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## The Story Behind YAKOANA: an Interview with Anh Crutcher

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## The Story Behind YAKOANA: an Interview with Anh Crutcher

### **Abstract**

Remarkably, the indigenous peoples in 1992, having endured centuries of severe oppression, took the political initiative to confront the nations represented at the Earth Summit regarding the ecological doom we collectively face on this planet. Marcos Terena is shown on film in Yakoana challenging the world's political representatives to hearken to the ecological wisdom of the indigenous peoples in order to reform their doomed practices. It is the story of this moment of turnabout which Anh Crutcher has attempted to capture through her documentary film. My interview with her attempts to capture the making-of-the-film story behind the story of the film itself. It is the story about one person following her dream and how, coming from contemporary urban life in America, she encounters indigenous people gathered from all parts of the planet.

## Introduction

In 1992 two amazing events took place in Brazil - the Earth Summit sponsored by the United Nations and the First World Conference of Indigenous Peoples. Since the indigenous nations were considered by the United Nations to be "populations" and not "nations" in a strict political sense, they had no seat at the Earth Summit. Through the efforts of Marcos Terena, a member of the Terena tribe of Brazil, approximately one thousand people representing 92 indigenous nations from all parts of the planet gathered in Kari-Oca, Brazil for the first-ever World Conference of Indigenous Peoples during the week preceding the Earth Summit. This gathering at Kari-Oca formulated a 109-point declaration on the world's ecological crisis, addressing issues on territory, environment, development, and human rights. The following week, Marcos Terena represented the collective voice of indigenous peoples in an address to the Earth Summit.

Six years later, through the dogged efforts of Anh Crutcher, the story of this extraordinary meeting in Kari-Oca became available in the format of a 60-minute videotape with the title *Yakoana* (The Kari-Oca declaration is available at [Yakoana.com](http://www.yakoana.com) ("<http://www.yakoana.com>"). *Yakoana* is being distributed through Parabola Magazine (<http://www.parabola.org>), 1-800-560-MYTH, 656 Broadway, #615, New York, NY 10012). On January 29, 1999, I met Ms. Crutcher at her home in San Francisco. We initiated our acquaintance over lunch at a neighborhood café,

and returned to her apartment for the interview which follows.

<http://www.portalmarket.com/yakoana.html>

Representing indigenous peoples on film is a project fraught with interpretive complexities, particularly when the camera is in the hands of an "other-than-indigenous person" as in the case of Ms. Crutcher. Rennard Strickland, a legal historian of Osage and Cherokee heritage, in *Tonto's Revenge: Reflections on American Indian Culture and Policy*, his recent critique of the history of cinema portrayals of American Indians, explains the interpretive dilemma faced by Indian people in the United States. "No group other than the Indian faces the precise situation in which their economic, political, and cultural fate is so completely in the hands of others . . . The media image is therefore an especially crucial and controlling one because it is that image which looms large as non-Indians decide the fate of Indian people." (18) The result of cinematic imaging of Indian people by the dominant culture, as Strickland recounts, has been detrimental to indigenous people. "Film gave light and motion to long-standing images of deeply entrenched stereotypes. The Indian in film is rooted in almost five hundred years of non-Indian portrayals of Native Americans." (24-25) Strickland goes on to note that the cinema tradition of imaging indigenous people is dependent in part on the interpretive tradition of documentary filming. "In many ways, popular films continue to reflect the Indian documentary tradition. In such films, Indians are treated as ethnographic

specimens with the filmmakers seeking to capture the last gasp of the dying aborigines ... The premise, the image, the idea behind all of these films is that the Indian is doomed." (30)

Remarkably, the indigenous peoples in 1992, having endured centuries of severe oppression, took the political initiative to confront the nations represented at the Earth Summit regarding the ecological doom we collectively face on this planet. Marcos Terena is shown on film in Yakoana challenging the world's political representatives to hearken to the ecological wisdom of the indigenous peoples in order to reform their doomed practices. It is the story of this moment of turnabout which Anh Crutcher has attempted to capture through her documentary film. My interview with her attempts to capture the making-of-the-film story behind the story of the film itself. It is the story about one person following her dream and how, coming from contemporary urban life in America, she encounters indigenous people gathered from all parts of the planet.

### **Interview with Anh Crutcher**

**DS: When we were talking in the café, you mentioned how you first got connected to the project and it had to do with going to a meeting, I think. Did you know Brian (Brian Keane) before that meeting?**

**AC:** No, I didn't. I had taken a few months off to try to figure out what I really wanted to do, what my dream was, what my reason for being on this planet is, and I had done what I called my "Walden Pond" time and just lived in this little cottage through the winter in Sag Harbor, New York. I wrote a lot in my journal and thought a lot and walked a lot and meditated and just tried to figure why I was here and what I should be doing. I realized that from my perspective, nature is like the great healer, or for me I found "God," and I found solace and I found a connection to the world, and a connection to being alive, which I didn't always necessarily find in my regular life.

**DS: Because you had lived in cities.**

**AC:** I lived in cities, and I think most of the people I know live in cities and are thinking about their career, or thinking about this or thinking about that, and whatever they are thinking about doesn't have much to do with nature; with the beat of nature, with the rhythm, with what I consider to be the real law. We've covered it up with abstract law, with concrete, with whatever. So, my theory was, and still is, that our disconnection with nature is the fundamental problem with all the other diseases that affect us, whether they are physical health diseases or not, but diseases like child abuse, and poverty, and disrespect to each other, and a sense of low self-esteem and low self-worth. I think that if we realize that we are part of nature and nature is sacred, then automatically we're sacred and we're part of this miraculous

wonder, and I think that raises your sense of self, and it also raises your level of respect for other people, as well as the trees, or the wind, or the rocks, or the sun, or whatever.

