



# Reiki with Indigenous People

BY GERMAINE DE PERALTA

**I**N AUGUST 2024, my former student, Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master Marie-Louise Chakapash Pachano, and her husband, George Pachano, invited me to offer Reiki sessions at the ninth annual Fort George Residential School Gathering Conference in Chisasibi, Quebec, Canada. As an organizer of this event, Marie-Louise said, “There are so many victims of trauma from Indian Residential Schools, and it was my intuition to bring in Reiki this year to help them, especially with intergenerational trauma...It was the right time.” This healing and empowerment conference attracted 180 Cree First Nations residential school survivors.

Chisasibi is one of the largest Cree reserves in Quebec, with a population of 5,000 Indigenous Peoples from this tribe.<sup>1</sup> In the five-day conference, First Nations healing methods included herbal medicine, cedar baths, sweat lodges, Sun Dance, and counseling by Cree counselors. Reiki, a non-Indigenous healing method, was offered alongside massage therapy and reflexology for the first time.

We provided Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki sessions to attendees and leaders from nearby Cree reserves. Reiki treatments were part of the self-care services under the mental health

support program where the Cree came to heal and empower themselves after their traumatic experiences during Canada’s colonization. The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay spearheaded this conference.

## Canada’s Indian Residential Schools

Indian Residential Schools were government-sponsored religious schools established over 150 years ago to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture.<sup>2</sup> In a study of missing Indigenous children and unmarked burials, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) confirmed as of 2015, 3,200 deaths of children who attended Indian Residential Schools between the 1870s and 1990s. However, the TRC received verbal accounts from survivors of many more children missing or dead. The official death toll is now 4,100.<sup>3</sup>

These findings garnered international attention in May 2021 when archeologists detected, through ground-penetrating radar, what they believed to be 215 unmarked graves in the province of British Columbia. In June 2023, the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) reported

Left: At the "Fort George Residential School Gathering Conference," Cree First Nations survivors and families gathered to heal and honor ancestors.

that First Nations across Canada found evidence of the remains of over 2,300 children in unmarked graves at or near former residential schools and Indian hospitals.<sup>4</sup> "The schools were a deliberate attempt to destroy Indigenous communities and ways of life and part of a broader process of colonization and genocide," according to the Canadian Museum of Human Rights.<sup>5</sup>

### How It All Started

Marie-Louise, an elder of Chisasibi, and her daughter, Marina Pachano, took my Reiki I & II classes in 2017. At my Reiki Wanderlust Healing Centre in Ottawa, Marie-Louise became an Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master in 2019. She was not only a dedicated student but also an excellent Reiki Master. We kept in touch over the years so she could continue learning Reiki, and we became good friends. I didn't know she would eventually invite me to offer Reiki sessions with her at the conference!

Marie-Louise and I set up a healing room for Reiki sessions near the large conference room where 180 Cree gathered to heal and empower themselves. They were processing trauma, and some came to get Reiki sessions as part of their healing. At some point, attendees lined up outside our Reiki room for treatments, and we got word those clients loved the Reiki sessions. We even had to extend Reiki treatments for one day after the conference!

Our clients were, I would say, more emotionally expressive than my usual clients in Ottawa as they narrated their stories of child abuse, missing children, murdered relatives, substance abuse, and other effects of ruthless colonization. Many of these issues were part and parcel of their intergenerational trauma. Through Reiki and other native healing methods, residential school survivors could express themselves freely after decades of being silenced by colonizers. So, while our Reiki sessions lasted 30–45 minutes, we allotted extra time for clients to discuss their issues, particularly after the Reiki sessions.

In the next room, Marie-Louise's daughter, Marina Pachano, a Reiki II practitioner, gave clients Reiki combined with the Indigenous healing modality of cedar baths, which a Cree cedar bath practitioner gave.



Marie-Louise Chakapash Pachano, and Germaine provide Reiki to their client.



Marie-Louise Chakapash Pachano, Germaine, George Pachano, and another Cree Leader are ready to enjoy pizza.



Germaine stands alongside three elders, Marie-Louise, and another mental health support team member.

## Issues of Trust

It helped that Marie-Louise was in the Reiki room with me since she was Cree and a respected leader in Chisasibi. Her presence in the room brought about trust among clients, allowing them to tell their stories freely and release emotions. The Cree speak English, but some of our clients could better express themselves in Cree, and it was great that Marie-Louise was there.

She and I sat together to listen and speak with clients in pre-Reiki session discussions and post-Reiki session re-caps of issues that needed to be released and discussed more in-depth.

When offering Reiki sessions to people in different cultures and communities, it is essential to have a trusted person present from their community. I experienced this during a healing trade with a shaman in Siquijor Island in the Philippines. A trusted local had to accompany me and introduce me to the shaman; otherwise, she would not have given me, a foreigner, a healing session. After her session, I offered to give her Reiki. Initially, she was afraid, but after some coaxing and with the presence of my local companion, she agreed to receive Reiki, and in the end, we bonded.

