politics in particular, seemed to be coming apart at the seams. So, we felt like we needed to come up with an especially meaningful song, not only for ourselves, but for our potential audiences as well.

The big question was: How were we supposed to ground ourselves in a deep and authentic way in the midst of such global chaos before we began to dive into music and lyrics?

Melinda happened to be wearing a Native American necklace that said "Earth, Fire, Water, and Time." The words, and the visuals they suggested, sparked a powerful bodily sensation in both of us.

It was clear that we needed to begin by grounding ourselves in the natural world, the wilderness inside and out, and by connecting to the wisdom of our native allies in the spirit world. We felt special guidance from the Ancestors. So that set the tone for the musical direction, and we soon got the rhythm, melody, and chord structure of the song.

As for the words....One thing that helps me bring through the lyrics to a song is to imagine that I'm taking a video of the story. I can pan my imaginary camera around and see the visuals surrounding me in clear detail....colors, sounds, smells, air temperature, time of day or night....and then the actions and the feelings will come through quite naturally in words as I simply describe what's already there.

With that strong beginning, Melinda and I finished the song on time, right there in our 4th floor air-conditioned Floridian hotel room. The next step was to call in our friend and brilliant guitar player Rick Cowling, who tuned into the essence immediately, and gave the song a more soulful and authentic musical feel.

The three of us sang and played "Ancestors" for the first time two nights later in concert there at the Positive Music Festival, and over time it has evolved into the recording you hear on the album.

When JD and I sing it now for live audiences, we begin by respectfully calling in and thanking the native guardians of the place where we are performing....and it feels like the spirits show up to support and guide us as we go.