I really felt that our disassociation with nature and the fact that we have drifted from there and that we look at ourselves as lording over nature and that nature is really nothing important except maybe a nice holiday weekend, was a big problem. So, I decided that what I wanted to do was to devote my life and my time to trying to re-instill in myself, as well as in other people, a sense that we belong to nature and that nature is so magnificent, a sense of wonder in nature, a wonder including us.

So, the Earth Summit was coming up and I thought "Great, this is going to be the largest summit in human history, and all of these people are going to go, and all this attention will be focused on the planet, and that's just what we need. So, great, this is where I'll jump in. But how?" I wasn't a journalist and I wasn't a scientist, I wasn't a farmer, I didn't necessarily know how to help in those arenas. About three weeks before the Earth Summit happened I met a guy named Brian Keane, who became associate producer of *Yakoana*. A few of us got together in Manhattan to meet with him, and he was going to tell us about indigenous peoples and the indigenous peoples' "earth summit." Everybody came and met him for an hour, and after an hour I was completely transfixed with this man and what he had

to say about native people. So, Brian and I spent the rest of the day talking, about six hours, eight hours. I was just sitting at the feet of a great storyteller. I realized from what he was telling me that indigenous peoples are the translators. They still know the language of nature. They know what I want to know. They know what I think my soul needs to survive, and what I also think the planet needs for me to know in order for it to survive. I realized that we have these translators that still speak that secret, wonderful language of nature, and the language that we have forgotten and that we need to learn in order to survive, and at the same time we're killing them. We're killing our link.

He told me all these stories about indigenous people and things that they have done, and their bravery in terms of sneaking out of their countries in order to meet other indigenous people so that they can try to effect change and try to save their families, and the planet, and their land and their forests. So, I said "This is it. This is how I can help."

Suddenly I could see a clear path for me to help with the environment. And Brian said, "Well, if you could record this conference, it would be great, because nothing like this has ever happened before, and we don't know if it will happen again. And we don't know if the press is going to pay any attention to us, since the Earth Summit will be happening the next week just down the road." So, I had three weeks to try to figure it all out. I found a cameraman and a field producer and a

sound guy, and I just put a bunch of airplane tickets and hotel reservations on my credit card and we went down there. So that's how it started for me.

When we got down there, we didn't know what was going on. I didn't know anything more about indigenous people than the average American person knows. It was this big, overwhelming, "Oh my God," thing.

**DS: You figured Brian knew, so you were going to be all right.**

**AC:** Yes. But, meanwhile, Brian was busy trying to coordinate things. The thing is that these people were all down there, some of them coming out of their villages for the first time ever, having maybe the most important meeting of their lives, maybe a meeting that would save their lives. So, they were concerned with these monumental issues of the planet and the saving of their entire culture, and we're running around with the camera saying, "We want to interview you ..." We were really low on the agenda in terms of priority. So, everybody whom we knew, like Marcos Terena, and Brian, they're dealing with these big issues, so it was quite a hurdle in terms of coordinating and logistics.

**DS: When we were talking earlier at the café, you talked about your personal reaction to being thrust into this situation. What it seemed like at the time and how it affected you after. And you told that with a real passion. Can you put that again into some words? What it was like to find yourself in a**

**situation like this which you've never been in? You didn't know what to expect and all of the sudden you are with a thousand indigenous people.**

**AC:** Never in my life have I felt so "white" before. I don't even think I knew what that meant. Part of it was just being in this structure and schedule that we are in this society where everything is really linear, and as a producer trying to make something happen, you get into this hyper-linear mode and you're really organized. Then we got down to this village of Kari-Oca that had been newly built by seven tribes from the Amazon, and blessed by 13 shamans and all the materials were sacred materials from the jungle. So, it in itself was this organic creation, and here we come with this linear attitude of "We're going to record this, and do this, and do that." We are in this linear way of thinking and all the indigenous people, whether they came from Norway or Australia or Japan or Africa, it's like they were thinking in a spherical way. We are thinking in our heads, "At 2:00 p.m. we're going to be here and this is what's going to happen," and the sense to me was that these people were thinking more with their whole beings. They were all on the same wave length, and then there was us. We were like the bumbling idiots down at Kari-Oca, where we were bumping into each other and getting everything screwed up.

**DS: Kind of like indigenous people being completely at home in, say, a rainforest? To you it's a wilderness, and to them it's home. And this is the way**