## Respecting Culture

In my Reiki practice, I have attracted clients and students from various cultures, such as my Cree students. I've always believed in incorporating some aspect of their cultures into my classes to honor and show respect. With Cree First Nations students, I felt even more inclined to do this as part of their Reiki healing and empowerment journey since having their culture stripped away by Canada's colonizers is tantamount to losing one's authentic self, which is a kind of "soul loss." This subject is sensitive to many ethnicities who have experienced colonization.

During the five-day conference, I wore Cree ceremonial clothing to our Reiki sessions and attended parts of the conference and other sacred ceremonies. I was very proud to wear a beautiful bright orange ceremonial skirt with black, yellow, and white feathers stitched into the skirt. I wore it with a bright yellow tee shirt that said, "You Are Not Forgotten," which had a silk screen sketch

of a mother holding two children. I alternated this shirt with an orange tee shirt that said, "Every Child Matters," referring to the over 4,000 Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves.

I made it a point to be culturally sensitive and respectful of Cree culture and traditions. For example, I allowed people at the conference to teach me about their culture and speak openly about it without trying to push my perspective, agenda, or culture on them. It would have been another way of colonizing them if I had done this.

I ate the local cuisine such as ptarmigan—a medium-sized game bird—goose, and wild salmon. The Cree are hunters, trappers, and gatherers. Most vegetables cannot grow in this part of Canada because it is so far north and freezing. I set aside my vegetarian diet and took their diet as my own for the three weeks that I lived in Chisasibi.

I joined the community in a large celebration called *Mamoweedow* (meaning "Get Together" in Cree) in Fort George, which included games and fun with family and friends, sharing stories, and traditional food! Fort George is an island across the river from Chisasibi, a spectacular nature haven, but also the site of several residential schools where the Cree suffered under the hands of French and British colonizers. I also enjoyed eating wild salmon with Marie-Louise's friends, walking around the island, and staying overnight at their cabin. I did as they did.

## Who Is the Teacher, and Who Is the Student?

Marie-Louise introduced me to her friends at the conference as her "teacher," and I felt embarrassed. I told her friends she was my Cree culture and residential school-teacher. I have always believed that we are always teaching each other, and in fact, I tell my Reiki students that we are all "classmates" learning together. In my Reiki classes in Ottawa, I make it a point to ask my students to bring an aspect of their culture, such as a teaching, ceremonial dress, or sacred object from their country to our class. When Marie-Louise became an Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master in 2019, I asked her to wear her ceremonial skirt to the last day of class and requested that she do a Cree prayer and chant, along with Cree music from her iPhone. I recall that the rest of us in class found Marie-Louise's sacred ceremo-

ny very healing and, shall I say, magical. She also taught me that burning sage would not set off the smoke alarm in my workshop room. We did burn a lot of sage in that class, and she was right!

I was very honored to visit Chisasibi and give Reiki sessions alongside Marie-Louise. I loved Chisasibi and its majestic natural environment of vast untouched land, pristine rivers and lakes, and endless forests of pine trees. While there, I was also blessed with the most colorful and bright aurora borealis (the northern lights) I have ever seen. To me, it was a blessing from the Cree ancestors.

In conclusion, providing Reiki sessions or classes to and with the Cree, attending the ninth annual Fort George Residential School Gathering Conference in Chisasibi, Quebec, Canada, and writing this article are ways for me *to be with and for* the Cree and other Indigenous Peoples *through the energy healing method of Reiki* to help facilitate their collective healing and empowerment journey. ■

Holy Fire® and Karuna Reiki® are registered service marks of William Lee Rand.



Germaine is an Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Master and a Holy Fire® III Karuna Reiki® Master. She owns Reiki Wanderlust in Ottawa, Canada. Germaine was a journalist based in the Philippines and Singapore for over twenty years. In Ottawa, she works as a creative nonfiction writer, a technical writer, and an instructional designer. You may contact her at [germaine\\_de\\_peralta@yahoo.com](mailto:germaine_de_peralta@yahoo.com) or at 1 (613) 697-3105. Germaine's website is <https://reikiwanderlust.com>.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> "Chisasibi," *Wikipedia*, July 21, 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chisasibi>.
- <sup>2</sup> "Residential Schools in Canada," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 10, 2012, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools>.
- <sup>3</sup> "Information of Missing Children from Indian Residential Schools," *Truth and Reconciliation Community Bobcaygeon*, June 22, 2021, <https://trcbobcaygeon.org/buried-children-at-residential-schools>.
- <sup>4</sup> "Residential School Denialists Tried to Dig up Suspected Unmarked Graves in Kamloops, B.C., Report Finds," *CBC News*, June 17, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/denialists-tried-to-access-unmarked-gravesite-tkemplups-report-1.6879980>.
- <sup>5</sup> "Canada's Residential Schools," *The Canadian Museum for Human Rights*, <https://humanrights.ca/resource-guide/canadas-residential-schools>.