**it was with the issue of time? They knew how things were going, and you didn't have structure, so you were lost?**

**AC:** Right. If it wasn't something where we could look at our watches and write it down on a piece of paper, then we couldn't figure it out. And for them, it seemed to me, I mean this is my projection, but it seemed to me that the watches and writing it down was just superfluous. It's completely unnecessary and completely out of rhythm with what was necessary to happen. And I guess what's necessary to happen maybe changes at every moment, and they're in tune with that, whereas for us, we're just like, "It doesn't matter what's happening organically, at 2:00 p.m. this is where we're supposed to be so we'll be there." It was my first experience at not really being at home and not always being welcome because there were other film crews down there. We were the only ones invited by Marcos Terena, but most of the indigenous people there didn't know that, and didn't know the difference necessarily between us and anybody else. So we were periodically being kicked out of the village because they wanted it to be a "native only" experience, and I think that's a great idea because native experiences are co-opted again and again and again and again, especially by filmmakers who go film their stuff and then go make a documentary or film out of it, don't ask if they've done it right, maybe make some really horrible faux pas, and then don't give the indigenous people a copy, or any money that's come out of it or anything. That is most native

peoples' experience with filmmakers. For me to walk into that role, there was a whole set of issues that I had to deal with that I had never dealt with before. It threw me off center a lot just because I hadn't dealt with it before, but it was so good for me to see, to experience a little bit of consequence of what my "tribe" has done, what my colleagues have done to indigenous peoples in the past. I'm "white," I'm educated, I'm American, I'm healthy, so I'm one of the most privileged people on earth in a certain way, and I can walk into any situation and be given the first-class treatment because of that. So to not get the first-class treatment was good for me.

**DS: There was pain that was there on their side and you could feel it.**

**AC:** Yes, and I also felt a lot of guilt because I come from the society, and I support the mechanisms of the society, that supports their destruction and the destruction of their ideals. Their ideals were what I had been searching for in my own philosophy to try and make my soul feel good, so I had in some ways just barely scratched the surface of this concept of being a miraculous part of nature, and by scratching the surface I had found so much joy and ease by contemplating that idea. And then to meet people, to even know that people existed who walked, lived, danced that idea, and to meet them was just incredible. It was like if you could dream your most exquisite dream, and your most exquisite kind of planet and exquisite kind of people, for me, it was indigenous people. But, I didn't know it. I didn't know it until I met them. Or until I met Brian and he described them. It was

like this is the perfect vision. This is what I think the world should be. So then to find out that they really are that way, and also to see the big difference between me and them - talk about feeling non-indigenous. I felt about as un-organic as a silicon chip next to these people. So that was sad, too, for me, personally to realize how far away I was, even though I felt like I had good intentions. Then, also to realize that these people are facing extinction in a very, very, very real way.

**DS: I want for you to say a little bit more about how it was for you afterwards. You took this in at such a deep level, it was so disorienting in some way or another, that it took you months to even begin to start to gain some equilibrium.**

**AC:** I think it blew my fuses. It was like too much electricity going through a circuit. It was so raw and it was so real. All my life I'd lived in this fairly protected realm without realizing how protective it was. I had grown up overseas, so I thought I knew what different cultures were like, but I had never met different cultures that believed they were a part of the earth. I go down there in my really innocent frame of mind and I realize this is real. It's not like I'm going to put my little educated magic wand to it and just make it all better. It wasn't like that at all, and I think that blew my mind. The severity of the situation on earth, the severity of what humans are doing to other humans, I had read about all this stuff and it wasn't like I didn't know it in my brain, but I had never felt the hot, wet wind of it blowing through my

body. I had never, ever, ever felt that. And I don't think I knew that it really even existed on some level. It was harrowing. And, also to have my worldview altered so much. I was getting information in my head, but it was more from my neck down that I was truly getting information, and I didn't know how to incorporate all that. As a "white" person that lives in the "most powerful nation in the world," I had to cope with what do I do now? It was like I was a vessel and I got filled with way more than my vessel could hold, and it was temporarily shattering. So I came home with guilt and incredible sorrow and incredible horror, yet also with this exquisite sense that these fantastic people exist on the planet, and have for thousands of years. They've made me love the planet even more and love life even more, and realize how tenuous it was and how we're just really close to screwing up heaven. Thoreau says heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads, and it is so true, and we just don't see it, and we're trampling on it and destroying, and we think we have power over it, and we're killing the people who love it. So it was the most wonderful thing I could learn, and the most terrible thing I could learn, and it was too big for my body and my psyche to calmly handle. It took me a while to put the pieces back together.

**DS: So you just let it be for several months without doing anything about it. But, tell me, there was a moment, or maybe it was more than a**

**moment, tell me how you made the switchover from going over there to record these things for them to deciding to make a documentary.**

**AC:** When I met Brian, I was under the impression that we were going down to record this historic event. I think I then jumped to the conclusion that we would end up with all these video tapes and we would hand them over to the indigenous peoples. Then, as I was down there I thought there are thousands of native people here from all over the planet. Which group am I going to give it to? Then I realized that it was great that I recorded this, but if nobody sees it what good is it going to do? And it's my world that needs to see it. Their world already knows all this stuff. They live it every day, the good and the bad of it. The indigenous people that I met didn't have a way to raise a lot of money to make a documentary and to try to get it on air, so it slowly dawned on me that it wasn't just that I was down there to help record it, but then I needed to take the next step which was to get this information out to people like me who didn't know it. It was a startling realization. I remember at one point being down in Rio with the Indians and being so shook from the core of my being, so rattled by their way and the destruction of their way that I remember saying, "I'm going to devote myself to the indigenous people." I remember as I said it, it was almost like I knew the ears of "God," or whoever it is that has ears, were really listening and that I had sort of signed a contract. And maybe that's where the vision thing came, or something came and said, "Okay, you said you'd do it. Now

you've got to do it." I was stuck. And there were times during the five years of producing it that I begged myself to do anything else because it was just so hard, and I couldn't think of anything else to do. I was really stuck. I couldn't even come up with any way out. Anytime I tried to get a job, it wouldn't work. I was really stuck. I had no choice. But, happily, most of the time – 78 percent of the time I was delighted.

I know one story that I wanted to tell you that I didn't tell you down at the café, is that when I got back from Rio I was in that "Oh my God," very shook-up frame of mind until I put the pieces back together and was inspired by what I had experienced with the indigenous people to really carry on and figure out how to make a film out of this. And, the first three years, nothing happened. The first two years, I was working for Parabola, so I didn't have full time to devote to it. But even then I was trying this and trying that and there were all these brick walls, and "no's" and doors closed, and my ignorance, and it just wasn't going anywhere. I decided at the beginning of the third year, "I'm going to quit work. I'm going to concentrate on this full time. And then it'll happen." Even within that year, things weren't working. I wasn't getting any funding. I wasn't finding anybody who was willing to help me, or people said they were and then they would screw up. They would lose master lists, and it was just like everywhere I turned nothing was working. I remember thinking "Maybe I'm not supposed to make this. Maybe I was just

supposed to experience it myself, and it was one person that got changed instead of thousands, or however many I thought would be possible through television. Maybe I'm not supposed to do this because I'm not indigenous and I'm going to do it wrong, and I would rather not do it than do it wrong, and be insensitive." So, a friend of mine and I were heading up the coast and we were near Big Sur, and for a completely different reason we had a meeting with a guy from the Esalen tribe named Little Bear. We were meeting him about a kids' camp. He had no idea about Yakoana, about me, about the documentary, about the fact that I'd been to Brazil. He didn't know any of that stuff. I had been complaining to my friend about how I felt so much like I was hitting my head against a wall trying to get Yakoana going as a production, and nothing was working. And I said, "This is the first native person that I've seen since Kari-Oca, so I want him to give me a sign. I won't tell him anything, but I want a sign from him whether I should do it or not do it." And I thought "Maybe I'm not supposed to do it, because the whole message in Yakoana is the fact that we're connected. We are connected to the sacred and to the universe and to the earth, and to each other and everything. And television is the ultimate medium of disconnection. All it does is make you stop talking to your friends, stop going out and dancing, stop everything. You just watch the boob tube." So, I thought "Maybe I'm not supposed to use TV. Maybe it's being completely hypocritical." So, we go up to where Little Bear's tribe lives, up in the hills just east of Big Sur. And he takes us into this sacred, semi-underground area and he sings a

sacred song and does a prayer for my friend and me. And then he tells us this myth about creation and destruction and what's happening, and how the world is now out of balance. And I said to him, "Okay, the world is out of balance. What are we supposed to do?" And he looked at me dead in the eye and he said to me, "TV." And I thought "Shit! That's the sign. That means I'm supposed to do it."

About a month after that, *Parabola* offered to buy me a plane ticket to New York because there was going to be this week about the Amazon, and Marcos Terena and Davi Yanomami, one of the people from the film, were both going to be there. It was my first chance to see Marcos and to see Brian, and these other people since Kari-Oca. I had a meeting with Brian and Marcos and a couple of other people, and I explained what I had been doing for three years and what I wanted to do. In my mind, I thought, "If Marcos says yes, I will fight tooth and nail to make this film happen, and if he says no I'll give him all the footage and walk away. It's up to him. And whatever he decides, I'll do." I was so nervous because three years had been riding on this. So, I told him what my ideas were, what I had been doing and what my intentions were and he just listened. I was shaking in my boots. After it was all over, he stood up, he reached across the table, he took my hand and he said, "Muito obrigado," which means thank you very much in Portuguese, and then invited me to go meet a couple of other indigenous people. That was it. Ever since I got that handshake from Marcos, the doors kept opening. I found my editor, I

started getting grants. It was like the first three years I had to try as hard as I could and get nowhere and still be willing to do it, to prove maybe on some higher level to the indigenous people that I wasn't going to give up. And then they said, "Okay. All right. You've made it through the test."

**DS: So, this film is about them, but the making of it has been your process. Almost entirely yours. You've had some people kind of helping, but you've just been individually the one that saw it through, and have gone through all the joys and agonies of staying with it.**

**AC:** Yes. I had great help from my editor, Vivien Hillgrove, who worked on it out of her dining room for about a year.

**DS: How did you get her involved?**

**AC:** She's my miracle. I have a friend named Vivi and she's also a producer, an independent, struggling producer like me. This was right after Marcos had given me the handshake, the cosmic thumbs up. So I came back and things didn't start working right away, so I was frustrated and I was complaining to my friend Vivi, and she said, "Bring all your stuff over. I want you to tell me everything you need and maybe I'll get an idea, and I can help you." So I did that, and as I'm talking, I was talking about the vision I had for the film, how I wanted it to be, the sense of it. I wanted it to be ethereal and like my experience of going into another world,

but also really jarring and hard hitting. And as I'm describing this, Vivi says, "You've got to meet Vivien Hillgrove. That's exactly how she thinks and that's exactly how she edits." I hadn't heard of Vivien, and I said, "Well, who is she?" And she said, "She edited *Amadeus*, *Henry & June*, *Blue Velvet*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Fletch*, *The Right Stuff*, and a bunch of documentaries that have won awards." And I said, "She'll never talk to me. I'm Miss Nobody in this world, and she'll never talk to me." And Vivi said, "Call her. You have to call her." So, I got Vivien's number and I called her and I got her machine, and I'm leaving a message and the moment I mentioned the word "indigenous peoples," Vivien picks up the phone and says, "What? Indigenous peoples! Come out for lunch!" Vivien had left the Bay Area about 13 years ago, and moved an hour north to Santa Rosa, where she has a 2.5 acre piece of land and had started a medicinal herb garden. She was working on finding her balance between technology and nature, and she had been really interested in indigenous peoples, which I didn't know.

I showed up at Vivien's house and I knew this was the top in the tap-dance of my life. Everything was riding on this. It was so important that I don't even remember what I said. It was like my eyes rolled back in my head and I just blabbed. An hour and a half later she said, "Come back for lunch next week." So I got in the car and I realized I hadn't eaten anything. I was sweating profusely and I didn't know what had just happened. I came back the next week with every piece of

footage, every book, every bit of research I had done. If the car had blown up on the highway, it would have all been gone.

I get back up to Vivien's, and from 9 in the morning until 3, I'm talking about my vision, I'm talking about the film. And she's still not saying that she'll edit, and I'm thinking, "I need her so badly." So I felt like I was proposing. I felt like this was the most important question of my life, that I should get down on my knee. And I said, "Vivien, will you be my editor." And she looked at me, and I could tell there was part of her brain that thought, "This girl has no money. This is going to be so hard." And she said, "Yes!" So then, it was great. I have this Academy Award winning editor who's going to edit my film, and I'm Miss Nobody who's worked on other people's stuff.

**DS: But, you were following your heart.**

**AC:** I was following my heart.

**DS: And so, she got to follow hers, too.**

**AC:** She did. She loves this film a lot. We borrowed a 3/4" editing machine, which Vivien says is about as useful as a refrigerator to edit on. We set it up in her dining room, and over the next year and a half, intermittently we'd work on it, because I couldn't pay her. When we finished the film, it was 2:00 in the morning

in an editing suite, and Vivien had gone home and the other editor was in a different room. I saw the film for the first time all the way through without being able to make any changes by myself. I realized that all the work I had done and all the work Vivien had done, was not to create a film, but to create a space through which the indigenous people speak. When I watched it, it was the first time in five years that I felt like I was back at Kari-Oca. I said, "This is exactly what happened down there. This is who was there." It was like we had been working on this film for five years and really focusing and concentrating and thinking about editing and storyline and plot and tempo, and all of this stuff, and I had been thinking about all of the little pieces, but really all I had been doing was clearing a space in the forest. And, miraculously the indigenous people came and it was like they had edited it. It was theirs. I really felt that. I couldn't see my fingerprints or Vivien's fingerprints on it at all. And that's a large credit to her. She's brilliant.

**DS: This is a great story! Wonderful!**

**AC:** I have another one for you unless you have a question.

**DS: No, I can take it somewhere else, but go for it.**

**AC:** Well, the one thing I think that got me through the whole five-year experience was the ceremony that I experienced when I was down there with the Yanomami which is in some way the essence of the message of the film. All of the

recording equipment had to be turned off because it was so sacred. We were all in a long house, 800 people or so. It was a thatched long house, open on all sides, and everybody was sitting around the edges, and there was just the earth for a floor. So Davi Yanomami was standing at the end of the long house with his arms crossed, looking down, and Levi Yanomami, they're both shamans. Levi is the guy who is on the cover of the video, with the smile. He's got the feathers in his ear and his lower lip, with the body paint on. Levi starts walking up and down the long house in this syncopated rhythm, his feet pounding the earth and his body moving. It was kind of jerky and he was blowing out his breath at various intervals, staccato-like, and saying this one word again and again and just going up and down, moving back and forth. Every now and then he would go back to Davi, and he would lean against him, and Davi would sort of whisper something, and then Levi would go back. I was sitting there with all these other people, watching this man move back and forth, up and down, and it was like some kind of tingling at the base of my spine, or something. It was as if I was remembering something that I knew from a primitive, primitive time. Not primitive in a bad way, but an essential time, or an earth time, or something when I was completely connected still. Tears are just pouring down my face, and I was enveloped in some kind of sensation. It made me sad. It's like suddenly remembering your mother who's long gone, or something like that. Really, it was like at the base of my spine. Something down there. And I was embarrassed because I'm crying, I'm trembling, and I'm thinking, "Anh, all

you're doing is watching a guy walking back and forth and blowing air in a funny way. What's the big deal?" But it was really riveting and disturbing in sort of a wonderful, sad way. And I look around, and everybody is having the same reaction. People are stunned, they're moved to tears. This one native woman was in some kind of trance. Suddenly he just stops, and he looks around, and he smiles, and everybody is just shaken. At one point I overheard somebody saying that the word he was saying was a word that also meant "I am," which is their same word for "God." And I thought, "That's what it is. It's like I am God, you are God, everything is God." And just that is what I really felt at that ceremony. I got infused with something that enabled me - even when everything around me was saying no, this is never going to work - enabled me to keep doing the film. It was about that one ceremony.

Later I remember they did a ceremony at night time, which was more playful, where Levi Yanomami kept going back to the jungle, and he would go as a bird, he would go as a monkey, and I was seeing him as a bird. It was like he shape-shifted. My eyes would see a man, but everything else in me knew he was a bird, a parrot flying over. I could see it. Or a monkey. And he would just laugh. It was like he knew what we were all experiencing. It was like he changed the channel and we would all be watching a leopard or something. I don't know how it all worked, but it worked.

**DS: That was the kind of question I was going to ask anyway, about what were the kinds of things that did affect you? And obviously this one did.**

**AC:** Yes. It's neat because Levi Yanomami, I never spoke to him personally. I think it's his spirit. He's the guy at the end of the film that says, "I will return. I will come back." That's Levi.

**DS: Oh, yes. He says something about "I'll become a shaman." And exactly what he meant by that is hard to say. It was kind of like another life is what he seemed to be saying.**

**AC:** But he was also saying, "I will not die. I will be back." And he's speaking in Yanomami. It took me almost the whole five years to find somebody in the States that would translate that.

**DS: Yes, I wondered about that problem.**

**AC:** I was going to put him in, even if I didn't know what he was saying. I think it was two weeks before we did our final edit that I found out what he was saying.

I thought, "That's what the documentary is about. That's what I want to call it." So Brian and I had talked on the phone. "What was it that he said?" And Brian said, "I think he said Akwana." So, I said, "Okay. Fine. That's the title. Akwana."

And so I phonetically spelled it a-k-w-a-n-a, and I was trying to find reference to that word, trying to verify that it was really a word, that I had the right one, but that was the working title.

Bruce Albert, an anthropologist had spoken with Davi and Davi had told him the creation myth of the Yanomami, and it had been transcribed and somehow along the road I had gotten a copy. And in the copy they talk about Yakoana, and they spelled it y-a-k-o-a-n-a, and I realized that's what it is, it's not Akwana, it's Yakoana. During the Amazon week conference that Parabola flew me out for, Davi Yanomami was there. I was trying to make sure that everything I did was okay by the indigenous people, that I wasn't accidentally screwing up or disrespecting them. So, I showed him all the footage and everything and I said, " I want to name it Yakoana, is that okay with you?" And that's when he said, "Yakoana." And he was the one who said "Yakoana helps us to hear the voice, the breath, of the planet and the song of the earth." He's the one that told that to me verbally. So, Yakoana is a sacred hallucinogen that's used in ceremony.

**DS: Have you ever been in a ceremony where it's been used?**

**AC:** No, although it might have been used when Davi and Levi did that ceremony, which may be why he said that. But I didn't see because the way it's given is that one person stands there and the other stands here, there's a huge reed

that's hollow, and if you were taking it you'd put it in your nose and I would blow. And apparently it hurts like hell, and only shamans do it. And I think in the Yanomami tribe only men are shamans. From what I understand, I learned this about the Kayapo, which is another tribe from the Amazon, is that shamans are the people that can cross through this spider web, or the membrane between life and death and come back sane. People who go insane are not able to be shamans, and people who die are not able to be shamans. Shamans are the ones that can go to both worlds. And that's why only shamans can take this. And what it does, apparently, is it brings the Shaburi. Shaburi are the little creatures in nature that are on the bottom of the Yakoana poster that look like little people. They are the spirits of nature, so when you take the Yakoana or Ayahuasca or other ceremonial medicines from an indigenous point of view, from what I've been told, it is the Shaburi who come and talk to you and help you to see how to help nature. That's the essence of the film, enabling us to be the song of the earth.

**DS: So that really came out of your deepest experience, out of what Levi was saying. And it was that word that he . . .**

**AC:** I'm pretty sure. Since we didn't record it I can't say for sure, but I'm pretty sure.

**DS: I like it. Kari-Oca was Marcos Terena's dream. Would you say a little bit about how that happened with Marcos?**

**AC:** Marcos Terena was born in the Terena tribe which is located in central Brazil. And when he was about ten or so his family decided to move to the city. I think his aunt had epilepsy or something and the tribe was being really diminished by non-native people. And they felt the only way to get her medical help was to move to the city. I don't know where the medicine people were in the tribe, maybe they had died. So, when he was ten he moved into the city and until then he hadn't had any concept of poverty or any concept of child abuse or anything like that. Like he says in the film, "I didn't know any of that." He moved to the city and he realizes that being an indigenous person is a horrible thing to be. In fact, until 1978, according to Brazilian law, indigenous people only had the same rights that the criminally insane had. So they were not considered completely whole human beings. They didn't have the right to vote or any of that stuff. And the racism against indigenous people in Brazil is apparently quite significant.

So, Marcos goes from his indigenous village into this arena where he's completely looked down upon and he realizes that he doesn't want to be indigenous. He doesn't want anyone to think he's indigenous. So he grows up doing as much as he can to be "white," and as a matter of fact he got a job as a young adult as an airline pilot. But, the only way he could fly a plane was to pretend he was Japanese

because there was no way anyone would let a native, an Indian, fly a plane. So, for 11 years he was supposedly Japanese instead of indigenous. Instead of Terena. So, he is in the city, he's in Brasilia or maybe Sao Paulo - I'm not sure where he lived - and a member from the Terena tribe sees him and speaks to him in the indigenous Terena language, and suddenly Marcos's real sense of self comes back to him, and he realizes that he wants to help the Terena people. So he has this unique situation where he knows the non-indigenous world really well, and he is in love with his indigenous roots. So he can walk in both worlds, which makes him a really good leader today for that.

He began working for his tribe, and then for all tribes of Brazil and started the Inter-Tribal Committee. Just a few months ago, he had a gathering of 80 tribal representatives from 80 tribes in Brazil to talk about what to do because the 500-year anniversary of the Portuguese coming to Brazil is coming up. He had always had a vision of how powerful uniting the tribes of Brazil would be for tribal indigenous rights, so he wanted to do that for South America and for the world, because it's all the same story, whether you're a Sami from Norway, an Aborigine from Australia, or an Ainu from Japan.

Marcos had this concept of globally uniting the indigenous people, and when the Earth Summit came up it seemed like the perfect time to do it because the world itself is uniting about the Earth in some way. And probably the fact that

although there are 5,000 indigenous nations, they are not recognized at all by the United Nations. They are looked at as just populations. So out of the 5,000 nations, there were only five minutes given to one indigenous representative to speak, and Marcos was the one who spoke.

Marcos had this vision and he decided to try to make it happen. They needed a piece of land for all of these indigenous people of the world to gather together, so he and a female shaman and a male shaman spent a few months following the clues of their dreams, their nightly dreams, and searching land area that was somewhat close to Rio. They finally found this piece of land that was just on the edge of the jungle about an hour and a half drive outside of Rio. And seven tribes from the Amazon spent two months bringing up sacred materials from their village and building a traditional indigenous village, and then 13 shamans came and blessed that village. The night before the indigenous conference officially began, a jaguar walked through the village, which they took as a really great sign.

**DS: Yes. In South America that is very powerful.**

**AC:** Yes. And the village, actually the piece of land it was on, you had to go through a checkpoint to get there, and the checkpoint, as I understood it (I mean, everything that happened to me was slightly dreamlike and confusing), was because beyond that checkpoint was an insane asylum. It was this dilapidated, forgotten,

Portuguese colonial town from at least a hundred years ago that had not been taken care of, and there were all these men in pajamas just walking around. You didn't see any nurses or doctors. It was weird. It was like this ghost town that was inhabited by slightly insane Brazilian men. Which was ironic since indigenous people, until 1978, had the same rights as the criminally insane. So you had to drive through this bizarre, surreal, insane asylum-type village to get to the indigenous village. And apparently the piece of land that the indigenous village of Kari-Oca was on, was given by the government and the government said indigenous people can have this piece of land forever to have meetings. But, within weeks after the whole Earth summit was over and everyone had gone home, someone came and burned down the indigenous village. Nobody knows exactly who it was. And Marcos said most likely it was an act of defiance against indigenous peoples, but the truth is that for indigenous peoples, when they have a village and then move to another place so they don't over-farm the land, or when they normally do their cycle-move, they always burn the village because even the ashes help renew the land and it's a sign of moving forward and moving onto the next level. So he said that even though there was probably ill will by whomever burned the village, it was actually a very auspicious and powerful statement that they're moving onto the next level - as a global, united, indigenous movement.

**DS: Kari-Oca involved a lot of stuff and you were watching, or participating, recording. Part of it was this declaration. What was that like? What sort of process did it go through? Do you know?**

**AC:** I know a little bit. I'm sure I don't know, really. I know from a "white" person's linear point of view. I can tell you that answer. What they did is they broke down the indigenous people into three working groups, and they were based on language: English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Most of these people spoke one to seven tribal languages, plus one colonial language. Every day there were certain things they would talk about: intellectual property, land rights, human rights, whatever. They would break down into these groups and then at some point come together to have a plenary session and review what each group had said. Then they had translators so each thing was said three times in each language. And I wasn't even aware as it was going on that there was going to be a declaration made, but that was probably because I was completely out of it and clueless. It's interesting that within a week, nearly 1,000 tribal people, many of whom had never met each other, made a 109-point declaration about how to live on earth and unanimously agreed to it and unanimously signed it. While meanwhile, down the road, all these people like Bush, and Castro, and Mitterand, who had known each other for their entire political careers couldn't even agree on what the word bio-diversity meant, and some of them couldn't even agree on

whether they were going to attend the conference or not, like George Bush, who came at the last minute.

**DS: You've mentioned to me at various points about how you wanted to make sure that what you did was true to them. At the same time you are an American, a European-American woman, doing this without knowing a whole lot about indigenous people beforehand, so when you were creating, in terms of doing the editing and all, how were you managing to figure out how to do it right? Because if you just trust your own creative intuitions, you might feel like, "Hey, what do I know?" So, what made it turn on in the way that you could feel was you creatively, honestly, and also was true about them? How did that happen?**

AC: Whenever I got to a significant point, like if I had written a rough draft of something, I would send it to all the indigenous people that were in it. I would try on average every 9 months to actually communicate with them, and I would send them my idea or a rough draft or whatever and ask, "is this okay?" No one ever responded back to me, which is really hard. Actually I did get very, very few responses, and actually a lot of them didn't know who I was because I didn't do the interviewing, and there was so much going on there. You've got a thousand people over six days. Most of them probably had never even seen me before. So, it was a little intimidating seeing Marcos after the three years and seeing Davi Yanomami,

and showing both of them footage and talking about my ideas. That really gave me a sense of, "Okay, I'm at least on the right track." Then I would follow up by just sending stuff to people and thinking if they felt it was really wrong, I would hope they would tell me. So that was part of it. I also would ask Brian because he's in direct communication with indigenous people and he's up to date on what they are doing politically, culturally, everything, and I wasn't really. So, he was another person that I would check with. Then I would just pray – I would just ask that I be a conduit, and Vivien did, too. Vivien was just astounding in her integrity. So, I do think that that intention really helped because I don't think that everything has to happen by phone and fax in order to be communicated.

**DS: The U.N. might be uneasy because you have a little bit of narrative framing in which you give an oppressor-oppressed coloration and talk about the history of colonization. And not only the history of it, but you talk about what's going on right now in terms of various forms of depopulation, dispossession, whatever. So did that feel to you like you were in the area of political activism?**

AC: I think I was. It didn't feel that way to me. Another way I tried to make it more true, is, originally I didn't want to have any narration at all, so it would be just their words. The only influence Vivien and I would have would be which of their words we selected and how we juxtaposed them. But I found in doing it that

there were bridges that needed to be built of information, and I chose that information, and I wrote the narration. When I watch it now, I know that I was really angry about what we are doing to the world, and I think that a huge part of my energy in making the film was anger and fear. And I used that energy to help me get through, but I think that also comes across in the film. I don't feel as angry or as fearful now in my life, in general. And it might be because I haven't had an experience like that in a while and I'm a little buffered again. Or maybe I'm just calmer about what's happening. Or maybe I just have more of a Zen attitude about it, I don't know. But sometimes when I watch Yakoana now, I think, it's a little too heavy-handed with some of the narration, and I would actually change it. Which is an interesting thing about film is that you make it when you are at a single point in your philosophy, which is an ever-changing thing, and so now that it's been several years since I wrote those words, I think a little differently than I did then.

**DS: Just because you wrote those words.**

**AC:** Yes. Probably.

**DS: It puts you into the next level.**

**AC:** Right. So it is an interesting thing that I had never experienced before which is that you say something and you know that it's true, and it is still true, but then the hue, the coloring, changes a few years down the road and you think, "Did

I have to be that direct?" And you can't do anything about it. It's on film and everybody's watching it.

**DS: In a way, what you're really showing, it seems maybe, is a view that is pretty consistent with indigenous people. That is, we take these words and our discourse, that is the discourse of the "haves" in the world, who think we are running things, and the culture of consumption and wealth, and we use a discourse that divides things up into religion and politics and economics and so forth. But when you were among these people, it was more seamless.**

AC: Definitely.

**DS: So that what was political or was spiritual didn't seem to be separated. So it seems that maybe that comes through in the way you made the film.**

AC: Well, that's good. Because I like that about the film, that they could have this conference that was about saving their lives and saving the earth, and they were also having ceremony and celebrating and eating and laughing, and it was like poetry, politics, spirituality, religion, earth, it was all just the same thing. And I loved that. It wasn't compartmentalized.

**DS: You loved it and that was also the discourse that got you all confused because you weren't used to that.**

AC: Yes. Everything about it got me all confused.

**DS: I was going to ask you about what they thought about you. You told me that pretty well. They had plenty of suspicion.**

AC: But, I have to say that they had plenty of suspicion then, and I got a grant to send all the people who are in the film a copy of the film, and make it into the format of whatever their country used, and I think it cost just under a couple thousand dollars to do that. And I got some of the nicest responses back. So what they think about me now and what they may have thought about me then is different. I feel like I have friends in the indigenous world and I don't feel ashamed or that sense of guilt or whatever that I did. But I had to earn that. And in this world here I don't have to earn anything. I can get someone to trust me and like me right off the bat just by doing something that really is meaningless. It's neat that I had to sacrifice for several years in order to get their gratitude because I see how much their gratitude is worth. It's worth several years of my work. And it's worth it. It's worth it. It makes my work more valuable in a way.

**DS: Do you suppose it was easier for you in some respects because this was all such an adventure that you didn't already have figured out ahead of**

**time, so that by giving voice to their thing, you didn't really violate your voice because you were busy finding it in the process?**

**AC:** I felt like their voice was my voice. I don't know if that's the right way to think or not, but I kind of felt that.

**DS: Because you were on this quest in the very beginning.**

**AC:** I was on this quest before I knew indigenous people really existed like I know they do now. Something intuitively inside me said, "Get back to nature. Learn the language of nature." And then I was fortunate enough to be able to meet the people who still spoke it. And to spend six years of my life championing their cause. And living with 15 hours of their words every damn day so that I was surrounded by these teachers. In a way I'm the luckiest person alive. I have this idea of a better world and I got to meet people who live in that dimension, and then I got to live just surrounded by them. Literally surrounded by them in this apartment for all that time. And now, still, because I get to speak, like today, for a couple of hours and remember all of this stuff. So, I really got a whammy of a gift!

**DS: I don't know what else to ask you because it's very full. You've told the story and any other question would be just picking around at the edges. I don't know how to ask another question that would go to the heart of it because it seems to me you've taken me there.**

## **The Afterward**

Neither the interview with Ms. Crutcher nor the *Yakoana* film tells the whole story of the Kari-Oca gathering or Marcos Terena's address to the delegations at the earth summit, but they do lay open for us the bigger story of the Kari-Oca mix of ceremony and community consensus and of the collective and confrontive stance of the world's indigenous peoples in Terena's stunning act of speaking political, cultural, and spiritual truth to "world leaders" about the planet's future. This story is about a pivotal moment in a long, global, colonizing history organized around a thoroughgoing objectification of the earth and its life forms, and an intensifying commodification of all forms of existence. In Brazil in 1992, exactly 500 years after Columbus encountered indigenous peoples of the Americas, and in the midst of planetary crisis, an opposing voice has challenged that five-century-long, world-dominating trajectory. This interview and the *Yakoana* film represent an effort to let that indigenous voice be heard and the story of that voice's challenge to become more fully known.